

CHAPTER 6

THE CHARISMATIC EVANGELICALS RESPONSE TO POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The focus in this chapter is on how the Charismatic Evangelicals are responding to the big question of poverty in South Africa in their witness. It is based on the responses that I solicited from interviews I conducted with various leaders across the nation. First, I shall elucidate on the interviews with key national leaders of churches within the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical movement. In my approach I have tried to have a broad representation of nuances that occur amongst the Charismatic Evangelicals. This is the reason I have featured these different national leaders:

- Dr Isak Burger whose denomination is Pentecostal but it is open to certain elements of Charismatic Evangelicalism. He acknowledges that those aspects have enriched some aspects of their witness as Pentecostals.
- Rev. Moss Ntlha is an evangelical and not a Charismatic but is also a renowned leader within a broader body that represents evangelicals in South Africa with some of the Charismatic Evangelical Churches being part of his constituency. The interview was basically draw information about the experiences of the Charismatic Evangelicals within his organisation.
- Pastor Ray MacCauley who is a Charismatic Evangelical but who does not necessarily represent the poor. But since 1994 his church has a majority of people who come from previously disadvantaged communities, the intention is to observe how has that change impacted their ministry.
- Pastor Chris Venter who is a Charismatic Evangelical leader within a body that represents a specific sector of some Charismatic Evangelicals. The idea was to glean on his insight about how his constituency witnesses amongst the poor.
- Pastor Mosa Sono who is a leading Charismatic Evangelical figure is a minister in the disadvantaged townships and rural areas. He is a relevant candidate who has experience of doing ministry amongst the poor.

I shall also reflect on their positions and examine the role the different Christian backgrounds are playing in their mission in the midst of deprivation. This will be followed by a comparative analysis of these backgrounds in terms of their witness in the context of poverty. Then, I shall proceed to reflect on the viewpoints and experiences of the leaders of local churches, people who have diverse denominational backgrounds within the Charismatic Churches across the various provinces and regions of South Africa. In this instance I have featured the interviews report on Bishop Gladstone Botswana and Pastor Don Phillips who are Charismatic Evangel ministers doing ministry in marginalized communities.

6.1 The Positions of Key National Leaders Within the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical Movement

6.1.1 Dr Isak Burger – Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM)

Dr Isak Burger, the Moderator of the AFM in South Africa, considers himself to be a Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical, like many other ministers within his denomination. Prof. Jurgens Hendriks and Dr Johannes Erasmus, in their research and census of 1996 found that (in), “South Africa, the AFM, with 3,7 % of the total Christian market share and 1.1 million members, is the oldest and largest denomination in this group. Its membership is 70 % Black, residing mostly in Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province”(Kritzinger 2002:20).

6.1.1.1 The Experience of Poverty

Dr Isak Burger estimates that about 50 % of their church is affected by poverty. They have scientifically evaluated poverty amongst their members and community in collaboration with researchers from the University of Stellenbosch. Poverty is prevalent extensively in churches that are located in previously disadvantaged communities. It therefore affects the black and coloured members of the church in particular, the majority of whom are still living in the same needy communities. The areas within their

constituency that are highly impacted by poverty are mainly the rural areas and townships. This, however, does not suggest that there is no experience of poverty in the more affluent areas. There are occurrences of penury amongst some white members of the church, but at this stage, poverty among whites is negligible compared to the rampant poverty within the black and coloured communities. The needs that they have identified correspond to the ones picked by our national surveys:

- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Education

The use of racial groupings to indicate the varying incident of poverty within the AFM church does not suggest any disunity within the church. It is done to enhance a better understanding the reality of the occurrence of poverty in South Africa and the profile of those it is affecting within this church, which is characterized by diversity.

6.1.1.2 Theology/Teachings In Relation to Poverty

Dr Burger cites Jesus' words, "The poor will always be with us." Yet, this he does not interpret as encouraging complacency when their church is facing the challenges of deprivation. He rather regards this as a call to continue to address the issue of poverty as it continues to occur in society. His church also acknowledges the fact that the poor are primary beneficiaries to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he was the Messiah, Jesus replied by asking, "What do you see?" They replied that they observed that the poor were being fed, and the gospel was being preached. Furthermore, when one reads Luke 4:18-19 it becomes obvious that the poor are close to God's heart. The church does, however, refrain from using any language that may suggest that God sides with the poor against the rich. They do not ascribe to the notion of 'God's preferential option for the poor.' But, they would still stress that God is against oppression and exploitation. For them it is not a matter of having to be poor to get to heaven. Rather, God takes sides with Christ and if you are in

Christ, that is the basis for salvation. Whether you are poor or rich, there is no different or special way of getting saved.

Dr Burger has indicated that their church was born within a Christian movement that had a concern for the poor. When the Pentecostal movement started in South Africa there was a spontaneous involvement with the poor like in the early Christian Church. Many of the early Pentecostals came from the ranks of the poor, even if there were a few affluent people. Dr Burger says if you read the early history of their church, and study the foundation which they built on, the roots from which they grew, it is evident that their intense involvement with people in need, the run-down, the hopeless, was one of the most outstanding characteristics of the AFM – like it was in the case of the early church. Poor people accepted the gospel and were touched by this revival. It was a very spontaneous thing that happened. But the second generation Pentecostals had to some extent neglected their responsibility to the poor. They did not take social responsibility as their ministry. Thus they were liable to the accusation that was levelled against them that they focused too much on the salvation of the soul and not enough on the person's urgent needs of the day. According to Dr Burger they had somehow, and to some extent, lost something of that compassion for the disadvantaged, and involvement in the woes of their communities. There is a divine obligation upon them to recover their unique design and redemptive purpose – to get back to their roots. During the last decade there has been an increasing awareness that the gospel of Jesus is the gospel for a total person and not only meant to get a person saved and going to heaven.

Their message has consciously aimed at empowering the church to get involved in the community. Their basic value in terms of the church's master plan is empowerment. The thrust of the church for 2004 was to empower and inspire the local church for greater community involvement and community transformation. The AFM leadership set aside 2004 as the beginning of a season of changing the mindset of their church, so that they may become a community church in the true sense of the word. Their Master Plan, vision and slogan makes this clear. Their vision statement reads: "We see a church, accessible to all people, celebrating our unity and God-given diversity, empowering our members for

caring and transforming our communities to the glory of God”...The word “accessibility” is a key-word in their vision. But they should not only think of their church as being accessible, the church must also position itself to access its communities. Every pastor and leader should honestly consider this question: Is our church really accessible, and, to what extent have we explored and utilized the different avenues of access into our community? What have we constructively done to transform, or at least influence our community? From their head office they visit all regions and meet AFM local church leaders, providing them with theological basis, inspiration and practical guidelines for community engagement. Their intention is to enable the local leaders set up local church-driven community involvement initiatives and transformations.

They are conscious of the fact that they come from an era of segregation within their own church. Some of their members were previously unaware of the other part of South Africa, that is grossly poor. They are now being exposed to that reality at all levels of the Church. It seems there are two worlds in South Africa, one of the affluent and the other of the poor. In 1996 unification was ushered in, to bring about the integration of previously segregated churches within the AFM churches, and break the bonds of the historical legacy of the Apartheid society. This resulted in the integration of their separate denominational structures, which had been organized according to various racial categories, into one national structure – a change that enriched the church as a whole.

These are the lessons learnt:

- a. A greater awareness of the real South Africa within the Church through their unified church, and of the bitter reality of impoverishment faced by other communities that were previously disadvantaged. Although the previously advantaged members of the church had been involved in relief initiatives amongst the disadvantaged, they were not really aware of the great extent of poverty within the previously disadvantaged communities. They became exposed to the reality of a Third World outside their own context.
- b. They discovered a fresh perspective of Jesus. They realized that Jesus Christ was concerned about the physical and economic aspects of human life. Jesus worked

- with the broken, healed the sick, and clothed the naked. His theology addressed to the total person.
- c. The AFM church experienced a blessing in realizing the importance of the extended family of God. They noted the limitations of the Westernised form of Christianity with its individualistic emphasis, and understood that they had been influenced in such a way that they had almost forgotten their responsibility to other members of the Christian body. They returned to the biblical concept of extended family amongst God's people. They learned that in the African community, community (*ubuntu*) is more important than just the individual. This is closer to the Middle Eastern culture, as depicted in the Bible, than to the Western concept. An example is Ruth, who returned to her homeland after the death of her husband. Her husband's relative, Boaz, had to take responsibility for her so that she would not be destitute. The early church also had a strong sense of responsibility for the family of God (Acts 6). They were sensitised to the broader needs of the family of God in such a manner that no one had too much and no one had little. In essence there was equality. The concept of sharing was characteristic to this church. The AFM still has a long way to go in entrenching this value amongst their own members. But there is an increasing realization that the family of God is the first priority. God's household should be cared for, through giving and sharing.
- d. There have been other unexpected forms of enrichment in terms of their faith. Prior to integration, some previously privileged members of the church thought they might find themselves solely on the giving side, while the previously disadvantaged would be on the receiving side. But they have discovered that there are other forms of wealth to be gained from mutual sharing, benefits that cannot be equated to anything in monetary terms, like spontaneity in worship and commitment.

6.1.1.3 Response to Poverty

The AFM church has an extensive national welfare programme that is driven by local congregations in their communities and supported by their national office. The AFM church has established a National Welfare Council that promotes the vision of ministry to the poor within their denomination and backs projects that are run locally through various local congregations. In the National Welfare Council there are various substructures, like the Executive Welfare Council, the Management Team, Director, Deputy Directors, Administration Staff and various projects.

uMephi Project

This is one of their national flagship projects, launched to deal with children in distress. These children come from different backgrounds and age groups, and have faced various disadvantages and problems. According to Pastor Eben Miller, the director of the uMephi project, the children are offered “the opportunity to have a *Mephiboseth* experience and to receive back what they have been robbed of, to be part of a family and to feast at a table as a child that belongs” (2 Sam. 9:3). Children being assisted fit into five major categories, namely:

a. Street Children

These are the children who come to the uMephi shelter after being taken off the streets. They are children who live on their own in groups on the streets without parental supervision and care. They come to the streets as a result of various social problems.

b. Maltreated and sexually abused children

These ones are children who have been victims of physical or emotional maltreatment and neglect by their families.

c. Abandoned Children

This group consists of children who have been abandoned by their parents in hospitals, many soon after birth. Some are left in public places and are ultimately found by members of the public and handed to the police.

d. Infants saved from Abortion

Through one of their programmes, Africa Cares for Life, they run pregnancy care/crisis centres and homes for unwed mothers. This programme enables them to assist pregnant unwed mothers who have not opted for abortion but have chosen to save their babies. They provide support for them and assist them in dealing with their decision to save their babies.

e. Aids Orphans.

In response to the growing social problems of Aids orphans, the AFM church is running a programme to help these children.

The AFM runs various programmes in responding to the abovementioned categories of needs faced by children who come into their *uMephi* Project. Street children and maltreated abused children would be put in a shelter once taken from the street. Then they would probably be taken to a satellite home where they would be taken care of. This might result in the child being reunited with family, or placed in foster care, or adopted. The children who have been abandoned, or saved from abortion and Aids orphans would be put in a care programme through satellite homes, places of safety and halfway houses. Depending on their health conditions, some will be put in adoption programmes, foster care homes, or hospices for the frail ones who ultimately die with dignity in their care. From January 2001 to April 2004 they had 960 plus babies in their project. About 540 babies were placed with adoptive parents, first in South Africa and then internationally in participating countries. According to the Winter 2004 issue of *uMephi News*, the *uMephi* Project cares for 324 children in 2 registered Children's Homes and their Satellite homes. Proper care and screening ensures that best possible foster parents are found for these children. They also network with other organizations that run welfare and community-related programmes nationwide.

Poverty Alleviation

The various local churches have basic relief programmes like feeding schemes offering food parcels. They run initiatives like Week of Bounty in which contributions are sought

to assist the disadvantaged in the communities where their local congregations are situated. They have realized that they should not just provide for basic needs but also work to prevent the causes of poverty. Their aim is to provide people with skills that will enable them to be self-reliant. Some local churches launch job-creation and skills development projects, to assist the poor in their communities. They regard it as their responsibility to assist the people of God within the broader Church, not within their denomination only. They target the poor Christians across all denominations in their ministry. As a matter of fact, they help all the poor, without asking them what their faith allegiance is.

Dr Burger gave four reasons why the members of his church must become more passionate about involvement with communities:

1. *Because God cares.* Their motivation is not merely a philanthropic concern and love. They have to love the struggling because God loves them. They haven't got an option. In the light of the Great Commission they can only start to be really effective in this world, if they sense something of God's love for sinners, the broken and the lost. Dr Burger admits that one of his most painful embarrassments, is that the hurt of the people does not have the same effect on him as it obviously had on Christ. He is ashamed that they have shed too few tears about the brokenness around them. Each one has to judge himself/herself in this matter. Do we prefer not to be reminded in any way of the pain of others? Do we resemble the attitude of the priest and the Levite and prefer not to be involved? Are we truly moved by the plight of the Aids victims and the poor? He believes that almost every Christian, and more so the leaders, need to be touched by God so that something of his love, compassion and care will ignite in their hearts. His plea is, Lord, please begin with me!
2. *Because Jesus set the example.* At the start of His public ministry, according to Luke, He uttered these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the

Lord”(Luke 4:18 –19). That was the main stumbling block of the religious leaders of his time: the fact that He ventured out of the religious cocoon, not to judge and condemn, but to save and heal. Typical was the reaction of the religious leaders when Jesus mingled with sinners and outcasts at dinner...(Mk. 2:16 –17). Even today some may have the conviction that the church only has the obligation “to win souls” for the Lord and not to worry about community involvement. It is for this reason that the AFM carefully takes cognisance of Jesus’ ministry. There is no doubt that the main purpose of Jesus’ coming to the world, and also of the church’s ministry, is that as many people as possible should be saved from eternal condemnation and be redeemed and go to heaven. For this purpose Jesus shed His blood on the cross. However, if we look at Jesus’ earthly ministry, it is obvious that he did more than that. He did not care only for people’s spiritual salvation; He was also concerned about their earthly condition and situation. He was not only concerned about people’s souls (spirits) but also about their physical health, their relationships, their empty stomachs, their sorrows at a graveside, etc. The gospel involves the total person. Of course Christ’s ultimate purpose in showing love and doing good, was to win the people for God’s kingdom, but his love was unconditional. For example, only one of the ten lepers came back to thank Him and to receive not only the healing but also the Healer. Yet He did not withhold healing from the other nine. Likewise, although the highest and final goal of our community involvement is to win our communities for Christ, we should also be involved because God loves them, cares for them and wants to do good unto them – and we are His instruments and channels.

