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**Pastoral experience
with the homeless in Korea**

By Fr. Vincenzo Bordo, O.M.I.

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Father Vincenzo Bordo, OMI, has been a missionary in Korea for over 20 years. He was invited to make a presentation at the First Integrated Meeting on the Pastoral Care of the Road/Street for the Continents of Asia and Oceania. The meeting was organized under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, in collaboration with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' Office for Human Development. It was held in Bangkok, Thailand, on October 19-23, 2010.

A. Introduction

Before starting my speech, it's important to clarify and to define who is a homeless person, so as to have a common base for understanding the issue.

Assuming that a definition as homeless person could be someone “*who is in a state of material and immaterial poverty which brings about a complex, dynamic and multiform discomfort*”, manifested in not having a fixed dwelling, then we can see that the dimension of relational deficiency – together with economic deficiency – is, to the same degree, an element that can define and cause a life of poverty especially for those without a fixed abode. This must be placed at the foundation of any further reflection.¹

I will be talking about people in this category, referring to a complex reality related not only to material poverty but also spiritual, moral and social poverty that cause for the individual dynamic and complex distress.

Furthermore, one should note that, although in this session I will talk about the homeless in Asia, many of you will find that it does not correspond with your own personal experience. In fact, the situation that the people in Korea face is very different from the situations one would find in India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka or any other country in this vast continent.² This affirmation comes from my having been in Asia

for 20 years and my having had the opportunity to travel across this continent. I have had the opportunity to encounter other pastoral realities that dealt with the homeless: they all presented many differences to what I was experiencing. So before starting my presentation, I have to point out a few things.

1.) I will not talk about the general situation of the homeless in Asia, but, simply my personal pastoral experience as a Catholic priest in Korea. (I arrived in this country in 1990.) To be precise, I will talk about the people “living on the street” in Seoul, the capital, and also in the adjacent region, Ghiong-Ghi-Do. These areas account, all together, for 50% of the Korean population.

2.) I do not have a higher academic formation vis-à-vis people who live on the street and the new poverty. I only have a diploma as a social worker, but I have matured through a long experience on site. My contribution does not pretend to be a global theory on the homeless, but, a personal, pastoral contribution that comes from having listened to, talked to and welcomed these people, and a life lived alongside them day after day.

B. A life lived on the street

After having prepared the common ground, I can now start to tell you of my experience. I arrived in Korea in 1990 with two experiences/desires within me: on the one hand, a great love

for Jesus (I wanted to bring to everyone this great experience of love that I had had in my own life); on the other hand, a great passion for the poor. I had entered the Missionary Oblates of Mary the Immaculate because their charism is evangelizing the poor (the Congregations motto is found in Jesus' words: "He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor." [Luke 4:18])

I did not know how to live this charism in the situation that was before me. Already in the nineties, Korea was a modern, rich, dynamic, industrialized country where even the Koreans used to say that there were no poor people. The Church too was flourishing and was producing many conversions and vocations. The questions that tormented my spirit were: "What does it mean to bring Jesus' good news to these people?" and secondly, "Where are the poor that need to be evangelized in this rich society?"

Slowly but surely, I started to listen to the missionaries that had already been present for many years in Korea. So I met with Maryknolls, Columbans, MEP, Consolata, Claretians, Franciscans, Conventuals, and Jesuits. Every meeting enlightened and opened new horizons for me. At the end of this pilgrimage, it was clear to me that in Korea, there existed the new poor, the "invisible poor" as the late Cardinal Stefano Kim used to call them: the down and outs, old people abandoned to themselves, youngsters in the streets, ex-prisoners, the handicapped, foreign workers, alcoholics, mentally ill people whose existence society ignored or pretended not to see. With the help of some priests, I ended up choosing to settle in Seong-Nam (a sleepy city with a million inhabitants just outside the capital, Seoul) where every day, the people commute to the city to work.³

So in 1992, with the help of a Korean priest, Don Pietro Be, and Sister Mariengel, a Korean nun who saw to the needs of the poor in the city, I started to dedicate myself to the new poor and to the people that had been abandoned in the city of Seong-Nam

The beginning of my pastoral work in favour of the poor.

