



Poverty USA

Student Action Project



Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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Catholic Campaign for Human Development
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Please send your [comments and feedback](#) on these resources to CCHD.

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Introduction

Today in America, 37 million people live in poverty. In the world's richest nation, one out of every eight people is unable to meet his or her basic needs. The rate is even higher among children, with one of every six living in poverty.

Our hope is in our future. As a people of faith, we believe that poverty can be overcome through education, reflection and action. We are called not only to meet the immediate needs of people in our communities through charitable activities, or direct service, but also to work to create a more equitable society through the powerful process of social action and social change.

This call to social action extends even to our youngest citizens – to students in our elementary school classrooms and religious formation programs. They, too, play an important role in working with the poor to help change the underlying structures that cause poverty and suffering for so many Americans.

For nearly 35 years, the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development \(CCHD\)](#) has worked to build community by bringing people together from all walks of life to work for social change. The mission of CCHD is to provide financial support to organized groups of poor and low-income people who are working to change laws and policies in order to promote social justice and eliminate poverty. The recipients of CCHD funding are focused on social change rather than direct service. CCHD also provides opportunities and resources to help Catholics reflect on how their faith calls them to promote a more just society.

The *Poverty USA Student Action Project* extends CCHD's mission to our school children, helping to raise our youth's awareness of poverty in America and to promote a continuing commitment to social justice. This toolkit is designed to help Catholic elementary school principals and teachers as well as religious education directors engage their campuses and/or parishes in a poverty awareness campaign utilizing resources developed by CCHD.

While CCHD's mission is the promotion of social change, the activities suggested in this toolkit recognize that direct service is often the entry point for a person's encounter with people in poverty. The lessons are structured in such a way as to move students along a continuum whereby direct service activities facilitate a process of understanding and action to address the root causes of poverty.

This project uses Catholic social teaching as its starting point. It is grounded in the belief that our faith calls us to engage in the work of both direct service and social change. Our Catholic social tradition can be summarized in [seven basic social justice themes](#), which run through each of the lessons in this toolkit.

The goal of these lessons is to inspire in our students a continued dedication to direct service and a life-long commitment to work for social change. Each lesson includes three essential elements:

- Education
- Taking Action
- Reflection

Education

The lessons aim to provide teachers with age-appropriate tools they need to help students begin to grapple with the issues of poverty and also to realize the powerful role they can play in addressing its root causes.

Lessons begin with an opening prayer that allows students to reflect on Jesus' call to love one another in our attitudes and actions. Warm-up activities help focus students on an aspect of poverty and give them an opportunity to gain knowledge and insight on important questions relating to who is poor and why poverty continues to exist even in so affluent a nation as the United States. Subsequent activities aim to inspire students to make a difference through either direct service or social change.

Lessons can be modified as necessary to meet the needs of individual classrooms, religious education courses or other instructional programs.

Taking Action

The work of social justice is central to CCHD's mission. Direct service activities, however, are typically the entry point for students to begin understanding the complex and often overwhelming issues of poverty. As students engage in service activities, reflection on their experiences provides the opportunity to discover why poverty exists, who it affects, and how poverty might be eliminated. Appropriate direct service and social action – completed as a class, as a school, or at home with family – leaves students with an understanding of poverty that can transform their lives.

In these lessons, students in every grade level will have an opportunity to put their knowledge about poverty to work in a project. The curriculum includes age-appropriate activities that guide students along a continuum from direct service to social action projects as follows:

- Students in the younger grades K-2 begin to consider the realities of poverty and are challenged to make a difference through direct service projects.
- Students in the third grade are taught explicitly about the “two feet” of social justice and consider the importance of social action in working to actually *change* the underlying structures that cause poverty to persist.
- Students in the older elementary grades 4-8 reflect on the meaning and causes of poverty and are guided through a series of exercises culminating in social action projects.

The projects can stand alone, but ideally they will be part of a campus-wide Poverty Action Day – a culminating event in which students throughout the school showcase their projects to help alleviate poverty in their community. A complete explanation regarding how to organize, coordinate and implement *Poverty Action Day* is provided separately.

Reflection

Students are challenged to reflect on difficult questions relating to poverty throughout the lessons. The warm-up activities at the beginning of each lesson are a form of reflection. Students continue to grapple with the challenges facing the poor as well as the challenges of alleviating poverty in America through the suggested activities.

At the end of each lesson, students will have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and consider if and how their knowledge and attitudes

about poverty changed. This concluding element is a critical part of each lesson, challenging students to realize their ability to make a difference through both direct service and social change – and inviting them to continue working for social justice throughout their lives.

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One Can...Make a Difference Food Drive

Kindergarten/ Grade 1

Overview

Students begin by reading through one of several recommended children's books that help teachers broach the difficult subject of poverty with young children. Students then will have an opportunity to respond to the needs of others through a food drive that, ideally, culminates on Poverty Action Day, when they count, sort and present their gifts to a local shelter.

Objectives

- To broach the subject of poverty and allow students to reflect on the realities of hunger and homelessness.
- To instill in students a sense that their actions can make a difference.
- To invite students to participate in a food drive by bringing cans.
- To empower students to take action in age-appropriate activities, including counting and sorting collected cans.
- To reflect on their experience and encourage additional action.

Opening Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class by asking students what they are thankful for. After students have an opportunity to share, the instructor may wish to teach them the following prayer, which can be said before mealtimes:

*Thank you for the food before us
Thank you for the friends beside us
Thank you for the love between us
Thank you, Lord.
Amen*

Education

Warm-up Activity

Poverty and hunger are global realities – and so many of their victims are children. One out of every six children in the United States lives in poverty. Other children may see homeless people sleeping on the streets or in their cars, and they often wonder why. In this activity, students will begin to reflect on the tragedy that many people – especially children – are not getting their basic needs met.

Begin this lesson by reading one of the following picture books to students. Each has been lauded as an excellent resource for beginning to explore the subject of poverty in a way that kids can understand, while also giving children a feeling that they can do something.

The Can-Do Thanksgiving by Marion Hess Pomeranc
Albert Whitman & Company; (September 1, 1998)
ISBN: 0807510548

Dee saves her money and buys a can of peas for the school's food drive. Persistently asking, "Where do my peas go?" she is happy when a church group contacts the school and asks for volunteers to help with its Thanksgiving feast for people in need. Dee goes and makes friends with a homeless boy.

Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting
Clarion Books; Reissue edition (March 22, 1993)
ISBN: 0395664152

A homeless boy narrates the story about his life, living in airport terminals with his father who continually tries to earn enough money for rent. Wondering if his life can ever change, the boy ultimately finds hope when he witnesses a trapped bird finally finding its freedom through an open window.

The Greatest Table: A Banquet to Fight Against Hunger
by Michael Rosen
Harcourt; Slipcased edition (December 1, 1994)
ASIN: 0152000283

Published in support of *Share Our Strength* and its campaign against world hunger, 16 popular children's book illustrators help give life to Rosen's verbal image of "The Greatest Table" as the world's dining room, "where all of us can help ourselves,/and all of us are fed,/and no one has been turned away/with just a crust of bread."

Sam and the Lucky Money by Karen Chinn
Lee & Low Books; Reprint edition (July 1, 1997)

ISBN: 1880000539

Sam gets to spend his New Year's gift money any way he likes. He shops in his favorite Chinatown stores but is disappointed to find that everything he wants is too expensive. Sam considers buying a sweet or a new toy for himself, but when he sees a homeless man barefoot on this cold day, he considers a better use for his money.

Sally's Journey by Ralph da Costa Nunez
Institute for Children and Poverty; (October 1, 2002)
ISBN: 0964178494

Sally the Snail loses his shell in a storm. He departs on a journey to find a new home. Along the way, he meets both friends and foes as he looks for a new place to call home.

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan
HarperTrophy; Reprint edition (April 24, 1997)
ISBN: 0688152856

A boy spends the day with Uncle Willie in the soup kitchen where he works preparing and serving food for the hungry.

Also, there are a number of New Testament stories that teachers can use. Examples include Loaves and Fishes ([Matthew 15:32-39](#)), the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25-37](#)), and Jesus washing the feet of His disciples ([John 13:1-17](#)).

Discussion

Be sure to spend some time discussing the book you selected and read together. Students should be given the opportunity to explore their feelings about the poor and about working with the poor. Challenge students to think about what they would do if they were poor. Where could they turn for help? What could they do to turn their situation around and end their poverty? Point out that people who work can still be poor if their jobs do not pay them enough to buy food and other necessities for themselves and their families. Invite students to share their thoughts as to how they think children who are poor or homeless must feel. These are difficult questions, but they are the foundation to linking direct service with social change.

Taking Action

This activity will help students develop their understanding of direct service by participating in a food drive that responds to neighbors in need.

Step 1: Assess Needs

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is committed to supporting poor and low-income persons who are working together to alleviate the conditions of poverty. The teacher may wish to contact a local shelter and ask about their needs. Ask what food items are in particular demand. The teacher also may wish to contact local CCHD-funded groups to see if items can be distributed in communities where these organizations are working. Find CCHD-funded groups in your community by contacting your [CCHD Diocesan Director](#) or by viewing the [CCHD Grants page](#) and scrolling down to "Recently Funded Initiatives".

Step 2: "One *Can*...Make a Difference"

In this age-appropriate direct service activity, students will begin to understand that their participation in their community plays an essential role in the effort to eliminate poverty. Begin by asking students to bring just one can that meets the needs identified by your local agency. The teacher may wish to divide the class into groups – each with a different food category. The food items should be non-perishable. If your school is coordinating a Poverty Action Day, time your food drive to end on that day.