3. *Because the church is not a club.* A club only exists to serve the interests of its members. The church is there for the world. It is tragic that, right through the history of the church, it tended almost without exception, after some time, to develop a ‘club mentality.’ That was the mentality of the religious people in the time of Jesus. In fact, that is a typical ‘religious’ trait: “Us four and no more.” The church should not be ‘distant’ and aloof from the community; the church ought to exist in close proximity to the people – right there in the marketplace. That was where Jesus was to be found during His earthly ministry – where it hurt the most.

Dr Burger says he got the impression that right from the beginning, it was one of the Lords' most difficult tasks: to get the church out of its safe and comfortable 'clubhouse' – into the world and into their communities. A church that lives only for itself and not for the community and the world in need, is denying the example and purpose of the Head of the church!

4. *Because people in need, were the easiest to reach.* People in need – of whatever kind – are as a rule more 'vulnerable,' open to God and His Gospel. The mightiest man in all Syria needed only the simple witness of a slave girl to bring him into traditional enemy country, to the humble prophet, with a wagonload of gifts – because he was a leper and needed healing! In our world unscrupulous people often exploit the vulnerable. However, the gospel brings hope, healing and restoration to those in need. Fact is that every person, without exception, at some or other time, becomes vulnerable. And that is the church's opportunity! That is why South Africa is 'paradise' for the gospel: because of the tremendous needs in our country. Jesus Himself said: "They who are whole have no need of the physician, but those that are sick." Marl 2:17. People in poverty, people with Aids, the unemployed, and the victims of crime – they are vulnerable people who are accessible to the gospel and they should be our prime targets. These are the people who need our attention, compassion and a ministry that can relieve their socio-economic, psychological and spiritual needs. For this to be done, we will have to be the "church in the market-place!"

The AFM has not reached a point yet where they can say they have done enough. But they have made a significant difference to the lives of the poor. Due to the high levels of poverty in communities they still have a long way to go. They are making a meaningful contribution at local church level with their various local church-driven programmes. But they also have to realign their strategies to involve the poor to participate in their mercy ministry. They should guard against implementing finished and tailor-made social development programmes without input from the disadvantaged who are the beneficiaries.

6.1.1.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

The social involvement of the AFM is not separated from their witness. It is not a matter of choosing between evangelism and social responsibility. These two are inseparable in the witness of this church. Also they do not use their poverty alleviation initiatives as an incentive for the poor to get converted. They do not lure the poor to Christ with these social welfare initiatives. They are interested in the total welfare of the person. They model their ministry on Christ's. Jesus was good to those who accepted and those who rejected his message. Also they wish to avoid any dualistic tendencies in their ministry to the disadvantaged. They do not have any hang-ups about people being converted just because they have been assisted in their distress. Rather, they want to show practical love that is more than just preaching. Their concern is to demonstrate the love of Christ as God incarnate, through their actions as His church.

As a Church they make a distinction between general acts of goodness or kindness that are obligations for every Christian, and specialized ministry gift practiced by a special group of Christians. It is generally accepted that every Christian as a follower of Christ has a biblical mandate to be generous, pray, share the gospel with others and show care to those that are weak, among other duties. But Romans 12 shows that not all Christians are gifted in the same way. Some have the special ministry gifts of leadership, mercy, healing etc. Therefore, even though all Christians are expected to fulfil all the general obligations, those with gifts of mercy should maximize their gifts within the church. The members of the Church who have received the gift of mercy are to become the champions of the poor. They need passion and compassion to accomplish this. The aim of AFM is to mobilize every local church and pastor to become aware of their calling and responsibility towards their community, in a manner that will stir up their enthusiasm and concern and make a difference to the impoverished.

The AFM church funds its ministry amongst the poor with resources collected from different stakeholders. All local churches as autonomous entities use part of their

collected funds to run mercy ministries. They do pay a levy to head office to cover administrative costs. A process has been started to decentralize some of the welfare programmes that have been run at national level so that they will become the responsibility of the local churches. Some of their funds come from outside donors, in the Government and private sector. The AFM budget for their mercy ministry is huge. It runs into several millions of rands.

6.1.2 Rev Moss Ntlha – The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA)

Rev Moss Ntlha is the General Secretary of TEASA. TEASA is the result of the merger of two organizations, namely the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA) and the Concerned Evangelicals (CE). These two organizations, representing different experiences and racial divisions of the apartheid era, disbanded to exist at the end of 1995, to re-form again in a joint expression of evangelical unity in a post-apartheid society. 8 to 10 November 1995 saw the launch of TEASA. TEASA represents a bold initiative of evangelical unity and witness. An estimated three million Evangelical (this includes Pentecostal and Charismatic) Christians now work together through the alliances in their denominations, mission agencies and para-church organizations to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in South Africa in word and deed. TEASA builds on the ecumenical efforts of EFSA and CE, while drawing in the other churches and groups who were not connected to either of the previous groups. The result is a broad-based organization in which many evangelicals in SA feel represented.

6.1.2.1 The Experience of Poverty

Poverty affects the Christian Evangelical community that is represented by TEASA significantly. Rev Moss estimates that 80 % of their constituency is affected by poverty. Many of these poor people are mainly in the Black and Coloured communities. Although there is a growing incidence of poverty in the white communities of their member churches, the number of poor whites is comparatively low. Women in the black community are the ones most severely affected by poverty. Children are amongst these

vulnerable groups. TEASA has never actually measured the prevalence of poverty, except to observe their own communities and church membership to identify those who are poor and unemployed. There is no scientific data that they have produced and can refer to in their analysis of impoverishment.

TEASA is aware of the fact that the communities in which the majority of the member churches are operational have serious needs. Problems that need to be dealt with, include the following:

- Unemployment
- Illiteracy
- Lack of skills/education
- Hunger
- HIV-Aids
- Lack of leadership

It is these challenges that they should address if they are to be relevant to their communities in their witness.

6.1.2.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

According to Rev Ntlha, poverty occurs when people do not have a viable plan to change their situation for the better but accept their status quo. Those who are poor now will probably still be impoverished if you meet them ten years later. They are people who have been marginalized to the extent that they are without any exit plan to escape from the conditions of deprivation. As, TEASA's membership is characterized by diversity, groups respond differently to the challenges of poverty. Within the church they have had two perspectives. There are members who are determined to take action and assist those who are struggling because they are destitute, while others, do not consider poverty to be of sufficient spiritual significance to warrant their response. The two categories can be summed up as follows:

1. Those who don't consider poverty to be a spiritual problem that warrants their special attention and opt not to prioritise it.

2. Those who respond to poverty by making a contribution towards its alleviation. It is mainly the Black leaders who prioritise dealing with the problems of poverty, whilst the leaders of the mainly white community would be passionate about societal moral dilemmas such as abortion, homosexuality and other controversial issues typical of a secular state.

The Evangelicals do not generally express their ministry to the poor in their liturgy. But in Black communities where there is a high level of awareness of poverty, Christians are learning to deal with poverty issues as they evangelise. When they meet desperate people like those with HIV/AIDS or orphans, they help them without thinking of it as part of their ministries. Therefore they would not share a testimony to the experience of having assisted someone who was impoverished. Whether they assist one another as Africans due to the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is not clear, but TEASA has no articulate theology of poverty. This has been identified as a weakness of the Evangelicals – the fact that they have not elaborated their theology of poverty and care for the poor.

In ministering amongst the poor in response to Christ's commands, they have learned many lessons that have enriched their spirituality and commitment to serving the Lord. These include the fact that:

1. God is interested in more than simply the soul of a human being, He is concerned with the whole person.
2. Expressing God's love can be done not only through the proclamation of John 3:16, but through caring too. John 3:16 is used by the Evangelicals in conjunction with Luke 4:18, which is more concrete in dealing with issues of poverty. Some evangelical Christians, in their evangelistic endeavours, are learning to move from John 3:16 to Luke 4:18 because it makes more sense to the poor and they respond to it better.

6.1.2.3 Response to Poverty

Below we list some of the areas in which members of TEASA have initiated programmes to assist the poor:

- Skills development, including computer training. Programmes range from computer literacy to using common software programmes and programming.
- Education, in which issues of adult literacy are addressed, and youth are helped to complete high school through various support programmes such as providing assistance with school uniforms and school fees.
- Micro enterprises: – People are helped to become entrepreneurs. As a consequence of apartheid education, the majority of blacks were socialized to be job seekers, not entrepreneurs.
- Food parcels being distributed amongst the poor to supplement their nutritional needs.
- Development Agencies: – World Vision, World Relief, and Tear Fund are Evangelical developmental agencies dealing on a large scale with community development issues and questions of poverty. These organizations, although international, also have a presence in South Africa.
- Advocacy: – There is a growing awareness amongst Evangelicals that the tool of advocacy may be used to deal with social problems. They use ecumenical forums, and engage government and other stakeholders like organized labour and business, to lobby for an agenda that would promote development that is pro-poor. Individuals and communities are assisted in gaining access to better social services, such as social grants provided by government.

The above-mentioned programmes are intended to aid the desperate and the unemployed in communities. People, who are perceived to be disadvantaged and excluded from the benefits that they are entitled to, are targeted by these development projects. Yet, when TEASA leaders evaluate themselves in light of their historical and current programmes in ministry, they feel they could have done more than they have. They admit that they have not responded adequately to deprivation in society at two levels:

1. They have not theologized their response – they have not formed an appropriate theology to deal with issues of poverty.
2. The scope of work covered is not satisfactory since more can still be done in those communities that are struggling with lack.

TEASA is determined to increase its momentum in ministering to the poor through its broader constituency.

6.1.2.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

The significance accorded to poverty alleviation programmes pursued in their ministry to the poor varies from one denomination to the other within TEASA. Some denominations have invested millions in poverty alleviation initiatives and personnel to deal with poverty, whilst others do it as a by-the-way response; there is no coordinated campaign to deal with the challenges of poverty. Where development initiatives are undertaken, people do regard them as part of their Christian mission. They are well aware of the theological trends in past decades, expressed in documents like the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, which directly connected social concern and evangelism as one aspect of the Christians witness. The Lausanne Covenant, however, had a more significant impact on those churches with international connections, like the Baptists. Those with global exposure are the ones who are more familiar with the Lausanne covenant and have been more profoundly influenced by its theology.

Within TEASA, the leadership of churches usually adopt a top-down approach to ministry amongst the poor, when they do engage in it. They would not readily involve communities as stakeholders in the activities meant to empower them, except as beneficiaries. They would rather do things for them than enlist them as partners working with them. Yet, when the congregants become involved, the tables are turned, and the poor are consulted. The congregants are often ahead of the leadership and hierarchy of the Church in engaging their own communities. The Church members are the ones who are actively involved in initiatives that deal with poverty alleviation. Congregants engage their communities without the support of the church hierarchy in certain instances. They are the ones who respond to the needs of the community and have contact with them.

There are various impact levels in their ministry to the poor. Some are of public interest and are acknowledged by the media, while others are local development projects that

have no impact other than on their immediate beneficiaries. Many accomplishments remain unrecognised due to lack of media coverage. It has been argued that assistance to the disadvantaged should be sustainable and transformative. In a democratic context, people's voices should be heard and access to the services that they are entitled to, should be encouraged.

In conclusion, Rev Moss Ntlha highlighted some areas of concern that TEASA should deal with in the future. *Firstly*, he would like to see evangelical theology on social issues being developed and made more holistic. There is still a tendency to be concerned mainly about heaven, and urge members to merely tolerate earth. Yet, when pursuing this holism, it should be done without losing the spiritual vibrancy and power of the Evangelicals. *Secondly*, there should be more financial and personal investment in schemes dealing with poverty alleviation. The dilemma is that the Evangelicals at the moment regard themselves a small Christian group. Therefore their number one priority is growth as a church. They are geared for channelling their resources towards expansion. The bulk of their funding comes from their own constituency. In rare instances funds would be sourced from government and the private sector. Most of their initiatives in ministering to the poor; are self-funded by the respective churches.

6.1.3 Rev. Chris Venter – International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC)

Rev. Chris Venter is the secretary-general of the IFCC. It was established in Durban, on the 18th August 1985. "A united Charismatic front was formed to provide spiritual covering, mutual support and open communication channels to other churches"(IFCC, 1995:4). The IFCC is an umbrella body for some of the many autonomous Charismatic churches that are not linked to any Pentecostal or Charismatic denomination. Various Christian leaders who had visions to pursue ministry outside the denominations, but embraced the Charismatic experience, started many of these churches. In 1997 it had a membership of 440 local churches that were spread throughout the country, according to a study done for TEASA by the Evangelical Commission in 1998 (cf. Kritzing 2002:49–50). A significant number of these were mega-churches.

6.1.3.1 The Experience of Poverty

Churches within the IFCC are confronted with different challenges with regards to poverty in their own communities. They find poverty to be so daunting that their limited resources do not allow them to respond adequately. The problem area of poverty within the IFCC is again the previously disadvantaged people, with Blacks being the most affected. They estimate that around 40 to 50 % of their own membership is affected by lack. The majority of the poor and the most pressing incidents of poverty are concentrated in rural areas. Therefore rural churches face a greater challenge in dealing with poverty than the city churches. Urban areas, however, do not escape deprivation. Here it is mostly concentrated in the inner cities, townships and mushrooming informal settlements. Below are common needs identified by the IFCC:

- Housing
- Food
- Clothing

Ordinary people are battling to meet their basic needs. One of the IFCC churches in the Free State, the Christian Revival Church, feeds 4 000 school children monthly. These children are being educated but they need to be supported in their learning with the provision of meals at school. This, it can be inferred, is just one of many instances of churches dealing with poverty in South Africa.

