

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Facilitator Background

## Engage

How much do you know about poverty in the United States? Take the following True/False quiz to find out:

True or False:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. As of 2023, the number of people living in poverty was more than 40 million people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. New York has one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. In 2019, almost one in every five adults with disabilities was living in poverty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. About one in every 20 families lived in poverty in 2023.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The poverty rate for children is far higher than for adults or seniors in the U.S.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. For a family of four, the poverty line (the amount below which people cannot meet their basic human needs) in 2023 was approximately \$30,000 a year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Poverty rates by race in America are highest for the Hispanic population.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Men experience poverty at a higher rate than women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The rate of child poverty in America is worse than in most other developed nations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25.

### Answers:

1. **True.** The estimated number of people living in poverty in 2023 was more than 40.5 million.
2. **True.** In 2023, New York's poverty rate was 14.1%, placing it tenth in the nation.
3. **True.** The poverty rate for adults with disabilities in 2019 was 19.9%.
4. **False.** It was one in every 10 families. In New Mexico, that number was closer to 1 in 5 families.
5. **True.** In 2023, the overall poverty rate was 12.4%, but it was 15.8% for children.
6. **True.** In 2025, the actual poverty line for a family of four is \$32,150. For an individual, it is \$15,650. Note that a full-time minimum wage worker falls below the federal poverty line.
7. **False.** In 2023, Indigenous populations experienced poverty at a rate of 24.2%; in South Dakota, that number was 45.6%.
8. **False.** The poverty rate for women in 2019 was 14.6% and 12.2% for men.
9. **True.** Despite having the highest national income among major economically advanced countries, the real child poverty rate in the United States (18.5%) is among the highest.
10. **True.** On July 24, 2009, the federal minimum wage moved from \$6.55 to \$7.25 an hour. It has not been changed since then. Even though many states have their own (higher) minimum wage laws, 20 states still follow the federal minimum wage.

### Reflect

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Were you aware of the extent of poverty in our own country? How do you feel about the accuracy of your answers?
2. How close to poverty are you? Have you ever been poor yourself? Do you know people personally who are poor? Do you interact with the poor regularly?
3. How aware are you of what the Church teaches and what the Church does to take action against poverty?
4. What motivates you to want to learn more about this topic?

# POVERTY AWARENESS

## Explore

On January 4<sup>th</sup> of 2005, the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) (CCHD) launched a national awareness campaign to focus attention on the millions of people in America who are poor. The CCHD chose January to coincide with the National Poverty in America Awareness Month. While you can use this resource any time during the year, we encourage you to use it during January to align with National Poverty in America Awareness Month.

The framework for the Catholic Church's position on poverty can be found in Catholic Social Teaching. The first principle, which calls us to protect the life and dignity of every human person, is based on our Catholic belief that all people are created in God's own image and likeness. Consequently, we are called to do whatever it takes to ensure that people have what they need to live, and to live with dignity.

Two of the seven basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching particularly remind us of our responsibility toward those who suffer from poverty: **solidarity** and the **preferential option for the poor and vulnerable**. All the principles are rooted in and emerge from Sacred Scripture.

### Old Testament

What does the Church teach us about poverty? We can go back as far as the early books of the Old Testament to answer that question. In the very first book of the Bible, God teaches us that we are responsible for each other when Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer for him then and for us today is a resounding **yes**.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, God called the people to take care of the poor among them. He invited them to focus especially on the needs of those most vulnerable.

*You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.*

*When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this. (Dt. 24:17-22)*

Proverbs provides a succinct message about poverty: "Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them." (Prv 22:22-23)

Many of the psalms sing of God's love and care for the poor. Take Psalm 72 as an example:

*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long. May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.*

The prophets took the people to task for not focusing on the needs of others. In fact, Isaiah taught this to the Israelites:

*Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 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 them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. (Isaiah 58:5-10)*

## **New Testament**

Jesus clearly fulfilled God's mission to care for the poor and vulnerable. He didn't just teach us to care for the poor—he came as one of them.

*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Lk 2:4-7)*

The Second Person of the Trinity stood in solidarity with the poor by becoming a carpenter's son when he could have come as a wealthy, powerful leader.

In making his first public teaching in the synagogue, Jesus quoted Isaiah and announced his mission. He equated this mission with helping those most in need:

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

Jesus invited us to become part of his mission to serve the poor. In Matthew 25, when he told the story of the master separating the sheep from the goats, Jesus taught us that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to him.

He also challenged us to not get attached to our possessions and material wealth. In Luke 21 Jesus praised the poor widow who gave of the little she had. In Mark 10, Jesus was confronted by the rich man who wanted to know how to achieve perfection:

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Mark 10:17-22)*

The rich man wasn't ready to give up his material wealth and take on a radical stance of solidarity with the poor.

Jesus' message was clearly embraced by his disciples. After Pentecost, when the faith community was growing and learning how to apply Jesus' teachings to their lives, Luke described what that community did for the poor:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

In his epistle, James took people to task for talking the talk but not walking the walk when it comes to helping the poor:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)*

Scripture taken from the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, 1993 by National Council of Churches. Used by permission.

## **Catechism Connection**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points eloquently to Jesus' solidarity with the poor:

*Jesus shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst, and deprivation. Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom. (544)*

Again, we see that Jesus' incarnation as a poor carpenter's son, not as one of the elite or wealthy, calls us to the solidarity he himself embraced.