As you know, parents will play an important part in this activity. Teachers may wish to send a note home explaining the class project. Some background information that you may wish to include in a letter follows:

- More than 37 million Americans live in poverty today.
- 1 out of 6 children is poor.
- Approximately 1 in 10 families is poor.
- A family of four lives in poverty if their income is below \$19,971.
- The Catholic Campaign for Human Development was established by the Catholic bishops of the United States to help people work toward the elimination of poverty through programs that promote self-sufficiency and social change.
- With just one can, you *can* make a difference.

A sample letter follows:

Sample Letter

(INSERT DATE)

Dear Parents,

I am writing to invite you to help your child participate in a food drive that our kindergarten class will be holding between **(DATE)** and **(DATE)**. Please send your child to school with 1-2 non-perishable food items. The items we most need are **(canned fruit, canned meat, canned vegetables, rice and pasta)**. The food will be donated to **(LOCATION)**.

More than 36 million Americans live in poverty today. If all the poor in the United States lived in the same state, it would be the largest state in the nation. Among those affected are nearly 13 million kids – that means that one out of every six children is poor.

As a people of faith, we are called not only to meet the immediate needs in our communities through direct service but also to work to create a more equitable society through the powerful process of social change.

This food drive is part of the Poverty USA Student Action Project, a program developed by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which works with the poor and low-income people to eliminate poverty through programs that promote self-sufficiency. The Student Action Project aims to instill in our elementary school children the belief that their actions can make a difference in creating a more equitable world and to set them on a life-long course committed to social change.

Please help our students understand their important role in the campaign to eliminate poverty by supporting our food drive. I want to thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

(YOUR NAME)

P.S. If you are interested in helping us count and sort the cans on Poverty Action Day on **(DATE)**, please let me know!

The teacher also may wish to help students organize a school-wide or parish-wide food drive. The above information could be shared throughout the school or parish community and included on posters, fliers and letters home. Make sure to designate the time and place for the collection.

Step 3: Collect Cans

Ideally, teachers would collect cans over the course of a week. Clean trash bins are great receptacles as are clean cardboard boxes. On Poverty Action Day, students will sort and count the cans that were collected. This activity promotes organization, cooperation and math skills!

Once the cans are sorted and counted, arrange delivery with the local agency or CCHD-funded group. Seek the assistance of the agency or parents who may be able to help with the heavy lifting and transportation.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on their service experience once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggestions for questions teachers may wish to ask their students:

- Did you like collecting the food? What was your favorite part? What part didn't you like very much?
- Where do you think the food went? Who will eat the food that we collected?
- Would you like to do this again? Why or why not?
- What are some other ideas of things you could do to work with the poor?

Allow students to make a mural of their project. Use butcher paper so that 6-8 students at a time can draw, color or write about their experience. The mural can be hung in the classroom as a reminder of their good work.

Also, don't forget to celebrate once the project is over. Send a thank you note home to the parents or place a note in the parish bulletin reporting the successes and offering thanks to all the participants. And thank the students with a special treat that recognizes their effort in this project.

Evaluation

Please help us to create future resources that fit your needs. Complete and submit the form found on page 53 or give us your feedback online by entering your comments at www.usccb.org/cchd/pusa.shtml or by emailing them to cchdpromo@usccb.org.

Take a Bite Out of Poverty Bake Sale

Grade 2

Overview

In the second grade, students traditionally prepare for their First Holy Communion. As students continue their spiritual journey to the Eucharist, they are taught that there is a place at the table for everyone. This lesson plan includes a series of activities that highlight practical knowledge about nutrition, celebrate the diversity at our dinner tables, and allow students to organize and complete a service experience – a bake sale in which students “Take a Bite Out of Poverty.” The bake sale allows students to raise awareness about the millions who go without food while also raising money to help alleviate the root causes of poverty.

Objectives

- To learn the importance of good nutrition.
- To celebrate cultural diversity.
- To reflect on the reality that millions, including children, live in poverty and go without food.
- To develop planning skills and teamwork by organizing a bake sale to help alleviate poverty.
- To reflect on their experience and encourage additional action.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the story of Jesus feeding the multitude loaves and fishes. [Matthew 15:32-39](#)

Education

Warm-up Activity

This activity teaches students about the importance of good nutrition, allows them to share their diverse food cultures, and helps them to reflect on the harsh reality that millions of children and adults live in poverty without the means to have their basic needs – including food – met.

Step 1: Good Nutrition

The teacher may wish to begin by asking students why food is important. Record students' responses on the board as they take turns answering.

Suggested responses: Food is important for many reasons. Some are included below:

- To grow. Our bodies need food to provide the nutrients essential for building strong bones, healthy skin, healthy muscles, etc.
- To stay healthy. Food contains vitamins and minerals that protect us against illness.
- For energy. Without food, we would run out of energy.
- Because we're hungry. Our stomachs growl when they're empty!

This is a great opportunity to introduce kids to the food pyramid recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture. For additional tools for your classroom, go to <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/KidsPyra/index.html>.

Step 2: Sharing our Diversity

Ask students to draw a food pyramid and include foods they commonly eat at home. This is an opportunity for students from different cultural backgrounds to learn about the range of foods that fill their homes and to develop an appreciation for the diversity in their community. It also helps underscore that every person needs food to survive, yet so many go without.

Step 3: Who goes without?

About 1 out of every 6 children lives in poverty in America. That's nearly 13 million kids who are poor and may not have access to resources to meet their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter.

This can be overwhelming to young children. But it is important that all our children, especially those being raised in the Catholic tradition, begin to reflect on this reality, learn early on to feel empathy for those less fortunate, and also feel empowered to make a difference.

To help students connect with the topic of poverty, the teacher may wish to read one of the following picture books. Each has been lauded as an excellent resource for beginning to explore the subject of poverty in a way that kids can understand, while also giving children a feeling that they can do something.

Note to Teachers: The books listed below also are recommended for use in the first grade. Second grade teachers may wish to coordinate with first grade teachers on their campus to avoid duplication.

The Can-Do Thanksgiving by Marion Hess Pomeranc
Albert Whitman & Company; (September 1, 1998)
ISBN: 0807510548

Dee saves her money and buys a can of peas for the school's food drive. Persistently asking, "Where do my peas go?" she is happy when a church group contacts the school and asks for volunteers to help with its Thanksgiving feast for people in need. Dee goes and makes friends with a homeless boy.

The Greatest Table: A Banquet to Fight Against Hunger
by Michael Rosen
Harcourt; Slipcased edition (December 1, 1994)
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Published in support of *Share Our Strength* and its campaign against world hunger, 16 popular children's book illustrators help give life to Rosen's verbal image of "The Greatest Table" as the world's dining room, "where all of us can help ourselves,/and all of us are fed,/and no one has been turned away/with just a crust of bread."

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan
HarperTrophy; Reprint edition (April 24, 1997)
ISBN: 0688152856

A boy spends the day with Uncle Willie in the soup kitchen where he works preparing and serving food for the hungry.

Discussion

Make sure you spend some time discussing the story you select with the students. Encourage them to ask questions, to share their feelings about the characters in the story they read, and to brainstorm ways they can help make a difference.

Taking Action

In this age-appropriate direct service activity, students will begin to understand that their participation in their community is an essential part in the work to end poverty. Students will have the opportunity to "take a bite out of poverty" by bringing in baked goods, raising awareness about poverty, and raising money for projects that help enable the poor to break the cycle of poverty.

Money collected can be given directly to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). In turn, CCHD will send the class a certificate in appreciation of their contribution and will recognize the class and school on the CCHD website. Send CCHD a digital photo of the class project that can also be included on the CCHD website. CCHD's website provides details regarding the [annual collection](#) for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) and [CCHD-funded organizations](#).

Step 1: Make Stickers

The purpose of this activity is to begin to raise awareness about the reality of poverty as well as to raise money to fund programs that work to alleviate it. In Step 1, students will create stickers that can be distributed with the purchase of a baked item to help increase awareness throughout the school or parish community.

The stickers could simply say "I took a bite out of poverty," or teachers could use the following information to guide your class to develop their own ideas:

- More than 37 million Americans live in Poverty, USA.
- 1 out of 6 children is poor.
- Approximately 1 in 10 families is poor.
- A family of four lives in poverty if their income is below \$19,971.
- There's room for everyone at our table.
- We can take a bite out of poverty.

For more facts on poverty, see the CCHD's [Poverty USA website](#).

Step 2: Organize the Bake Sale

Ideally, the Bake Sale will occur on Poverty Action Day. The following steps will help guide you're planning:

- Divide the class into groups – each responsible for bringing a different baked item.
- Organize set-up and clean-up requirements. Arrange for an appropriate place and time. Don't forget napkins and a cash box.
- Advertise. Create posters, fliers, parent letters and bulletin announcements. The class could also sponsor a poster contest to help build awareness for the event.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on their service experience once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggested questions teachers may wish to ask their students:

- What did you think about the event?
- How do you feel about giving this money to those who are in need?
- Would you like to do this again?
- What else could you do to work for people in poverty?
- With whom would you like to share the leftovers?!

Also, don't forget to celebrate once the project is over. Send a thank you note home to the parents or place a note in the parish bulletin reporting the successes and offering thanks to all the participants. And thank the students with a special treat that recognizes their effort in this project.

Evaluation

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Hall of Heroes

Grade 3

Overview

In this activity, students consider the reality of poverty in their community and begin to investigate how different people work to address poverty. Students study heroes of both direct service and social change and create a Hall of Heroes recognizing the accomplishments of both. They will then recognize a local hero with a certificate of appreciation and an invitation to speak to the class.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the story of the Good Samaritan.
[Luke 10: 25-37](#)

Objectives

- To reflect on what it means to be poor.
- To begin to understand the difference between direct service and social change.
- To learn about men and women who have dedicated their lives to social justice.
- To realize their own ability to make a difference and work with the poor through direct service and social change.
- To celebrate local heroes.

