

dled market economics into our society's food system, that there is effectively greater hardship for both the producers—the farmers—and the consumers—the poor and working-class people whose numbers and needs have been increasing, especially among people of color. We know that in addition to the racial characteristics of poverty, homelessness, and hunger, it has increasingly become the problem of women and children.

I recall reading a few months ago that one in four young children in our country lives in circumstances of poverty. These, too, rely, as my own family does, on government-supplied commodities for basic nutrition. While the numbers of such people in need continue to grow in our cutthroat economy, the availability of these food supplies does not—it even diminishes! To draw again on our experience at Zacchaeus Kitchen, the single most reliable source we have had for large quantities of meat is the USDA commodities program. The canned pork and canned beef we've received has been indispensable to our ability to provide the quality of the nutritious meals we presently serve. Without such basic foods I daresay we would be compelled to drastically curtail service, something that would be virtually unconscionable in this period of increasing hunger in our city. These foods are very badly needed by programs such as ours.

I'm aware that there is a need to be concerned with maintaining a viable farm economy, too. Indeed, without the farmers, nobody eats. The people who grow the food—and I mean the working men and women who plow the fields and harvest the crops, not the agribusiness people who have hijacked our food economy for profit—need to be able to work their fields *and* make an honest living *while* the food they grow meets everybody's need and right to eat decently. I have had the good fortune to travel all over this country over the years, including to our nation's farmlands. It seems clear to me that we have the land and the talent and wealth in this country—in short, all the means—to provide abundant food for our people and many more besides.

If there is any place in the history of the world where the biblical miracle of loaves and fishes can occur, it is in our society. But as in that Scripture story, accomplishing the miracle depends entirely on our willingness to understand that people have the right to eat and that those with the means to provide food need to respond to hunger as a matter of compassion and justice. We are in crisis in this society because we disparage our most basic resource—our people—across the whole spectrum of our society and because too many of us have insisted on scrapping with each other for the crumbs from the rich man's table when we ought to unite as Martin Luther King showed us, in a non-violent struggle for justice for everybody. We have done our best over nearly two decades to participate in such an effort at Zacchaeus Community Kitchen and we would invite any of you to come and see for yourself what a miracle of caring and sharing looks like and how it can free our society.

Elsie Pilgrim

Health holocaust of the medically indigent

Martin Luther King's legacy was well known in the black community, and especially by many people who had worked hard in the field of civil rights. They had tried very, very hard. And even before Martin started, there were many, many people, especially in the state of New Jersey—where you might have thought many rights had already been put into place. But I am here to tell you, in 1946, there were many things still closed to all types of citizens in the state of New Jersey. For example, there were blacks who were not allowed to go into nursing schools in New Jersey. There were theaters which were closed to blacks. Some theaters were opened, if you would sit in the balcony. And there were entertainments such as roller-skating rinks, and many other businesses where you were not even allowed to work.

I myself, as a young child, as a teenager, I remember going to Woolworth's and putting in an application to work. The woman looked at me, and she smiled, and she put my application into the wastepaper basket.

Still, those who believed in civil rights and economic justice for all people struggled on. And when Martin Luther King came on the scene, we thought, this is truly the anointed one, this is the one who will lead us all. And we all got together, people who were white, black, blue, green—because many of the things that Martin Luther King talked about, economic justice, really rang true for all people. Such as the farmers, those people who were in the West, those people in the East. It had a common ring of clarity and truth. And even those who went to the U.N. expounded on some of the thoughts of Martin Luther King. And one of the main things was about the right of every person to have good health care. And there were those who took up the cause and who are still trying today. There are people, regardless of whether they're white or black, who still try, within the inner cities, to see that all people get decent health care.