The *Catechism* also describes how concern for the poor is one of the ways in which we turn our hearts to God:

*Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. (1435)*

We hear the Church call families to take responsibility to help the poor in 2208:

*The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor.*

The works of mercy exemplify the idea of sharing what we have with those most in need. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the works of mercy:



*The **works of mercy** are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities...The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. (2447)*

The *Catechism* speaks of the poor in the “Life in Christ” pillar more than any place else, pointing out that the Gospel calls us to help those in need. It is our call as members of Christ’s church to love the poor, and is an ongoing part of our tradition:

*This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to “be able to give to those in need.”...Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use...St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls...”Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.” (excerpts from 2444, 2445, 2446)*

One of the most powerful teachings on poverty in the *Catechism* comes in 2448:

*...those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a **preferential love** on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere.*

In a nutshell, the Church is called to help those in need because that’s what Jesus did by identifying with the poor and reaching out to them throughout his life on earth.

## **Our Bishops’ Challenge—Catholic Social Teaching**

Our U.S. Bishops continue to challenge us to live out the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Ensuring the life and dignity of every person, accepting the call to family, community and participation, standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, and having a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable all demand that we take responsibility for the poorest among us. (See [www.usccb.org/sjp/catholic-social-teaching](http://www.usccb.org/sjp/catholic-social-teaching) for more information.)

In describing the life and dignity of the human person, our bishops note, “We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.”

The bishops call us to family, community and participation. They challenge us: “We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.”

When describing the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the bishops teach us that “A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.”

The bishops call us to global solidarity, inviting us to stand as one human family because “We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world.”

In 2002, the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral reflection [\*A Place at the Table—A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God’s Children\*](#) described what we can do to eliminate poverty. They identified four arenas and the potential in each one for making changes for the better. They note:

- What we as individuals and families can do to make sure all of God’s people are treated with respect, fight for their own rights but also the rights of others, and support marriage and family life (because that is the best way to overcome poverty for children);
- What community organizations and faith-based institutions can do to support families, end discrimination, and hold public officials accountable for taking care of the poor and vulnerable;
- What the business world and the marketplace can do for the common good, so that the poorest people and poorest countries don’t fall through the cracks; what they can do to ensure that all workers receive a living wage, access to health care, vacation time, family and medical leave, a voice and participation in the workplace and the prospect of a decent retirement;
- And what government can do to serve the common good, provide a safety net for the most vulnerable, overcome discrimination, and ensure equal opportunities for all.

In 1999, our bishops wrote [\*Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice\*](#). On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they introduced this document with the following:

*One of the great challenges for Christians is as old as our faith, but it takes on special urgency today as we approach the Third Christian Millennium. How do we connect worship on Sunday to work on Monday? How is the Gospel proclaimed not only in the pulpits of our parishes, but also in the everyday lives of Catholic people? How does the Church gathered on the Sabbath act as the People of God scattered and active every day of the week? How can we best carry the values of our faith into family life, the marketplace and the public square? How do we love our neighbor, pursue peace and seek justice in everyday choices and commitments?*

*In these reflections, we highlight one essential dimension of the lay vocation which is sometimes overlooked or neglected: the social mission of Christians in the world. Every believer is called to serve "the least of these," to "hunger and thirst for justice," to be a "peacemaker."<sup>2</sup> Catholics are called by God to protect human life, to promote human dignity, to defend the poor and to seek the common good. This social mission of the Church belongs to all of us. It is an essential part of what it is to be a believer.*



## Pope Leo XIV

And now, Pope Leo XIV has once again called attention to the plight of the poor and how we as Christians need to respond with his first apostolic exhortation [\*Dilexi Te: to all Christians on Love for the Poor\*](#).

Caring for the poor seems to have become a controversial topic in today's world. But Pope Leo calls us back to the teachings we find throughout all of Scripture (as evidenced above): *"I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor"* (paragraph 23). There should be no question about our obligation to the poor and vulnerable in our midst. In fact, he goes so far as to say *"No Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our 'family.' They are 'one of us.' Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function* (paragraph 104).

The poor and vulnerable are not just objects of our charity, however. We have much to learn from them, as Pope Leo reminds us:

*Growing up in precarious circumstances, learning to survive in the most adverse conditions, trusting in God with the assurance that no one else takes them seriously, and helping one another in the darkest moments, the poor have learned many things that they keep hidden in their hearts. Those of us who have not had similar experiences of living this way certainly have much to gain from the source of wisdom that is the experience of the poor* (paragraph 10).

Our bishops and Popes have connected the Gospel message to our ordinary lives as disciples. The Gospel invites us to care for the poor on a day-to-day basis. We don't have to do heroic deeds, **but we do have to act.**

*The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. **She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome.** And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community* (paragraph 75).

The Dicastery of Promoting Integral Human Development has created a synthesis and some great infographics that summarize Pope Leo's exhortation in three parts. You can find them [here](#) under "Resources" at the bottom of the page.

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### Apply

#### **Application 1: Personal Learning Reflections**

What do you see as the connection between the challenges in Scripture to care for the poor and how you choose to live your life?

What new insights did you get from exploring Scripture passages and *Catechism* references?

What struck you most in what our U.S. Bishops teach about Catholic Social principles?

What do Pope Leo's words inspire you to do?

Based on what you learned, what do you think God is calling YOU to do personally to help end poverty in our country?

How has this learning program prepared you to share responsibility toward the poor with others in your faith community?

What key points would you emphasize in sharing with others about this topic? As an example, you might see the importance of teaching that Jesus calls us to have a preferential option for the poor.

What challenges do you think you will encounter from others when you share this topic? How will you respond?