6.1.3.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

The IFCC executive does not prescribe to affiliated local churches how they should respond to poverty theologically. They just encourage churches to make their best contribution towards alleviating poverty with their available resources. They are also to proclaim the gospel to the poor in a manner that is relevant to their situation. They work as a loose federation of churches and do not have the tight structure of a denomination. They regard it as important to equip the poor, teaching them to fish for themselves, and to improve the quality of their lives. Their aim is to provide hope and skills to sustain their

livelihood. The response of IFCC churches in ministry amongst the poor varies. Some run community development centres that are well equipped and situated in strategic positions so as to be accessible to the poor. Here they attend to an array of needs amongst the disadvantaged, implementing programmes to deal with issues such as HIV/Aids and job creation. They also operate nutritional schemes.

Their position as conveyed through their teachings is that poverty is a curse, and that Jesus came to destroy its legitimacy on the cross. They point people to the cross, so that they may take courage and come up with practical solutions to poverty. For them there is no biblical justification for the impoverishment that has been created by discrimination. They believe that any verbal response to deprivation will be insufficient if it is not accompanied by realistic deeds of grace. This, according to Rev. Venter, is the reason why they should be more practical, and to do more than they speak to alleviate poverty.

One of the greatest challenges poor communities battle with, is illiteracy. How can an illiterate person write a CV? Writing is one of the essential tools you need if you wish to be employable, a skill, which many who are privileged possess and even take it for granted. Many of the poor do not even have a proper home address. It becomes difficult for them to be contacted unless they are fortunate enough to have a cell phone. They have no property or any valuable asset. Adding to these dilemmas faced by the poor, is another challenge – the lack of financial skills. They do not know how to draw up a budget for themselves, in order to use the money they do have to their advantage. They have but a limited understanding of money and generating wealth. It should be the role of the church to educate the downtrodden, and to help them acquire these life skills.

In their witness among the poor the churches within the IFCC have interacted with them in such a way that both parties have benefited. Their spirituality has been improved through contact with the poor. These are the lessons that they have learnt in their witness in a situation of need:

1. To be practical in their witness. To reach out to people in their real struggles, going where people live. In choosing to communicate with them, to listen to their

- actual story in their own language about their life and hope, so as to pick up their real needs and not their perceived needs. People do not need to be scratched where it does not itch. Churches sometimes discuss ways to alleviate poverty, but then do not pursue their plans because they are reluctant to go out to people where they are located.
2. They have been encouraged by government support for the role of the church in helping the poor. The current government has been a willing partner in poverty eradication endeavours.
 3. On the ground, amongst the poor, there is lack of trust. Those who are involved in poverty alleviation projects are regarded with suspicion. This is the result of incidents of corruption that occurred when certain agencies misused the resources they acquired in the name of the poor.
 4. The impact of gambling on impoverished communities is extensive. Some of the disadvantaged are regular patrons of casinos, and other gambling dens, or spend their money on lotto tickets. They are driven by the desire to win the bonanza prizes, which they hope will change their fortunes. The tragedy is that many lose their livelihood and sink deeper into impoverishment. The gambling syndrome creates stumbling blocks to poverty alleviation programmes. In some instances, where there is excessive gambling, even the social grants that are meant to be a lifeline, are squandered. The church needs to hone its skills, to be better able to assist the poor in dealing with the many self-defeating habits that compound their problems.

The IFCC reports that their positive interactions with the poor are helping them to strengthen their witness in ministering to them.

6.1.3.3 Response to Poverty

The various member churches of the IFCC have customized their programmes according to their respective visions and varying local contexts. Their responses include the following:

1. Practical responses – helping people to acquire skills; training them in areas where the need is most urgent, to render them employable or enable them to start their own businesses.
2. Facilitating income generation and saving projects in the form of *stokvels* within communities. The purpose of these *stokvels* is to free people from the stifling debt trap. Many of the poor only have access to loans from micro-lenders. They are at the mercy of unscrupulous loan sharks who exploit them and entrap them in burdensome debts. *Stokvels* have become a user-friendly alternative in which members form a club to pool their resources and help one another on a rotational basis. These funds are also used to finance the empowering ventures of members.
3. Empowering talks or workshops. The disadvantaged need to be taught financial and other skills. Without financial understanding they cannot make wise decisions, or manage their debts responsibly. Those who out of desperation and lack of access to loans from credible financial institutions, are forced to approach ‘loan sharks’ need to understand the risks they take. Otherwise, the financial woes they incur will be worse than their initial troubles.
4. Many of the churches have HIV/Aids programmes to assist both those infected and those affected by HIV/Aids.

Not all the leaders are happy with how the IFCC churches have responded to challenges of poverty. Due to limited resources and varying contexts some churches have not been able to be a credible witness of Christ with a practical ministry towards the poor. Churches have, however, been realistic in their expectations when addressing social problems; since they understand the magnitude of poverty in their community and that there are no quick fixes.

6.1.3.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

In their view, ministry to the poor is part of the mission of the church. There is a growing consciousness amongst IFCC churches that they need to focus on their ministry amongst the poor as one of the primary tasks of the Great Commission. This awareness is accompanied by a strong commitment to that ministry. The church has an indivisible

mission, which includes both spiritual and social concerns. These should not be addressed separately, as they are intertwined parts of the Christian witness. The ministry to the poor is not a special ministry that can be detached from the actual mission mandate of the church. Rather it is part of that mission and should not be isolated from any other church activity.

There has been an attempt by some churches to consult the poor communities, but this is a progressive trend as the various churches are only beginning to understand how important the participation of the poor in their own affairs is. There has been some visible evidence of the success of their witness amongst the poor. Those who have been touched by these poverty alleviation programmes, are now extending a helping hand to others. Having received a lifeline they too have learned to share with others in gratitude to God. They introduce others to the means of empowerment and development. The culture of sharing, after all, has always been characteristic of those who are deprived.

If the IFCC could operate more like a denomination they might be better able to adequately and practically respond to the challenges of poverty. Their loosely structured affiliation has not been beneficial in creating a corporate identity that would promote a common purpose and better cooperation in dealing with social issues. Closer collaboration would enable them to share resources, avoid duplication of programmes, conduct joint researches and transfer skills within the group. Their challenge is to develop the synergy and cooperation needed to consolidate the disconnected responses of various autonomous churches within the IFCC. The IFCC as an umbrella body does not have common funds that can be disbursed for poverty alleviation programmes. Funding for the ministry to the poor is raised by the respective affiliated churches on the ground and allocated at their own discretion. The financial resources used in the ministry to the poor by local IFCC churches are a combination of self-funding, and donations from community donors and business. A small percentage comes from government grants.

6.1.4 Pastor Ray McCauley – Rhema Ministries South Africa

Pastor Ray McCauley is the senior Pastor of Rhema Ministries in Randburg, a northern suburb of Johannesburg. This Randburg congregation has a membership of well over 20 000. He is also the senior leader of the Rhema Family of Churches, which consists of all the churches that have been started in association with the Rhema Ministries in Randburg. Rhema churches can be found in almost all the provinces of South Africa. Several are mega-churches. Pastor Ray McCauley is also the president of the IFCC.

6.1.4.1 The Experience of Poverty

Pastor Ray estimates that between 30 to 40 % of the Randburg congregation is affected by poverty. Those who are poor are mainly the unemployed and those employed informally [underemployed]. The church is located in an area, which is affluent as compared with the townships created by the apartheid state. Yet, a number of disadvantaged people enter the suburb as domestic workers, employed in the homes of middle class and very wealthy families. On the surface there are no poor people in the immediate area of the church. But approximately 10 kilometres from the church there are informal settlements in areas like Honeydew, Diepsloot and Lion's Park. Some of these squalid areas are part of the catchment area of Rhema Ministries. In the midst of the apparent wealth of Rhema Ministries, one may also observe the face of poverty – in the church and in the community. Many of these disadvantaged are people of African descent. Church officials measure the levels of poverty in this church by using the indicator of how disposable income is spent. The majority of the poor members spend 80% of their disposable income on food. The critical needs they have discovered in their community are in the following areas:

- Employment
- HIV/Aids prevention and treatment.

These are not the only needs they have identified, but they are the most pressing ones. The church addresses these and other needs through their social development programmes.

6.1.4.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

Pastor Ray McCauley's opinion is that poverty is not a blessing but a curse; instead, God wants the poor to be prosperous, because God is God of the poor. The greater proportion of the prevalent poverty has been created by the social structures of the previous apartheid regime. Therefore the current poverty of the majority of our people is not God-ordained, although some small proportion of it ensues from laziness and the sinful tendencies of the individuals affected. This happens, for instance, in the case of people who abuse alcohol. They have become careless stewards of their adequate resources and livelihood. Thus sometimes, through hedonistic attitudes and behaviour, people squander their opportunities to live a respectable and affordable life. In their message as a church they express the view that God will always help the poor. They also teach that God expects those who are blessed, to help others who, in comparison to them, are disadvantaged. God's blessings ultimately culminate in people experiencing better life, while persistent poverty results in bondage.

The church must be involved in the quest to improve the lives of the destitute. It is the Christian's responsibility to encourage those regarded as the least in our society, to support initiatives for the redistribution of unequally distributed resources. In essence it means promoting equal access to all opportunities and the empowerment of the poorest of the poor in society. Yet, according to Pastor McCauley, they also recognize that human relationships are not as fulfilling as God intended them to be. People are experiencing emptiness and remain unfulfilled in their relationships. The reason is that they have not surrendered their lives to God. Therefore it is the responsibility of the church to assist people with the gospel to find meaning and contentment in their lives, while remaining accountable to God.

Pastor McCauley admits that their church has not always responded sufficiently to the needs of all who are desperate. It tends to be a swamp rather than a river. A church can become a swamp when members are self-centred, and not Christ-centred. They are swallowed up in their own spiritual programmes and church activities that are all inward looking, focusing only on the interests of the local Christian community. They are devoid of any serious desire to reach out with the gospel, in word and deed, especially towards the distressed in their society. Members of Rhema Ministries, therefore, tend to be more materialistic in their outlook since they have become possessed by self-interest. The church should strive to be like a river that is constantly flowing, with a balance maintained between inflow and outflow, a river that is life-giving. Members of the church need to reach out to the less fortunate, building their self-worth and dignity. The life of Christ that is constantly flowing into the church must be spilled into the community to produce a transformation that will be pleasing to Christ.

According to Pastor McCauley, his Ministries are learning that they should not be irrelevant as Christians by failing to recognize that it is not enough to feed a hungry person just for a day. Ministry to the poor should not be limited to giving handouts without engagement with the poor. It may be a noble thing to be involved in acts of benevolence that contribute to their welfare. But for a ministry to be truly relevant and credible, they should be building meaningful relationships with the disadvantaged. Relationships should never be patronizing, but should boost the dignity of the poor as human beings. In addition, the deprived should be allowed to make a vital contribution. Below are some of the enriching experiences and lessons that have emerged from their ministry amongst the impoverished:

1. The church needs to learn to use power for service and embrace an approach to spirituality that reflects humility and a mindset that is caring, having an element of *Ubuntu*.
2. The poor have exhibited remarkable sincerity and willingness in practicing forgiveness. Despite having experienced injustice they still graciously forgive their persecutors. This is a clear sign of how God's saving and forgiving power continues to work amongst people, even when they have been downtrodden.

3. The poor show a commitment to God that is not motivated by material benefits. The poor display genuine dedication to the Christian faith even when they are barely surviving.

The Christian witness in a situation of poverty has turned out to be a journey to renewal and growth for the witnesses because of the revitalizing fellowship with the God-revering poor, whose love for God is so refreshing and challenging.

6.1.4.3 Response to Poverty

Poverty, according to Pastor McCauley, is a challenge that has been part of our sad segregated past; even today it is still a reality to many. Therefore Rhema Ministries started a ministry to address social development issues. A number of programmes have been launched to contribute to the reconstruction of society. Rhema's programmes include the following:

Hands of Compassion (HOC)

The inspirational biblical text for this project is 2 Cor. 8:14. Through its social programmes Rhema shares resources with the intention of achieving equality amongst people. The Rhema Hands of Compassion is a Christian community that lives out their understanding of the gospel, with particular emphasis on practical help to those in need. This vibrant, non-racial, inter-cultural community lives and works to fulfil a three-fold vision:

- Reconciliation
- Recovery
- Restoration

It was established in 1987, on a 47-acre smallholding near Lanseria Airport, Johannesburg, and forms part of the Rhema social services network. The project is funded by donations from compassionate people who believe in the relevancy of love in action.

Who comes to Hands of Compassion?

The community includes people from all walks of life that are in the process of healing and on a journey to recovery and restoration. Two types of people come to Hands of Compassion: those that choose to live more simply and want to serve others in a practical way; and those that have been broken and rejected by society, and need to be restored. Through Christian counselling many draw closer to God and are challenged to walk with integrity before the Lord.

Overseas workers, especially the youth, are often sent by their churches to spend a period of time at Hands of Compassion, learning and experiencing the community and ministry.

Projects of Hand of Compassion

Many projects and outreaches are conducted by Hands of Compassion. They include:

Tuesday Workday

The underprivileged members of the local community are invited to participate in a “work for food programme” every Tuesday. The day starts at 08:00 with a church service. At 9:00 work duties are given out to everyone according to their abilities. At 12:30 food parcels are given to the visitors and on occasion they receive blankets, clothing, shoes, schoolbags for children, toiletries and various other donated goods.

The Tuesday Workers group averages 50 people weekly and several tons of mealie-meal is distributed each month. When regular members of this group are ill, they are visited in their homes and food is taken to them, giving the HOC staff an opportunity to minister to their family.

Rhema Recovery Project

After being in a rehabilitation programme or prison, it is difficult for recovering substance abusers to face the outside world. HOC offers a “halfway house”, where spiritual and emotional support is given, for a minimum period of six months.