Education

Warm-up

The teacher can begin the lesson by simply saying the word "poor" or writing it on the board. Ask students to define the word and think about who are "the poor." Or try using a picture or series of images to trigger students' responses. Jot down responses on the board as students raise their hands and take turns trying to define the term, or have them write a journal entry reflecting on their understanding of the term "poor."

Suggested responses: The term "poor" includes people who lack food, shelter and clothing, as well as people who are working – sometimes two

jobs – but still earning an income that falls beneath the federal poverty line. (For 2005, the government set the federal poverty line at \$9,973 for an individual. For a family of four, the federal poverty line is set at \$19,971.) Today, there are more than 37 million people in the United States who are poor. One out of every six children is poor. One out of every 10 families is poor.

Now ask students to consider the question, “Who helps the poor?” Have students consider what they would do if they lived on an income below the federal poverty line.

Suggested responses: Who helps the poor?

- Government agencies at the federal, state and local levels help the poor, providing supplemental income through welfare and food programs, access to affordable housing and access to medical care. Depending on the budget, legislation passed each year increases or cuts funding to programs that help the poor with housing, food, health care, educational opportunities, etc.
- The poor help themselves by working with churches, community organizations, government agencies and private groups to change laws and policies that address the root causes of poverty.
- Church organizations, such as the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), support groups run by and with poor and low-income people to address the root causes of poverty with the ultimate goal of breaking the cycle. Other private organizations, such as Catholic Charities and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, work to meet the immediate needs of the poor.
- Private individuals and organizations help the poor through charitable works and direct service, such as food and clothing drives, as well as through social action that seeks to change the underlying structures that cause poverty.

Discussion: The Two Feet of Justice

Jesus began his ministry by telling us to love our neighbors as ourselves. As Catholics, we are challenged not only to help the poor through charitable acts but also to work with the poor to change conditions in our society that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

One of the goals of this program is to help students understand that, according to the Catholic social tradition, there are two basic ways for individuals to respond to human need – the so-called “two feet of social justice.” One is direct service and the other is social action or social change.

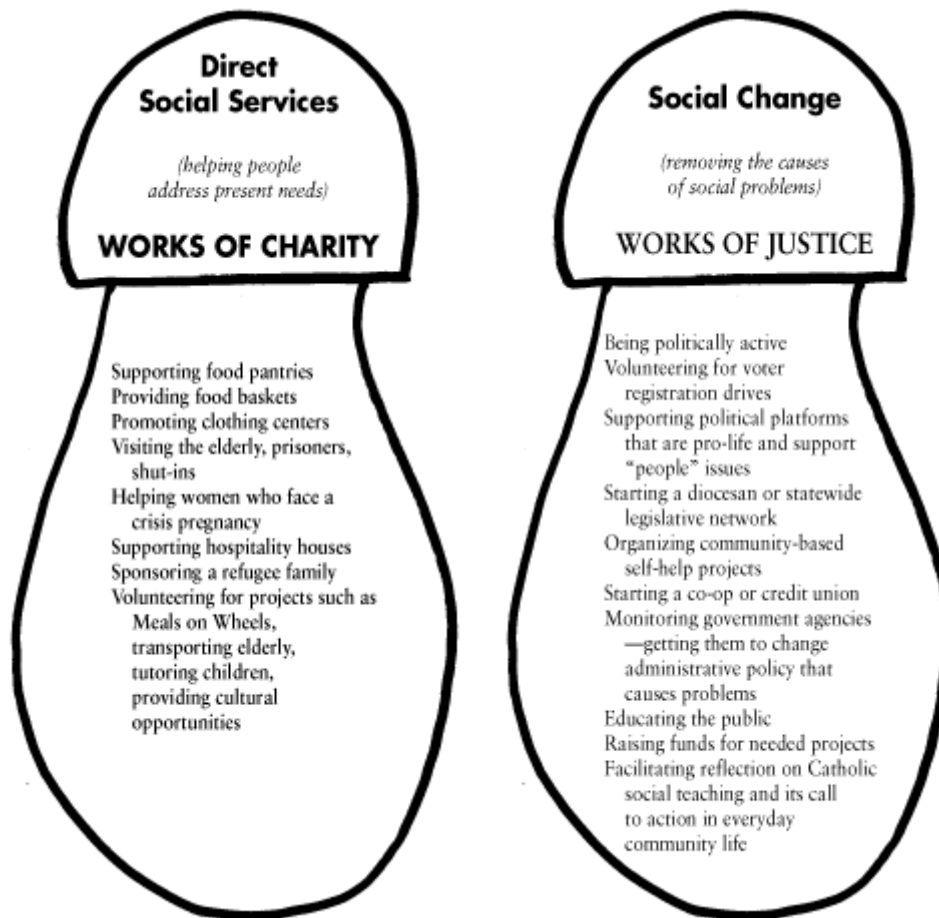
Through *direct service*, or charitable acts, we identify people who need assistance and then go out and help them. For example, if someone is hungry, we may donate food to a food pantry. If someone needs clothing, we donate clothing to a charitable organization that distributes it to the poor.

Social action or social change is related but different. It means that we work to change laws and structures in our community that give rise to these needs in the first place. For example, if someone is hungry, we ask the question, “*Why* are people hungry?” Is it because they can’t afford to buy food on their current wages? In that case, an example of social action would be to advocate for a “living wage” that would ensure that a worker can meet the basic need of buying food. If we identify and work to address the root causes of hunger, we are getting at social change.

The teacher may want to draw the “two feet” on the board. Use the image on the following page as your guide. On one foot, write the characteristics of direct service; on the other write social action/social change. For example, under direct service: meeting the immediate needs of someone in need such food, clothing and shelter. Some examples of social action/social change include:

- Voting;
- Organizing a voter registration drive;
- Meeting with elected officials (e.g. to ask for better paying jobs for workers);
- Working to change laws and policies that perpetuate poverty (e.g. raising the minimum wage, increasing the availability of affordable housing, etc.);
- Working with persons living in poverty on projects they decide are necessary to end poverty.

These can be adapted to meet the skill level of your students. For a follow-up activity, ask students to list on a separate page activities they see themselves doing one day under each category.



Taking Action

Mother Teresa offers us a wonderful example of direct service. She teaches us that we can see the face of Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor. Cesar Chavez challenged us to change the social structures that give rise to injustice among farm workers. He is a model of a person who worked for social change.

In this activity, students will begin to learn the difference between direct service – responding to people’s immediate needs – and social action – addressing the root causes of the need. They will then create a Hall of Heroes celebrating people who dedicated their lives to either.

Step 1: Create Student Groups

Divide students into small groups. Ideally, there would be no more than five students in a group. Assign each group one hero of direct service and one hero of social change. Try to ensure that each group picks one hero from each of the two categories.

Note to Teachers: A list is provided below. This is not an exclusive list. Add saints, political figures, community leaders, etc. or challenge students to come up with their own examples. Information on each person listed below can be found on the web. Encourage students to do additional research.

Direct Service

- Mother Teresa
- Frederic Ozanam
- Mother Henriette Delille
- Teachers may also wish to add Catholic saints who were dedicated to serving the poor.

Social Change

- Cesar Chavez
- Dorothy Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Archbishop Oscar Romero
- Dom Helder Camara
- Rosa Parks
- Jean Donovan, Sr. Ita Ford, M.M., Maura Clarke, M. M., Sr. Dorothy Kazel, O.M.U.
- Msgr. Geno Baroni
- Success stories of CCHD-funded groups can also be used as examples of heroes of social change. Find them in the [CCHD newsletter](#) and at the [Poverty USA website](#).

Step 2: Create a Hall of Heroes

Students should assemble information on their social justice heroes and come to class prepared to share their information with their small group. Give students some time to design a poster demonstrating their understanding of the major features of their heroes.

Finally, students can share their posters with the rest of the class and discuss each of the elements on their poster. The posters could be displayed around the classroom, around the campus, or in a school auditorium on Poverty Action Day.

Step 3: Recognize Local Heroes

Now that students have learned about social justice heroes in the world, challenge them to find two heroes in their local community – one working in the field of direct service and one working for social change. Examples of local heroes could be found in local community groups working with the immigrants and refugees to secure access to housing, with workers to secure better wages or working conditions, or with the poor on other issues. You might also contact representatives of [CCHD-funded groups](#).

Once identified, ask students to invite the two local heroes to school as a guest speaker. Have the heroes explain what they do and how their work may be an example of direct service or social change. Students could prepare certificates of recognition or appreciation ahead of time for their local heroes and present it to them at the end of the visit.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on their service experience once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggested questions that teachers may wish to ask their students:

- What qualities make a person a hero?
- What qualities make a person a hero of social justice?
- Do you understand the difference between direct service and social change? Which do you think is easier to do? Why?
- With which of the heroes you learned about in class did you most identify?
- What did you like about the local hero that your class recognized?
- How can you work with poor people to help them help themselves?

Evaluation

Please help us to create future resources that fit your needs. Complete and submit the form found on page 53 or give us your feedback online by entering your comments at www.usccb.org/cchd/pusa.shtml.

Poverty Action Kits

Grade 4

Overview

It is hard for many people to truly understand the scope of poverty in America. It can be especially overwhelming to young children. Our Catholic social tradition teaches that each of us is called to face this reality and to work to build a more just society. As educators, it is important to begin to plant the seeds of empowerment early so that students grow up with the belief that they can make a difference. In this lesson, students reflect on who is poor, consider the needs of those living in poverty, and organize a school- and/or parish-wide campaign to collect items that people living in poverty need. The lesson culminates on Poverty Action Day when students assemble the items from their collection into Poverty Action Kits that they can send to elected officials to remind them what poor people in their community and nation need – all 37 million of them.