## Application 2: Personal Application for the Topic

Pray for the courage and simplicity to stand in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable. Pray with Kathryn Spink, who wrote the following prayer:

*Lord, open our eyes,  
That we may see you in our brothers and sisters.*

*Lord, open our ears,  
That we may hear the cries of the hungry, the cold,  
the frightened, the oppressed.*

*Lord, open our hearts,  
That we may love each other as you love us.*

*Renew in us your spirit.  
Lord, free us and make us one.*

("Lord, Open Our Eyes", *Living God's Justice – Reflections and Prayers*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006, p.2)

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### Summary Page

1. January is National Poverty Awareness Month. We are called to pay particular attention to the circumstances of the poor among us.
2. The Old Testament teaches us that God calls us to have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.
3. Jesus stood in solidarity with the poor. He came to earth as one of the poor.
4. Jesus teaches us that his mission was on behalf of those who do not have what they need to live lives of dignity and hope.
5. Jesus teaches us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to him.
6. The New Testament challenges us to act on behalf of the poor, not just mouth the words.
7. The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes the words of Scripture, calling us to have a preferential love for the poor.
8. The Catechism points out the danger of wealth and possessions.
9. Our U.S. Catholic Bishops emphasize that we need to apply the Word of God in social situations. They call us to protect the life and dignity of all, to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, to have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, and to answer the call to family, community and participation.
10. Pope Leo reminds us that discipleship requires that we care for the poor and vulnerable in our midst.

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### Related Resources for Further Study

#### Bishops' Documents:

- United States Catholic Bishops. *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999.
- United States Catholic Bishops. *A Place at the Table—A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2002.

#### Catechism Connections

- 544, 1435, 2208, 2443-2448

#### Websites

- National Poverty in America Awareness Month (Materials are also available in Spanish)
- Learning activities for poverty education, from the USCCB (some activities are also available in Spanish)
- [www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org). Go here to learn about poverty in America
- *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice*
- *What Catholics Should Know About Solidarity*. Marie J. Giblin. June 2007
- <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/poverty>

Statistics for Poverty Quiz taken from [www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org) and KFF.



# POVERTY AWARENESS

## Youth Session

Time: 90 minutes

### Activity Objective

- To give youth a deeper understanding of the Gospel and the Church's call to fight against poverty.
- To encourage them to campaign against poverty.

### Connections to the Catechism

- 2444-2448



### Supplies and Preparation

- Have three youth prepped to proclaim Mark 10:17-22, Acts 2:42-47, and Acts 4:32-35.
- Have the YouTube video of John Legend talking about poverty (Show Me Campaign) ready to show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8bvmbqoeoQ>
- Have the youth sit in small groups as they come in.

### Activity Plan

1. (5 minutes) Begin the session with the following [spoken text]:

*January is Poverty Awareness Month. We are called to pay attention to the poor in our midst. Sometimes it's easy to ignore poverty. How many of us have turned away when we see a homeless person sleeping on the sidewalk, or a person standing along the street with a sign which reads "Will work for food"? Why do we turn away? Is it that uncomfortable feeling? Is it guilt that we have so much and others have so little? Is it because if we make eye contact, we might actually feel compelled to **do** something about the suffering which poverty causes?*

*Today we are going to look directly at poverty and make decisions about what we can do to make others aware of it. Then together we can make a difference. But first let's look at our Catholic faith and what it has to say to us about poverty. We will begin with the Gospel. What does Jesus have to say to us about the poor?*

**Invite the youth who is proclaiming Mark 10:17-22 to come forward and read the text.**

2. (10 minutes) After the proclamation of the Word, continue [spoken text]:

*In your small groups, discuss the following questions:*

- *Do you think Jesus meant that the man had to literally sell everything? Why or why not?*
- *What does the fact that the rich man went away sad, because he had so much, tell you? What wondering might it create in you about your own relationship with your “stuff”?*
- *What is Jesus’ message to you in his encounter with the rich man?*

**Allow several minutes for the discussion.**

3. (10 minutes) Continue [spoken text]:

*Jesus really identified with the poor. In addition to himself being poor, he constantly reached out to those most in need. The message he taught the rich man—that perfection means sharing our resources with the poor—is echoed over and over in the Gospel. Remember when Jesus separated the sheep from the goats? The sheep got to go to heaven because they responded to the needs of the poor—the least of their brothers and sisters. This was the bottom line for Jesus. Being his disciple meant being for the poor.*

*After the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, the early Church took off. And what did that new Church do? How did its members live? Let’s listen to two descriptions of the first Christian community in the **Acts of the Apostles**.*

**Have the youth prepped to read proclaim Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35. Then continue [spoken text]:**

*Think of what our community would be like if we lived like the early Christians did. There would be **no one** in need. We’d all have what we need because we would share our resources. Wow! We’re very far from that. Yet it’s possible because that’s what happened two thousand years ago. What would we need to change to be able to say there is no one in need in our community? Discuss this in your small groups. Try to be as specific as possible about what we need to change.*

**Give groups several minutes to discuss, then invite them to share ideas with the large group.**

4. (5 minutes) Continue [spoken text]:

*The Gospel challenges us to help the poor. Our Catholic faith does the same. One of the basic principles of Catholic social teaching is the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable among us. Pope Leo, in his first official writing as a Pope (apostolic exhortation), chose to write about how we must pay attention to and care for the poor. This is what he said:*

*“I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor” (paragraph 23).*

*The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. **She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome.** And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community (paragraph 75).*

*We are called to have a preferential love for the poor as disciples of Jesus. This means more than just throwing a dollar in a collection once in a while. It means we make getting rid of poverty a priority in all of our lives. We don't wait until we graduate or until we get our first full-time job. We don't wait until prom is over, or football or soccer season, or whatever. We act **now** to campaign against poverty.*

5. (20 minutes) Continue [spoken text]:

