

MESEISET

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SPECIAL ISSUE: **HOMELESSNESS IN HONOLULU**

by Alton Higashi

Many Americans believe in a legend that an ostrich buries its head in the sand, when it is afraid or it tries to avoid danger. This belief is untrue. In the case of man, we say that a person ōburies his head in the sandō to avoid the truth or reality. This may be true.



I am actually discussing not the ostrich but the Chuukese people. In the matter of homelessness of some Chuukese people in Honolulu, many non-homeless Chuukese may be burying their heads in the sand to avoid a truthful discussion about homelessness.

By definition, homelessness is a “*condition of people who lack regular legal access to adequate housing*”, according to Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2003. Easily several hundred Chuukese in Honolulu live in tents at public parks and along streets. They have no housing. Also, according to Joakim Peter, a health insurance advocate for the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii, most homeless Chuukese in Honolulu do not know nor understand their legal rights to have public housing.

As serious as this problem may be, what is irksome and tragic is a three-fold issue. First, most non-homeless Chuukese people in Honolulu do not want to discuss this matter. They are like the legendary ostrich which buries its head in the sand. Second, many Chuukese people in Chuuk have homeless relatives and friends in Honolulu, and they do

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THE EARLY YEARS OF HOMELESSNESS IN HONOLULU

by Alton Higashi

Homelessness among Chuukese persons in Honolulu, Hawaii, was a socio-economic problem about 25-30 years ago. However, it was then a small problem for fewer than 50 individuals, primarily college drop-outs, almost all young men.

There were two major reasons for being homeless. First, although they began as college students with U.S. federal financial aid, such as the PELL grant, SEOG, and CWSP, they misused such funds by buying alcohol a lot. In time, they had little money left to pay for housing rental, food, and other necessities. Second, at times, especially on weekends, they caroused at night and disturbed the peace. Apartment owners eventually kicked them out, and these Chuukese had nowhere else to go except to live in public parks.

Certain parks were favorite places for these homeless Chuukese. The two most popular parks were Ala Wai Park and Kakaʻako Park.

In the early 1980s, the then Chuuk State Director of Education Chutomu Nimwes visited Honolulu. He asked me to take him to visit the worst apartment where Chuukese student were living. I reluctantly agreed and took him to a studio apartment in Makiki where 10 men and one woman ô all Chuukese ô were living together. Among the 11 persons, only three had CWSP jobs and paid for rent and food. The others were freeloaders.

After 10 minutes of visitation, Chutomu and I left. He then told me several things. First, the shoes at the front door were stink. Second, the bathroom door was open, and he could smell the stench in the bathroom. Third, when a student opened the icebox to offer Chutomu cold water, he looked into the icebox ô filled with numerous cockroaches.

Two weeks later (after Chutomu had departed from Hawaii) all 11 Chuukese were kicked out of the studio apartment for non-payment of rent. Several became homeless at Ala Wai Park.

I used to work at the Hawaii State Legislature in the 1980s. With the help of a legislator, Representative Calvin Say, I got permission from the University of Hawaii's Department of Agriculture station in Waimanalo to get free breadfruit. One summer we received so much breadfruit ô enough to fill two trucks. Some Chuukese and I then visited many apartments where Chuukese lived and distributed all the breadfruit. We did this three

consecutive summers.

Please realize that, in the 1980s, most Chuukese people did not receive U.S. federal and Hawaii state welfare services, such AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), housing benefits, health insurance, and food stamps.

To be sure, homelessness among Chuukese students in the 1980s can be attributed almost fully to the foolishness of the students themselves, such as misuse of U.S. federal financial aids as well as alcohol consumption. All the same, as thoughtless as they were, they were still human beings in need of assistance.

And, by the way, among the 10 men who lived together in the same studio apartment, two are now classroom teachers and one is a state legislator in Chuuk.

A CASE STUDY OF THREE CHUUKESSE ADVOCATES IN HONOLULU IN THE 1990s

Three Chuukese persons ô all from the Mortlocks ô did something to help other Chuukese in need in Honolulu about 15 years ago. They helped set up a feeding program through a church in Palolo Valley.

Jimmy Emilio (Ettal) with assistance of Margarita Cholymay (Losap) and Mike Olap (Moch) realized the growing problem of desperation among Chuukese people in Honolulu. Jimmy contacted the St. Patrick Church in Palolo Valley and spoke with churchgoers to pledge free food to the Chuukese, primarily those living in the Palolo Valley Housing area. The church people provided hot food for dinner every Tuesday evening. About 50-75 Chuukese persons came together each Tuesday for fellowship and food. This program lasted for about two years.