While working and learning a variety of life skills, residents have time to prepare to be re-integrated into society. Families are reconciled and jobs and accommodation sought,

during their stay at HOC. A follow-up system is in place once the resident leaves the programme.

Primary Health Clinic

The clinic operates five days a week, offering primary health care to disadvantaged people living in the surrounding areas. Services include baby and pre-natal care; attention to the aged and other much needed assistance. The clinic is run by the Provincial Health Department and tends to the needs of over 50 people a day.

Bakery

A well-equipped bakery produces bread for the community and for the soup kitchens. New residents learn to make bread, and at times have been able to take up jobs in commercial bakeries.

Literacy Programmes

Literacy programmes are presented once a week. For many of the students, it is a privilege to be able to sign their names. The self-worth that accompanies such achievements brings as much joy to the learners as it does the teachers.

Student Empowerment Project

High school children from disadvantaged backgrounds and broken families are given the chance to complete high school in a stable and inspiring environment. They live in the community and are assisted with transport to schools, purchase of books, stationery, and uniforms, as well as learning basic computer literacy and various life skills. Some students that have come through this project are currently doing their tertiary education through correspondence and held responsible jobs.

New Mothers Project

Unwed mothers and their babies are placed in this programme for a period of up to eight months. They are counselled on motherhood and supported to make the right choices for

their newborn babies. During this critical time the women are surrounded by a team of caring people who are committed to seeing them successfully continue with their lives.

Crisis Response Team

The HOC is often approached to assist with crisis management. Teams on call, give support to people who are in need, including victims of fires, floods, evictions and other disasters. Blankets, clothes and food are often taken to the hurting people. Giving practical help creates a platform to share God's love and concern for others.

The HOC team is part of a bigger network of role-players in crisis-response, called the Disaster Relief Committee.

Luke 14

Homeless people and the poor are invited to a festive lunch, where they are served and honoured with a meal fit for a king. The outreach is based on Luke 14:12 –14.

Counselling, Pastoral Care and Assistance

The HOC office at the Rhema Church in Randburg offers a “walk in” care centre for people who live on the streets, including a food depot, handout of clean clothes and the opportunity to join in a Bible study group or to be counselled. At times the need is for a shower and clean clothing.

Employment office

The core service of this office is connecting people in Rhema Church seeking employment, to members of the congregation that have jobs to offer. Unemployment is still one of the most serious problems in South Africa today and many people have been successfully placed.

Emergency rooms

Rooms at the farm are set aside to provide temporary accommodation for people in distress. When destitute people arrive at the Rhema Church they are accommodated for

short periods of time and provided with meals and counselling. There is a network with other organizations to help with more permanent solutions.

Chef's Training Programme

A training facility is run from the HOC kitchens to empower and equip young people with tangible skills. After a probation period of six months the trainees are enrolled in Intec College, where they do a Gourmet Chef's Course through correspondence. For a period of two years the trainees are exposed to various types of catering.

Soup Kitchens

Over 70 feeding projects are supplied with vouchers donated for food, which they then use in the area. Over 70 000 meals are distributed per month.

Local Outreaches

These include visiting schools and churches in surrounding disadvantaged areas, providing spiritual guidance to the youth and support to local pastors. Through counselling and food assistance, families are ministered to and restored.

Social Justice

The involvement in legal aspects includes resettlement of displaced communities, mediating in land disputes, providing temporary accommodation and facilitating negotiated agreements between opposing segments of a polarized South African society.

Rhema Service Foundation

Overview

The Rhema Services Foundation (RSF) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization with the objective to uplift, and develop and individuals, families and communities, and is an outflow of Christian conscience and community spirit. It is involved in running numerous projects, including children's homes, care for the chronically ill, HIV-Aids patients and community support centres.

Projects:

Hospice facilities

These fully operational hospices have a capacity for 400 patients and are focused on providing care for the destitute, chronically ill and HIV-Aids infected people. The “*Emseni*” Hospice is located in Hillbrow and the “*Phomolong*” Hospice is in Boksburg, east of Johannesburg. Here people are given a chance to live out their lives in dignity, enjoying proper medical care and counselling.

A number of other social care projects that are managed from the hospices, including a nursery school, a nurses training centre and home-based care services.

Children’s Village

RSF has been involved in children’s work for nine years, pioneering a street children’s programme that has rescued hundreds of children off the streets of Johannesburg. These projects are now amalgamated into one facility that is situated in Gordon Terrace, opposite the Johannesburg Athletics Stadium.

The Rhema Children’s Village accommodates children who are placed by the courts. Here they have access to social workers, childcare professionals, medical services and education. The objective of the Village is to stabilize the children and then offer a safe environment where schooling can continue.

A further objective is to reunite children with their families. The social workers employed at the village offer counselling to the families in the hope of reunification.

The project is to offer the children sport and recreation opportunities with the hope of inspiring them to overcome their past and to develop into responsible and happy adults.

Primary Health Care Services and Home Based Care

Itsoseng Community Health Care Clinic

The clinic offers basic health care services and forms part of the Bristol Meyers Squib Foundation. The clinic is the answer to the health needs of more than 1500 people in the *Itsoseng* informal settlement and neighbouring smallholdings in Kya Sand, Nooitgedacht and Lion Park, and falls within the Randburg Magisterial district.

Social Services and Home Based Care

The following services are offered:

Alexandra:

- Facilitation of educational awareness through workshops
- Training of auxiliary work students
- Foster care supervision for HIV-Aids children
- Weekly support groups for caregivers of the needy and children not yet in foster care.
- Youth focus groups on income generating and business skills

Randburg:

- A school for Social Auxiliary Work
- Social services in the area
- HIV-Aids support.

Zandspruit and surrounding areas:

- Women's sewing project and bead work group
- Vegetable garden management
- Support groups for perpetrators of violence
- Food parcel programme for HIV- Aids children
- School uniform programme

Care Centres

Social issues such as crime, abuse and unemployment were the initiating reasons for the birth of the Rhema Care Centres. These facilities were established during the 90's as places of love and caring and are located in Alexandra and Soweto.

Even with such a number of social development programmes undertaken by Rhema, they still feel they can do more. The needs on the ground amongst the poor are overwhelming.

They have responded compassionately with numerous ministry initiatives for the poor in their context with the resources at their disposal.

6.1.4.4 Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

Ministry to the poor is very significant to the mission of Rhema Ministries. They subscribe to the concept of four pillars of ministry, of which service to the needy is one.

The four pillars are:

- Evangelism
- Social significance
- Prophetic relevance
- Spiritual potency.

Their development initiatives in their witness are part of the “full gospel”. Thus they perceive the role of the church entailing, amongst other things, seeking to meet the needs of humanity in all areas. The church should become a channel of love and compassion; so that Christ may be demonstrated through his followers. Thus they involved their church members in social development programmes although some of these programmes are managed by a fulltime staff of professionals and other personnel. Members are afforded the opportunity to make a contribution through their voluntary services at various levels of these programmes and they also provide financial support to this ministry. Meanwhile they also seek to involve the poor, who are beneficiaries of the various poverty alleviation projects like soup kitchens, the Hands of Compassion Community and the Work for Food Programme.

6.1.4.5 General

The church has invested significant amounts of financial and other essential resources in their ministry to the deprived. The annual budget for their poverty alleviation projects is as follows:

- Rhema Service Foundation – approximately R20 million
- Hands of Compassion – approximately R3 million

These funds are come from their congregation, government and corporate partners, and go a long way in helping the community, which is aware of the services that are provided for their welfare. These services are run from a good church infrastructure and strategic locations throughout the city. The favourable impact of these programmes is borne out by good testimonies received from those who have benefited.

6.1.5 Pastor Mosa Sono – Grace Bible Church, Soweto.

Pastor Mosa Sono is the senior pastor of Grace Bible Church in Soweto. This church has experienced such a phenomenal growth within Soweto and the surrounding areas to such an extent that satellite churches have been planted in those areas. The current membership in the Soweto congregation is above alone 11 000 adults and 1500 children.

6.1.5.1 The Experience of Poverty

According to Pastor Mosa, between 35 to 45% of their congregation is affected by deprivation. In his estimation on the prevalence of poverty, he says, it is very close to the national census figures as described by Statistics South Africa. Many of these poor people, live below the bread line. They cannot afford to pay for the basic necessities that would enable them to live a normal life as human beings. This is the desperate scenario of poverty that Pastor Mosa paints about his community:

- People with low levels of literacy, and are unskilled, therefore struggling or unable to find employment or to acquire skills essential for any engagement in productive activity.
- Some of the poor come from homes historically embedded in poverty. Their parents were previously unemployed or at some stage underemployed. Their family life was one of hardship. As children, they are at a disadvantage when they start out in life. They are raised in acute lack that has limited their options for upward mobility in society. To be brought up in poverty means, being subjected to a poor quality of life in terms of education, social and recreational amenities, health, and other significant economic and political opportunities. Some of the

homes have a legacy of impoverishment, and perpetuate a circle of multigenerational poverty.

- They have large households that include members of the extended family. Life gets tougher in such circumstances, especially if all the members of those sizeable families have to share the minimal resources that they just manage to obtain.
- The upsurge of HIV-AIDS further complicates the situation of the poor. It creates more needs when people are already struggling with the minimal resources at their disposal.
- Women and children are usually the ones who are highly impacted by poverty. Many households are progressively becoming woman-headed households. Single parents, especially mothers, are the ones who have to take care of children when families break up or there has been a loss of a spouse.

Poverty that is material is real and readily recognizable. Yet, there are aspects of poverty that go beyond the material, which are less obvious. The following issues that are also confronting the poor need attention:

- People's self-esteem is negatively affected as a result of their being marginalized. The result is that such people are not assertive enough and tend to be more doubtful about themselves and their abilities. They become fearful and lack the initiative to venture into anything that has better prospects for their development. The issue of a positive identity is critical, in enabling people to maximize their potential despite adversity. Many, due to low self-esteem, hesitate to use the opportunities that they are entitled to in order to improve the quality of their lives. When possibilities of gaining resources are presented to people, they lack the confidence to take advantage of them. This low self-esteem is so dis-empowering that it locks them into a vicious circle of marginalisation.
- It is common to see some of the poor people in worn-out clothes that become their public trademark.
- Some of the deprived having a resigned look that makes them appear as if they are hopeless, having given up all hope of seeing their lives ever improving.
- Their inability to contribute to the church coffers since they use their meagre resources mainly for their own survival.

- The disadvantaged are forced to walk long distances to carry out some of their errands, due to limited access to affordable transportation.
- The discomfort of making frequent requests to the church, seeking assistance. For many it is humiliating to ask for help, but out of sheer desperation in their struggle for survival, they are pressurized to beg in order to cope with the hardships of impoverishment.

These are some of the needs that are prevalent in the community served by Pastor Mosa:

- People consistently battling to put something on their table for daily sustenance.
- Parents have limited access to the resources required in educating their children. Many parents wish to help their children to achieve significant results educationally, to enhance moulding a future towards a good career. But, this dream remains elusive since they cannot afford to fund their children's tertiary education.
- A proper understanding of the historical factors behind the damning circle of poverty. We should not underestimate the historical reality that has compounded their deprivation. Sometimes, people feel bad simply because they are poor. They have never been able to fully analyse their situation, or injustice that has marginalized them, let alone the fact that there is nothing wrong with them. They are not the cause of their misfortune as compared to others who are more advantaged than these are. Many of those who are affluent, started on a better footing than those who were disadvantaged. Yet, this does not justify blame-shifting and making excuses instead of taking some responsibility for improving their adverse situation.

6.1.5.2 Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty

Pastor Mosa teaches that God is not the author of poverty. God does not like it and God does not want anybody to be poor. However, it's impossible to separate poverty from our present socio-political realities. Biblically, there is always a historical reality tied to the occurrence of poverty amongst a people. Therefore, to tell poor people that they can be

well off without considering their socio-political context, would amount to giving them false hopes. It would frustrate the poor people, since that would not be addressing the fundamental flaws embedded in their societal reality. It would be merely telling them they could be rich whilst neglecting the socio-political factors that are the source of their destitution. In addressing part of this impoverishment, they need restitution, restoration and repentance. This would be in line with the Biblical tradition of addressing poverty, which was not previously well presented in their church circles.

The church should be teaching and exemplifying that God loves the poor. It should also demonstrate that with practical steps, and provide skills that would enable the disadvantaged to be rescued from poverty. This should be done in a positive and affirming way, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Poor people should be shown the magnitude of the love that God has for them and how the Bible can assist them in changing their lives. This should result in significant changes in people's:

- Expectations
- Belief systems

The church's intention is to convince people that even if they are poor, they stand a chance of getting out of their current difficulties. People should embrace the possibility of a better life. The Holy Spirit should work through the church, enabling it to preach uplifting messages that suggest realistic ways of dealing with the challenges of pauperism.

In interacting with the poor these are some of the valuable lessons that Grace Bible Church has learned:

- They have been amazed by the way people achieve incredible things in their lives and family with less, by how they manage to live in contentment despite living from meagre salaries and experiencing lack.
- They have learnt to exercise subliminal caution as leaders and as a church, to never exclude the poor from any aspect of their Christian life and ministry. Otherwise, the church would be dominated by the life orientation and values of

the middle class and celebrities. Often people who do not have the means are not part of the equation that makes the totality our society. The poor are usually ostracized and become the forgotten people in society, but this should not be the trend the church is promoting.

- To have an in-depth understanding and experience of Christ's concern for the poor.
- To focus on the task of the missions seeking to be a beacon of hope and rebuilders of the community. When looking at the magnitude of the needs of the poor, they have been motivated to strive to do more in ministering to them.
- To review their commitment and double their efforts for the rebuilding of their community.
- To realize that people can be damaged by poverty to an extent that they lose their God-given human identity. This has helped the church to understand why people resort to extreme and deplorable means to survive. Therefore, one must be very slow to pass judgment, condemning the actions of the poor that we might classify as unsavoury. Yet, without condoning their actions, it should be recognized that such actions are desperate measures adopted for survival.