*So what are we going to do to say YES to Jesus, to his call to help the poor? How do we manifest a preferential love for the poor? While there are many things we can do, today we will focus on just one. Since January is National Poverty Awareness Month, we are going to look at how we can make others—our families, our fellow students, our communities—aware of poverty among us and aware of their responsibility to do something about it.*

*Before we create our own campaign, let's look at how one person is campaigning against poverty in his own unique way.*

**Show the YouTube clip by John Legend, "Show Me Campaign." Then continue [spoken text]:**

*Granted, John Legend is a bit more famous than you and I are. But he is on a mission to eliminate poverty around the world. That is our mission, too. So now we are going to create our own campaigns against poverty. Your mission, if you decide to accept it, is to do a step-by-step plan for what you as youth can do to raise the awareness of others about poverty and get them to do something to end it. Use all the resources available to you—social media, YouTube, texting, talking, emailing, whatever. But come up with a plan for campaigning against poverty. Your group will have 15 minutes to come up with your basic campaign idea. Any questions?*

**Circulate while the small groups work on their campaigns. Encourage any groups that appear to be stuck. After 10 minutes, give them a five-minute warning.**

6. (10 minutes) Call groups back to attention and have them share their plans.
7. (30 minutes) Invite the whole group to either choose one plan they all want to implement or choose several that smaller groups wish to do (these can be different groupings based on what kids want to do). Let the Spirit move them in whatever direction they are called to go. Give them the time and space to actually create their campaign(s).

8. (5 minutes) Wrap up the session with the following:

*Let's end our session with a prayer to help us never turn away from or ignore the poor:*

*Lord, open our eyes, that we may see you in our brothers and sisters.*

*Let's all pray: **Lord, open our eyes.***

*Lord, open our ears, that we may hear the cries of the hungry, the cold, the frightened, the oppressed.*

*Let's all pray: **Lord, open our ears.***

*Lord, open our hearts, that we may love each other as you love us.*

*Let's all pray: **Lord, open our hearts.***

*Renew in us your spirit. Lord, free us and make us one. Amen.*

(Adapted from "Lord, Open Our Eyes" by Kathryn Spink, *Living God's Justice—Reflections and Prayers*, p. 2)

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Intergenerational Session

1. Opening Prayer Service (10 min)
2. All Ages Opening Activity (15 min): Red Light, Green Light
3. In-Depth Learning Activity (30 min): Why Should We Care?
4. In-Depth Learning Activity (25 minutes): Poverty Tour
5. In-Depth Learning Activity (30 minutes): JUST Do It!
6. Reflection/Application Activity (10 minutes)
7. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)





## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Opening Prayer Service

### Supplies and Preparation

- Have three readers to proclaim the Gospel from Luke: one to narrate, one to be the rich man, and one to be Abraham.
- Have a cantor to lead the assembly in the sung response.
- Have five people of different ages prepped as Readers 1-5.
- Be sensitive to the fact that some of the people joining your session have experienced poverty at some point in their lives. This may give you a chance to have some of those people share their stories, but because of the stigma around poverty, it is likely that these people feel undue embarrassment and shame. The decision to disclose any of their personal experience should be left solely to them.

### Activity Plan

#### Gather

Sing “Lead Me, Lord” or another song about answering the call to serve others.

Leader: *We gather today (tonight) to challenge ourselves in two ways: to challenge our eyes, ears, minds, and hearts to be aware of the poverty in our nation; and to transform this awareness into action so that our hands and feet are moved to make a difference. And so we pray...*

*Loving God, you are a God of justice who, from the very beginning of humankind, has called us to care for those most in need. Open our hearts today so that your Spirit can lead us to serve the poor in our midst. Help us to live in solidarity with the poor, and to remember that your Son came among us as a poor person himself, being born in a stable. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

#### Listen

Proclamation of Luke 16:19-31

#### Respond

Leader: *Jesus, the master storyteller, challenges us not to be like the rich man, who didn’t even SEE Lazarus or his suffering. We are called to awareness of those in need in our world. Let us respond to this Gospel proclamation with openness and action. Our sung response will be: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*



*Reader 1: I am a teenager living on the street of the city. I got into drugs, ran away from home, and now I am scared, cold, and hungry. My name is Lazarus. Do you see me?*

*All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*

*Reader 2: I am an 85-year-old retired schoolteacher. I live on Social Security, but it's not enough. I need medical attention but can't afford the treatment—even with Medicare. My name is Lazarus. Do you hear me?*

*All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*

*Reader 3: I am a young adult who got caught up in using my credit card to pay for everything. I am now several thousand dollars in debt and can't afford next month's rent. My name is Lazarus. Do you understand me?*

*All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*

*Reader 4: I am a single mom with three children. I work hard, but only make minimum wage. I can't afford health insurance, and now my baby is sick. My name is Lazarus. Do you feel my pain?*

*All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*

*Reader 5: I am a mentally ill homeless veteran. I served my country and risked my life, but now I have nothing. My name is Lazarus. Can you help me?*

*All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.*

*Leader: Oh, God. We know that you have a special place in your heart for the poor. Help us to be aware, to care, and to take action to help them lift themselves out of poverty. As we look at poverty in America today (tonight), give us your love and your compassion. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

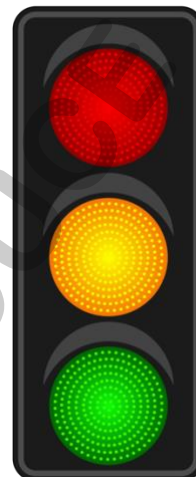
### **Go Forth**

**Sing "Here I Am, Lord" or another song of commitment.**

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# All Ages Opening Learning Activity Red Light, Green Light

Time: 15 minutes



### Activity Objective

To get participants thinking of their own awareness of poverty in America.

