

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

I conclude my thesis by referring to the research question that I introduced at the beginning of my study: “Will the church in the informal settlement community be able to address the problem of poverty if it takes into account the needs of the poor, their socio-cultural and political situation into account? ”. The research conducted has established that the people in the informal settlement communities do suffer and their suffering is probably more severe than in other communities in the country, and that the church indeed faces numerous challenges in this regard.

In view of scriptures and the history of the church over the years we noted that the church was always involved in the works of charity and caring for the needy. The literature review has also revealed that mission must involve both verbal witness and exemplary deeds. It has become clear that the church developed a variety of strategies to address the needs of the poor. Even today God is calling His church in the informal settlement communities to address the problems of the poor: the street children, prostitutes, drug addicts, the HIV-AIDS sufferers and the homeless people. We must be able to give hope to needy people. These acts of compassion on the part of the church should result in the consistent integration of word and deed in our ministry. Our goal in ministry is not simply to help

poor people to meet their daily needs, but to see them transformed by the power of God and empowered to be people of dignity and worth in society. This implies that the transformation of people and of social structures also form part of the church's agenda.

7.1 Main conclusions

My main conclusions coming from my research are as follows:

- Informal settlement communities are the new frontier of Christian mission for the church of today. The church cannot relinquish its mission in these areas. It is obliged to minister in word and deed to all the needy in the community.
- God demands that his people share his special concern for the poor. He commanded us to love the marginalized, the widows, the sick, etc. An encounter with these people should result in an inclusive and loving response.
- Our ministry must begin by learning to know poor people and identifying ourselves with them. Then in partnership with them, answers can be sought to meet their needs.
- There is a need for churches to develop a comprehensive mission strategy in helping the poor in the informal settlement communities.

It has become evident that if we take into cognizance the socio-cultural situation, as well as the political situation of the poor if the church wants

to be able to answer to the needs of the poor in the informal settlement communities. The church must also go beyond relief and development programs. It must call people to be transformed by the gospel. Only as people themselves are changed will there be a change in their conditions.

The church must also work to transform the social structures that keep the poor in bondage.

- It can help the homeless to start projects and build their own homes and assist the poor to get their titles.
- It can speak out publicly for the rights and dignity of poor people
- It can lobby the government to provide them with water, sewers, and roads.
- It can change structures that oppress the poor
- It can empower people to live a meaningful lives

Poor people need dignity and hope. On a daily basis, they are despised by the society in which they live. The church must provide people with a sense of their dignity and power as new creatures in Christ. With this comes hope, joy and the ability to change conditions.

The church must continually be informed about people suffering in our communities. We must respond spontaneously and generously to help meet the needs. “Let each according his ability, decided to provide help for

the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

The ministry of sharing our resources with the poor, fellowship with them in our churches, and witnessing that Jesus is Lord, was demonstrated in the life of the early Christians, “All believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who was in need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:44-47)

Today we are also called as a church to bring back the self-respect and self-image of the poor by enabling them to stand on their feet and become independent. This is the unique work to which all of us as urban Christians have been called to do. The poor call us to bring the gospel and show mercy upon them. We must not ignore their cry. These people are also human beings made in the image of God. They have many needs, but above all they need Jesus Christ and the salvation through him. There is a tremendous missionary challenge awaiting us in these communities.

7.2 Further Areas of Research

In this study I have concentrated primarily on the need for the churches to develop new strategies for a comprehensive outreach to poor communities.

A number of issues have been left untouched, that warrant further research. They include:

- Strategies to empower the laity as well as the clergy in local congregations to rise to the challenge of the marginalized communities.
- Research the way in which the needs of the poor and the challenges of the Gospel in this regard are incorporated in the curricular of theological faculties and seminaries.
- Research the role that the South African Churches, especially the Dutch Reform Church family, have played in combating poverty in recent years.
- Analyze the way in which the churches may form networks with the governmental sector as well as with non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to better the position of the poor and the marginalized.