I spent the whole of 1992 at Sister Mariengel's side. She carried out her pastoral work in the

poorest area of the city. I would accompany her when she visited the poor families, when she helped the old people who were alone and abandoned, as well as the young people on the street and the handicapped. I learnt from her how to move around in this new situation, and to get to know the reality with regards to the new poverty in the city where I had decided to establish myself.

Canteen House of Peace.

In 1993, with the help of the parish and the council, I opened a canteen called "House of Peace" for lonely, elderly people that were left to fend for themselves, and the poor in general. In the beginning, we were offering only a hot meal at midday, but with the passing of time, we started to organize for our guests' schooling -- many of them did not know how to read or write -- general education classes and health education courses, etc.

Oratory "Sharing" (1994)

In the afternoon, I continued to visit the poor and needy families in the area where I did my pastoral work. Slowly, after listening to the parents, I realized that the young people in the area needed help with their schooling. Many of these families were having a hard time: alcoholism, abandonment, and serious economic and moral poverty. In 1994, with the help of 40 young volunteers, we set up a small oratory called "Sharing" for the poor children of the neighbourhood. There were about 70 youngsters who, after school from 18:00 to 21:00, attended our small oratory. We started with remedial classes, only to continue with a film forum, table-tennis, basketball, guitar lessons, painting and various recreational activities. The beauty of all this is that it was staffed by volunteers. The tutors were mainly young university students who were providing these services joyfully and with enthusiasm for these young people that were less fortunate than they. The aim of all these activities was to get these young people off the street and help insert them in school and into society.

My pastoral activity moved between the Canteen, the House of Peace, the elderly

poor, the homeless, visiting the marginalized families in the poor neighbourhood of the city, and the oratory for the poor youngsters of the neighbourhood.

Association of Volunteers (1995)

As I became evermore immersed in this reality of poverty and knowledge of the city, I realized that in this city, there were various groups of Catholic volunteers that were already working to help the poor, but each one was working independently of the others that were in the territory. The idea rose for us to meet once a month so as to share our experiences and to coordinate our work in order to be much more effective.

We formed the “Association of Catholic Volunteers for the urban poor of Seong Nam”. It was a network that brought together 25 Catholic groups with about 1500 volunteers who worked in various parts of the city. We felt the need, not only to share and coordinate our work, but also to pray. So, once a month, we would meet for a Mass together and spiritual formation led by me. As mutual respect, knowledge, and friendship grew, we felt the need to spend some days in friendship and serenity together. The first Sunday of each month, we would go for walks in the nearby hills, concluding the day with Mass. A further step was taken the following year when we decided also to increase and develop our human and professional formation by organizing study days, three days in the Spring and another three days in Autumn, with conferences given by university professors who were leading experts with regards to charity and volunteer work.

All this pastoral work for the formation of the volunteers did not create anything new; it only gathered, coordinated and brought to awareness what the Catholics were already doing as normal citizens.

Anna's House

In 1998, a very big economic crisis hit Korea and all the Southeast Asian countries: millions of people all of a sudden were in the street, without a job and without any social security.

I questioned myself about these dramatic events and so I decided to dedicate and focus my pastoral activity to this new emergency in Korea: I would work for the “street people”. I entrusted to others the little oratory “Sharing” for difficult children and the canteen “House of Peace” for the elderly poor. I then fully immersed myself in this new and, up to then, unknown phenomenon of the homeless. At that moment, they seemed to me to be the poorest and the most abandoned of Korean society.

With the help of many lay people, we set up an evening canteen called Anna's House; it was for those who were living on the street. We started off offering only the evening meal but then, after talking with them and listening to their needs, we opened a little clinic for those who had health problems; an unemployment office for those who wanted to work; and legal advice for those who had legal problems. We then began to distribute clothing. We helped them take care of personal hygiene (shower and hair cut); we offered psychological counselling for whoever needed it, and last of all we opened a small “Evening School” for those who wanted to broaden their horizons intellectually. This was done to help them have more self-esteem; in fact the majority of our guests had not even finished a primary school education, so this caused them to have an inferiority complex.