### Supplies and Preparation

- Have the handout *Red Light, Green Light* copied and on the tables, one per participant.
- Have pens or pencils on the tables.
- Have a list of several local charities (Catholic Charities, St. Vincent de Paul, a food bank or homeless shelter) which give aid to the poor ready for the prize-giving.

### Activity Plan

1. (5 minutes) Begin by introducing the topic in your own words or using the words below [spoken text]:

*January is National Poverty Awareness Month. All of us are challenged to pay attention to the poor. That could mean not turning away when we see a homeless person on the street. It could mean not making fun of the kid in school who doesn't have the nice clothes or the iPhone or the stuff everyone else has. It could mean not judging someone at the grocery store who is using food stamps to feed her family. It could mean listening to the stories on the news about poverty in America instead of turning the channel.*

*As Catholics, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we don't really have a choice. We are called by God to pay attention—not just during Poverty Awareness Month but all year round—to the condition of our brothers and sisters in need. So to begin our journey to deeper awareness, we're going to do a little exercise. How many of you have ever played Red Light, Green Light? OK, since there are so many of us, we can't do it physically. But we'll do a written version! On your tables is a handout, one per person. Please pass the handouts around the table and make sure everyone has a pen or pencil. \*\*If your group is smaller and you have the space, you can play this game rather than doing the written version.*

*I am going to ask you several questions. Whenever you can answer yes to a question, draw a line through a number on your paper, beginning with the number 1. When you get to ten, raise your hand and the game will be over. Teens and adults, help the younger children if they need any of my questions explained to them.*

2. (8 minutes) Ask the questions, but pause after each one in case someone at a table needs help with the question. After the pause, give the correct answer for those questions which have specific answers. Stop the questions as soon as someone raises his or her hand. Begin [spoken text]:

- Question One: Have you ever smiled at a person holding up a sign which said something like “Will work for food”?
- Question Two: Do you know what the minimum wage in the U.S. is?

(Answer: \$7.25)

- Question Three: Do you have a friend or at least know someone personally whom you would say is poor?
- Question Four: Do you know why the sheep got to go to heaven and the goats had to go to hell in Jesus’ story in Matthew?

(Answer: It’s because they treated those in need like they would Jesus, giving them food or clothing or shelter or whatever they needed.)

- Question Five: Did you know that about one in ten families in America lives in poverty?

(That is an accurate statistic.)

- Question Six: Have you ever heard of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development?

(Answer: This is the arm of our Bishops’ Conference which focuses on domestic poverty and helps people at the grass-roots level to better their lives.)

- Question Seven: Have you ever served at a homeless shelter or a food pantry?
- Question Eight: Do you know what the Peter’s Pence collection taken up at Sunday mass once a year is for?

(Answer: It is money which the Pope can use in any way he chooses to help those in need.)

- Question Nine: Have you ever asked a poor person how he/she became poor?
- Question Ten: Do you know one of the patron saints of poor people? (Actually, there are three, so any one of them will do.)

(Answer: They are Anthony of Padua, Giles, and Lawrence.)

- Question Eleven: Do you know if Jesus himself was a rich person or a poor person when he came to earth?

(Answer: He came as a poor carpenter’s son and was born in a stable.)

- Question Twelve: Do you know which age group has the most people living in poverty?

(Answer: Children.)

- Question Thirteen: Do you donate time, talent or treasure on a regular basis to organizations which help the poor?
- Question Fourteen: Of all ethnic groups, which has the largest percentage of poor people?

(Answer: Indigenous people do. In 2023, their poverty rate was 24.2%.)

- Question Fifteen: Do you have an approximate idea of what the federal government says the poverty line—the amount of money below which a family of four is considered living in poverty—is in America today?

(Answer: \$32,150 in 2025)

- It's likely that someone will have reached ten by now. Have everyone give that person or persons a round of applause.
3. (2 minutes) End this session by sharing the following in your own words or in the words below [spoken text]:

*Jesus tells us we need to pay attention to the poor. As we heard in our opening prayer, he told us the story of the rich man and Lazarus to point out that the poor cannot be invisible in our lives. We need to see Lazarus wherever he is. And we need to be informed on how many others there are like Lazarus in our town, our state, our country, and the world.*

*Let's take our awareness of the poor with us as we continue our learning today (tonight). Let's be willing to move from awareness to action on our journey.*

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### Red Light, Green Light

Listen to the facilitator's questions. For every question to which you can answer YES, draw a line through a number, beginning with #1. When you get to #10, raise your hand.

#### Red Light

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**

**10**

#### Green Light

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Poverty—Why Should We Care?

Time: 25-30 minutes

### Activity Objective

- To give participants awareness of what the Bible, the Catechism, and Catholic Social Teaching tell us about caring for those in poverty.
- To motivate participants to take action against poverty from a faith perspective.

### Connections to the Catechism

- 544, 1435, 2444-2448

### Supplies and Preparation

- Copy the handouts. One-third of the tables will get the Scripture handout, one-third the Catholic Social Teaching handout, and one-third the Dilexi Te handout. Note: if you have a larger group, you could break into 4 groups and include the Catechism handout. Consider using this summary from the Bishops, either alongside or in place of the Catholic Social Teaching handout.
- Have scissors, tape, newsprint, and markers on a supply table for any groups that choose to use them.
- Have leaders rotate around the room to help any groups that appear stuck.

