

Celebrating the Millennium Development Goals

“Jesus said, ‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.’” (Lk. 16:19) But the poor man who lay at his gate, starving and covered with sores, is the only person in a parable told by Jesus who has a name. He is Lazarus. In Hebrew, his name means “God has helped.”

If we have been listening to Jesus in Luke these past weeks and months, we may not be surprised to realize that it is the beggar in the story, clothed in sores and licked by the dogs, who has a name, resonant with faith and hope, while the rich man dressed in fine clothes is the anonymous one.

Jesus invites us to see with different eyes in a world where, even today, it is almost always the poor who are faceless and nameless: the homeless men and women we pass by in the park without noticing; the man or woman curled up on a piece of cardboard on the sidewalk whom we step around to get our morning coffee; the person begging outside the parking garage whom we walk past without acknowledging as he rattles change in a cardboard cup. It is still the rich who are famous, pursued by reporters, spotted out on the town, featured on magazine covers and in the news.

As in first century Palestine, the common assumption is that the rich have earned their places of comfort and ease—by their smarts, or blessings, or just plain good luck—and the poor belong outside the gates, as invisible as possible. Just as wealth is often inherited, poverty may seem to us almost a genetic condition, and, thus, hopeless. But in the parable, it is the rich man whose condition turns out to be hopeless. Somewhere along the way tradition gave him a name, Dives, which is Latin for “rich”. So he was defined, confined and even named by his wealth. He kept and used it only for himself, with not even a family or friends mentioned as having feasted with him. He was blind to the one person in the picture with him, Lazarus, who was starving at his gate. Day by day, he himself widened the chasm between himself and Lazarus, until, in the end, it could no longer be bridged.

Today we celebrate the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Eight goals adopted by the members of the United Nations in 2000 with the purpose of significantly reducing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and related causes, by 2015.

A Redeemer friend once told me that he goes to Street Church because he wants the homeless to be more than just “the poor” to whom we have a Christian duty. He wants to come to know the poor as human beings, who have names, faces, stories and hopes, who are real, like any one of us, children of God, like any one of us. There are many places where you can read about statistics on poverty, hunger and disease around the world, and how the MDGs can be achieved. (*See, e.g.,* September ‘07 Redeemer Spirit, the insert in today’s order of service, August ‘07 Episcopal Life.) This morning, I

want to bring a name of a real person into our a midst, and a bit of his or her story, for each of the 8 MDGs.¹

Goal One: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

One-sixth of the world's population lives on less than \$1.00 a day. One person dies from hunger every 3.5 seconds. Each one is a child of God.

Ambroise is a farmer in Katakela, a small impoverished village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His children suffered from malnutrition, because the small garden behind his house did not yield enough food. Episcopal Relief and Development began a food security program in Katakela. Ambroise and his neighbors were given a large plot of land and taught better farming practices, such as seasonal farming and crop diversification. As a result, Ambroise can now produce enough food for his family, with some left over. He sells the excess produce and is able to send his children to school with the money.

Goal Two: Achieve Universal Primary Education for Children

Education is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty. And yet, more than 100 million children are not in school today. Children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS, if left alone without a support network, are especially likely to drop out of school because they have to work to support themselves and their siblings.

Vastiganda lives in eastern Zambia. She lost both her parents to HIV/AIDS, and is responsible for her four younger siblings. With the help of a program partnership for HIV/AIDS orphans, between ERD and a local ecumenical foundation, Vastiganda receives basic living support, and is able to go to school. She is a hard worker, and gets up before dawn to do the household chores, then sets off to school. Without the help of the aid program, like too many other orphans and abandoned children, Vastiganda and her four siblings would be driven to scavenge for food in garbage, or, if they were "lucky," to try to find work in a sweatshop or the fields. With the help they receive, they have hope for a stable future.

Goal Three: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Women have an enormous impact on the well-being of their families and societies. Educated women raise healthier children, become leaders in their communities, and are less likely to die during childbirth. The specific target for Goal Three is to achieve gender equality in all levels of education by 2015. The name and story I bring has to do with women's lack of power and control over their bodies and lives, and the hope of empowerment through the MDGs.