Slowly Anna's House grew. From being simply an evening canteen for the homeless, it transformed itself into a centre that helped the homeless to recuperate, inspired by a holistic vision where a human being is not a compartmentalized thing, but a complex being consisting of a spirit, with a mind and a body. This means that we have to look after him holistically, not just as a stomach to be filled or a body to be clothed. We have to be attentive to his overall situation and welcome him with all his limitations.⁴

Shelter for the “young homeless” (1999)

Between 1994 and 1998, I had been working in the oratory “Sharing” for the young poor people of the city. Having to do with the street people,

visiting them in their neighbourhood, being in contact with them, I ended up meeting the young people who were living on the street, young, homeless, completely ignored by Korean society: an extremely new and shocking situation for Korean society. So for these young street people whom I met by chance or because they came to eat at the evening canteen, in 1999, we opened a shelter to accommodate them, to give them primary assistance, and then offer them programs to help them humanly and psychologically.

Homeless adolescents go through the same adversities as the adult homeless. Most of them are orphans or have dysfunctional families. They were abandoned by their parents or have faced domestic violence, which cannot be ignored, or they have their own individual problems. Moreover, they are more subject to crimes (e.g., prostitution, violence, low-wage labor) and are likely to become life-long homeless persons.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family adversely affects a child's emotional well-being. It is crucial to note that of the homeless adolescents who visited Anna's House, 90% were from dysfunctional families suffering from poverty, divorce, the early death of the parents, child abuse or domestic violence. All of these problems affect the lives of the children afterwards, preventing them from growing up to lead a normal life and integrate into society.

We tried to help them with a three-step method:

First step: "Let's be friends" is our motto. We try to welcome the young people at Anna's House where they come, like the other homeless, to find food. In a simple and warm way, we give food, clothes, a place for a shower, medical care etc., without any demands from our part. Usually, when they come to our Centre, they have had a lot of bad experiences and are wounded; therefore, they are very diffident. We interview each person, trying to understand his/her needs and to respect his/her own decision.

Second Step: We offer them a safe place to live (shelter) where, with the support of 2 employees

and 20 volunteers, we run a daily programme. This programme helps them to cultivate self-esteem and to learn of job opportunities. We also conduct sex education and we offer a few classes for the entrance or qualification examinations, in order to enroll them in private educational institutions. Our sole purpose is to get them to acquire the skills necessary for a job or to take some courses in school.

Third Step: A group home. The experience in the first and second step of the programme was quite free; there were not so many rules to keep. It is like an 'open space' for these young people who come from the streets and are not used to the community life.

After a long discernment and preparation, just those who are most ready are invited to join the third level of the programme: to live in a group home, where they have to take their responsibilities and continue to go to school or go to work.

So, in 2004, we opened a house called "Anna's House--Group Home" for those young people who wanted to be able to return to study. A year later, in 2005, we opened a shelter called "Eugenio's House", for the youngsters who wanted to work. At the end of the year our programming for these young people revolved around 3 shelters:⁵

- Shelter: "Benedetto's House" for young runaways who were on the street and who are not able to decide the course of their lives (15 youngsters).
- Group home: "Anna's House" for the youngsters who go to school (7 youngsters).
- Shelter: "Eugenio's House" for the youngsters who are work oriented (5 youngsters).

C. What have I learnt from the homeless?

Trying to make a summary -- more from pastoral experience than academic -- based on my presence in Korea alongside the poor for about 18 years, I think I can state that there is a survival instinct in these people:

1) With the exception of only a few, the homeless do not choose to live on the street. It's a hard life, full of suffering and dangers; homelessness is a conditioned reality that is determined by various factors, often independent of the individual. Often, their situation is tied to their family circle: abandonment by parents when they were very small; the death of both parents; the family's extreme poverty; alcoholism of either one or both parents (often caused by job loss); traumatic divorces. Other factors can also bring them to live on the street: economic failure with an inability to begin again; physical illness; mental illness; personality problems; a prison experience; anxiety due to the phenomena of uncontrolled urbanization.