### Activity Plan

1. (3 minutes) Introduce this session [spoken text]:

*We can look at poverty as a problem to be solved. We can feel compassion for those who suffer in poverty. But as disciples, we are called to do something about it. In this session we are going to the source to hear what God has to say about caring for those who are poor. We will look at both the Old and New Testaments as well as the writings of our U.S. Catholic Bishops and our Pope. We will give one-third of you a handout on Scripture, one-third a handout on Catholic Social Teaching from the bishops, and one-third a handout on Pope Leo's first Apostolic Exhortation, Dilexi Te. Your mission as a table group is to read the excerpts on your handout, discuss what you think are the core messages about our responsibility to the poor that are being taught, then find a creative way to share one of those messages with table groups studying the other topics. This could be a song, a skit, an activity or a work of art. We have scissors, markers and newsprint on the supply table (point it out if it's not obvious) if you need them. You will have 15 minutes to accomplish*



*this task. At that time, you will be sharing your work or performing your activity with two other tables—one from each of the other sources. Your activity or sharing should last no more than two minutes.*

2. (15 minutes) Have your volunteer leaders rotate the room, helping any groups which appear stuck. Give people a five-minute warning after 10 minutes. During this time, group the tables so that there will be three tables sharing with each other—one on each of the three sources.
3. (10 minutes) Call time, quickly grouping the tables. Remind them that each group has two minutes in which to share their learning with the other two table groups.
4. (1 minute) Wrap up the session [spoken text]:

*Thanks for being teachers and learners during this session. Hopefully we all understand a little better how much service to the poor is part of our Catholic identity.*

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Why Should We Care? Scripture

### Old Testament

*You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this. (Dt 24:17-22)*

*Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 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 them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. (Isaiah 58:5-10)*

### New Testament

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Mark 10:17-22)*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)*

*Scripture taken from the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, 1993 by National Council of Churches. Used by permission*

### **What is Scripture telling us to do about people in poverty?**

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Why Should We Care? Catholic Social Teaching

### **Our Bishops' Challenge—Catholic Social Teaching**

Our U.S. Bishops challenge us to live out the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Ensuring the life and dignity of every person, accepting the call to family, community and participation, standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, and having a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable all demand that we take responsibility for the poorest among us. In describing the life and dignity of the human person, our bishops note, *"We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person."*

The bishops call us to family, community and participation. They challenge us: *"We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable."*

When describing the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the bishops teach us that *"A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first."*

The bishops call us to global solidarity, inviting us to stand as one human family because *"We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world."*

### **What is Catholic Social Teaching telling us to do about people in poverty?**

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### **Why Should We Care? Catechism of the Catholic Church**

*Jesus shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst, and deprivation. Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom. (544)*

*Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. (1435)*

*The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. (2208)*

*The **works of mercy** are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities...The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. (2447)*

*This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to "be able to give to those in need."...Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use...St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls..."Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." (excerpts from 2444, 2445, 2446)*

*...those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a **preferential love** on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (2448)*

**What is the Catechism telling us to do about people in poverty?**

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### **Why Should We Care? Pope Leo XVI: *Dilexi Te***

*“I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor” (paragraph 23).*

*“No Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our 'family.' They are 'one of us.' Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function” (paragraph 104).*

*Growing up in precarious circumstances, learning to survive in the most adverse conditions, trusting in God with the assurance that no one else takes them seriously, and helping one another in the darkest moments, the poor have learned many things that they keep hidden in their hearts. Those of us who have not had similar experiences of living this way certainly have much to gain from the source of wisdom that is the experience of the poor (paragraph 10).*

*The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community (paragraph 75).*

**What is Pope Leo telling us to do about people in poverty?**



## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Taking a Tour of Poverty

Time: 25 minutes

### Activity Objective

To help participants appreciate how difficult it is to survive on income below the national poverty line in America.

### Supplies and Preparation

- Have internet access for this session (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lztAodWjMmw>).
- Make copies of the handouts, enough for one per table group.
- If you have a very large number of participants, have a microphone or two ready at different spots in the room for them to share their insights.
- Have someone prepped to proclaim Psalm 72.

### Activity Plan

1. (5 minutes) Introduce this session using your own or the following words [spoken text]:

*The Catholic Campaign for Human Development strives to end poverty in America through support of the poor and through educating all of us on the reality of poverty in our country. CCHD has created a video about the Web of Poverty. We are going to watch that video now. After this short video, we will discuss what we view.*

**Note:** The original CCHD poverty video is also available on YouTube. It was published in 2016 so the statistics are very outdated, but it is very well done. If you want to use this video, you can find it [here](#). The Economist also has two good options: [Why is There Still Poverty in America?](#) and [How to Help America's Poor](#).

Show the video(s) you chose.

2. (15 minutes) Invite participants to take the handout on each table and discuss the questions:
  - What feeling did the video evoke in you?
  - Did anything surprise you?
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before? What new awareness of people in poverty did you get from the video?

- If your family could not afford everything they needed or wanted, what would you give up?
  - How do you think your household's spending on food, housing, utilities, health care, transportation and childcare (if applicable) compares to that of a family below the poverty line?
  - What does this experience make you want to **do**?
3. (5 minutes) After fifteen minutes, bring the attention of participants back to you. Invite individuals to stand and share any insights, reactions or conclusions they have from the video and how people in poverty have to make choices.
  4. (5 minutes) To wrap up the session, continue [spoken text]:

*It's tough to be poor. I think we all become more aware of how hard poverty can be when we look at the decisions the poor have to make. They struggle daily to find dignity and hope amid despair and misery. Yet that's not what God had planned for them. God created all of us—rich and poor—in his own image and likeness. God wants everyone to have a good life, to live with dignity, and to have what they need to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families.*

*Let's end this session by listening to Psalm 72. The psalmist sings of God's care for the poor.*

**Have the person prepped proclaim Psalm 72.**

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### What Will You Let Go?