6.1.5.3 Response to Poverty

This church has embarked on initiatives that seek to build its community. They believe that until you help people to have skills, which will help them survive without you, and then true empowerment has not really happened. Their objective is to assist people stand on their own feet and do things for themselves. They have observed that when empowered people succeed, they become those authentic and inspirational role models for others who are still suffering. The poor take courage when they see someone who was once struggling just like them but who has prevailed over paucity. This can motivate people to persevere in their resistance to marginalization. Progress of a person or group from their community is a positive stimulus for the development of others in the same community. There is a need to create a testimony of enough homegrown wins against poverty, in our backyard to start a ripple effect of transformation. When the deprived see

their peer's triumph, they too may be challenged not to accept the status quo. To achieve this goal, the church has embarked on community building activities in the following areas:

- Prison ministry. They have an outreach programme that seeks to reach out to offenders who have been convicted, sentenced and incarcerated from society, through criminal activity on their part.
- Skills development focus. They conduct workshops and seminars with the intention to foster an entrepreneurial spirit amongst poor people. Pastor Mosa's congregation is running a computer school as well.
- Leadership development programmes. They conduct seminars in which they have partnerships with leading figures in business, in civil society, in government, in the church and in the community, to educate people on a variety of matters related to the field of leadership. The aim being to create a culture of leadership within the community that would ultimately contribute to people developing self-reliance and having capacity to take responsibility for all their personal, family and community issues.
- Awareness campaigns. They address specific social, educational and health related problems in society. They have been dealing with issues of HIV/Aids, care for the frail and aged, prevention of drug abuse and have conducted career seminars for the youth.
- Trauma Counselling. This service is provided to people who have experienced any psychosomatic or physical trauma, such as people who have been sexually abused, survivors of crime and patients suffering from terminal ailments.
- Feeding Programme. They have a soup kitchen that they run weekly, and also periodically distribute food parcels to the underprivileged families.
- Relief Aid. Through this service, they offer financial grants to the needy in cases of emergencies to deal with issues like displacement and funerals.
- Bursary fund. Through this fund they offer study grants to aspirant students from disadvantaged backgrounds to further their studies for career development.
- Recognition of exceptional people who emerge out of conditions of adversity. When people succeed others in their backyard are inspired by their achievements.

- The church is deliberately encouraging people to believe that they bear the image of God as it is written in the Scriptures; therefore, they are valuable and precious before God. They invite them into a vibrant relationship with their Creator and Jesus their Lord.
- They motivate people to use their talents or gifts for their own empowerment.
- They challenge those who have succeeded and left the deprived township and rural areas, to return and plough back into the community, with that benevolent gesture creating a sense of gratitude and appreciation to God for blessing them.
- They strive to network with other like-minded organizations in order to strengthen their efforts in ministry to the community.

With these above-mentioned ministry projects, they are making a contribution towards community transformation. Their first priority is to raise people's consciousness to the realization that they have been made in the image of God, and to be led into a vibrant and living relationship with their Creator. People should experience the liberty to express themselves through their talents, and consequently, to use those talents and skills to make a living for themselves and their families. Finally, people should be able to plough back the harvest of their productive activity into their community. Transformation, therefore, is realized when people have a sense of pride, knowing that they are becoming that which God has intended them to be, in humanity. Then, they will also appreciate what they have, the abilities they possess, their environment and their community.

In self-critique Pastor Sono feels they have not done enough to his satisfaction in their witness to deal with the challenges of poverty in their community. These are the steps that they intend to take to gain a momentum for their ministry amongst the poor:

- To create the capacity to run projects in a sustainable manner.
- To increase resources to tackle more challenges, that is, to increase the scope of their ministry amongst the poor.
- To look at their mistakes in ministry constructively. Rather, to seek to correct the tendency to quit after experiencing setbacks in their witness, in a context of deprivation.

Those proposed corrective actions would contribute to strengthening this witness to the poor, in obedience to Christ's commission.

6.1.5.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the work of the Church

Ministering to the poor is very significant to their mission as a church. This is properly encapsulated in their church mission statement that advocates "Grace Bible Church is a church that D.R.E.A.MS." This acronym is analysed or expressed in the following manner:

D = Discipleship

R= Restoration

E= Evangelism

M= Missions

S= Social Relevance.

They have initiated a D.R.E.A.M.S campaign in an attempt to enhance the quality of ministry and service to all the people in their community, through a variety of programs and interventions. They have made a commitment to contribute in the restoration of broken lives, families and societies. Ministry to the poor is a priority to this church, although it is still in a developmental phase. Some of their programmes are just evolving; they have not yet achieved their aims to the fullest. They have a cluster of designated personnel on the church's payroll, which are the custodians of the vision of ministering to the poor and dealing with matters of social welfare and development. It is so significant to them, that they allocate resources to addressing issues of poverty.

Ministering to the disadvantaged is closely connected to the church's mandate of proclaiming the gospel. They believe Christians should not just proclaim the good news without dealing practically with the actual needs of the people being addressed. The Lord Jesus set an example when He addressed the felt needs of people. Since then, Christians have to earn their right to minister to the poor by responding properly to their needs. That response should follow the example of Jesus, who showed the deprived that he genuinely

loved and cared for them. But, the church should not dilute this concern for the poor with ulterior motives of manipulating people to become its members. The motive should be to demonstrate God's love to them because they are made in the image of God. Experience has taught them that treating the poor with respect has enabled the poor to win their hearts. Therefore, they have been more open to most invitations where they had to engage in dialogue about the gospel.

In their witness to the poor, they have involved members of their church to join the teams that offer this ministry. They have a number of volunteers who are the workforce behind these essential services. Their church relies a lot on volunteers in pursuing ministry activities. They participate by giving generously towards the needs of the poor both financially and in kind, especially by donating food parcels to cater for the pressing needs of the moment. They still have to develop the involvement of those who are beneficiaries in their poverty alleviation efforts, so that they become meaningful contributors. Their past attempts to involve the poor as stakeholders lacked a proper follow-up once the projects were initiated. They are faced with a challenge to explore this issue extensively in their present ministries.

The community that their church is serving appreciates the ministry to the poor. Despite having experienced some shortcomings, those projects have made a difference to the community. There are individuals, families and groups who were given a lifeline when they were in dire straits. The volunteers have memories of families who were thankful for the supplies of food parcels in the face of hunger, for financial help to bury a loved one in the face of lack, and youth who were assisted with bursaries when academic exclusion was an inevitable reality. Also, they have received testimonies of the relief experienced by those who benefited psychologically and spiritually from the counselling interventions of the church. Although, these are just small initiatives, they have provided significant services necessary for the welfare of those who do not have the luxury of many options. The impact has been in proportion to their input. Therefore, they see a need to improve and grow as they witness amongst the have-nots. These are the areas in their spotlight for enhancement:

- To increase the rate of consistency in conducting community projects.
- To improve the level and quality of participation of the poor in poverty alleviation initiatives.
- To obtain more resources to launch projects that will have more impact.
- Structuring their budgeting appropriately to channel enough resources to ministry amongst the poor.

They hope to hone their initiatives as the church to serve the poor with dignity, although they themselves have to make do with what they can raise in a very poor community. Even so, they marvel at the generosity of their church members to assist the poor within the community beyond the structured programmes of the church.

6.2 A Comparative Analysis of the Perspective of National Leaders Regarding their Witness in a Context of Poverty

The Experience of Poverty

These eminent church leaders agree that poverty is indeed a challenge that all the respective churches need to address. There is an unwavering consensus amongst them that poverty is a giant facing the church in South Africa. Poverty is a giant that complicates their witness, because it affects a large section of the population. It is so widespread throughout the nation, that it affects individuals, families, communities and churches both in the urban and rural areas. It continues to destabilize the majority of people in the communities, with women and children being the ones that are most cruelly hit by it. A huge number of families, especially the ones in previously disadvantaged communities, in rural areas and townships, are desperately poor.

The difference is in the extent of poverty their different church members and communities are facing. On the basis of the table below I seek to illustrate how their different constituencies are affected by poverty:

Table 2: The Extent of the Experience of Poverty

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP	EXTENT IN PERCENTAGE ESTIMATES
Rev Moss Ntlha – TEASA	80
Pastor Ray McCauley – Rhema	30 to 40
Dr Isak Burger –AFM	50
Pastor Chris Venter – IFCC	40 –50
Pastor Mosa Sono – Grace Bible Church	35 – 45

In view of the figures presented above one can see a vast differences in how these eminent leaders, representing dissimilar constituencies experience poverty. But it does seem that on average, an estimation of at least 40 % of their membership across the board is affected by poverty. Therefore, poverty poses a huge challenge in their ministry. It is a reality they cannot just ignore but have to deal with fulfilling their God-given mandate to care for and serve God’s people.

These eminent leaders also seem to have a practical understanding of poverty in their context. They show insight into the profile of the disadvantaged in their setting. This is their common description of those affected the most by poverty:

- Previously disadvantaged communities – Black and Coloured communities
- Women
- Children and youth
- The unemployed.

Also, they have successfully identified the actual needs that are prevalent within their communities. Although in some instances senior church leadership is out of touch with the life world of their constituency, there are leaders who seem connected with their communities. The recurring common needs that they have recognized are:

- Nourishing food and decent clothing
- Proper shelter or housing
- Education and training in appropriate skills for employability or productivity as entrepreneurs
- Job or employment opportunities
- Effective programmes to address all HIV-Aids related issues.

Their profiling of the deprived and identification of the needs present in their communities coincide with the findings of the UNDP and Statistic South Africa reports.

Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

It is clear that these eminent leaders come from church traditions that do not all have the same emphasis when they proclaim the gospel to their own congregations. Yet, from their varying doctrinal positions, they all manage to reflect on theological issues of poverty. They have *four points of convergence* in their theology and teachings on poverty. *Firstly*, that the marginalized are at the centre of Christ's mission as the Saviour of the world. When you look at Christ's message, ministry and life, He was pro-poor. Through the entire mission of Christ God demonstrated His love for the poor. Therefore, if we exclude the poor from the ministry of the church we lose the essence of the gospel. For this reason, Luke 4:18 –19 featured in their viewpoints on poverty. *Secondly*, deprivation within the historical context of South Africa is not an ideal state, to be spiritually romanticized. In short, poverty is a curse and not a blessing from God to be embraced. In their opinion God does not want anybody to be disadvantaged and those who are poor should be freed from poverty. *Thirdly*, the Church has been commissioned to minister to the poor. They consider themselves to have a prophetic mission to help the deprived out of the dehumanizing and unjust conditions of marginalization. They just fell short of saying that the church is the church of the poor. *Finally*, that the gospel of Christ is a gospel that addresses a complete person. All the aspects of human life are significant to Christ. Therefore, the church needs to be a witness of the whole gospel that addresses people in totality.

There are *dissimilarities* in the way these churches communicate their message in response to poverty, due to their varying contexts. Rev. Moss Ntlha and Pastor Chris Venter expressed the view that some leaders within their constituencies do not see the issue of poverty as a major theological priority. Rather, as Rev Moss puts it, they would interpret John 3:16 in such a way that it overshadows Luke 4:18. The emphasis on John 3:16 would be on saving souls without dealing with the contextual complexities of the poverty of those souls. Those who subscribe to this position seem to be more concerned about preserving people for heaven. Later, incidentally, they may deal with their physical needs. There seems to be some dualistic tendencies in their thinking. First, they deal with spiritual issues, which are much more important to them than secular matters.

Secondly, there are differences in their perceptions in how God enriches the poor. Pastor Ray McCauley's view is that God does not want the poor to be poor but His purpose for them is that they should prosper. All the leaders share the view that God wants the poor to prosper, especially in a country that through discrimination has marginalized them. But, there is some contention on how this prosperity theology should be applied without producing a small elite that is extremely wealthy whilst the poor are growing poorer. Prosperity teaching was misused in the past to create a minority 'elitist group' of the highly 'blessed' and 'prosperous,' people who had no commitment to the gospel or connection with the poor. They lived a privileged life, which continued to evade the poor. Prosperity theology is irrelevant to the poor, since, it ignores the socio-political, economic, and historical realities that condemned them to deprivation. Thus, Pastor Mosa is of the opinion that even though, he sides with the poor the poor will never escape deprivation unless the church and other relevant stakeholders such as the government participate in the empowerment of the poor. There should be an orchestration of vehement societal movement to deal with the problems of poverty.

These national leaders agree on the fact that ministry amongst the poor should not be a one-way stream from the church, flowing to the poor. Rather, they are continuously learning from the poor in a manner that augments and improves their lives in service to Christ. They all have a sense of indebtedness to the disadvantaged and express admiration

for their commitment to the gospel despite being in appalling conditions of deprivation. But, one of the lessons they seem not to have learnt is to practically involve the poor in their ministry and poverty alleviation initiatives. Their ministries have not mastered the art of making the poor meaningful stakeholders and active partners in all efforts of the church to empower them. They need to change from merely doing charitable work for the poor, to doing things with them, with the ultimate goal being to have the disadvantaged do things necessary for their empowerment for themselves. The poor should not be involved only in ministry as beneficiaries. Rather, they should grow to be contributors, and shapers of their own history and future. The marginalized are the ideal guardians of their own interests, aspirations, rights and freedom. Otherwise, the undesirable consequence of our efforts might be dependency, rather than emancipation and empowerment within the ranks of the poor who are being served.