We need to recognize heroes in this case study of people helping Chuukese. Foremost are, of course, the advocates Jimmy, Margarita, and Mike. Also, local churchgoers, Hawaiians people themselves, joined in by providing free food. And, of course, the Palolo Valley church deserves recognition for its support.

Selfless regard for others is a benchmark of some Chuukese people.

TROUBLED CHRISTMAS IN PARADISE

Several hundred Chuukese celebrated Christmas in Honolulu, but it was for them a time for much trouble and sadness in Hawaii's paradise. These Chuukese are homeless.

Take, for example, the Chuukese homeless in Kaka'ako, as shown in the picture below. They live about a mile or two from the famed Waikiki, but they had little to celebrate during the holiday season.



Source: The Huffington Post (December 23, 2013) & <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/kakaako-homeless>.

Two Chuukese in Honolulu are quite fortunate, because they have places to live. All the same, they have plans to assist their fellow Chuukese who are homeless. The first is Joakim òJoJo Peter who works as an advocate with the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii. He specializes in health care assistance for the homeless and visits almost daily with Chuukese homeless in Honolulu. He finds his job extremely difficult because many homeless people struggle with personal health problems and cannot receive public assistance. All the same, JoJo says, *"The challenges are many but not insurmountable."*



The second is Mekioshy William a Protestant minister in Honolulu. He is presently organizing several Protestant ministers and congregations to assume greater responsibility for helping the troubled homeless Chuukese in Honolulu. He says, *"It is never enough to feel sorry for our fellow Chuukese. The more fortunate need to take action to help the less fortunate."* To Mekioshy, action will include soup kitchens and spiritual guidance.



According to JoJo, most homeless Chuukese do not have health insurance, and they do not know how to find health assistance at hospitals and clinics. One of JoJo's tasks therefore is to provide public awareness on health care. He needs to connect the homeless with available health programs, such as Hawaii's Med-Quest Program. The program is a U.S. Medicaid-managed care program where the Hawaii State Government pays to cover medical and mental health services. A barrier, however, remains. JoJo says, *"A homeless Chuukese must pass the Med-Quest eligibility requirements by having certain documents such as a social security number/card and proof of FSM citizenship."*

Mekioshy admits that the fortunate Chuukese in Honolulu need to be mobilized to take action. He claims, *"There are existing programs in Honolulu, sponsored by government, non-government organizations, and church groups, which help our homeless people. Yet, it is a shameful fact that we the more fortunate Chuukese have done so little to help our own less fortunate people in Honolulu. This lack of action on our part is not acceptable."*

JoJo and Mekioshy also agree that the Chuuk State Government and the Chuukese citizens in Chuuk need to do much more to find solutions for the homeless Chuukese in Honolulu.

Both men share a special kinship in their studies. JoJo is currently working for his doctorate degree in Special Education at the University of Hawaii (Manoa). Mekioshy is currently working for his master's degree (online) in Special Education from the University of Massachusetts.

MORE TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Some of Hawaiians people feel sad about the plight of the homeless in Honolulu, and others have no empathy for the homeless at all. Here are just two — both elected representatives in the Hawaii State Legislature. Representative Calvin Say cares, and Representative Tom Brower does not care.

As homelessness increased in Honolulu, Representative Say tried to increase public funds from the Hawaii State Government to help the homeless, including the Chuukese homeless. In the past 30 years, Say has gotten to know personally many Chuukese people living in Honolulu.

In November 2013, Representative Brower took a sledgehammer to Kakaʻako and destroyed the properties of many homeless people, including some Chuukese homeless. He claimed that he was right in doing so to get rid of the problem of homelessness in Honolulu.

Say hails from the Representative District of Palolo. Brower hails from the Representative District of Waikiki-Ala Moana-Kakaʻako.

Brower's sledgehammer action divided people in Honolulu. Some agreed with him, and others were quite angry.



Calvin Say



Tom Brower



Brower and his sledgehammer in Kakaʻako

ANOTHER KIND OF TROUBLE

Let us talk crime for a little while — crimes which Chuukese people in Guam and in Hawaii cause. Last year Chuuk Governor Johnson Elimo reported that, among all prisoners in Guam's jails, 40% are Chuukese. Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie reported that, among all prisoners in Hawaiians jails, 35% are Chuukese.