But I will still say to you today, there is still, in the United States, a double system of health care, a dichotomy. There is a system of affordable health care for those people who can afford it, and there is a system of no health care at all, for those people who must use Medicare. When I talk about those people who have absolutely no health care, these are

the people who are medically indigent. Some of the people perhaps work, or do not work, and are not able to get into the Medicaid or Medicare system. And these people do not go to hospitals, do not go to doctors, because they cannot afford to. Some of the people who are on welfare, mothers who are on Aid to Dependent Children, can go to a health care system which affords them the opportunity to wait long hours to be mistreated, to be abused, and not have the opportunity to go to their private physician.

Minority health professionals discouraged

There is a concerted effort in the inner city to discourage private physicians, especially black or Afro-American private physicians, to take care of their own.

To give you an example: Many of these private physicians, if they take the welfare cases, have to wait long periods of time before they receive their check. And the physician, in order to keep his office going, in order to have all of the things that allow him to have this type of care—he needs to have the money returned to him.

In other instances, these physicians, all over the United States, not just in inner city Newark or East Orange or Orange or West Orange—all over the country, feel that they are being persecuted. They are being investigated about the claims that they make, and they are being hauled into court. And this is forcing people with very bad health care to go to public institutions, and the more people who go to public institutions, the less likely they are to get the type of health care they need. It is a really vicious cycle.

The medically indigent, if they manage to have to go to the hospital for an emergency, in our particular area, will pay anywhere between \$95 and \$110 per visit. Now just imagine, if you're underemployed, and maybe you are working at a place of business where you are making \$250 a week, and maybe you have a family of four—your wife, and maybe two children—and suddenly you have a problem for which you must go to a hospital for an emergency, and you get a bill for \$95. That takes a large portion of your check. And if you live in a four-room apartment that costs you \$600 a month, you don't have any money to pay for this. Your food bill for a family of four is going to cost you somewhere over \$100-200 a week, just to eat. So what do you do? The system causes you not to tell the truth. You go because you have to, this is an emergency. Your child is sick, someone has gotten hurt. You must tell an untruth. And this is the untruth that you tell: You give an address that does not exist. And so when they send the bill, the bill goes to that unknown address. And you don't feel sorry about this—why should you feel sorry? It was your right to receive health care; it was your basic human right to receive the best health care possible. And if you're a mother or a father and your child needs health care, you have to do what is basically right on your part to make sure that you achieve it.

This dichotomy of health care does not encourage people from the lower economic groups to go into the professions. At one time, there was such encouragement. I can remember, even though I told you I was previously turned down for nursing school, there were people who did try to help minorities. There was a particular organization in Jersey City that paid for my whole three years in nursing school. But what is now happening, as far as minorities going into nursing schools, is that the costs of the college or baccalaureate program for these nurses are absolutely out of their reach. They cannot afford it. And this has nothing to do with your color, because it is affecting many, many people who cannot afford to go to college. The number of people from the lower economic groups who are going to college is actually diminishing.

You might say, well what happened to all these EOF programs? They have been cut back. And now they are attacking people who were unable to pay for the programs through their loans, and many people within the inner city cannot even afford to get a loan.

We must face the fact that institutional racism is involved in the health care picture. Because when we see certain figures coming from specific races, we know there has to be a concerted effort to oppress certain numbers of people.

I would like to give you an example. In the city of Newark, the infant mortality rate is 19 per 1,000 live births. That is higher than some of the Third World countries. This is a country that has a Gross National Product that produces billions and billions of dollars, yet some segments of the country have an infant mortality rate like those countries which have a much lower Gross National Product.

This means that for every 19 babies out of 1,000 live births—they die. They die because of malnutrition and all of the problems with the concerted effort to suppress people of the cities and the inner cities.

Black males an endangered species

The black male is number one as far as the death rate. The black male is really an endangered species. I heard someone talk about the whales. And yes, it's true, the powers that be, the powers that are responsible, and make the decisions on who lives and who dies, who eats and who starves in this country, would certainly not send out a whole militia to prevent the extinction of the black male. Now why am I saying the extinction of the black male? Because his death rate is the highest. He is number one in the death rate of cancer, strokes, heart disease, and also homicide. One in every 21 black males dies in a homicide. There are at least 2-3 million black males in prison in the United States today. In New Jersey, 85-90% of the persons in prison are black. And that is a horrifying statistic. It is not the same all over the United States, but that is how it is in New Jersey.