2) I think I can also say, from my experience at Anna's House, that the profound, basic and common reasons for the hardships of living on the street are to be found in childhood. Many of today's homeless have experienced abandonment in their childhood. Just as psychology teaches us, this brings on a lack of self esteem: human beings, from birth until the ages of 6 or 7, if they do not receive love, attention and education from their parents, do not develop a mature sense of self esteem. This provokes a big difficulty in achieving healthy relationships with others and with one's self. The majority of the homeless that I have met have not finished their elementary schooling, so they bring with them a big inferiority complex when relating to other people. Consequently, with this lack of self-esteem, this inferiority complex, this incapacity to relate with others on the same level of dignity, the individuals begin to distance themselves from society. They feel that society is rejecting them and, as a consequence, society does reject them because they are homeless.

3) From my experience, I believe I can describe four main types of homeless persons in Korea:

a) The homeless who live in the shelters.

- Characteristics of these people.

This category includes mainly those individuals who are working normally and have a normal family. All of a sudden, they face an unexpected and catastrophic economic crisis (e.g., the crisis of 1998 which struck millions of people,

especially from the emerging Far East, like Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia). They find themselves without work and consequently, they lose their home. These people coming from a "normal" experience seek refuge in the shelters and here, they are helped with recovery programs so as to be reintegrated into the work force; slowly the majority of them manage to reintegrate themselves into society.

- What answers can we offer?

The Korean Government, finding itself with a million unemployed people forced to live in the street, prepared a way of helping these people.

i.) 1999-2003: In the city of Seoul, according to the Ministry of Health, this help consisted in the following:

- Three listening centres, active 24 hours a day, for all those who found themselves living on the street. Here the clients were informed of all the ways they could be helped. Those who were willing were sent to a big welcoming centre, the "House of Freedom".
- The "House of Freedom": a big, abandoned school building was adapted as a public dormitory for hundreds of people; they were given a place to sleep, meals and a place for showers, but above all, they received advice and help from social workers. After having listened to and dialogued with the person, the social workers tried to direct the client in the most helpful way possible.
- The next step was to try to get into one of the 120 shelters that the State had put up for the homeless. Here, the stay was longer and there was the possibility of being inserted into a series of work programs.
- The State sponsored a series of "socially useful jobs": cleaning of the streets, cutting the grass in the parks, etc. There was the possibility of working in one of these programs for a period from 3 to 9 months. With the money they earned there doing these socially useful jobs, many returned home and started a new job with a new life. In the acute period of the financial crisis, thousands and thousands of "normal"

people with a solid cultural, psychological and human formation within their families, finding themselves unexpectedly on the street, took advantage of this help and were able reintegrate themselves into society and into their own family.

ii.) The period from 2004 to today has seen the restructuring of the help programmes for the homeless that are now articulated in this way:

- 11 “Listening centres”.
- 28 canteens.
- 67 shelters that host about 3875 homeless people.
- 10 centres called “The Little Room” that offer the poor and the homeless a room to sleep in (about 6022 utilize this service).

b.) The “chronically homeless” people who have been on the street for a very long time.

- Characteristics of these people.

The people who belong to this group, according to the Ministry of Health, are 95% men and 5% women. The majority are orphans (71%), or people who were abandoned at a very tender age and nearly all are from situations of extreme poverty. Normally, the father was not working because of alcohol or mental problems or a scarce sense of responsibility and the mother, forced to work to maintain the family, often, when she returned home, was ill-treated or beaten up. In this dramatic situation, often the mother would run away, and the children by law remained with the father, who in turn ended up living with a step-mother. The step-mother would treat her own children well but would ill treat and beat up her second husband's children. These children, exasperated by the violence and poverty, would choose the street as a refuge. They left school and, living on the street, learned how to survive by begging, prostitution, stealing and other expedencies; so already, from a very young age, they ended up being “the young homeless”.