These prisoners are not homeless. They get free medical care and free food in prison. Below is a picture of a Chuukese man found guilty of murder in Honolulu. He is now an inmate of the Hawaii prison system.

A Hawaii state legislator in late December said, *"Let's deport the troublemakers back to Chuuk. We don't want them here in Hawaii."*



There is discussion now in both the Guam Territorial Legislature and the Hawaii State Legislature — to pass laws to allow deportation of persons found guilty of felony.

PUBLIC WELFARE AVAILABLE

An estimated 10% of all Chuukese persons in Honolulu may be living in low-cost public housing or receiving assistance through public welfare programs, according to a reliable source from the Hawaii State Department of Human Services. A note of caution is cited — the 10% estimate is a rough figure.

Some Chuukese families presently live in low-cost public housing projects, as shown on page 5. The Hawaii Public Housing Authority was unable to cite any percentage of all Chuukese persons in Hawaii who might be residents in these low-cost housing units.

Similarly, no numbers were available on how many Chuukese are receiving special programs for the homeless or welfare benefits from the U.S. federal and Hawaii state governments, as well as other non-government agencies and church groups. The figures may be very high. See page 6 for more information.

HONOLULU'S LOW-COST HOUSING PROJECTS

There are a number of low-cost housing projects in Honolulu. Many Chuukese families live in these housing projects. Just six projects are shown below:



Palolo Valley Homes

Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT)



Puuwai Momi Housing in Halawa (Aiea)



Mayor Wright Housing
in Lower Kalihi



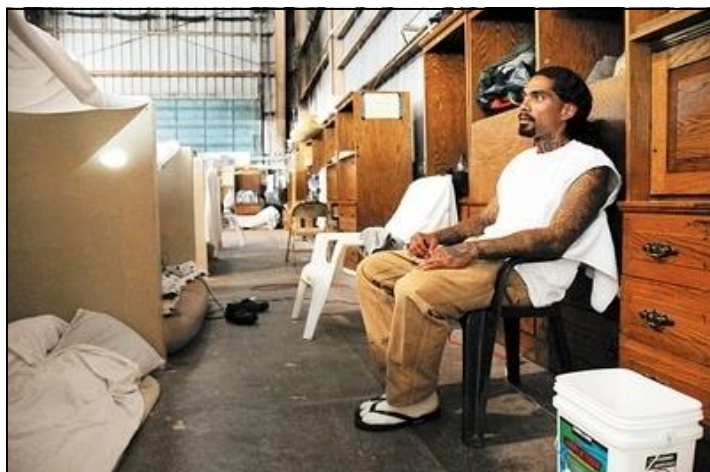
Weinberg Village
in Waimanalo

Kamehameha IV Housing
(or Kalihi Valley Homes)
in Upper Kalihi



SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR THE HOMELESS AND OTHER WELFARE CLIENTS IN HONOLULU

The U.S. federal and Hawaii state governments work with approximately 50 non-government agencies and church groups in sponsoring special programs for the homeless, including other welfare clients, in Honolulu. Many Chuukese families receive program services, such as those below:

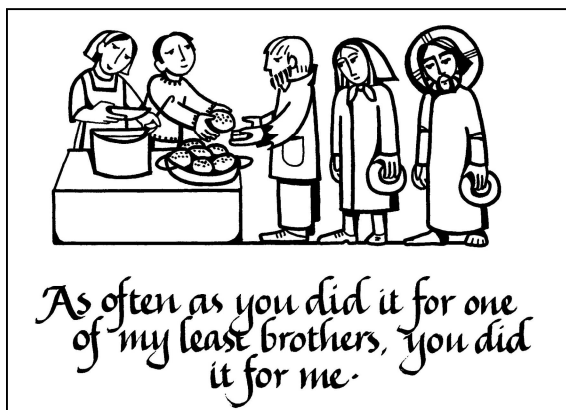


temporary shelter in Kakaʻako
for the homeless



free food through the *Food Bank*

Legal Aid Society of Hawaii
(volunteer lawyers
who provide free legal services
to Chuukese homeless)



community-based *soup kitchen*
for the homeless

Waikiki Outreach Center
(for free health care, dental services,
church services, and child care)



CELEBRITIES WHO ONCE WERE HOMELESS

(Source: <http://www.angelfire.com/stars4/lists/homeless.html>)

Did you know that some celebrities, as pictured below, were homeless in their past? If Hawaii's Representative Tom Brower knew them then, would he have destroyed their properties with a sledgehammer? Can you identify them by their pictures?



