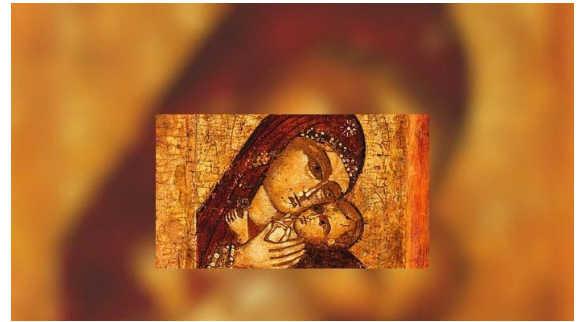


Unmasking Idols: Five things the early church was known for. Care for the Poor & Marginalised.

The early Christian church was distinguished by its radical care for the poor and marginalised, a practice that set it apart from the broader Greco-Roman society. Central to Christian belief was the idea that every human being, regardless of status or wealth, was made in the image of God. This theological principle compelled Christians to care for the vulnerable, considering it not only a moral duty but an expression of their faith. Acts of charity and compassion were core to the church's identity, as believers created networks of support for the destitute, the sick, and the socially outcast. In times of crisis, such as plagues or natural disasters, Christians were known to remain in affected areas to tend to the sick, often at great personal risk. This self-sacrificial care distinguished them from others, who might abandon the afflicted for fear of contagion. The church's commitment to these acts of mercy attracted the attention of outsiders, many of whom were moved by this display of love and sought to join the Christian community. By prioritising the dignity of every person and extending care to the most marginalised, the early church helped shape a new social order. Its charitable practices eventually influenced broader cultural norms, contributing to a shift toward compassion, kindness, and justice as essential values. In doing so, the early church not only addressed immediate needs but also laid the foundation for future developments in social welfare and human dignity.



As a group, read the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-27.

How did Jesus' teaching impact how the early church lived?

During the urban plagues in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Christians characteristically didn't flee the cities but stayed and cared for the sick and dying of all groups, often at the cost of their own lives.

Rodney Stark, in his book "The Rise of Christianity", says that the great plagues caused the deaths of up to 1/3 of the population.

In a letter to other Christians, Dionysius, a Bishop from the third century, wrote during a 15-year plague the following:

"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty; never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Headless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner..." Pg 82.

What are the “idols” that you see this radical self-giving challenging?

- 1. In our church community, what criteria do we use to define success?** Are we primarily focused on personal achievement, financial growth, and individual accomplishments, or do we also prioritise our collective responsibility to uplift and support the poor and marginalised in our midst? How could we measure our success against God’s heart for the poor and marginalised?
- 2. What Does generosity look like in our lives?** How do our practices of generosity reflect our commitment to care for the marginalised? Are we merely donating excess resources, or are we actively seeking ways to engage with and support those in need, fostering relationships that embody Christ’s generous love and compassion?
- 3. How inclusive is our community?** In what ways does our church intentionally include and support those who are marginalised?
 - How can we, as a whole church actively work to break down these barriers?
 - How can you do it as a small group?
 - How can you do this as an individual?

As a church, we have several ministry partners that we support who seek to look after those who are poor and marginalised. Have you ever considered them or given to them?

1. Jenga. <https://jengauganda.org>
2. Empart. <https://empart.org/au/>
3. Bushikori <https://www.bushikori.org.au>
4. New Life Fellowship Cambodia. <https://www.nlfcambodia.org>
5. Open doors. <https://www.opendoors.org.au>

Consider as small group.

Unfortunately, because of political reasons there isn’t a lot on the Empart website. As a group, have a look at one of the websites. Jenga has some fantastic video’s. New Life, has a wonderful testimonies page and Bushikori has links to its latest newsletter and child sponsorship. Open Doors provide support to Christians persecuted for their faith. They provide practical, emotional and spiritual support.

We give to these groups as a church out of our EGS fund, but perhaps you might like to consider giving directly or giving to the “Kingdom builders”. This is where we can choose to personally give extra monies to those partners we support, which the EGS team then distributes. Each of the websites above provides options for personal giving. If you would like to give to the “Kingdom builders”, go to the church website and click on “EGS”

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