Another problem that makes all of these other problems

possible is the feeling of hopelessness. When you take away a person's hope, what else does he have? People say, "They don't even try." But if you're a young black male, and if you've gone out there, and you've tried to get a job, right now the majority of the manufacturing jobs are outside of the city. Now our current transportation system does not afford the average black person the ability to go out into the suburbs to get to this job. So number one, he doesn't have transportation to get to his job. The second problem is, he doesn't have the skills. Why doesn't he have the skills? I can't speak for the whole United States, but I can speak for New Jersey: There is a disproportionate amount of funds spent on the education of people in the inner city, as opposed to the suburban areas. Right now, in the inner city, children and their parents are collecting Shop-Rite [cash register receipt] tapes, in order to get computers. And many of the schools in suburbia have computers.

So the black male does not often gain the skills that he needs to get the job, coupled with racism, therefore he is not afforded the opportunity to get the job, and he feels hopeless, and the other problems of drug addiction and other illnesses come into play.

AIDS, a viral holocaust

Because this does occur, the inner city, with all of its vast problems, of homelessness, the economic deprivation, we in the inner city have now been visited with a viral holocaust. You might say, "A viral holocaust?" No one else calls it a viral holocaust. Elsie Pilgrim calls it a viral holocaust. I call AIDS a viral holocaust, just as people have called the holocaust which was caused by the Germans many, many years ago. This viral holocaust is the vehicle, but the root cause of this holocaust is racism. It is visited on people in disproportionate amounts, the people who can least afford to resist it. The people who lack the resources to mount the attack against this terrible disease.

New Jersey has almost 8,000 cases as of the end of 1989. These are cumulative cases, from 1981. The United States has over 113,000 cases. And I'm sure you're aware that the overall fatality from AIDS is 50%. But first, you must understand the disproportionate amount that is occurring in the inner city, by means of the fact that 42% of the national cases are represented by blacks (27%) and hispanics (15%). Whereas the black community is 20.5 times more than what the white community has. And the picture in New Jersey is even bleaker. The black population has 53% of the cases; in the United States 27% of the cases. But please understand, the black population both in New Jersey and in the United States is only 11%. So 11% of the population is carrying the burden of 53% of the cases in New Jersey, and also 27% of the cases in the United States. Please let that sink in. Eleven percent of the population is carrying this big burden.

Essex County, in the state of New Jersey, has 30% of the

cases of the women, and Essex is number one in the case load in New Jersey. Hudson County is number two. But what is interesting is that Hudson County is a smaller county than Essex County, and when you put it on the one-to-one per capita, it actually comes out that Hudson County, per capita, has a larger amount.

But this should really sink in to let you know what is happening in this viral holocaust in New Jersey and in the United States.

The inner cities all over the United States have suffered from benign neglect. It has been *all right* to watch this holocaust be visited on these innocent people. The powers that be have decided that it's *all right* to see this amount of people die. It's all right to see, in New Jersey, 90% of the children with AIDS to be black and hispanic—it's all right to see these children die.

Ladies and gentlemen, even with the research that they are doing, they found 1 in every 22 mothers—although they printed it as being 1 in every 22 babies—as having the virus, or being HIV-positive. That means they are carrying the antibody, and that means that, in order for them to have the antibody, they had to have the virus first. They say this about the children, but what it really means is that 1 in every 22 mothers is carrying the virus.

And what makes me cry, and weep, and be so sad, is that when those statistics were out, they talked about the infants, and they forgot to emphasize that the mothers were the ones who were carrying it, because the babies get their antibodies in the first year of life from their mothers.