During Burundi's long civil war (1993 -2003), widespread rape led to the spread of HIV/AIDS among the female population. When Viola was diagnosed with HIV, she

¹ Goals to be read by members of the Vestry. Names and stories are from the Episcopal Relief and Development web site, www.er-d.org/programs

was shunned by her neighbors and left destitute. Through a cooperative program of the Church of Burundi and ERD, a micro-credit loan program for people living with HIV/AIDS, she was able to start her own food shop, which flourished. The neighbors who once shunned her now buy food from her. Viola is now independent and self-reliant, and again accepted in her community.

Goal Four: Reduce Child Mortality

Every three seconds a child under the age of five dies. A disproportionate number of these children live in developing countries, without access to clean water or basic medical care.

Ramon lives with his family in Copan, a small village in western Honduras. A nearby river is the only source of clean water, but it takes hours of hard work to bring the water to his home. The village has no latrines; the bushes serve as bathrooms. Unsanitary living conditions mean his children are often sick with diarrhea and parasites. Recently, the Diocese of Honduras, with ERD, has begun a sanitation and health project in the village. A water cistern and latrine will be built in Copan. Ramon says, "We're happier. Now our health will improve . . . we already feel more secure."

Goal Five: Improve Maternal Health

Every year more than half a million women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. [In many cases, delays in seeking maternal health care are caused partly by cultural practices that restrict a woman from seeking health care without permission from her husband or male family members.]

Kathy Deasy is an obstetrician and gynecologist at the Tuba City Health Center on the Navajo/Hopi Reservation in Arizona. Six times in the past four years, she has traveled to Afghanistan, a country with one of the highest mortality rates of children and mothers in the world. She has cared directly for sick mothers and children, and also trained Afghan physicians. While Dr. Deasy was in a Kabul hospital for 10 days in April of this year, there were six maternal deaths, all of which could have been prevented, she said. "When the mother dies, the family dies," she said. "It's almost inevitable the baby will not survive past its first birthday. And 25 percent of all children who have no mother will die before the age of 5."²

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Each of these diseases is preventable and treatable. Malaria alone claims over one million lives every year, and kills a child every 30 seconds.

Elize lives with her husband and eight children in Kapolowe, a village in the Diocese of Katanga, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Malaria is rampant [in the area], Elize's children had frequent bouts with the illness, and treatments were typically ineffective. The Diocese of Katanga, with ERD, started a malaria prevention program in

²"Children in peril," Episcopal Life, August 2007, p. 12.

her village. After Elize received a long-lasting insecticide-treated net³ to protect her family, no one in the family has contracted malaria. She is now organizing her neighbors in community action on malaria prevention.

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

The targets of Goal 7 are to cut in half the number of people without safe drinking water, and to reverse environmental damage by practicing sustainable development.

Maria and her family of five live in a small village in El Salvador. For most of her life, she cooked over an open fire under a lean-to roof. The cooking area was smoky and dangerous—the children were often burned, they breathed in the smoke, and developed chronic upper respiratory and eye infections. The Diocese of El Salvador, a local association and ERD have built smokeless stoves in Maria's village. She now cooks on a cement stove in her house, vented to the outside. The stove has been a life-changing gift. The children are no longer burned, and no one has had an infection since the stove was built.

Goal 8: Create a Global Partnership for Development

The success of the MDGs depends on all of us: rich and poor, churches, corporations, non-profits, governments, all working together as partners. “Extreme poverty can be ended, not in the time of our grandchildren, but in our time,” according to noted economist Jeffrey Sachs.⁴ Like wealth, poverty is often inherited, but it is not a genetic condition. People who are poor, hungry, sick, illiterate, and powerless are all real people, as real as you and I, and all children of God.

I hope that hearing the names and circumstances of a few of our brothers and sisters will lead you to want to learn more about the MDGs and how we can help to achieve them. And that doing so will be not only our responsibility, but our joy.

³ “Netsforlife” is the program. See, Episcopal Life, August 2007, p. 14.

⁴ Quoted at www.episcopalchurch.org/ONE