1. What feeling did the video evoke in you?
2. Did anything surprise you?
3. What did you learn that you didn't know before? What new awareness of people in poverty did you get from the tour?
4. If you were forced to make a choice, what would *you* let go? Come to an agreement as a table group on which things you'd give up first, last, and in between. Rank the following from 1-10, with 1 being the first thing you'd give up and 10 being the last.
  - a. Education
  - b. Entertainment (movies, video games, tv)
  - c. Recreation (sports, equipment)
  - d. Life Insurance
  - e. Furnishings

- f. Toiletries
  - g. School Supplies
  - h. Holiday Gifts
  - i. Birthday Gifts
  - j. Cleaning Supplies
5. How do you think your household's spending on food, housing, utilities, health care, transportation and childcare (if applicable) compares to that of a family below the poverty line?
6. What does this experience make you want to **do**?

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Learning Activity: JUST Do It!

Time: 30 minutes

### Activity Objective

- To expose participants to the many different possibilities for taking action against poverty.

### Connections to the Catechism

- 2208

### Supplies and Preparation

- Copy the handout, one per person. Have it on the tables before the session begins.
- You can present this activity two ways. Choose what works best for your situation.
  - Option 1: Have individuals or families read about each option and commit to doing one thing on their own.
  - Option 2: Have stations set up so participants can take action during the session instead of committing to doing it on their own later. If you do this you will need to set up five stations and prepare the following:
    - Station One: blank or pre-printed postcards, copy of the legislation you are advocating for, list of members of Congress for your participants
    - Station Two: copies of Stance of Solidarity handout
    - Station Three: info on some local organizations and how to donate (could be QR codes or similar)
    - Station Four: supplies for making posters, list of facts about poverty
    - Station Five: volunteer sign-ups for some local organizations that are fighting hunger (include any parish volunteer opportunities you may have, i.e. delivering food donations to the food shelf or loaves and fishes, etc.)

## Activity Plan

(2 minutes) Introduce this session [spoken text]:

*Talk is cheap. How often have we heard that expression? But it's true. As St. James said in his epistle, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."*

*If we want our faith to be alive and vital, we need to do more than wish people well. We need to act. But a huge issue like poverty can seem so daunting that we end up doing nothing. So we can't think about how we can end poverty in the world. We have to ask how we can help one person in poverty achieve a better life.*

*In this session we are going to look at several ways we can take action against poverty. Then you are going to choose one to which you can commit your own talent and energy.*

### Option One

1. (8 minutes) Invite participants to take the handout, then continue [spoken text]:

*One way we can fight poverty is through **advocacy**. That means being a voice for those who have no voice, no power to make changes. We are advocates when we send emails to our representatives on the state and national levels of government, asking them to vote for bills which help people in poverty. We are advocates when we speak out against those who blame the poor for their condition.*

*Another thing we can do is stand in **solidarity** with the poor. We can do that in many ways. One of them is simplifying our own lives, giving up something—not because it's bad—but because the poor would never be able to afford it. If money is involved, then we can take the money we would have spent and use it to fight poverty. An example of a lifestyle change is making a commitment to give something up every time we buy something new.*

*A third choice of action is offering our **support** to organizations working on behalf of the poor. We can donate our time or our money. We can let others know about the good work of the organization. An example might be Catholic Charities and the work it does locally for the poor.*

*A fourth choice is **educating** others. Today (Tonight) we are learning the Church's teaching on poverty and expanding our awareness of this issue. How can we expand the awareness of others? One example would be making posters to place around town which encourage people to help in the fight against poverty.*

The fifth choice is direct **service**. Which agencies in our community need our time to help them help the poor? An example might be volunteering as a family to cook for a local homeless shelter once a month.

The last choice we will look at is **prayer**. How much do we trust the power of prayer? How can we integrate prayers for the poor into our daily meditations? An example might be creating our own family or household prayer for the poor, and praying it with our grace before dinner each evening.

2. (2 minutes) Instruct participants to take time individually or as a family to review the six choices and choose one which they would like to actually do.
3. (10 minutes) Have each person or family at the table share their choice with the rest of the table group. Invite the whole group to help them brainstorm specific actions which could be done. Give them about 10 minutes, then offer a one-minute time check.
4. (1 minute) Wrap up the session [spoken text]:

*I encourage you to take your handout home and live out your discipleship by committing to one action over the next month.*

## Option Two

1. Invite participants to take the handout, then continue [spoken text]:

*One way we can fight poverty is through **advocacy**. That means being a voice for those who have no voice, no power to make changes. We are advocates when we send emails to our representatives on the state and national levels of government, asking them to vote for bills that help people in poverty. We are advocates when we speak out against those who blame the poor for their condition.*

*If you would like to take action through advocacy, visit Station 1, where you will send a postcard to your members of Congress urging them to (fill in the blank here – you can search a list of current legislation [here](#). Use keyword ‘poverty’ to find a list of legislation related to this session.)*

*Another thing we can do is stand in **solidarity** with the poor. We can do that in many ways. One of them is simplifying our own lives, giving up something—not because it’s bad—but because the poor would never be able to afford it. If money is involved, we can use the money we would have spent to fight poverty. An example of a lifestyle change is making a commitment to give something up every time we buy something new.*

*If you would like to take action through solidarity, visit Station 2, where you will find a family activity called Stance of Solidarity to work on together.*

*A third option is to offer our **support** to organizations working on behalf of the poor. We can donate our time or our money. We can let others know about the good work of the organization. An example might be Catholic Charities and the work it does locally for the poor.*



*If you would like to take action through support, visit Station 3 where you will have a chance to donate to a local organization.*

*A fourth choice is **educating others**. Today (Tonight) we are learning the Church's teaching on poverty and expanding our awareness of this issue. How can we expand the awareness of others? One example would be making posters to place around town that encourage people to help in the fight against poverty.*