Response To Poverty

All these key leaders agreed that their church should respond practically in its witness amongst the poor, in way that is harmonious with the spirit of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, they, as leaders in their own structures, have shaped the vision of the church to include programmes that address the needs of the poor. Thus, their churches are making contributions in an array of areas from education, shelter, feeding programmes, HIV-Aids prevention and care, skills development and job creation. The difference is in the broadness, organization and administration, and scope of their programmes as facilitated by different ministries. The AFM and Rhema Churches were amongst the leading churches in how they structured their ministry programmes amongst the poor. Their programmes were well conceptualised, organized, administered and well resourced. Highly specialized and experienced staff, competent to minister to the poor, leads their welfare and social development programmes. Their programmes are also registered with the Department of Welfare and Social Development. This registration status has won them national recognition as stakeholders who make a difference in serving the poor. They are, therefore, positioned advantageously to attract funding from the government and business sector. Meanwhile, other national leaders report having programmes that are

run on a small scale by local assemblies without the support of their national offices. Therefore the level of organization, administration and funding vary from one assembly to another depending on the capacity of the congregations in those areas. Unlike the AFM and Rhema, they do not have the advantage of having a national office or central administrative offices to offer strategic support to the welfare and development projects of local churches within their fold. A point on which national leaders disagree is the recognition of advocacy on issues of poverty as the task of the church. Rev. Moss Ntlha highlighted the importance of advocacy in addressing the issues of pauperisation. This is critical especially if we wish to address socio-political and economic issues that have national and global ramifications. Pastor Mosa has had the opportunity of being able to mobilise his own constituency successfully to provide support for their ministry amongst the poor. Many of their programs that empower the power are supported with local personnel, funds, and resources. Pastor Mosa Sono said, “They marvel at the generosity of their church members, who assist the poor within the community beyond the structured programmes of the Church.” They have developed a culture of sharing their resources with the poor in the church and community fighting against poverty.

There is consensus in their objectives of ministry amid the poor. This is how the leaders enumerated the objectives of their ministry in a situation of poverty:

- To bring immediate relief to desperate situations [like in response to hunger, homelessness, abuse, disaster].
- To promote empowerment through skills development.
- To show and demonstrate the love that God has for the poor
- To incarnate the full gospel
- To foster a caring spirit that should characterize the Church as a family of God.

In the light of these vividly stated goals, they all agreed that ministry to the poor must benefit those who are desperate, in terms of their earlier stated profile. Again all agreed that, despite their respective churches’ participation in ministry to address deprivation, they have not responded satisfactorily to the challenges of poverty. All unanimously conceded that still more needs to be done still, to address the backlog of poverty. Hence, the need to intensify this struggle and increase their resources for their witness in a

situation of poverty. They also need to broaden their network of alliances with those who share this just cause, in terms of poverty eradication, in view of the gospel of the Kingdom.

The Relationship Between Poverty Eradication And The Work of the Church

The leaders of these different churches agree unanimously that ministry to the poor should be viewed as an indivisible part of the whole mission of the church. The church has a mandate to fulfil. That mandate deals with contextual matters that include problems of poverty. Ministering to the poor is an integral and essential part of the gospel. This gospel should be both proclaimed and exemplified in deeds in our communities.

Points of dissimilarities are noticed in the levels of impact, through programmes on the poor and the extent to which communities know about these ministry initiatives in their locality. All the leaders have testimonies that attest to the difference these programmes have positively contributed to targeted communities. Obviously, the scope of programmes run by those who are well resourced, have more impact than those run by churches with limited resources. But, every contribution, even on a small scale, is significant. It may not be making it into the media headlines, but to its beneficiaries, it might be the only lifeline when they are in a crisis. Yet, this should not encourage mediocrity when people launch compassionate ministry projects. Churches with limited resources, which do not see the need to raise the community's awareness of their ministry to the poor, may subsequently inadvertently become domesticated to serving the poor within their own church alone. They may miss the opportunity to extend their service to the poor outside the church and incidentally to also attract additional resources from the broader community that could be employed in this ministry.

The leaders of the respective churches indicated several areas in which they could improve their witness in circumstances of poverty. They need to do the following:

- To do an appropriate needs analysis of the community. To ensure that they engage the poor in order to identify real needs, not just what they perceive to be needs as facilitators of ministry.
- To embark on ministry initiatives that would become sustainable.
- To consolidate their theology with reference to their witness amongst the poor.
- To mobilize their churches to be more involved in community issues such as addressing deprivation in their community.

These leaders have unequivocally expressed and renewed their commitment to focus on poverty eradication in their communities. Contrary, to popular perception, they are aware of the challenges of poverty in their own context and they are growing in their response to the poor. Dialogue about their mission when faced with the realities of poverty has been part of the history of the different churches, although leaders have displayed varying degrees of conviction. Consequently, that dialogue has been translated into some action in various large-scale and small-scale ministry initiatives. They have a challenge to continue the development of their witness to the disadvantaged in a manner that is compatible to the demands of the gospel of Christ – not just socially relevant.

6.3 Positions of Some Leading Charismatic Evangelical Leaders in Local Churches

This is a reflection on the viewpoints of various local church leaders as ministers in their own congregations. The focus is on how they deal with poverty locally. Some of these leaders that I have had dialogues with, are also national and regional or provincial leaders in their constituencies. But, here, the spotlight is on their responsibilities and ministry at a local level of their respective communities, without any motive of undermining their stature as servants of Christ at any other level. Below, is a list of the leaders (with their congregations) who have been interviewed and whose constituencies have been visited:

- Pastor Don Phillips, Umtata Christian Centre, Eastern Cape.
- Pastor Dublin Poswa, Umtata, Eastern Cape.
- Pastor Thembinkosi Ntongana, Africa Evangelical Church, Umtata, Eastern Cape

- Bishop Gladstone Botwana, Zoë Bible Church, Pimville, Gauteng.
- Bishop Stephen Zondo, Rivers of Living Waters, Sebokeng, Gauteng.
- Pastor Thomas Makhubu, Arise Bible Church, Taung, North West.
- Pastor Johannes Monosi, Healing Mission Centre, Free State.
- Pastor Glen Shroedder, Christian Revival Centre, Durban North, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Pastor Molutsi, God's Tabernacle Christian Family Church, Polokwane, Limpopo
- Pastor Blessing Selepe, Family Support Ministries, Limpopo

In this discourse, I will reflect mainly on the positions of Bishop Gladstone Botwana and Pastor Don Phillips. Although in my comparative analysis of their positions I will cite the views of some of the interviewed leaders in few instances. But I have included a more detailed report on their points of view as expressed during these interviews, in the Appendix.

6.3.1. Bishop Gladstone Botwana – Zoë Bible Church, Pimville – Soweto.

Bishop Gladstone Botwana is the presiding Bishop of Zoë Bible Churches in South Africa. They have several congregations throughout the country but at the moment they operate mainly in townships. He is currently pastoring one of their biggest congregation in Pimville, Soweto.

6.3.1.1 The Experience of Poverty

In his observation, Bishop Botwana noted that slightly more than 50% of his congregation is affected by poverty. Being in Pimville, they have not escaped the poverty that affects township people. However, in their church, they have a number of people who are working, a few amongst them are either middle class or upper class. These church members stay in the surrounding suburbs but they fellowship in Soweto, but they still want to keep in touch with their churches and roots in the township.

Poverty is a real problem that their church and community face, and that impinges on the family. In Pimville, you cannot look at an individual apart from his family. There are families that experience poverty even though they have an employed breadwinner. This person might be unwilling to share his or her resources with the family especially in cases where there is conflict or other family difficulties. Some men are beginning to feel the devastation of poverty as a result of unemployment – just like women. Jobs are no longer an easy privilege for men in our society that is now rightly affirming women who were often marginalized in the previous dispensation. But, there is still more women than men that are severely affected by poverty.

This is how they have been measuring impoverishment:

1. They look at the income of the church and divide it by the number of members belonging to the church. They have discovered that having a large number of people attending church services does not necessarily imply that the church would have an increase in their resources. Their coffers only receive contributions from the 20% of the members of the church who are working. If one looks superficially at their congregation on a Sunday morning, one might see a church filled with thousands of people. On the surface, the people might look prosperous but many of them are unemployed. They are struggling to provide for their daily needs.
2. They assess their struggle for sustainability in running community and other church related projects. When the church initiates community projects, members are willing to support them but they are unable to contribute money to keep the projects in operation.
3. They review how church leadership interacts with the people. They discovered the needs of the people through communication and visitations. They experienced that poverty is a real challenge that their people are facing. When they talk to their parishioners, they hear and see that they have ambitions for themselves and their families. Yet, it is a struggle to earn the amounts of money needed for their children to finish school and go to tertiary institutions. Families struggle, and fail to take a sick family member to a nearby doctor, due to depleted finances.

These are the common needs of the poor in the Bishop's community:

- The disadvantaged need the assurance that though they are struggling, there is someone who cares, who loves and respects them even when they are impoverished. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"(John C. Maxwell cited by Botwana).
- People need to have a sense of belonging. The poor should never be discounted but should be included in all aspects of church life despite their lack. They want to feel that they belong to the church despite their poverty. Their background of deprivation should not be an excuse for anyone to discriminate against them.
- The church must have a kind of spirituality that offers consolation to the poor in their suffering. They need to be reassured that it was never God's intention to make and keep them poor, but that they are disadvantaged due to unfair socio-political and historical factors.
- The poor seek to be encouraged and supported to find employment or to be self-employed. Of course, the long-standing problem of the poor has been access to seed capital to start their enterprises. They have the desire to be self-employed but they are battling to get start-up capital for their business ventures.

6.3.1.2 Theology/Teachings in Relations to Poverty

The mission of the church in the context of poverty should be based on the commission that Jesus gave to the church, to reach out to all people in the world. But the church should also model that mission, imitating the example set out by Jesus Christ. Jesus dealt with the basic needs of people, such as, food and health. He fed them when they were hungry and healed the sick. These were the basic needs that Christ addressed in his context. Therefore, we cannot have a different mission from that of Christ, and ignore the basic needs of communities. The church also has to teach that deprivation is not part of God's original plan for humanity. It is a scourge that must be resisted in all societies, among nations and the world. Part of their teachings is to remind people to fight the mentality of poverty that perpetuates the status quo of being marginalized. Sometimes, people accept the conditions of poverty as their inescapable reality. They get accustomed

to lack in their lives, especially if it has persisted for long periods. Thus, there should be some re-programming in people that will change their mindset and motivate them to refute the fact that their lives were meant to end in poverty.

According to Luke 4:18 the good news is that the poor should not continue to be poor anymore. In the gospels, Christ affirms the fact that poverty should not be a permanent feature in people's existence. Reading John 10:10, Christians are presented with the promise of abundant life. This should be the norm for all of God's children, as a result of God's redemptive mission through Jesus Christ's life and ministry. The good news to the poor is that, Christ crushed the legitimacy of poverty as a result of sin out of the Fall; they do not have to be poor anymore. The poor, therefore, need to protest against all the forces that still enforce their impoverishment.

Lessons drawn from their ministry to the poor are:

1. Poverty is a painful experience, because it hinders freedom and dehumanises people. It distorts your 'self' and creates loss of identity as a person. Bishop Botwana cites Henry Ford who said, "Money doesn't change men. It merely unmasks them. If a man is naturally selfish, or arrogant, or greedy, the money brings it out; that's all." We do not know many of the poor, since poverty keeps being or humanity under wraps. We will know who they really are once they rise from the slums.
2. Help people to affirm who they are. Poor people should be respected. They are usually undermined and disrespected because deprivation makes one stand out as being different, maybe due to their unfashionable dress code. From personal experience, Bishop Botwana can attest to this. As one who was deprived, he had to discover who he was. Even if a person did not have a privileged upbringing, there is always a longing in him to be recognized as a human being, not to be despised for his unsavoury background, but to be respected.
3. Poverty can turn people into monsters. It can shatter dreams, aspirations and desires one longs to achieve. If the quest for a desired accomplishment is

frustrated by deprivation, and, if you are not a religious person and you have not been raised in a principled manner, the lure of criminality for survival may be hard to resist. The means you might adopt in desperation may be at the expense of the next person. Apart from the fact that we have a sinful nature, the environment of poverty has the potential to turn some people into monsters.

6.3.1.3 Response to Poverty

Bishop Botswana's church has been involved in programmes to assist the poor on a moderate scale. These are some of their initiatives in ministering to the needy:

- Individuals or families within the church adopt disadvantaged children [not legally], to support them as part of their Christian obligation. The church would frequently check on their needs and address them.
- Gentlemen mentor boys who are raised by single mothers. Through this exercise they attempt to provide these boys with good role models, hoping to have a positive impact on the character development of these children.
- The church runs a relief aid programme called the Helping Hand. They support the poor with food distribution, and provide special meals or lunches, especially for senior citizens and families in need. They intend to expand these programmes beyond the borders of the church once they have increased their resources.
- Youths provide cleaning services for frail people. They volunteer their services and tidy the houses of those frail people in the community who are unable to do it for themselves.
- Outreach programmes are organized by members of the church to assist and support orphanages and homes in the community run by other organizations. They occasionally donate clothes and pay visits to entertain and play with the children. They also invite them to attend church services, after which they would be provided with lunch.
- One of their new projects is a Bursary Fund that is just three years old. It was started to support students from a disadvantaged background to further their studies. These students have the potential to advance their education but their own

families are unable to pay for it. At the moment, they have started with few students, their intake will escalate as and when their funding grows.

They hope to achieve the following objectives:

- To project the caring heart of Jesus to the poor. They believe that people will never know Christ's love for them, unless the church demonstrates it.
- To say to the poor people, "Once you have been helped by either the church or an individual in the church, you then have to help the next person yourself". It must be a legacy, once a person is helped, he in turn must help others.

They feel they have not adequately responded to the challenges of poverty in their context. Poverty is widespread in the community and they have limited resources that cannot address all the needs of the people. The needs are so overwhelming, since they are compounded by the increasing HIV/Aids pandemic. Therefore, the impact of their ministry on the lives of the poor is not at the level they would have liked it to be. Nevertheless, out of their ministry to the disadvantaged, they still have some success stories. They have received a number of inspiring testimonies from people whose lives have become different through the ministry of their church. Some have become economically empowered through the assistance of the church when they were once living in poverty. Some, testify how applying teachings received from the church has helped them to be promoted in their workplace. Therefore, with better benefits at work, the quality of life has improved significantly – theirs and families' too. Many of those who are economically viable and who have left the township, have kept their membership with their township church. Despite having made progress to live in suburbs where they can afford to live an affluent life, they still want to identify with a poor church. This is a demonstration of the impact that the church has in these Christians lives.

6.3.1.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

The church's ministry initiatives involve church members, who give their resources and skills to help others who are destitute. Some congregants have developed in their witness to the extent that they have initiated their own community outreach projects. They balance the participation of skilled and unskilled members of the church in ministry to the poor.