People are not told

This was an anonymous study. None of these people knew—at least for 90 days—that they were carrying the virus. And I personally feel that anyone who is to be tested, and if their results are positive, they should be told, in a confidential way in which they have time to digest the information, and also that the powers that be make the resources available for treatment. Because I am sure you are well aware of those patients who received AZT, a special drug for AIDS, the cost of this drug was almost \$10,000 a year. Now the drug companies have felt a little bit sorry, and have reduced it a little bit—I think it's now down to about \$7,000 a year. And they also talk of the possibility, once you find out that you have an antibody to AIDS, that you can receive the AZT as a prophylactic. But I put it to you, ladies and gentlemen, many of these people who are being tested will not have made available to them the AZT they need in order to survive.

So what are we looking at for the future? A potential in New Jersey of about 70,000 or more people who are probably already infected. There are numbers of teenagers that we possibly won't know until later on, when they become sick. There are teenagers who are out on the street who are known to be carrying the virus, who will not come in, who are



Elsie Pilgrim, infection control specialist, Newark.



Juliet Grant, community activist, Newark.

actually walking time bombs. There are people who are homeless who have AIDS, who cannot come in to any shelter. And I would put it to you: I have seen patients who have had AIDS who had to go to shelters, where you could sleep there all night, and they didn't dare tell the people they had AIDS. And they had to walk the streets during the day. I know of a patient who had no place to go, no food, no shelter—he purposely walked out in the middle of the street, in order to get hit by a car, so that he could have a reason to be admitted to the hospital.

Dr. King's dream was for all

In this country today, we are looking the other way. And I'm sure Martin cries, and the Lord Jesus—or whoever you believe is the Supreme Being—cries to see people looking the other way. Not all people: There's a young man who is trying very hard to feed the hungry; there's another person who has worked with the homeless. There are still people trying, people out there in the bushes still drumming up and still hoping that this country will come to the full realization of the dream of Martin.

Last week, I saw on TV a young man—and I felt so sorry for him, because he didn't realize what a predicament he was in, and what he was saying—it was a picture taken of the Ku Klux Klan march last year against Martin Luther King's birthday. And he had on his chest a T-shirt with a picture of Martin Luther King with a circle around it; he had a bullet hole in his head. And it said, "We killed Martin's dream, and I'm glad." And the reason it went through me, is that I said, "This man doesn't realize that Martin's dream was for all people, even him. And when he killed Martin's dream, he killed his own dream, because Martin loved him just as well as everybody else."

Juliet Grant

Intolerable plight of America's homeless

I'm very pleased to be here as we celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King. I've had the privilege and sometimes the un-privilege of working in shelters in the City of Elizabeth, New Jersey and in New York City.

Who is a homeless person?

I want to start by giving you a brief definition of a homeless person: *single man, single woman, single parent with children, family, mother, father, and children, adolescents, young adults, children, small siblings, children put into foster care*, quite often because the family is homeless, *runaway adolescents, displaced homemakers*.

Additional reasons for homelessness are: *incarceration in jail, hospitalization for a long period, AIDS victims, TB and other diseases, loss of a job, non-payment of rent, eviction from your apartment, property foreclosure, farm foreclosure* like the gentleman who spoke to us earlier [George Gentry]. One of the things that happens quite often, especially with property foreclosure, is that by the time the average citizen finds out that there are places that they could go for counseling it's probably too late and they're in the street, or they had too much pride, and just couldn't tell people how bad it was.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, fighting, all these contribute to homelessness. *Difference in life-styles, overcrowded facility*. A lot of people have five, six, seven, eight, and ten people in an apartment. The landlord is squawking because he didn't rent the apartment to you with this large amount of people, and therefore he will evict you. *A fire victim*, one of the most devastating things that can happen to anybody in their life. *Release from a mental institution*—a lot of people are just released from mental institutions with nowhere to go, the family network has fallen apart, the family that they did have, has moved and therefore they're supposed to be tracked through the mental health systems, and they fell through the crack of the mental health systems.

A day's life in a shelter

As I worked in New York City in one of the largest shelters, a 200-bed facility for women, let me tell you what I feel a day is in a New York shelter.