Living on the street already at a very tender age, they slowly accumulated psychological, social, mental, personality and emotional problems. These are people who lack self-esteem, who carry

with them a very strong inferiority complex, an inability of concluding basic schooling and the inability to relate properly with others. This helplessness leads them to separate themselves even more from the society that already excludes people who cannot relate with its demands.

Some 64% of these people live in the metro stations, in the parks, in hospital waiting rooms, in public toilets, in internet points and in abandoned houses in the winter. When they are able to put some money together, with daily jobs such as in the building trade or loading and unloading merchandise at the general market, these people, especially in winter when it is very cold, take refuge in low-cost boarding houses or in little rented rooms. Those who belong to this category, even though they know about the existence of the shelters run by the Government, refuse to enter them (84%). The reasons why they refuse to make use of the government shelters are these: life in the shelters is not completely safe or they fear community life, (20%); the accommodations there are too constricted (5%); they want to live freely without any restrictions from anybody (31%). So this category of people, even though they know the existence of the shelters for the homeless run by the State, prefer the life on the street or chance places, due to their incapacity for being in touch with others. This is due mainly to their lack of self-esteem, psychological problems or personality problems. (In this category, at least 50% are divorced; in other words, they have experienced a family breakdown and have abandoned their children.)

- What answers can we offer?

First of all, it's important to accept them for who and what they are and, at the same time, offer them the primary and basic aid they need: food, clothing, showers, barbers, medical, legal and psychological assistance. One also has to help them find the assistance that will help them cease being homeless. Our Centre, “Anna’s House”, wishes to be one of the answers for this type of homeless person: while respecting them in their choice of living on the street, we offer services that respond to their primary needs. In the meantime, our Centre provides training programs that encourage the development of the person, an

“Evening school” of general knowledge, courses for those who have problems with alcohol, sexual education mainly for the prevention of AIDS, health education, and legal education. Slowly, “Anna's House” has transformed itself from being initially an evening canteen for the homeless to being a centre for the help and rehabilitation of the street people.

The aim of our Centre is to accept people from the street for who and what they are, listen to them and then try to help them. In Italian, I call this the “3A” steps: Welcome (*accogliere*), Listen (*ascoltare*), Help (*aiutare*).

All this work is done in collaboration with the other centres in the capital and in the network of all services, hospitals, and programmes run by the State so as to offer the broadest gamut of services and opportunities for an eventual reintegration into society.

c.) The seasonal homeless or roofless.

- Characteristics of these people.

This category is linked with the urbanization phenomena (the formation of the megacity) and industrialization. Many young people with low intellectual capacity, with inadequate schooling, who live in the countryside where agricultural wages are very low, who have no good prospects for the future, fascinated by the glamour of the city, transfer themselves to the megalopolis in search of fortune. With very little general knowledge and being very simple people psychologically, and with no contacts (friends, relatives) in their new environment, they end up working in insecure jobs, in the building trade, as unskilled labourers, loaders and un-loaders, etc. So when they have some money, they take care of themselves by lodging in small, poor rooms, buying and eating their food from what they save. When there is no work, especially in winter (the temperature can go down to -10 C), or in the rainy season, they find themselves living on the street, in friends' houses or in abandoned houses, eating what is offered in the various centres for the homeless.

These “seasonal” homeless who depend on the weather, the seasons, the economic situation of the market and of the recurrent financial crises are the most likely to become homeless; they are the ones who move from one part of the country to another or from one neighbourhood to another inside this huge city. This group is called the “seasonal invisible”; they do not appear in any of the government's statistics, but it is the largest group. Those of us who are involved and work in this area are convinced that these seasonal homeless are at least forty to fifty thousand in number!

- What answers can we offer?

The way to help these homeless “seasonal invisible/roofless” is to create centres for their initial assistance and any advice which they need. We need to reach them wherever they live and provide them with information about the various possibilities that these centres offer.

The government, on a regular basis, organizes help for the weaker members of the population. These “seasonal homeless” can become involved in professional formation courses so as to become electricians, carpenters, computer operators, bakers, etc. These are opportunities for them to become qualified and to look for a stable job. These are good opportunities for them to come out of the state of homelessness; unfortunately not many take advantage of these formation courses. Even those who do manage to get a diploma are not always able to reintegrate themselves into the working world.

d.) The homeless with mental disorders

- Characteristics of these people.