They have been evaluating their witness amongst the deprived and have noted areas that call for improvement. They hope to improve their preaching, to be more practical when responding to the challenges in their community, like, the response of the youth in showing love, by helping to tidy the homes of the senior citizens. The deeds of the youth make sure that the elderly will not feel neglected in the community. Projects such as of those reaching out to the poor people in winter, with soup kitchens can be a practical means to assist the poor. They realize that if they do not engage in practical ministry they are only going to be reaching out to intellectuals. Poor people will only be impacted if the church responds to them in practical ways that are in line with the spirit of the gospel. Running support programmes to tutor high school students to master certain school subjects is one idea. There are Christians in their congregation who help the poor with medicine (that has not expired) to treat their ailments.

6.3.1.5 General

At the moment, the Zoë Bible Church spends five percent of its income, on addressing the needs of the poor. The truth is, being a self-funding church; their financial resources are greatly limited.

6.3.2 Pastor Don Phillips, Umtata Christian Centre

Pastor Don Phillips is the senior Pastor of Umtata Christian Centre that is situated in the Eastern Cape, in the city of Umtata. This church is also one of the fastest growing of the

largest churches in the region. The church ministers to both the urban and rural communities in the vicinity.

6.3.2.1 The Experience of Poverty

Poverty in their community is affecting approximately 35 % of the people. Those who are poor are unemployed and have no steady source of income. This means that materially they are not coping well. At face value one would note the material signs of deprivation when observing the community. Yet, looking deeper, one of the recognizable indicators is the high level of hopelessness amongst those who are affected by poverty. Therefore, as a church, they see it as their role, amongst others, to help people to regain hope. The message of hope is the one they carry to those who are experiencing poverty.

Umtata is a typical cosmopolitan city, populated by people representing both extremes in economic status. Its residents are both the affluent and the extremely poor, living in the same city. These are the prevalent problems amongst the poor:

- The inadequate provision of shelter or housing.
- The high incidence of alcohol abuse, which could be linked to hopelessness.
- It is the loitering of able-bodied people. These are people you should expect to be working, but are jobless.
- The groups of street children, roaming the streets at all hours of the day when they should be at school or at home with responsible parents and guardians. These street children's problem of a rough life on the streets is compounded by the lure of drug abuse, petty crime and prostitution.
- Mothers with children on their back whilst trying to help people carry their luggage to their mode of transport in exchange for a tip, are a common sight.
- The problem of laziness, with some people suffering this self-defeating habit that is created by negative personal attitudes and other societal factors.

6.3.2.2 Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty

In Pastor Don Phillip's opinion and observation poverty is a dehumanising phenomenon. It reduces people to a terrible state. They find themselves leading a deplorable existence that is plagued by lack of meaning, hopelessness and loss of dignity. Meanwhile, Christ's mission was to give people meaning in life and to restore their dignity. Poverty has a psychological, crippling effect on people, in that it neutralizes their potential. Deprivation has an undulating effect; it moves from the parents and becomes a stigma that affects their children. In experiences whilst doing prison ministry, they have dealt with cases of children who have been raised on the streets and have ended up in prison.

Their approach to the poor is to treat them with dignity and great respect. They do not allow any impartiality between people, even when they have both the affluent and poor in their church, they are particular about treating everyone equally. In the provision of services to people, they seek to give their best, notwithstanding the person's status. This is done to enable the disadvantaged to regain their hope and heal their marred dignity. They are aware that some of their members do not have running water or access to electricity, and even walk long distances when they come to church. People, when they come from such backgrounds, in the church, could be sitting next to a judge of the Supreme Court, but they should not feel inferior to such a fellow Christian, since they all have the same dignity.

6.3.2.3 Response to Poverty

Ministering to the poor is on the main agenda of the church. It is their responsibility as the church to support the deprived. In helping the poor, they are careful not to create a culture of dependency. They work with them, assisting them to discover their potential and resources, which are very instrumental in their empowerment. This is helpful when it comes to them exploring job-creation opportunities. In their church, they have set up help desks to assist people to investigate employment opportunities through the networks created within the church and the business community in their area. Other disadvantaged

people receive aid, in the form of training to start small businesses. Church leaders encourage wealthier individuals to use their private initiatives to teach the marginalized how to generate their own income. They have also partnered with the local authorities in supporting their job creation initiatives, to benefit the poorest of the poor in the community. They have initiated various workshops to promote skills development, focusing on hospitality skills like cooking, baking and helping those who are underemployed like domestic workers. Some of their members who employ helpers in their homes are encouraged to come with them to church, rather than leaving them at home on Sundays. Domestic workers are struggling to survive on their wages. For them, the church offers programmes that help them to acquire catering skills that they can also use in their current employment. Some of them develop to ultimately run their own businesses. Furthermore, they help the poor to have access to funding from certain bankers in order to launch their own enterprises; and they support some disadvantaged learners to complete their schooling. In addition to this, they are running a school, since they have a passion to educate the nation.

They have ventured recently into a small agricultural pilot project. They have cultivated vegetable gardens on six hectares of land, which the church has earmarked as site for the sanctuary and other ministry facilities. They enable unemployed people acquire agricultural and business skills, through this vegetable farming project. This project gives them a chance to learn how to produce and how to sell their products on the local market. They have successfully harvested some crops, which they have sold profitably. This project has snowballed into one of the villages where more poor people are being given an opportunity for empowerment. Other ministry programmes to the community include the following:

- Distribution of food parcel to desperate families
- Partnership with business in their city on the in-service training project of personnel.
- Contributing to the care of the environment in their area.

- Provision of primary health care. Volunteer health practitioners like nurses, through the churches help desk offer auxiliary services in the provision of basic health to the disadvantaged.

6.3.2.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church

Ministering to the poor is a very critical aspect of their mission. When you read Luke 4 you discover that this was at the centre of Christ's mission. Also when reading the Gospel according to John, you realize that Jesus came to deal with all aspects of life. He touched our well being, personhood, and freedom. Jesus did not come to address one aspect of human life. If that were the case, it would create an imbalanced community, strong in that aspect, falling short in other dimensions. He addressed life in its totality. Therefore, it has been their practice as witnesses to the gospel to minister to people holistically. If their people have educational needs, that is the need they will have to address. They have a testimony from someone with a Doctorate in Mathematics, who has previously benefited from the poverty alleviation programmes of the church. Another testimony is from a youth who was hopelessly devastated by poverty, but who wanted to further his studies. The church assisted him to complete his high school education. In the same way the put six young people who had no one else to help them, through University.

In serving the poor the church, is also being influenced in that encounter, in a manner that shapes their witness. These are some of the lessons they have learnt, out of their ministry amongst the disadvantaged:

1. To exercise the greatest sensitivity when serving the poor. The poor deserve respect and they should be treated with dignity without any reservations. There is a perception that the Umtata Christian Centre is a wealthy church, thus perceived to be elite. But, they make a point of treating the poor compassionately as their equals even when they do not expect that from them.
2. To believe in the poor. The deprived are people with amazing potential, who if given a chance, could improve the quality of their lives tremendously. In his involvement in prison ministry over a few years, Pastor Phillips has seen some

prison inmates transform their lives positively when someone showed faith in them. About thirty-five prison inmates from a Maximum C section who participated in their intervention programme managed to complete their diplomas with Damelin. This gave them a qualification that could make them employable once they leave prison. They have also set up a computer centre in that prison. This will enable the prison inmates to leave prison with some form of computer literacy that would assist them later in life. In addition, they have set up a preschool in the female section of one of the prison in the city. The church is funding the salaries of the pre-school staff and supplying them with the necessary stationery and literature that they might need to educate children. This is done to give hope to those who have wronged society, so that they could also be rehabilitated and forgiven by society. If you do not treat the poor with contempt, breakthroughs in ministry seem to follow.

According to Pastor Phillips, his church hopes to achieve the following objectives as they serve the poor according to the Scriptures:

1. To revive their hope.
2. To help repair that damaged self-concept. Poor people need to recover their lost dignity and identity.
3. To support the disadvantaged in opening and accessing doors of opportunity and empowerment.
4. To implement their vision to serve the poor, to influence and penetrate them with the gospel.

In their self-evaluation they conclude that they have not done enough to serve the poor. But, they are hopeful that they are gaining pace, and will soon do more in partnership with their disadvantaged community. Yet, their contributions have had some notable impact on improving the undesirable circumstances of some members of the community.

6.3.2.5 General

The financial resources they use come from members of the church and the community. Some essential services that they offer when helping the poor are not paid for since they use the expertise of the congregants.

6.4 A Comparative Analysis of the Position of the Leaders in Local Churches in Various Regions

In this discourse I shall just briefly analyse and compare their positions, looking for points of convergence and divergence.

Experience of Poverty

These leaders have a common starting point in the joint acknowledgement of poverty as a multilevel problem within their respective communities. Their experiences differ from one another because of their unique personal, family, regional or provincial, rural and urban backgrounds. According to Pastor's Botwana, Sono, and Phillips:

“Poverty is a painful experience, especially because it hinders and dehumanises people. It distorts your ‘self’ or personhood and creates loss of identity... Poverty can turn people into monsters... People’s self-esteem becomes affected negatively as a result of being marginalized...It reduces people into a terrible state. They find themselves leading a deplorable existence that is plagued by lack of meaning, hopelessness and loss of dignity.”

Some leaders have individual and personal experiences of poverty. There are those like Bishop Zondo who have been homeless and known life on the streets, growing up in the townships of the Vaal. There are those like Pastor Makhubu who is presently staying in an RDP house. He knows at first hand the inconveniences of overcrowding, just like the rest of the members of his church and community. There are those like Pastor Monosi, whose community lives in informal settlements and RDP houses. Their Churches are just large shacks or, in the case of Pastor Makhubu, a roof without walls. A roof without walls is also the experience of Pastor Mosa Sono’s church. They used this construction for 17

years, until they built their church in 2002. Others are not necessarily poor themselves, but serve in rural and urban communities that are disadvantaged. Meanwhile, some leaders have churches in relatively affluent suburbs, where there is no sign of an informal settlement or squalor. But, they attract the poor from surrounding townships and rural areas to the church worship services. All these leaders face poverty in all its manifestations, either at a personal, community, or distant level.

The differences in the extent to which the local churches experience poverty, are very pronounced. Let us look at the table below:

Table 3: The Extent of the Experience of Poverty by Local Church Leaders

LEADER	REGION	TYPE LOCALITY	PERCENTAGE
Rev Poswa	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	Peri-Urban	80
Pastor Don Phillips	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	City	35
Pastor T Ntongana	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	Peri-Urban	80
Pastor Makhubu	<i>North West</i>	Rural Town	80
Pastor Molutsi	<i>Limpopo</i>	Township, Villages	60
Pastor Monosi	<i>Free State</i>	Township/Informal	70
Pastor Selepe	<i>Limpopo</i>	Village/Township	80
Pastor G Schroeder	<i>KZN</i>	Suburb	30 – 40
Bishop Zondo	<i>Gauteng</i>	Township	60
Bishop Botwana	Gauteng	Township	50

The highest incidence of poverty is found in the poorest provinces of South Africa, in terms of their contribution to GDP. Eastern Cape, according to the national census, has the highest incidence of poverty. Local churches that are situated in previously disadvantaged communities, either in a township, village or rural areas also experience very high levels of poverty. On the other hand, a city or suburban church, would have the lowest levels of poverty in comparison to churches in different settings.

The leaders agree in their profiling of those who are poor. It is a profile that is similar to that cited by national leaders. Their descriptions of the common needs that are prevalent in their constituencies also concur with the assessment of national leaders. These local leaders use similar criteria to identify the needs of the impoverished. Common indicators are:

- Individuals and families' ability to meet their basic needs. Therefore they will assess the quality of food, clothing and shelter that people have access to, if they are fortunate to access any in whatever state.
- The income of the church per member.
- A person's ability to fulfil his obligations to the ministry.
- The frequency in which they approach the church for assistance.
- State of their self-esteem, whether people have a persistent and unhealthy perception of themselves.
- The level of motivation. Some have a tendency to be overwhelmed by hopelessness and seem to have a resigned and dull expression on their face.
- Likelihood of people being employed in terms of their skills and job opportunities in the area.
- Tendencies of substance abuse.

These are the usual pointers that these local church leaders generally apply in discovering the disadvantaged that they should help in the church and community.

Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

There are five areas of convergence in the teachings and theology of these local church leaders in the context of poverty. *Firstly*, they use Luke 4:18f as a key text to define their mission when dealing with the poor. Bishop Gladstone Botswana says, "According to Luke 4:18 the good news is that the poor should not continue to be poor anymore. In the gospels Christ affirms the fact that poverty should not be a permanent state." This text highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling Christ to minister in a way that is sensitive to the struggles of the poor. For many them the Holy Spirit is the power of God that is working through Christ to destroy the enslaving influences of deprivation.

Secondly, they teach people to use their faith in God as the basis for their struggle against poverty. They should learn to trust in God who is on their side, against their marginalization. The church and the poor should not be resigned to poverty and accept the situation as their predetermined fate. Instead they should mobilize to eradicate it in their lives and the community. *Thirdly*, they attempt to awaken the poor with the gospel, to enable them to recognize and appreciate their potential. In their teaching they seek to make them realize that God has richly endowed them with talents. Therefore they encourage the poor to discover, develop and use their God-given abilities to improve the quality of their lives. *Fourthly*, they inspire the poor to revive their dreams. Many of the leaders agree that poverty disturbs the positive outlook and vision that the disadvantaged need to acquire a better life than their present squalid existence. Their wretched conditions are poisonous and detrimental to the psyche of the poor and sow attitudes of negativity and hopelessness. Thus their message is one of hope for the deprived as they seek to rise from deprivation. *Finally*, they agree that their teaching should build the identity of the poor in such way that they will value themselves as humans. Those who live in poverty are exposed to conditions that are hostile to their human dignity. Their self-concept becomes a casualty to marginalization. Poverty subjects people to a stigma that prompts others to undermine them. Thus the church should proclaim the gospel of Christ to the poor in a manner that affirms their human rights and dignity as those who are bearers of God's image.