Objectives

- To allow students to reflect on the many faces of poverty.
- To address some of the stereotypes of poverty.
- To identify local needs in your community.
- To organize a school- and/or parish-wide collection.
- To teach students the important role they play in advocating for the elimination of poverty.
- To allow students to reflect on their action experience and encourage them to pursue additional activities that promote social justice.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the Golden Rule.
[Matthew 19:16-19](#)

Education

Warm-up Activity

This activity begins to help students put a face on poverty. Provide each student with a piece of paper and colored pencils or crayons. Give them a short period of time to draw a “person who is poor.” Have students complete their drawing individually. After they have finished, ask them to share their drawings with the class and to explain their drawing.

Discussion

The warm-up exercise is important in affording students the opportunity to put a face on poverty. Many children and adults have stereotyped views about who is poor. Give students a chance to discuss their drawings. It is important to encourage students to recognize the many faces of poverty – that is, that “the poor” is a comprehensive category that includes people of all ages, races and backgrounds. Moreover, the causes of poverty are many and varied. Poverty affects senior citizens, veterans, immigrants, people who are out of work, people who work two jobs, people who are homeless, families with children, single men and women, single parents, persons with disabilities, etc.

Taking Action

This activity will help students begin to realize not only the importance of direct service but also the powerful role they can play in advocating for the elimination of poverty. Students will have the opportunity to brainstorm what people living in poverty need and to organize a collection. The lesson culminates on Poverty Action Day when students create Poverty Action Kits that can be sent to elected officials along with a cover letter written by the students reminding their political leaders what people in their community and nation need to move out of poverty.

Step 1: Identify human needs

Divide students into groups of no more than four and give them an opportunity to brainstorm what people living in poverty need. Once students have had a chance to reflect on this in their groups, create a class list.

Suggested responses: Make sure students don't forget such needs as nutritious food, warm clothing, affordable housing, as well as toiletries, a job, quality education, access to health care, job training, etc. The teacher may wish to contact a local CCHD-funded group ahead of time for suggestions of particular needs and issues for people in their

community. Check the latest list of CCHD-funded groups in your community by viewing the [CCHD Grants page](#) and scrolling down to “Recently Funded Initiatives”.

Step 2: Organize a Collection

The following steps will help guide your planning:

- Identify the items you would like to include in your kits. Some items may be collected – such as cans of food or toothbrushes and other toiletries. However, other items may have to be added to the kits symbolically. For instance, students may wish to draw pictures of a house or pictures of people working to represent the need for affordable housing or the need for good jobs.
- Select a drop-off location for items that can be collected. The location should be big enough to accommodate all the items that you expect to collect as well as convenient and secure enough for drop-off. Ideally, sorting and assembly can occur in the same place. This saves the time and effort of moving the articles after they are delivered.
- Advertise. Create posters, fliers, parent letters and bulletin announcements. This class could also sponsor a poster contest to help build awareness for the event. The advertisement would include the items that are to be collected and where and when they will be dropped off.
- Give students some time to draw pictures or create images of the symbolic items they plan on including in their kits.

Note to Teachers: This may be an excellent opportunity for members of the class to make a very brief presentation at the end of each mass several weeks before the collection begins. Teachers can make arrangements with the parish priest. With a prepared presentation, representatives from the class could tell the parish about the upcoming drive, what they are collecting and why it’s important. This is a powerful message for the entire parish community. This could also be done for the entire school community.

Step 3: Collect the Tangible Items

After selecting a convenient drop-off location, start collecting! Items may be collected over a period of time – usually from several days to a week.

Step 4: Assemble the Kits

Students can work in groups, with each group responsible for assembling a kit. Ideally, the assembly will occur on Poverty Action Day. Provide a list of the items to be included in each kit. Have students separate the items into categories and then assemble the kits. Don't forget to include the items being represented symbolically – a picture of a home, an image representing access to health care, etc. – into each kit.

Step 5: Write letters

Give students some time on Poverty Action Day to write a brief letter to their elected official to be included in their kits. Some points students may wish to include in their letter include:

- More than 37 million Americans live in poverty today.
- 1 out of 6 children is poor.
- Approximately 1 in 10 families is poor.
- A family of four lives in poverty if their income is below \$19,971.
- The Catholic Campaign for Human Development was established by the Catholic bishops to help people work toward the elimination of poverty through programs that promote self-sufficiency.
- To learn more about the state of Poverty in America today, go to www.povertyusa.org.
- The items in this Poverty Action Kit serve as a reminder of the needs of the poor who live in our community and across our nation.

If you are able to arrange for elected officials to visit your campus, students could arrange to present the kits on Poverty Action Day. Otherwise, the kits could be delivered to a field office or mailed. Still another option is to present the kits to your [CCHD Diocesan Director](#) or to [CCHD-funded organizations](#), who can arrange for distribution of the kits.

Reflection

Once the class has thanked all the parents, students and staff who participated, allow students to reflect on their experience. It is critical to give students the chance to share their feelings about the project. Some suggested questions follow.

- What did you think about the event?
- How do you feel about sharing these items with those who are in need?
- Would you like to do this again?
- What else could you do to work with people in poverty?

Note to Teachers: Another excellent reflection activity is to invite leaders of a CCHD-funded group, a representative from a local agency or a client who received the items to visit the class as a guest speaker. This person can share with the class answers to such questions as: Who is being served? How will the donations be used? What else could be done to help? What do people need to move out of poverty?

By inviting members of CCHD-funded groups and other organizations to the classroom, students learn the importance of asking people most affected by poverty what they need in order to change their situations. What persons living in poverty say they need and what we think they need may be very different.

Evaluation

Please help us to create future resources that fit your needs. Complete and submit the form found on page 53 or give us your feedback online by entering your comments at www.usccb.org/cchd/pusa.shtml or by emailing them to cchdpromo@usccb.org.

Postcards from Poverty, USA

Grade 5

Overview

If all the poor in the United States lived in the same state, it would be the largest state in the nation – the state of Poverty, USA. After gaining a greater understanding of the extent of poverty in the United States through a Poverty Quiz, students will be challenged to conceptualize an imaginary state called Poverty. Students design postcards from this imaginary state and have the opportunity to address them with a brief note to the President of the United States or other elected officials urging them to visit this state -- and to decrease the number of people living in Poverty, USA.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the following reading from Scripture. [1 John 4: 19-21](#) (Whoever loves God must also love his brother.)

Objectives

- To reflect on the realities of poverty in the United States.
- To promote creativity and map skills by drawing a map of the state of Poverty, USA.
- To provide an age-appropriate experience of advocacy through a letter-writing campaign.
- To reflect on their experience and encourage their continued work for social change and social justice.

Education

Warm-up Activity

To help students begin to understand the extent of poverty in America, the teacher may wish to begin with the following true-or-false Poverty Quiz adapted from CCHD's [Poverty USA](#) website.

Note to Teachers: The unedited [Poverty Quiz](#) also can be taken online.

- Most Americans could get out of poverty if they only had a job.

False. Most Americans living in poverty are too young, too old or physically incapable of working due to illness or disability. In fact, nearly two-thirds of all Americans living in poverty have to depend on someone else in the household to bring in money to live.

- The federal minimum wage is now \$5.15 per hour.

True. But for a mother who works full-time at minimum wage to support one small child, which translates to earnings of \$10,712 a year – which is \$2,043 below the 2005 poverty threshold for a family of two.

- One out of every three Americans lives in poverty at least two months out of the year.

True. That amounts to more than one-third of all Americans. And the number of people living in severe poverty – with incomes below *half* the poverty line – is actually on the rise.

- One of every six children in America lives in poverty.

True. Nearly 13 million kids live in poverty. In fact, children in America have higher poverty rates than adults, and children under the age of six have been particularly vulnerable.

- California has the highest rate of poverty.

False. The American South has the highest poverty rate at 14.0 percent. The South had a disproportionately large share of those in poverty: 40.6 percent, compared with 35.6 percent of all people. The states with the highest poverty rates are as follows: Mississippi and New Mexico 17.3%, Louisiana 18.8 %, Texas and District of Columbia 16.7%, Arkansas 16.4 %, Alabama and Kentucky 16.0 %, West Virginia 15.8%, North Carolina 15.1%.

- If all the poor in the United States lived in the same state, it would be the largest state in the nation – the state of “Poverty, USA.”

True. Home to 37 million, the state of Poverty, USA is even larger than the state of California in total population. As an extension activity, have students review information provided on the [Poverty USA map](#). This site provides lists of the top 20 states with the highest poverty, child poverty and violence rates.

Discussion

To help students more deeply connect with the issue of poverty, ask them to consider the causes of poverty. That is, *why* are people poor? The teacher may want to jot down their responses on the board or give the students an opportunity to reflect in a journal entry.

Suggested responses (adapted from CCHD's Poverty & Faithjustice program):

- Many people can't find work.
- Even if people can find work, sometimes they don't have full-time jobs, or don't have full-time jobs with pay and benefits that allow them to meet their basic needs.
- Many can't work because of physical/psychological disability or because of their age, and they don't have enough money from their personal resources or from government assistance to cover their expenses.
- Some struggle with alcohol or other drug addiction.
- Many are single parents who don't receive child support.
- Some don't have adequate job training or education.

Taking Action

If Poverty, USA really were a state, what would it look like? Who would live there? What would life be like there? In this activity, students will have an opportunity to reflect on these questions and try to illustrate their answers in a visual format.

Step 1: Review a map of the United States and the basic features of the map. Note the presence of cities and towns and geographic features like bodies of water, mountains and deserts. Ask students to identify their own state on a map and its important features.