In this category belong the persons who have mental disorders, more or less serious, with behavioural or psychological problems associated with serious unsociability and chronic alcoholism. Many of them have been abandoned by their families and are on the street; others are patients in specialized centres for these illnesses. According to the information given by the Ministry of Health in 2010, in Korea there are 37 institutions that care for about 9,385 people who belong to this category.

- What answers can we offer?

I feel that the State organization seems to be responding well to these needs for both men and women and that the existing programs are well run and are a great help for these homeless.

D. Conclusion

If one considers how the Korean government identifies the homeless as only those who live on the street, 1588 in all, or who are in the shelters (about 3875), then the problem is not serious and the government is doing a good job addressing it.⁶

If one looks more deeply and one takes into consideration the homeless definitions that the “Third International Meeting on the Pastoral Care of the Street” or the “Department of Housing and Urban Development” in the United States adopted, we can see immediately that adding up the four homeless categories mentioned before, the numbers are quite different.

- The homeless who live in shelters: 3875.
- The chronic homeless (those who live on the street): 1588.
- The seasonal homeless or roofless: 40.000 to 50.000.
- The homeless with mental disorders: 9385.
- The “Little Room” programme: 6022.

The numbers are quite different: roughly 70,000 persons!

So you can see that even in Korea, the problem of the homeless is not marginal but involves a lot of people. Furthermore, if you take into consideration that the problem of homelessness is linked to urbanization, to mental stress and trauma (always more frequent in a capitalist, modern society with super technology) and to the inability of the simpler people to keep pace with this type of society which is always more complicated and fast moving, one can then understand how the numbers of these people are destined to increase and not to decrease.

From my personal experience and point of view, I believe that there is still a lot to do in Korea:

- Regarding the homeless who refuse to enter the shelters and prefer to live outside, we need a widespread programme of information and outreach.
- Regarding the State which still finds it difficult to understand the problems of the homeless in its global complexity and therefore refuses to help financially centres like ours. Anna’s House is entirely financed with voluntary contributions from friends and benefactors.
- Regarding society that rejects the homeless, seeing them only as dirty drunks, lazy people who don’t want to work or are mentally ill.
- Regarding the Catholic Church that pays very little attention to the homeless (62% of the shelters are run by Protestants; 9% by Buddhists; 5% by Catholics and the remaining 22% by others) and to the poor in general. Catholics in Korea represent 10% of the population and should live with greater commitment the commandment of love (John 13, 34-35) for those people that are suffering, poor and abandoned. Jesus himself loved and helped the poor and the suffering and He has taught us to do the same. (Luke 10, 29-37: The Good Samaritan).

At Anna's House, together with other voluntary organizations, we work mainly in this “no man's land”, namely, “the chronic and seasonal homeless”, so as not only to help the “street people” but also to help the State, the Church and society understand better and without prejudice, the truth about homelessness. To do this, we work on three levels:

- Hundreds of volunteers are personally committed to this work and so are having a good experience side by side with the homeless, so that they can get a precise idea of the problem. In our centres, the volunteers always start with a moment of prayer/meditation, and they end the day with a moment of formation about their volunteer work.
- We organize meetings with political and administrative institutions to make them aware of the real and vast scope of the problem.
- Through the mass-media, we make television programs, give interviews and write articles

about this problem. Lately, through a little newspaper, "New Life", we have given the homeless people the opportunity to talk about themselves and their life.