The leaders agree about the objectives of their ministry in the situation of poverty. This is how they have defined these aims:

- To concretise God's love for the poor.
- To renew the disadvantaged mindset that has been acclimatized and accepted poverty as the normal way of life, whereas it is denounced by the gospel.
- To participate in God's empowerment mission for the disadvantaged.
- To bring hope in any situation of poverty
- To help to repair the damaged self-esteem of the poor.

The difference is in how they prioritise and implement these objectives in terms of their ministry programme. Some leaders express these noble goals but they do not necessarily have a programme of action to actualise them.

Furthermore, they have points of convergence concerning the lessons that they have learned in their interaction with poor. The poor are also making a difference in their journey in God's service. These are the common lessons that they cite:

- The poor have a qualitative commitment to God despite their apparent miseries.
- The leaders have discovered the richness of the life of the disadvantaged in terms of their culture, tradition, spirituality and community life.
- The leaders have experienced fulfilment in sharing and serving those who are desperate.
- They have recognized that the poor have something to offer; they are not only recipients of charity.
- They have been impressed by the humility and simplicity with which people accomplish extraordinary things for God and help others with less in terms of resources.

Some of the leaders mention additional lessons that they, in their unique circumstances have learned. Varying experiences teach people different things, according to their level of development and exposure. Below are some of the insights that are unique to individual leaders:

- The toxic effects of the previous apartheid system, which created damaging and persistent realities, are still complicating the lives and future of the poor, who continue to live in hardships.
- Poverty can turn some people into monsters. It can make people lose faith in taking legitimate means and opportunities to empower themselves. Rather it can lure them into resorting to illicit ways of keeping their heads above the boisterous waters of deprivation. If you are not religious and you have not been raised in a principled manner, the lures of criminality may be hard to resist. The means you might adopt in desperation may be at the expense of the next person. Apart from

the fact that we have a sinful nature, the environment of poverty has potential to turn some people into monsters.

- It is essential to recognize one's prejudices and apply subliminal cautiousness not to exclude the poor from the life of the church. Otherwise the church would be dominated by the life orientation and values of the middle class and celebrities. People who do not have the means are often excluded from our society. The poor are too easily ostracized and forgotten.

These experiences as reported by the leaders, indicate their growing insight into the quality and depth of their witness in the context of poverty. There is strong evidence that the particular leaders' horizons are being broadened for the good of the church and the community.

Response to Poverty

The local church leaders we interviewed are involved in ministry activities in their churches and they are making contributions in the following areas:

- Self-help schemes like vegetable gardens
- Skills development and job creation initiatives
- HIV-Aids education and support programmes
- Relief programmes – food distribution, and provision shelter.
- Education to create awareness of opportunities and places where people can get assistance in their empowerment.
- Healing and rebuilding of families.
- Initiation of group saving clubs
- Provision of primary health care, and trauma counselling.
- Funding for education – bursaries
- Prison ministry to offer intervention necessary for the rehabilitation of the convicted offenders.
- Moral regeneration initiatives

The respective leaders have played a significant role in the initiation of these responses together with other stakeholders in their community. Just to cite Pastor Don Phillips who

said, “Ministering to the poor is on the main agenda of the Church. It is their responsibility to support the deprived. In helping the poor they are careful not to create a culture of dependency. They assist them in assessing the potential and resources they have so that these things could be considered when serving them.” Yet, these programmes are pursued at different levels of commitment by particular leaders and their local churches. Some of the programmes are advanced and well coordinated while others are still rudimentary and loosely coordinated. Therefore they differ in impact. Some contribute significantly to the quality of life of people, while others have but a minimal effect, and are still at an elementary level. The latter must not be dismissed as irrelevant since they are programmes launched by leaders who are still learning the ropes of effective ministry amongst the poor. Let us consider these simple and uncoordinated programmes to be like a baby’s first steps. It is by trying that these churches are learning valuable lessons for improved ministry response. Many of the churches were only established in the past two to six years. You cannot compare them with Ecumenicals that are veterans of witnessing in the context of poverty and injustice.

Relationship Between Poverty And The Work Of The Church

The majority of the local church leaders concur that poverty alleviation ministry is a very significant component of the whole mission of the church. Ministry to the poor is part of Christ’s broad commission for his church to the world. According to Pastor Makhubu, “Caring for the poor is part of their mandate, included in the Great Commission. It is this ministry that gives Christians an opportunity to give, not only materially, but also their knowledge, skills, time and other essential resources. Part of the Christians responsibility is not only to preach to the poor but also to share his resources to address their needs.”

Therefore we cannot exclude ministry to the poor from the mission of a local congregation. It is an essential ingredient of the vision that the church should fulfil, on expression of its Christian witness. Therefore the church seeks to present a holistic gospel that addresses all the human needs that are relevant in a situation of deprivation. There is an important relationship between poverty eradication initiatives and the work of the church. Poverty eradication ministry is more than just the work of the church, it is the

very life of the church in its allegiance to Christ. Jesus Christ himself put the poor at the centre of his life and ministry. The poor were a Kingdom priority for Christ to the extent that He even labelled his gospel the gospel to the poor. They were the primary audience to the good news of which He was the herald. Ministry to the poor should be the core function of the church, and should never be neglected.

In theory the leaders of the local churches all agree – at least theologically – about the importance of reaching out to the poor. But in practice the churches differ. Not all of them really regard their ministry to the poor as a priority or run programmes that would practically and convincingly match their statements. The personnel and resources allocated to these ministry initiatives do not make them premier projects of the church. The mean contributions of these local churches towards ministry to the poor are approximately 5%. “Sadly many of our poorer churches have a ghetto mentality, absorbed in self-preservation and in not wanting to share the fruits of their mission heritage or their social gains. Christ calls us to repent and live by the Cross”(Nicholls and Wood 1996:10). The majority of the local churches have no specific budget for poverty relief.

There is consensus amongst the leaders that they involve both their congregants and the community as key stakeholders in their poverty alleviation ministry. In some local churches people participate at two levels:

- Donors, making contributions, financially and in kind.
- Volunteers, responsible for the operational aspects of this ministry.

The laity has, as a rule, not as yet been invited to participate in the strategic aspects of ministry to the poor since it is the preserve of the local church hierarchy. In exceptional cases local churches do involve laity at leadership level. Also, many of these local leaders have not fully mastered the strategy of assisting the local community. Some of the local church-based programmes are mainly dealing with internal poverty needs due to limited resources and capacity. Many local churches are still flexing their muscles, slowly developing their capacity to expand their ministry into the community. They also need to

augment their pool of resources so that they will be able to sustain a broader community vision of ministry to the poor.

Local leaders differ about the impact of their ministry on their community. The size of a church and the competence and experience of different leaders determine how they deal with issues of poverty. Some local churches are still inexperienced in ministry to the poor. The quality of their ministry is not the same as those who have been running such a ministry for longer periods and have improved in time. Some of the churches only embarked on this ministry in the last three years, and have not fully mastered all the dynamics of ministry to the poor. Others only deal with the needs of the poor within their local church. In such cases the impact of their service to the poor is in-house, and their influence in the broader community is negligible. In contrast, there are some local churches that involve the poor to participate as serious partners in their own development. They avoid doing things for the poor, but rather work with them in dealing with their needs. The poor become problem-solvers, not only beneficiaries. Some impact has been made in the following areas:

- Dealing with immediate and urgent needs, like feeding the hungry, and providing shelter, clothing the naked and care for the frail and sick.
- Providing comfort, counselling and support for those facing trauma.
- Education and guidance – for career, health and social development.
- Skills development – job and business opportunities.
- Self-help food-growing programmes.

The levels of effectiveness of these ministry initiatives differ from one local church to another.

Many of the local church leaders agree that there are areas in their ministry to the poor that need to be improved. They have targeted the following:

- Leadership and management
- Increasing resources
- Expanding ministry to the greater community, beyond the local churches' borders
- Community awareness and partnership for their ministry

General

There is consensus that the local churches use all the resources and the infrastructure at their disposal. Many of the local churches' initiatives to serve the poor are sustained through self-funding. The churches donate the funds to start and maintain their programmes. A few have managed to obtain other resources from the business sector and NGO's through their fundraising schemes. Almost all of them need to strengthen their partnership with the Department of Social Welfare Development to gain access to the public funding that is available. The infrastructures that the local churches use in their witness range from basic to very sophisticated. Some churches have an informal infrastructure suited to informal settlement or 'ghetto' surroundings that are the reality of their ministry, whilst others have first world structures befitting the developed areas where they are situated. But whatever the state of the infrastructure of a particular church, it serves a noble cause. Local churches mainly use their church building for the programmes except in cases where teams travel to homes, prisons, schools and hospitals. Local churches are accessible since people have already established patterns of utilizing them.

6.4 A Critique of the Charismatic Leaders' Response to Poverty

Firstly, many of their responses to poverty are relief initiatives. They focus on helping people to deal with day-to-day survival needs without dealing with the underlying social problems that created their poverty. Many of the above-mentioned churches have programmes like feeding schemes, provision of temporary shelter, and disbursement of clothes amongst the poor. These programmes although necessary just deal with immediate needs on a short-term basis. They just help people to cope with the situation of poverty without uprooting the underlying causes of their poverty.

Secondly, very few of these programmes are developmental or transformational. Some of the above-mentioned churches are making progress in moving away from relief-

orientated programmes to programmes that are more developmental or transformational. Some of their poverty alleviation initiatives seek to deal with issues of skills development, job creation, entrepreneurship, literacy, and leadership development. There is a growing awareness amongst them that some of their previous relief programmes were insufficient to address this endemic problem of poverty. Such initiatives help poor people to survive for a few days but unfortunately in a short while, they return to their original plight of deprivation. Also those relief initiatives were not empowering the poor, but rather perpetuating their dependency. Charismatic leaders are learning from their progressive shift from relief and developmental strategies to more transformational and sustainable strategies, that poverty alleviation is a complex phenomenon. It requires partnership with various stakeholders at various levels of society such as other non-governmental organizations, denominations, business, government and other relevant specialized institutions. The poverty that they are tackling although it is more visible in local communities, it is a national problem.

Thirdly, most of the leaders are facing the challenge of sustainability. The issue of sustainability plagued many of their poverty eradication initiatives, which were relief-orientated, developmental or transformational in focus. Initially, most of them struggled with the issue of resources, in terms of funding, personnel and capacity to administer those poverty eradication projects. Many of these churches depended on donors as well as resources generated from their own poor communities, which were not sufficient to address their needs adequately in order to empower those communities. Some of the above-mentioned communities are residing in obscure rural areas, which are underdeveloped and escape the attention of possible investors such as the government or other transformational agencies. Therefore, some of their poverty alleviation programmes have not been run consistently for at least five years without disruption. Some programmes folded within two years of being started due to limited access to the required resources to keep them operational.

Fourthly, some of the programmes started in good faith were not really programmes for the empowerment of communities but means to enhance evangelism mainly. Ministry to

the poor was pursued in generosity, but with the motive of saving sinners who in this case were disadvantaged. According to Bosch (1980:33),

“There are, however, also those Evangelicals who regard such ‘services’ not as the logical consequence of evangelism but rather as aids to evangelism. Schools, hospitals, orphanages and the like are primarily seen as instruments affording pupils, patients and orphans the opportunity of hearing the gospel. By attending to man’s body (for instance in the hospital) or mind (in the mission school), they are preparing him for the gospel. The success of mission schools and hospitals is often judged according to the number of converts they produce.”

It is important that Charismatic Evangelicals should shed the tendency to look at ministry to the poor in a narrow sense of using poverty alleviation initiatives merely to win the lost souls. Even though the poor are sinners who need to be reconciled to God, the church should not reduce poverty alleviation ministry to be an appendage of evangelism. A Church that mainly promotes evangelism should not consider poverty alleviation a minor task of their ministry.

Finally, a laudable thing about the Charismatic Evangelical response to the poor is their concern for the poor. They are making many attempts to reach out to the poor. Many of their efforts are geared at meeting the needs of communities that are suffering. Bosch (1980:33) observed that, “Evangelicals often reveal greater sacrificial involvement with the existential needs of the victims of society – drug addicts, refugees, the exploited poor, the sick, and so forth – than many Ecumenicals who malign them for their lack of social concern.” The Charismatic Evangelicals have been striving to connect with people and to minister to their real needs in their communities. Many of the Charismatic leaders that I interviewed showed tremendous insight into the issues and challenges of people in their community.

6.5 Conclusion

This discourse focused on the positions of national and local church leaders on the witness of the church in the context of poverty. It investigated the actual state of affairs in

the churches they are leading, how they are experiencing poverty, their theological and practical response to poverty, and the significance of their ministry to the poor in terms of their mission. It has been established from interviews with leaders at local level as well as national level of the Charismatic Evangelical leadership that poverty is a phenomenon that affects this church and the community most severely. The church leadership examined the theological and biblical implications of this problem, and responded according to the background and denominational position of the respective leaders. The various leaders reported on an array of practical poverty alleviation programmes that their respective churches initiated in response to the context of poverty in their backyards. These practical ministry responses to the poor ranged from small-scale and basic to elaborate and large-scale projects. The nature of these ministry initiatives was influenced by the nature of the vision, access to resources, and capacity of the respective leaders and churches. Therefore the impact of their witness, by their own account, varied from being merely local to being widespread. The leadership of the churches, learned valuable lessons that improved the quality of their witness in their ministry to the poor. Many of the leaders from local to national level in the hierarchy of the Charismatic Evangelical church admitted that their witness in the face poverty was far from perfect in their own assessment. They cited numerous areas that need to be enhanced. They are evidently growing in their capacity to deal with the complexities of poverty, and the challenges of limited resources. Yet, despite these hurdles they are striving to fulfil their ministry mandate, which is the task they were commissioned to do by Jesus Christ. Christ himself modelled this ministry to the poor through His life and mission on earth. The Charismatic Church hierarchy and their constituency have availed some resources to address the needs of the poor. Ministering to the poor is an integral part of the mission of this church as it proclaims the full gospel of the Kingdom of God.