Step 2: Divide students into groups. Distribute butcher paper. Ask students to imagine that there was another state – the state of Poverty, USA. What would *this* state look like? Have each group design and cut out the shape of their new state – the state of Poverty, USA.

Step 3: Have students brainstorm responses to the following prompts and add them to their map:

1. What are the names of the major cities?
2. What's the name of the capital? Where is it located?
3. Would there be mountains and oceans, or would there be deserts and valleys?
4. Where would the highways go?
5. What are the major points of interest? Would there be beautiful sunsets and high-rise buildings or would there be fog and smog and sewage plants?
6. Where do most people live? In the cities or rural areas?

By tapping into the students' creativity, they not only learn about the state of Poverty in the U.S. but also reveal their assumptions and biases – issues that can be discussed through reflection.

Step 4: Ask students to present their map and provide reasons for why they drew what they did.

Step 5: As a concluding activity, students will convert their understanding of Poverty, USA into advocacy. In their small groups, students will design "postcards" that highlight a particular feature of their state of Poverty, USA. Students can use the information from their maps as well as information from the poverty quiz. Examples would include a drawing of their "capital," fictitious points of interest, or depictions of prominent citizens accompanied by facts about the state of Poverty, USA. Have students write a brief message on the back, urging elected officials to do something about this state of affairs.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on this exercise once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggested questions that teachers may wish to ask their students:

- What features of the state of Poverty, USA did most groups have in common?
- What feature was the most original?
- Why do you think so many people live in this state?
- Next year, do you think that more people will move into or out of this state? Why?

- What are the residents of Poverty, USA doing to help themselves?
- Do you think that people in the other states should work with the people living in Poverty, USA? Why or why not?
- What would you do if you were the President (or other elected official) and received that postcard?
- What more could you do to help alleviate poverty?

Evaluation

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Justice Walk-a-Thon

Grade 6

Overview

More than 37 million Americans live in poverty. Who are they? What does it feel like to be poor? This lesson helps students reflect on the answers to these questions. Working in groups, they will consider the lives of five people living in poverty who are facing a dilemma. Students will then learn to organize an event to raise awareness about and alleviate the conditions of poverty.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the following reading from Scripture. [1 Cor 12:12-31](#) (One Body, Many Parts)

Objectives

- To reflect on what it means to be poor.
- To sensitively reflect on the challenges faced everyday by people living in poverty.
- To organize an event to raise awareness about poverty.
- To realize their own ability to make a difference through social action.

Education

Warm-up Activity

As a warm-up activity, make copies of the six statements below ahead of time and select six students to read them aloud to the class, in the order given.

- Who is poor in the United States? This is how those living in poverty would answer.
- We are White. We are African-American. We are Hispanic and Native-American and Asian, too.
- We are young and we are old. We live in cities, suburbs and in the country. We go to work and go to school and go to church.

- We are concerned about raising our children well. We help others who are in worse shape than we are. We sometimes depend on the kindness of others.
- We are one out of every six children in America. We are one out of every ten families in America.
- We aren't all the same.

Now write the word "poor" on the board. Ask students to define the word and think about who are "the poor." Jot down responses on the board as students raise their hands and take turns trying to define the term, or have them write a journal entry reflecting on their understanding of the term "poor."

Suggested responses: The term "poor" includes people who are destitute, lacking food, shelter and clothing, as well as people who are working – sometimes two jobs – but still bring in an income that falls beneath the federal poverty line. (For 2005, the government set the federal poverty line at \$9,973 for an individual. For a family of four, the federal poverty line is set at \$19,971.) Today, there are more than 37 million people in the United States who are poor. One out of every six children is poor. One out of every 10 families is poor.

Discussion

Now divide students into five groups and assign each group one of the following scenarios in which they put themselves in the shoes of the person described. Ask each group to consider the situation and work through the dilemma together. Have students prepare a group presentation in which they present their solution. The students may find a creative way of preparing for their presentation – for instance, they may wish to write a short story, or read a group reflection, or present a skit they wrote.

- My name is Matthew. I was a factory worker with the same company for 15 years, but yesterday I found out that the factory is closing. I was laid off. I don't have a college education. My job skills are limited and I don't have the money to pay for additional job training. My wife works as a receptionist, but the money she earns won't be enough to pay our rent. It seems that all the good factory jobs are leaving this city. What should I do?
- My name is Joseph. I moved to the United States last year with my wife and 5-year-old daughter. I am hard-working but speak little English. Right now, I work as a dishwasher in two restaurants. My wife Martha works, too. She cleans houses.

We don't make much money, but we can usually make ends meet. Now Martha is very sick and can't work anymore. I don't know how we can pay for everything. What should I do?

- My name is Samantha. I'm a single parent. I have been staying home with my one-year-old daughter Lucy. I have an opportunity to get a job, but it pays only minimum wage and I can't afford child care for Lucy while I'm away at work. I currently receive government assistance, but I don't want to stay on welfare forever. What should I do?
- My name is Tim. I'm 16 years old and my family is homeless. My mom works a part-time job while my little brother Ricky and I are at school. We usually sleep in my mom's car and sometimes save enough cash to get a motel room. We used to live in a nice house with everything, but after my dad left it was hard for mom to find full-time work. I've been thinking about getting a job and saving enough money for us to afford a deposit on an apartment. The winter is coming and it's getting cold. But that would mean I'd have to drop out of high school. My counselors at school tell me I'm a good student and shouldn't drop out, but they don't understand. I could always finish high school later. But my family needs me now. What should I do?
- My name is Jack. I'm nearly 70 years old and I'm retired now. My only source of income every month is from Social Security. It isn't much, but I stretch it as best I can. It pays the rent and utilities. I get help with groceries from a food pantry run through my church. But now I have a new problem. I've got high blood pressure and have to take medicine. Government programs cover part of the cost but not all of it. I don't know how I'm going to come up with the money. What should I do?

Taking Action

This activity combines student creativity with advocacy by organizing a Walk-a-Thon – with a social justice twist. In most Walk-a-Thons, people agree to walk a certain distance for every sponsor who donates money. In this activity, students agree to walk for sponsors who agree to help spread awareness about poverty by hanging a poster or using a handmade craft made by the students. Teachers should arrange the location for the walk ahead of time and ensure suitable supervision will be available. A school field or playground area would work well; otherwise, students could simply walk around the school.

Step 1 – Design a Poverty Awareness Campaign

Students will create handmade crafts and posters that will serve to inform members of the community about the state of poverty today and make suggestions about what can be done. Students can work individually or in groups to create the handmade items. Examples include posters, greeting cards, and simple crafts such as necklaces or simple jewelry. Whatever the craft, every item must include a tag on which they print one of the facts on poverty and a suggestion on what actions could be taken to help alleviate poverty and promote social change.

For instance, a student could make a simple necklace with a tag that says, “1 in 6 children in America is poor” on one side and “Please write your local elected official to support nutrition programs for children” on the other. Posters allow students to creatively convey the information they’ve learned to the rest of the community. Greeting cards could include information about poverty on the back and a suggestion for social change. Sponsors also could be sent [e-greeting cards](#) found on the CCHD website.

Step 2 – Find sponsors

Ask students to find sponsors for their Walk-a-Thon. But instead of asking for money, they simply ask their sponsors to agree to use their handmade item – for instance, wear the necklace on the day of the Walk-a-Thon, hang the poster at their workplace on the day of the Walk-a-Thon, send the greeting card to a friend, etc. Challenge students to look for sponsors outside their immediate family.

Step 3 – Contact the Media

About a week before the Walk-a-Thon, contact your local newspaper and ask them to send a reporter and photographer to cover your event. Prepare students who will be able to speak with the media about Poverty USA – the issues and the solutions.

Step 4 – Walk!

The day before the Walk-a-Thon, remind students to wear comfortable shoes. Students should walk a lap, mile, or other designated distance for every sponsor. Consider making the distance an effort – like the poor who have to make a great effort to meet the challenges facing them.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on their experience once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggested questions that teachers may wish to ask their students:

- Now that you've completed this lesson, what do you think about the conditions in which the poor must live?
- Why do you think people are poor?
- If you were poor, what would you do?
- What are the poor doing to help themselves?
- What were the challenges of completing this project?
- What were the high points of completing this project?
- Do you think you made a difference? Why? Why not?
- What more could you do to work *with* the poor to alleviate poverty?

Evaluation

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Community Action Guide

Grade 7

Overview

Can you distinguish between things that are real needs and those that you simply want? In this activity, students will consider the concept of “needs.” In small groups, students develop a list of necessary items and estimate the cost. They then compare their budget with the budget of someone living in poverty. Students are challenged with a series of questions asking them to consider what they might give up in order to meet their budget, who they might ask for help, and what they might do for themselves to change their situation. Through a series of reflection questions, students will better understand the predicament of the poor and the difference between direct service and social change. The lesson culminates in the creation of a *Community Action Guide*, a resource for all people in their community interested in changing the social structures that give rise to poverty.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the following reading from Scripture. [Luke 16:19-31](#) (The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus)

Objectives

- To identify the differences between “needs” and “wants.”
- To compare their budget with the budget of someone living in Poverty, USA.
- To reflect on the challenges and decisions related to “making ends meet.”
- To reflect on the difference between meeting people’s immediate needs through direct service and working for social change.
- To brainstorm actions that people in their community can take.
- To help change the social structures that give rise to poverty.

Education

Warm-up Activity: POVERTY USA Budget Activity¹

As a warm-up activity, ask students to respond to the question: *If you lived on your own, what would you need to live?* Ask students to individually write their responses. Ask students to share their responses with a neighbor in order to develop a common list of needs.

Develop a list of items as a class. Write student responses on the board. Using feedback from the class, place a star next to items that students believe are "needs." Identify items on the list that are "wants."