There is a long way to go still, but I think the path has been well determined and I think that, with time, all of this will bear good fruits

I would like to conclude with a glimpse at the "Spirituality of Anna's House". This house is founded on the apostle Saint Thomas' experience when the risen Jesus Christ shows him his wounds (John 20, 24-29): "Put your finger in my wounds; touch with your hand my side." Jesus, the Son of God, is risen and has defeated

death. He is glorious and alive amidst us. We can experience his glorious, live presence in the sacraments, the Word, in the Church community and in nature's beauty. Where can we see His open, living wounds that he still bears on his glorified body? Where are they? They are alive and present amongst us, in each person who suffers, who is isolated, the outcasts, the rejected... each one of them is a live wound of the glorious Christ. So all of us who work in Anna's House are not doing good deeds for the poor, for the abandoned, for the homeless; instead, we have the honour of treating and bandaging those wounds that the Risen Jesus still bears on his glorious body. This is the spirituality of Anna's house.

Endnotes

¹ III International Meeting on the Pastoral Care of the Street: n.6. Vatican City, 26-27 November 2007.

-In the United States the Department of Housing and Urban Development use this definition:

a- Homelessness: is the condition and social category of people without a regular house or dwelling because they cannot afford or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing, or lack, "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."¹¹ United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Federal Definition of Homeless"

b- The term homelessness may also include people whose primary night time residence is in a homeless shelter, in an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or in a public or private place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. (Office of Applied Studies, United States Department of Health and Human Services, "Terminology" United States Code, Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter I, § 11302 . United States Code : General definition of a homeless individual.)

² It is not only about material poverty but also about psychological or mental poverty. For ex-

ample, it happens very often, and this horrifies many people, that amongst the homeless who attend our Centre, there are some who, when they line up for the evening meal, talk calmly without any problem on their mobile phone or listen to music on their MP3!

³ Here is a letter that I have sent to my friends. It reflects well the sense of being a missionary in Korea:

MISSIONARY IN A CONCRETE JUNGLE.

In Asia in the 1970's, there were only 8 cities with a population of more than five million. By the 1990's there were 31. By 2020, metropolitan areas in Asia will have a total of more than 2.4 billion residents, which will be about half the population of the entire continent. Today in Asia, there are 13 cities with a population exceeding 10 million ...

I live in one of these: Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. What does it mean for a missionary to live in such an environment? Why is a missionary called to live in one of the most wealthy, modern and developed cities of the world? The 2002 World Cup soccer competition showcased

these aspects of Seoul. Towards the end of 2002 the Asian Games were also held in Korea. Prior to this, the World Exposition came to Daejeon (1993) and before that, in 1988, the Olympic Games were held in Seoul.

The mission in Korea, as in every wealthy part of the world, is a profoundly quiet one. Like the Eucharist, the mission here consists of silent presence, loneliness, a sincere effort of sharing and willingness to let others receive first. This missionary vision not only applies to me, living in the Far East, but to all missionaries called to carry out their work in economically advanced countries. It is in these countries that we find pockets of poverty; it is where the “new poor” live. If we were to simply define this newly emerging reality, we might call it the “Fourth World.”

I am aware that decades of literature, slides and videos about missionary activities have brought us to associate the word “mission” with Africa, with poverty, with the heroic and the extraordinary. The word “mission” evokes green and forbidding forests, stormy rivers to be forded, and dusty, dangerous paths to be trodden. This is probably the image of the Third World, the mission in Africa for example.

Slowly, from beside that reality is emerging a new one where we do not talk about forests but instead, about a jungle of concrete. We don't talk about stormy rivers to ford, but rivers of people that fill and flood the already chaotic modern metropolis. We don't talk about the beaten track, but about motorways, the internet and satellites. This is the mission of the Fourth World: a modern world. Neo-capitalistic, rich, secularized, where communication has become easy and where there is rapid development of the economy.

But living on the fringes of this world are a myriad of those who have been marginalized--handicapped people, alcoholics, disabled people, laborers from other countries, drug addicts, homeless, people with AIDS, old people, the poor and the jobless; In a word, we can call them the “new poor,” who, rather than being dressed in rags, are stripped of their human dignity. Nobody cares for these people; their very

presence is ignored. Yet this is a reality that is close to everyone because it is common in our very own cities.