(1) _____



(2) _____



(3) _____



(4) _____



(5) _____



(6) _____



(7) _____



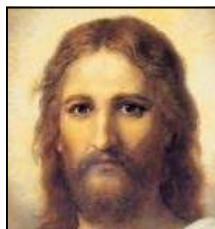
(8) _____



(9) _____



(10) _____



(11) _____



(12) _____



(13) _____



(14) _____



(15) _____

NAMES OF THE CELEBRITIES ABOVE

(with brief descriptions of their fame)

- (1) KELLY CLARKSON: The first winner of the TV show *American Idol*.
- (2) HALLE BERRY: Oscar winner in the movie *Monster Ball*.
- (3) HILARY SWANK: Two-time Oscar winner in the movies *Boys Don't Cry* and *Million Dollar Baby*.
- (4) JEWEL: Songwriter and singer nominated for the Grammy Awards four times.
- (5) JIM CARREY: Popular movie star.
- (6) WILLIAM SHATNER: Captain James Kirk in the *Star Trek* movies.
- (7) JENNIFER LOPEZ: Better known as J-Lo, starred as the lead in the movie *Selena*.
- (8) SAM WORTHINGTON: Lead actor in *Clash of the Titans* and *Avatar*.
- (9) SHANIA TWAIN: Grammy Award winner.
- (10) SYLVESTER STALLONE: Lead actor in the movie series *Rocky* and *Rambo*.
- (11) JESUS CHRIST: Nazarene carpenter.
- (12) MICHAEL OHER: NFL football star and subject in the movie *The Blind Side*.
- (13) COLONEL SANDERS: Multi-millionaire and founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC).
- (14) JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME: Popular martial-arts star.
- (15) LIL' KIM: Very successful female rapper.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HELPING THE HOMELESS

by Alton Higashi

As everyone in Chuuk should know, I am no expert in Biblical lessons. All the same, I wonder what the Holy Bible would say about helping the homeless ô particularly, the homeless Chuukese in Hawaii.

I did some research and found a few verses from the Bible on the subject of helping the homeless. I am certain that my research findings are just the tip of the iceberg, but let me share five verses that I did find.

In general, the five verses contain outstanding assumptions which should guide us in finding ways to help the homeless:

É Action speaks louder than words. It is not good enough to talk about helping the homeless; it is necessary to translate the words into action.

É The love of God is embedded in a person's desire to share what he has with those who do not have. This is what Mekioshy William stated about the more fortunate helping the less fortunate.

É The precept of helping the homeless is predated by the traditional Chuukese custom of sharing. It is no wonder that Chuukese Christians should have a lot of empathy toward the homeless.

Then, I look at the reality of the homeless Chuukese in Hawaii, and I wonder further why most Chuukese Christians ô the so-called ômore fortunateö in Honolulu and also the Chuukese people in Chuuk who have homeless relatives and friends in Honolulu ô do not act like Christians.

Maybe some Chuukese Christians in Chuuk can only talk the talk, but they will not walk the talk with Christian decency.

Isaiah 58:7

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed.

Proverbs 21:13

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

Luke 3:10-11

And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."

1 John 3:17-18

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

SPECIAL ISSUE: HOMELESSNESS IN HONOLULU ô (continued from page 1)

not want to discuss this matter either. In effect, we have two related species of head-burying people ô one in Chuuk, and the other in Hawaii.

Many Chuukese people claim that their culture (both traditional and modern) is based on sharing with relatives, friends, and neighbors. That was likely true in Chuukese tradition. Unfortunately, this claim is disintegrating nowadays. Non-sharing may become a new custom to replace traditional sharing. If and when this happens, the Chuukese people will become victims of their own doing.

Third, most Chuukese people claim to be Christians. They talk a lot about being Christian. However, Christianity is not a ôtalk the talkö religion. It is a ôwalk the talkö religion. What is hypocritical of some Chuukese ô many in Chuuk, and many non-homeless Chuukese in Honolulu ô is that they do very little to help the homeless Chuukese in Honolulu. I wonder how widespread this problem is ô not only in Hawaii, but also on Guam and the U.S. mainland.

The claim ô being Chuukese and being Christian ô does not have to die. All it takes is for Chuukese people to restore their traditional custom and their Christian ethics. I finally wonder if our own Chuuk Campus students know and understand their responsibilities to the homeless Chuukese.