Suggested responses: Remind students about large items that they may have forgotten such as rent, utilities, transportation and food. Also consider including health care and child care. Encourage students to include items that they might include in their own family budget, such as recreation, birthdays, clothes, school supplies, etc.

Have students try to budget the amount of money it would cost for each item. You might consider assigning this for homework. Once students have had an opportunity to reflect on the cost of their needs, listen to several guesstimates to determine an average and list the amounts on the board.

Present students with another scenario. Divide students into small groups of four. Tell them to imagine they are a family of four with a budget of \$19,971. Tell students that the federal government says a family of four making \$19,971 a year is living in poverty. Ask students how far \$19,971 goes in America today? How do you budget? What do you leave out?

After giving them time to complete this exercise, review the information from the Poverty USA tour provided below.

¹ Sources of Statistics:

Rent, utilities, transportation, food, health care: *Consumer Expenditures Survey*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2005;

Child care: *Expenditures on Children by Families*, United States Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, April 2005

Poverty threshold: U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004*

VISIT: <http://www.povertyusa.org>, CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/index.shtml>

Budgeting for Poverty

Rent

The median, fair-market annual rent for a two-bedroom apartment within a major metropolitan area is \$5,329.

\$19,971
-5,329
\$14,642 yr.

Utilities

To keep a family of four warm and secure, the average expense for utilities and public services runs \$2,309 a year.

\$14,642
-2,309
\$12,333 yr.

Transportation

A family at the poverty line will spend \$4,920 to own and maintain a used car and fill it with the gas and oil needed to go to work, to daycare, to the store, wherever.

\$12,333
-4,920
\$7,413 yr.

Food

Even with public assistance such as food stamps, families making less than \$19,971 will spend \$4,102 a year for food at home and away.

\$7,413
-4,102
\$3,311 yr.

Health Care

Even if an employer contributes part of the costs of health insurance, a family of four at the poverty line would still pay on average \$2,132 year for health and medical expenses. The cost of not having health insurance, however, could be devastating.

\$3,311
-2132,
\$1,179 yr.

Child Care

The costs in a metropolitan-area child care center for two children five and under can reach over \$13,000 a year. Even with child care subsidies, low income families with two small children will spend on average \$2,300 a year on child care.

\$1,179
-2,300
-\$1,121 yr.

Tell the students that they are now \$1,121 over budget. Ask them what items were left out.

Suggested responses: Among the items left out are toiletries, school supplies, shoes, clothes, holiday gifts education, life insurance, furnishings, recreation, cleaning supplies, entertainment and birthdays.

Discussion: The Two Feet of Justice

Jesus began his ministry by telling us to love our neighbors as ourselves. As Catholics, we are challenged not only to help the poor through charitable acts but also to work with the poor to change conditions in our society that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

One of the goals of this program is to help students understand that, according to the Catholic social tradition, there are two basic ways for individuals to respond to human need – the so-called “two feet of social justice.” One is direct service, or charitable works, and the other is social action or social change.

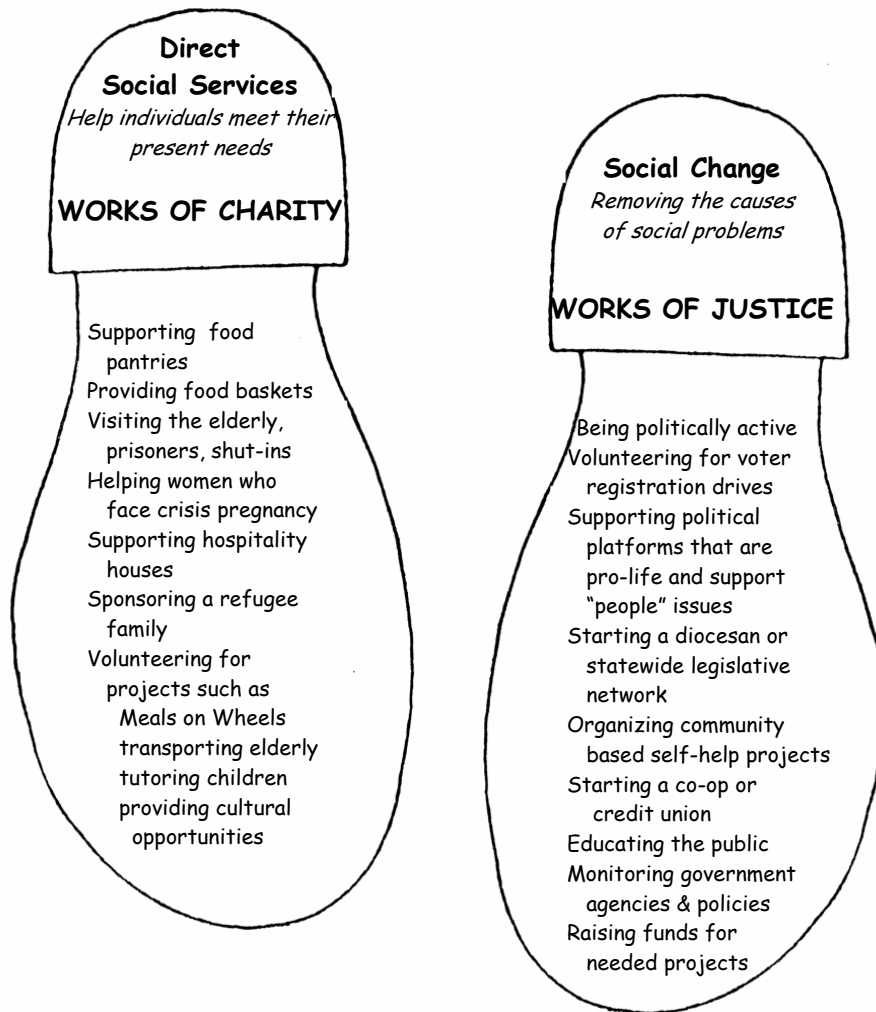
Through *direct service*, we identify people who need assistance and then go out and help them. For example, if someone is hungry, we may donate food to a food pantry. If someone needs clothing, we donate clothing to a charitable organization that distributes clothing to the poor.

Social action is related but different. It means that we work to change the structures of our community that give rise to these needs in the first place. For example, if someone is hungry, we ask the question, “*Why* are people hungry?” Is it because they can’t afford food on their current wages? In that case, an example of social action would be to advocate for a “living wage” that would ensure that a worker can meet the basic need of buying food. If we identify and work to address the root causes of hunger, we are getting at social change.

The teacher may want to draw the “two feet” on the board. Use the image on the following page as your guide. On one foot, write the characteristics of direct service; on the other, write those pertaining to social action/social change. For example, under direct service: meeting the immediate needs of someone in need such food, clothing and shelter. Some examples of social action/social change include:

- Voting;
- Organizing a voter registration drive;
- Meeting with elected officials (e.g. to ask for better paying jobs for workers);
- Working to change laws and policies that perpetuate poverty (e.g. raising the minimum wage, increasing the availability of affordable housing, etc.);
- Working with persons living in poverty on projects they decide are necessary to end poverty.

These can be adapted to meet the skill level of your students. For a follow-up activity, ask students to list on a separate page activities they see themselves doing one day under each category.



Taking Action

As a response to the information that they learned in the previous activity, students will have the opportunity to create a Community Action Guide. This guide is a list of 10 to 25 student ideas on how their community can be a force for social change and a compilation of organizations working to end poverty through social change, helping people to help themselves.

This resource can be distributed to other schools and parishes, to the Diocesan director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) or CCHD's national office, to the Catholic schools office, and to organizations in the local community that may not have the staff or the time to assemble updated information. The resource can also help individuals in their community connect to agencies that work with the poor to alleviate poverty through social change.

The following suggestions are offered to facilitate the process. They should be adapted as necessary to meet local needs. Encourage student creativity as they design covers and contents.

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas for social change.

The Community Action Guide ideally will include two parts – the first is a list of students' ideas for how their community can work for social change.

Students can begin by brainstorming ideas for social change. The teacher may wish to divide students into small groups, with each group tackling a separate topic area. The following are suggested topic areas that students may wish to reflect on in their own communities: affordable housing, jobs and employment (minimum wage/living wage, labor unions), children's issues (childcare, education), access to public transportation, immigration, food and nutrition programs, health care, etc.

The goal is to complete a list of 10 to 25 ideas for social change.

Suggested Responses: Take another look at the ideas listed in the "shoe" of social change above. Encourage students to apply these ideas to their own community using the topic areas above.

Step 2: Compile a list of organizations.

The Community Action Guide's second component, ideally, would be a compilation of organizations already engaged in the work of social change in your community or ideas for how the school might be involved in the work of social change (i.e. writing letters to elected officials, encouraging friends and family members to vote, etc.). A great starting point is to find CCHD-funded groups in your community by viewing the [CCHD Grants page](#) and scrolling down to "Recently Funded Initiatives".

Step 3: Determine the "look."

Encourage the students to be creative in designing the guide, whether it be one page or twenty. This is a valuable service to the entire community!

Step 4: Assemble the information.

Double check all contact information to make sure it is up-to-date.

Step 5: Publish and distribute the Community Action Guide.

Distribute the guide on Poverty Action Day. Consider presenting the guide to an elected official, a representative from a local shelter or your pastor on that day.

Reflection

It is essential that students have an opportunity to reflect on their experience once their project is completed and Poverty Action Day is over. Here are a few suggestions for questions teachers may wish to ask their students:

- In the budget exercise, what did you give up? Why?
- How did you make your decisions?
- If you were in this position, what would you do? Where would you go for assistance?
- What would you do with other people in the same situation to help yourselves?
- What can we do to help people help themselves?
- How did you feel about working with your group to complete the guide?
- Did everyone in your group participate?
- Was the work evenly divided?
- Who was the leader of the group? Why?
- What were the challenges of completing this project?
- What were the high points of completing this project?
- Do you think you made a difference? Why? Why not?
- What did you learn about the organizations listed in the Community Action Guide?
- What more could you do to work *with* the poor to alleviate poverty?

