

Safety Net vs Life Line

The US safety net is a mix of public programs, charities, churches, and public/private partnerships. This net prevents someone from living in complete destitution. When we see destitution something strange has happened.

It's common to think about "What would I do if an economic tragedy hit my family?" It's an important question, and it's good to make a strategy. How would you spend your limited money? Where would you seek shelter? How would you find food? How would you start to rebuild? This is a worthwhile reflection for everyone.

When people meet the poor, they compare their strategy to the actions of the poor. It's shocking to see that the actions of the poor are not a strategy to escape poverty. Sometimes they are a strategy to merely maintain, and at worst, they are self-destructive. If this was just a strategy problem, we would just hire more social workers to help people through the systems.

When someone starts to execute a good plan, they experience helps and sabotage. The sabotage usually comes from their family and peers. Seeing success makes someone's failure more painful. The hatred of success is a sneaky problem, and people don't want to admit it. It is a cultural, spiritual, and psychological problem.

The helps generally come from people who find it satisfying to see someone better their life. Sometimes, these people can have counterproductive motives. When they take pride in their role, their help usually falls flat. The only productive motivation is a realistic love for the other.

The Call to Rescue

These claims about US poverty are hard to accept. Simple House missionaries become convinced after meeting the destitute and reflecting on the encounter. As they grasp the real problem, they are taken aback. The issue is a bigger human problem, and the problem does not have a political or material solution.

The safety net requires a person to complete a few steps before they have access. The most basic steps are birth certificate, social security card, and an ID. Our missionaries share a meal, sit in waiting rooms, and pay fees. Even with this help and encouragement, it's difficult to get people to complete these basic steps.

A destitute person does not want to use the safety net. They give complex and varied reasons, but the basics are simple. They do not have hope that life can be better, and they don't believe that God or anyone else wants better for them. Intoxication and momentary distraction feel more real than love or trust. The important work of a missionary is to give the person a life line not a safety net. We share the gifts of faith, hope, and love so someone grabs the line. This is done by words and actions. The most important actions are these: prayer, showing a real interest in the person, eating with them, and offering to cooperate with them.

Faith, Hope, and Love are the foundation of a good life. With these three things, someone can live a great life with very simple things. This is the witness of a monastic cell, and I have found people living this witness in every community that has the basic necessities. There are some places without the basic necessities. I don't find this witness in a homeless encampment.

When missionaries see this work as difficult, something is wrong with their perspective. Every person is made in the image and likeness of God. Each one is a spectacular creation. There is no sin that takes away the glory of the base creation; sin just tarnishes the creation. The way a gearhead loves cars, we need to love people. The car lover sees a rusty car in a field and becomes excited. The old car doesn't function, but it shows the potential and the

genius of its creator. The restoration requires an enormous investment of time and treasure, and the end result is better than new. The whole affair is a little irrational, but car lovers willingly go through the process. Jesus does this for man, and we are invited to join Jesus in this work.

The ultimate sacrament is love. All sacraments serve Love, and we want our ministry to be creative love. All acts of love are eternal. Even if they do not have an obvious consequence in this world, they do not pass away, and they will never be a regret.

The Safety Net is a good thing. It is primarily created by institutions.

A Life Line is a Holy thing. It is created by individuals cooperating with God.