

Ending Poverty In Community
A Toolkit for Young Advocates

Lesson 3

A Place at the Table: Who is Responsible for Addressing Poverty?

Overview

In this activity, participants will read a portion of the United States Catholic bishops' pastoral reflection titled *A Place at the Table*. This reflection uses the metaphor of a table. Each leg of the table represents a unique social institution: 1) families and individuals; 2) community and religious institutions; 3) private sector and business; and 4) the government. This activity will help participants understand how their faith calls upon various institutions to act collectively to address poverty in the United States and throughout the world.



Objectives

- To identify ways that our faith calls upon various social institutions to address poverty both in the United States and throughout the world.

To assess how our faith calls upon each individual to respond to the needs of the poor.

Materials Checklist:

Click [here](#) for a list of materials required for this lesson.

Part I: Opening Prayer and Warm-up

(Estimated Time: 15 minutes)

1. Set up one table in the middle of the meeting room with snacks and treats. Have an open Bible and lit candles displayed on the same table. Hand participants a slip of paper as they walk into the room. The slip of paper will signify where they will sit – some will be assigned to chairs seated around the table while others will be instructed to stand against the wall – away from the table.

2. Invite participants at the table to eat the snacks. After a few minutes have passed, ask those at the table to decide who at the table will read the opening prayer – the Scripture passage from [1 Corinthians 12:12 -27](#) (One Body, Many Parts).

After the reading, ask participants to consider the following questions.

Note: To continue the "table exercise," only call on those seated at the table or ask those seated at the table to respond before anyone else.

- *What does it mean to be part of the Body of Christ?*
- *What did it feel like for participants at the table to eat when others are standing around watching you?*

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- For participants standing against the wall, what did it feel like to be left out?
- How can we respond to the Scripture reading and help make a place for everyone at the table?

Part II: Activity – A Place at the Table

(Estimated Times: 35 minutes)

In this activity, participants reflect on the pastoral reflection of the United States Catholic bishops titled, *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children*.

Overview

Explain to participants that they will review a pastoral reflection about poverty written by the Catholic bishops of the United States. In this reflection, the bishops reaffirm the Church's commitment to serve the poor and use the metaphor of a table to describe how the faithful should address poverty both in the United States and throughout the world. Each "leg" on the table represents a distinct social group that shares responsibility for meeting the needs of the poor: 1) families and individuals; 2) community and religious institutions; 3) private sector/business; and 4) government. If one leg on the table is missing, the table falters.

As the bishops note, the metaphor of a table reminds us that:

- "A table is where people come together for food. For many, there is not enough food and, in some cases, no table at all."
- "A table is where people meet to make decisions – in neighborhoods, nations, and the global community. Many people have no place at the table. Their voices and needs are ignored or dismissed."
- "When we gather as Catholics to worship, we gather around a table to celebrate the Eucharist. . . . As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists, 'The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest' ([no. 1397](#))."
- "In our world and nation, many of our sisters and brothers live in poverty. The causes are complex, but the results are clear. They cannot find decent work, feed their families, educate their children, secure health care, or find adequate housing. Millions of children live in nations with too much debt and not enough development, in societies with deadly diseases and inadequate health care, in lands where conflict and corruption leave people without a place at the table. Millions of families cannot live in dignity because they lack the conditions worthy of human life." In this activity, participants will read a portion of the United States Catholic bishops' pastoral reflection titled *A Place at the Table*. This reflection uses the metaphor of a table. Each leg of the table represents a unique social institution: 1) families and individuals; 2) community and religious institutions; 3) private sector and business; and 4) the government. This activity will help participants understand how their faith calls upon various institutions to act collectively to address poverty in the United States and throughout the world.

Directions

Divide participants into four groups – one group for each of the four legs of the table. Distribute the following handouts, one for each participant in each respective group:

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- Group A:** Families and Individuals ([Participant Handout 3A](#))
Group B: Community and Religious Institutions ([Participant Handout 3B](#))
Group C: Private Sector/Business ([Participant Handout 3C](#))
Group D: Government ([Participant Handout 3D](#))

Provide each group with a piece of butcher paper or poster board. Ask participants in each group to accomplish the following two tasks:

1. Summarize the passage. Describe their "leg" on the table; and
2. Identify ways that their "leg" can address poverty both in the United States and throughout the world.

Ask a representative from each group to present his or her group's summaries and recommendations. After their presentation to the large group, ask the representative to tape the group's butcher paper or poster board to one side of the table that was used in the opening activity.

Note: Allow all participants in the room to share the remaining snacks while they work. The facilitator may bring out additional snacks to ensure that there is enough to go around. If the size of the group is large, the facilitator should divide participants into multiple groups for each "leg" of the table.

Part III: Reflection

(Estimated Time: 10 minutes)

In the activity, participants reflected on the United States bishops' pastoral reflection entitled *A Place at the Table*. After all the groups have presented their summaries and recommendations, ask them to reflect on the metaphor of the table. Ask a volunteer – preferably someone not seated at the original table in the opening activity – to read [1 John 3:17-18](#). Ask participants to reflect on the following questions either individually or with their small groups.

Note: Distribute [Participant Handout 3E](#) if you would like participants to have a copy of the following questions.

- *What happens to a table if one "leg" is missing?*
- *How does my faith call upon me to respond to the needs of the poor in my community? In the United States? Throughout the world?*

Additional Resources

Click [here](#) for additional resources that will support this lesson.

Faith in Action Extension Activity

Ask participants to create an advertisement, bulletin announcement, video or audio public service announcement, banner, checklist, etc. that highlights how various legs of the table can respond to poverty in the United States and beyond and how their parish or school community can help support one or more of these legs.