Evaluation

Please help us to create future resources that fit your needs. Complete and submit the form found on page 53 or give us your feedback online by entering your comments at www.usccb.org/cchd/pusa.shtml or by emailing them to cchdpromo@usccb.org.

Poverty Action Bill

Grade 8

Overview

In the eighth grade, students begin to realize the power of the democratic process. As Catholic school educators, we are charged with the responsibility of helping to raise faithful citizens who will be engaged in the civic process. In this activity, students analyze the causes of poverty and brainstorm potential solutions in cooperative learning groups. Students then write a series of legislative bills based on their solutions. On Poverty Action Day, students submit their bills to an elected official in their community.

Prayer

The teacher may wish to begin class with the following reading from Scripture. [James 1:22-27](#) (Lazarus and the Rich Man)

Objectives

- To reflect on the causes of poverty
- To gain confidence in their ability to take social action and find ways to alleviate poverty
- To become comfortable working in teams to address community concerns
- To identify ways in which they can learn from those living in poverty in the United States.
- To learn to communicate with elected officials and take part in the democratic process

Education

Warm-up Activity

As a warm-up activity, begin by discussing who is poor in the United States and why. You may wish to write the word "poor" on the board. Ask students to define the word and think about who are "the poor." Jot down responses on the board as students raise their hands and take turns trying to define the term, or have them write a journal entry reflecting on their understanding of the term "poor."

Suggested responses: The term “poor” includes people who lack food, shelter and clothing, as well as people who are working – sometimes two jobs – but who still earn an income that falls beneath the federal poverty line. For 2005, the government set the federal poverty line at \$9,971 for an individual. For a family of four, the federal poverty line is set at \$19,971. Today, there are more than 37 million people in the United States who are poor – or one in six Americans. That includes nearly 13 million children. Most of the poor are white, but many are African-American, Latino, Native American and Asian.

Discussion

Now write the question “Why?” on the board and ask students to reflect on the various reasons that people are poor in America. Again, the teacher may want to jot down their responses on the board or give the students an opportunity to reflect in a journal entry. Save these responses.

Suggested responses (adapted from CCHD’s Poverty & Faithjustice program):

- Many people can’t find jobs, don’t have full-time jobs, or don’t have full-time jobs with pay and benefits that allow them to meet their basic needs. (Employment)
- Many can’t work because of physical/psychological disability or because of their age and they don’t have enough money from their personal resources or from government assistance to cover their expenses. (Disability, Age Discrimination)
- Some struggle with alcohol or other drug addiction. (Addictions)
- Many earn the minimum wage, which has not kept pace with inflation over the past 50 years so the purchasing power of their earnings has declined. (Minimum wage)
- Some lost their jobs after companies closed and moved to another country where employers often pay workers less. (Globalization)
- Many are single parents and their ex-spouses do not have to pay or do not pay the child support ordered by a court. Also, some single parents are receiving child support payments that have not kept pace with inflation since 1969. (Child support)
- Some women who were married for years find themselves struggling in poverty after divorce because they did not have the skills to get decent jobs after years out of the job market. (Job training)
- Many lack sufficient education to get a job. (Educational opportunities)
- The rich-poor gap continues to widen. Ten percent of Americans own approximately 70 percent of private wealth in the U.S. (Economic opportunity)

Finally, ask students to consider the questions, “Who helps the poor?” and “How do the poor help themselves?” Have students consider what they would do if they lived on an income below the federal poverty line.

Suggested responses:

- Government agencies at the federal, state and local levels help the poor, providing supplemental income through welfare and food programs, access to affordable housing and access to medical help. Legislation passed each year increases or cuts funding to programs that help the poor with housing, food, health care, educational opportunities, etc.
- Private individuals and organizations help the poor through charitable works and direct service, such as food and clothing drives, as well as by working to change the underlying structures that cause poverty.
- The poor help themselves by working together and with government agencies and private groups to identify what they need to make ends meet with the ultimate goal of breaking the cycle of poverty. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) gives grants to poor and low-income persons working to create more just communities by ending poverty.

Taking Action

This activity could easily be used as an extension to a social studies lesson on the legislative process or it could stand alone, in either case highlighting the important role citizens and citizen participation play in a democracy.

Step 1: Go back to the students’ answers to the questions of why people are poor in America. Have students brainstorm ways in which they could work to help alleviate poverty. Write their responses on the board and categorize them as either *direct service*, or charitable activities, or *social action* that leads to *social change*. For instance, the idea of organizing a food drive is an example of direct service. The idea of writing a letter to elected officials or writing a legislative bill to submit to an elected official are examples of *social action*.

Tell students they will be working together for *social change* by writing proposed legislation of their own.

Step 2: Students will play the role of legislators, breaking into “committees” or small groups to write a bill. You may assign each group a different topic, but each topic should relate back to the theme of alleviating poverty. For instance, groups could be assigned the topics of minimum

wage, access to educational opportunities, access to affordable housing, access to rehabilitation programs, protection for senior citizens, etc.

You may wish to research issues that local CCHD-funded groups are addressing to help stimulate ideas and identify specific issues being pursued in your local community. Background information and research information on poverty may be found at the [CCHD](#) and [Poverty USA](#) websites.

Step 3: Ensure that students are familiar with the legislative process. The legislature – one of the three branches of government – makes laws. They start out as bills in committee – proposals that must then be approved by a majority of the legislature.

Before giving students time to work on their bills, be sure to review the guidelines that students should follow when writing a bill or resolution.

- The bill or resolution should contain only one main idea.
- The bill or resolution should offer suggestions that improve on the present system rather than restate what is already occurring.
- Use affirmative language that suggests doing something rather than not doing something.
- Remind students to write clearly and avoid slang.
- Include at least two reasons explaining why the bill or resolution should be accepted.
- Write the specific recommendation at the end of the proposal.

Step 4: Once students have a chance to share their bills with the rest of the class, have them submit them to their elected officials. Students could write a cover letter that includes information they learned in class about poverty in America today – who is poor and why – as well as a brief explanation of why they wrote this bill and what they hope their bill will accomplish. This could be a great activity for the students to complete on Poverty Action Day.

Contact information for the local representative or senator in your community can usually be found in a community directory or telephone book, or look it up online at <http://www.us.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>.

Make sure that students include their return address when sending letters to legislators. This will improve the likelihood of their getting a timely response from their elected official.

Students who wish to continue their involvement in the legislative process can find action alerts on a variety of issues on the U.S. Conference of

Catholic Bishops (USCCB) [Social Development and World Peace](#) page. Also see [Faithful Citizenship](#) resources available online.

Reflection

Students will have completed a complex unit that not only teaches about the legislative process but also about their own power and ability to work with those in need to alleviate the root causes of poverty. It is essential that they take some time to reflect on their experience. Some suggested reflection questions follow.

- How did you feel about working with your group?
- Did everyone in your group participate?
- Was the work evenly divided?
- Who was the leader of the group? Why?
- What is the best action we could take to help people help themselves out of poverty?
- How can we hear directly from poor and low-income people about their needs, issues and concerns?
- Do you think that your letter will influence people's opinions? Why or why not?

Evaluation

Please help us to create future resources that fit your needs. Complete and submit the form found on page 53 or give us your feedback online by entering your comments at www.usccb.org/cchd/pusa.shtml or by emailing them to cchdpromo@usccb.org.

Lesson Evaluation Form

Parish/School: _____ (Arch)diocese: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Contact name: _____ Email address: _____

Grade level lesson(s) used: _____

Did your class/school conduct a Poverty Action Day? Yes No

For the following questions please rate the effectiveness of the lesson on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being 'least effective' and 4 being 'most effective.'

How effective was the lesson in presenting the topic? 1 2 3 4

How effectively did the following activities engage the students' interest?

Prayer:	1	2	3	4		Taking Action:	1	2	3	4
Education:	1	2	3	4		Reflection:	1	2	3	4

How effective were the materials in meeting the lesson objectives? 1 2 3 4

What did you like best about the lesson?

Would you teach this lesson again to a different class? Yes No

If yes, what would you do differently?

What other resources would be helpful in educating about Catholic social teaching and poverty in the U.S.?

Please return this form to:

Youth & Young Adult Coordinator
Catholic Campaign for Human Development
3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017

Fax: 202-541-3329
email: mpoulin@usccb.org
Phone: 202-541-3297

Appendix

Web Resources

Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/index.shtml>

CCHD Diocesan Directors

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/director.shtml>

CCHD-Funded Groups

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/grant.shtml>

CCHD Annual Collection

<http://usccb.org/cchd/resources/index.shtml>

Success Stories of CCHD-Funded Groups

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/newsletter.shtml>

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/successnov1.shtml>

CCHD E-Greetings

<http://www.catholicgreetings.org/affiliates/cchd.asp>

CCHD Legislative Action Alerts

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/index.htm>

Poverty USA

<http://www.povertyusa.org>

Poverty Quiz

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/povquiz.shtml>

Poverty Map

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/map.htm>

Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.htm>

The New American Bible

<http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/>

Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

<http://usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/index.htm>



Poverty USA

Poverty Action Day Guide



Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Poverty USA Poverty Action Day Guide

Catholic Campaign for Human Development
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20017-1194
202-541-3210

Please send your [comments and feedback](#) on these resources to CCHD.

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*You have been told... what is good, and what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.*

[Micah 6:8](#)

Project Overview

The *Poverty Action Day Guide* is designed to serve as a culminating event for the *Poverty USA Student Action Project* lesson plans developed by the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) (CCHD). Poverty Action Day serves as a coordinated day of celebration that gives students the opportunity to take concrete steps to address poverty in their own communities.