*If you would like to take action through education, visit Station 4, where you will work together to make posters for our parish community that raise awareness about poverty.*

*The fifth choice is **direct service**. Which community agencies need our time to help them help the poor? An example might be volunteering as a family to cook for a local homeless shelter once a month.*

*If you would like to take action through service, visit Station 5, where you will have a chance to sign up to volunteer at a local organization.*

*The last choice we will look at is **prayer**. How much do we trust the power of prayer? How can we integrate prayers for the poor into our daily meditations? An example might be creating our own family or household prayer for the poor and praying it with our grace before dinner each evening.*

*We will send you home tonight with a family prayer to use so we can all take action through our prayer.*

## POVERTY AWARENESS

### **Just Do It!**

#### **Advocacy**

How can we be a voice for the voiceless? How can we change unjust structures which trap people in poverty in the first place?

#### **Lifestyle Choices**

How can we simplify our lives to be in solidarity with those who are poor?

#### **Support Groups Working for Change**

Which organizations are in our community to which we could contribute time or talent or treasure because they are doing good work for the poor? What could we do to support them?

#### **Education**

What can we do to educate others about poverty? How can we increase awareness in our community of the reality of domestic poverty?

#### **Do Direct Service**

What can we do right now to work for those in poverty? Where can we volunteer our time?

#### **Prayer**

Do we pray for the poor regularly? How can we make them part of our daily petitions to God?

## POVERTY AWARENESS

# Reflection/Application

### Activity Objective

- To help parishioners reflect on what they have experienced and learned in the intergenerational session on National Poverty

### Supplies and Preparation

- Mix participants so they are sitting with different people during this activity from those with whom they shared the In-Depth Learning Sessions.

### Activity Plan

1. Share the following [spoken text]:

*We have spent time today becoming more aware of poverty in our country. We have heard the Word of God telling us how much God loves the poor. We listened to the message of our Church, teaching us to take action on behalf of the poor. Now let's spend our final moments together reflecting on what we have learned and where we want to go from here.*

*At your tables, share the answers to the following questions:*

- *What is the most important thing you've learned about poverty in this session?*
  - *What is the meaning of a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable? Of solidarity?*
  - *What type of action do you hope to commit yourself to over the next month?*
2. Share what is in the home kit with the participants. If you chose Option 1 for Just Do It, this should include Stance on Solidarity, Learning through Books, and the Bishops' Prayer for the Poor.
  3. Then move to the Closing Prayer.

# POVERTY AWARENESS

## Closing Prayer Service

### Supplies and Preparation

- Someone prepped to proclaim Matthew 25:31-46

### Activity Plan

#### Gather

Sing a service or commitment song such as *The Summons*.

*Leader: Let us pray. O God, you call us to serve the poor and vulnerable, to care for the least of our brothers and sisters. Help us to leave here today with a renewed commitment to walking with the poor on their journey to a better life. Amen.*

#### Listen

Proclamation of Matthew 25:31-46

#### Respond

*Leader: Let us listen to St. John Chrysostom's response to the Gospel:*

*Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not despise him when he is naked.  
Do not honor him in the building with silks, only to neglect him outside,  
When he is suffering from cold and nakedness.*

*For he who said, "This is my Body," is the same who said,  
"You saw me, a hungry man, and you did not give me to eat."*

*Of what use is it to load the table of Christ?  
Feed the hungry and then come and decorate the table.  
You are making a golden chalice and you do not give a cup of cold water?  
The temple of your brother's afflicted body is more precious than this temple (the church).*

*The Body of Christ becomes for you an altar.  
It is more holy than the altar of stone on which you celebrate the holy sacrifice.*

*You are able to contemplate this altar everywhere,  
in the street and in the open squares.*

*Go be Christ to the poor! Amen!*

#### Go Forth

Sing *I Will Choose Christ* or another song of commitment to service and discipleship.

# Prayer for the Poor

From the USCCB

*As baptized Christians, it is our right and duty to pray for the needs of the Church and the world. As members of Christ's Body, we share in the joys and struggles of others, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. In faith and trust, the prayers in this section lay before God the hopes and concerns of a broken world awaiting redemption.*

God of Justice,

open our eyes

to see you in the face of the poor.

Open our ears

to hear you in the cries of the exploited.

Open our mouths

to defend you in the public squares

as well as in private deeds.

Remind us that what we do

to the least ones,

we do to you.

Amen.



## Stance of Solidarity

Many years ago, the Church called us to abstain from meat, not just during Lent, but every Friday of the year. The purpose was three-fold: to identify with the suffering of Jesus; to develop self-discipline in small things so we have the courage to say no when evil tempts us; and to stand in solidarity with the poor.

When that precept was changed, we were encouraged to choose something else to give up voluntarily once a week. It could be a food we really love, like chocolate or meat. It could be television or listening to music.

What can you, as a family, give up once a week to stand in solidarity with the poor? Here are some possibilities:

1. Dessert
2. A favorite family snack
3. Television
4. Technology (email, snapchat, phones, video games, etc.)
5. Going to the movies or a game
6. Complaining
7. Criticizing
8. Fighting

Discuss what you can commit to, then try it once a week for a month. If it's something that costs money, donate the money you would have spent on it to an organization which helps the poor. If it's something that takes up time, take some of that time to pray for the poor or advocate for them (e.g., writing to your representatives in support of legislation which helps the poor).

At the end of the first month, evaluate what happened. Did it help you as a family grow in holiness? In solidarity? In strength? In appreciating Jesus' self-sacrificing for you? Decide whether to stick with the same thing to give up or choose something else for the next month.