These new poor are found in Osaka (in wealthy Japan), in the ghettos of Chicago, in the slums of Nairobi, in the favellas of Sao Paulo, in Seoul, in Rome...The Fourth World is not a geographical reality, far away and difficult like the mission in the Third World, but a cultural reality on everyone's doorstep, since it is present in every modern capital city. It is an easy situation to approach, because rather than requiring tremendous wealth, men and women can, with relatively few resources, become involved through listening and dialogue, to try to solve the problems of these “new poor” with a creative and compassionate presence.

We can therefore say that the mission of the Fourth World that comprises the new poor and the reality of marginalization is a mission close to home that we find in every modern society. It is easy because it doesn't require vast resources. It can be carried out with basic means; it is simple because it concerns each of us without exception. Do you understand, now, how the horizons of the mission have enlarged enormously for me, for you? It is here that human suffering is in need of consoling and, like Jesus on the cross, cries out to feel the close presence of God. That is where brothers walk together, sharing the portion of love received through the Eucharist. The missionaries of today--the missionaries of the Fourth World--are not so much people who build or distribute goods; they are men or women who live together with the people, sharing the same joys, hopes and concerns.

They are a simple sign of the rich presence of God among the people. They are the bread broken for the poor. This has been my missionary experience in Korea.

⁴¹ **Soup-kitchen: meals for the homeless people** (Monday to Saturday: 16:30-19:00): An average of 400-450 people come every day. These people are homeless, alcoholics, jobless, the elderly poor, the physically and mentally sick. 70% of them are living on the streets. This activity is conducted with the help of 600 volunteers

divided into 30 teams that come once a month.

2. Dispensary activities: general clinic, psychiatrist, dental clinic (Tuesday 17:00~19:00):

After consultation with the doctor, we give free medicines or, if the case requires it, we offer a specialized intervention. We send the patient to a big hospital. We have a network of 8 general hospitals that intervene free of charge. Working in this field there are more than 25 volunteers, including doctors, nurses and helpers.

3. Counseling for the jobless (Thursday 17:00~19:00): Weekly we set up a consultation office to help the jobless people find a job.

4. Psychological counseling (Friday 17:00~19:00): There is a team of 2 social workers who every Friday come to counsel persons with psychological problems and try to help them solve those problems.

5. Barber shop and shower service (Wednesday and Thursday): We have 2 teams (each of 4 people) who give barber services twice of week.

6. Distribution of clothes (Wednesday): 70% of the people who come into our center are living on the street, so they don't have the opportunity to wash their clothes. After three or four weeks of wearing the same garments, they need to change clothes. We provide them with clothes that are gathered by volunteers who go periodically into the parishes of the city to collect used clothes.

7. A lawyer service: Once a month, a lawyer comes to Anna's House to try to solve legal problems that people are facing. Besides that, the lawyer is always available for consultation by telephone.

8. Birthday party for homeless people: The first Wednesday of every month, we have a birthday party for all the people who are celebrating their birthday in that month. We have a cake, some soft drinks, songs and small gifts. Through this small

party, we want to express to these people our affection and recognize them as normal human beings. Usually, in everyday life, they experience crisis, loneliness and alienation.

9. Small library: Many of the guests arrive at Anna's House very early in the afternoon; they have nothing to do until the evening dinner. Therefore, for those who want to spend time in a different way, we have prepared a small library to consult freely. This library is for everybody.

10. Spiritual counseling: A priest is always available for the homeless people as well as for the volunteers, since some of them want to talk with a priest or go to Confession.

11. Formation courses: We have organized weekly classes on cultural topics. The persons who come to these have put together a little newspaper written by them. There are also courses on alcoholism, the law and on mental health problems.

12. Outreach: We go on the streets where the homeless live, especially at night, to meet them, listen to them and help them.

⁵ On March 3, 2010, at Anna's House, 543 homeless were interviewed. We did this in order to better understand the situation of our clients. The data that came out of the questionnaire are very similar to nationwide statistics and more or less similar to the survey done in our Centre in 2008.

⁶ We have noted often that statistics and data provided by the government do not correspond with reality. Just as an example: the data provided by the City Council of Seong Nam where I work state that there are 72 homeless! However, just in our Centre, every day we have at least 150 that come from Seong-Nam!