Through age-appropriate activities, students move from direct service – meeting the immediate needs of people in poverty – to social action – in which they will reflect on ways to address the root causes of poverty. Through this process of communal action and reflection, students increase their ability to make future connections, increase their sense of faithful citizenship, and understand that pursuing justice may require both direct service and social action.

Our hope is that through these lessons and this culminating activity, students may learn how to live out their faith as positive agents of change.

Project Goals

- To apply the concepts of direct service and social action to help meet immediate needs and to alleviate the root causes of poverty.
- To apply the basic elements of Catholic Social Teaching in order to address real community needs.
- To reflect on the process in order to develop one's faith and sense of civic responsibility that manifests itself in faithful citizenship.

Project Summary

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Lesson</u>	<u>Poverty Action Day Event</u>
K-1	One Can ... Make a Difference	Food Drive
2	Taking a Bite out of Poverty	Bake Sale
3	Hall of Heroes	Recognize Local Heroes
4	Poverty Action Kits	Assemble Kits, Write Letters
5	Poverty, USA Postcards	Write and Mail Postcards
6	Social Justice Walk-a-Thon	Walk-a-Thon
7	Community Action Guide	Present
8	Poverty Action Bill	Present Bill

Poverty Action Day

Poverty Action Day is designed to serve as a capstone for the accompanying activities and lessons written for grades K-8. Each grade level has age-appropriate lessons and activities that will help students better understand the existence and causes of poverty in their community. The lesson plans challenge students to take action and complete a project – a project that ideally will be completed as a culminating, community activity on Poverty Action Day as a sign of a school’s solidarity with our brothers and sisters living in poverty.

The Appropriate Time and Place

To heighten the impact of Poverty Action Day and increase the possibility of positive press coverage, you may choose to coordinate it with local or national days of service or significant feast days. Consider holding Poverty Action Day in conjunction with [National Poverty in America Awareness Month](#) each January. Other possible times might coincide with the Dr. Martin Luther King National Day of Service in January, or the Cesar Chavez Day of Service in March. The Lenten season also presents a powerful opportunity for students to reflect on and act on their faith in a coordinated way with the whole school community.

Reflection

Reflection is an important part of this process and should occur throughout each stage of implementation. In this way, students can better inform their planning, troubleshoot the implementation of their project, and in the end consider how their work connects to their lives and to the lives of others. Suggestions for reflection activities are provided in each lesson.

Appreciation

To highlight the significance of the day and to maintain the partnerships that have been developed through this process, it is important to recognize the individuals and groups who participated. Recognition can occur with a certificate presented at the end of the day, through a letter from the principal, or a mention in a press release or parish bulletin.

Sample Schedule

The following sample schedule is provided as a guide to how these lessons may be connected. It assumes that all grade levels participate. Teachers and administrators should adapt these guidelines to meet the unique requirements of their site.

Sample Schedule

Time	Location	Grade / Activity
8:30 – 10:00 a.m.	Individual Classrooms	K-1 Sort and count food
		3 Display Hall of Heroes in Auditorium
		4 Complete Poverty Action Kits, Write Letters
		5 Write Poverty Postcards
		6 Conduct Walk-a-Thon
		7 Finalize Action Guide
		8 Finalize Poverty Bills
		10:15 – 11:15
7 Present Community Action Guide to elected representative(s)/ invited guests		
8 Present Poverty Bills to elected representative(s)/ invited guests		
11:30 – 12:15	Lunch	2 Bake Sale

Timeline

The following timeline provides you with general benchmarks to guide your progress. Feel free to adjust the timeline to best meet the needs of your school community.

Before the Event

- ❑ Review the lessons and determine which instructors will be involved in the project.
- ❑ Each lesson is written with a particular grade level in mind. Decide if you wish to make any changes.
- ❑ Select a date, time and location for Poverty Action Day.
- ❑ Secure the necessary approvals. Organize transportation and releases of liability if the activities will be held off-campus. For instance, the sixth graders organizing a Walk-a-Thon may wish to walk to City Hall.
- ❑ Brainstorm a list of parents, possible community partners and other outside resources who could assist with the project, including the local [CCHD Diocesan Director](#).
- ❑ Organize the structure and layout of Poverty Action Day. You may wish to plan a prayer service for the beginning or end of the day.
- ❑ Make sure that all elements of the set-up are safe and complete.
- ❑ Consider contacting the press.
- ❑ Consider inviting elected officials.
- ❑ Reflect on the organization of the process throughout the preparation period.

Day of the Event

- ❑ Teachers should make sure that all of the necessary materials are available for their students and the facilities are prepared for the activities to be completed.
- ❑ If you have invited the press, appoint a contact person who can provide the necessary information and perhaps prepare several of the students to be able to speak to the press.
- ❑ Consider taking pictures to document the event. Use a digital camera so photographs can be easily uploaded to your school or parish website.
- ❑ Conduct a prayer service at the beginning or end of the day.
- ❑ Take some time to reflect.

After the Event

- ❑ Clean up.
- ❑ Reflect on Poverty Action Day. How did this affect your life?
- ❑ Evaluate Poverty Action Day. What did you like? What would you change? What did you learn?
- ❑ Celebrate.
- ❑ Thank and recognize all who participated in this event - particularly the students.

Identifying Community Needs

The Poverty USA Student Action Project is grounded in Catholic social teaching and our belief as a people of faith that we are called to engage in the work of both direct service and social change. Our Catholic social tradition can be broken down into [seven basic social justice themes](#), which infuse each of the lesson plans in the toolkit.

The material that follows is designed to supplement the lesson plans and can be used by elementary school teachers or religious education instructors who wish to explicitly connect reflection questions to Catholic Social Teaching themes.

The material could also be used by faculty and other staff members of your campus who wish to reflect on our faith's call to social action as they prepare to participate as adults on Poverty Action Day. After all, the ministry of education calls us to be leaders and models of social change for our students.

The material should be modified to meet the unique needs of your school or parish community.

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The foundation of Catholic Social Teaching is the belief that every person is made in the image of God. That means that every human life is sacred. God loves a hardened criminal as much as God loves the most renowned saint. The way that we should evaluate our community is based on how it treats people – all of the people.

Questions to ask...

- Who are the poor in my community?
- Are the poor seen or unseen?
- How are the poor treated in my community?

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Each and every human being is loved by God, but God also created us to seek the company of other people and to live and work within communities. Anything that undermines a person's ability to fully participate in the community is a problem that should be addressed.

Questions to ask...

- Are the poor welcomed or rejected in my community? How do I know?
- Do some people suffer discrimination because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, social or economic class?
- Are there some people who are forced to live in certain parts of the community because of their race or social class?

3. Rights and Responsibilities

Catholic Social Teaching affirms the principle that everyone in our community should have their basic needs met in order to permit a decent and dignified life. At the same time, everyone in our community has the obligation to contribute to the larger society.

Questions to ask...

- Does every member of the community have their basic needs met? Are there people who are homeless? without food? without health care? without adequate education? without a job?
- Are there some people in the community who can't or don't participate to make the community a better place to live?

4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

According to Catholic Social Teaching, the measure of a good society is based on how it treats the poor and most vulnerable. Poverty is not only the lack of material goods necessary to live a basic human existence. Poverty is also the lack of access to institutions that make life livable. The poor should have a preferred place in public policy discussions. If a community budget is to be cut, the poor should not shoulder the burden alone.

Questions to ask...

- Who are the poor in my community? Who are the vulnerable?
- How does my community treat children? the elderly? the mentally, physically, psychologically challenged?

- Are there newly arrived immigrants in my community? How are they treated?

5. Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Access to meaningful work is a central component of a good society. Work not only provides people with the resources necessary to live a productive life, but work also allows people to share their talents and contribute to the community. The rights of people to create jobs and to work need to be protected.

Questions to ask...

- Can everyone who wants to work find it?
- Are workers treated fairly in my community? Are they paid fair wages? Do parents earn enough to be able to provide for their families? Are people forced to work part-time without benefits?

6. Solidarity

We are connected to other people in our city, in our nation and throughout the world. We have an obligation to care about people not only in our immediate circle, but to also care about all people wherever they may live.

Questions to ask...

- How is my school or parish connected to the rest of the community?
- Where do our clothes come from? our food? the products in our stores? our gasoline?
- What is our responsibility to the people who produce these products?

7. Care for God's Creation

Human beings are stewards of the earth. That means that the earth is ours to borrow – not to keep. We have an obligation to care for the environment so that future generations may benefit from its resources.

Questions to ask...

- Do the poor in my community have access to parks? clean water? clean air?
- Where is the garbage dumped? Do the poor have access to adequate services?

Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (Place this at the top of the page, under your school's letterhead. All letters are capitalized.)

CONTACT: (Include as much information as you can to make it easy for a reporter to contact you. An administrator may be able to assist as a point of contact. Consider providing your cell phone or home contact information to make it easy for a reporter to gather information after normal school hours.)

Contact Person

School Name

Telephone Number or home

Fax Number

E-mail Address

Web site Address

(Skip two lines)

Headline (should be in bold type)

City, State, Date — (This will tell the reporter when you sent the release.)

First paragraph should include the answers to the basic questions like who? what? why? where? when?

The remainder of the text should briefly provide additional details. Include a brief discussion of the community need(s) to be addressed and the contributions of community agencies and experts. Quotes from students about their participation would be helpful.

#

(indicates the end of the Press Release)

Appendix
Web Resources

Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)
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National Poverty in America Awareness Month
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Poverty USA
<http://www.povertyusa.org>

Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching
<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.htm>

The New American Bible
<http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/>