POVERTY AWARENESS MONTH 2021

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1

An annual papal message for the World Day of Peace (Jan. 1) has been released every year since 1968. In the first papal message for the World Day of Peace, by Saint Paul VI, the Holy Father highlighted these “threats” to peace: selfishness in relations among nations; disrespect for the right to life and human dignity; recourse to “frightful weapons of extermination,” excessive weapons spending which hinders human development; and the belief that controversies cannot be solved by “negotiations founded on law, justice, and equity.”

Challenge: Read Pope Francis’ 2021 message. How does his message challenge you? Use the accompanying resources to reflect on Pope Francis’ important invitation to all Catholics and people of good will. As you start the new year and make your resolutions, take a moment to think of one way you can address poverty in your community, school or parish.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2

For over 50 years, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) has been working to empower new mothers, immigrants, the elderly, and families to together address the root causes of poverty in their communities. Watch this video to learn more about the complexity of poverty in the United States. Then, visit PovertyUSA.org to discover more about poverty in your community and how we can work together to upend the cycle of poverty.

Challenge: The local organizations that CCHD supports are helping communities build resilience and stand in solidarity with their most marginalized members. Read about the work of CCHD and discover how you can join the celebration of 50 years of transformative work.
SUNDAY, JANUARY 3

In today’s responsorial psalm, we hear that God “rescues the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him” (Psalm 72: 12-13). The Church teaches us that our God is a God of justice and that we have a responsibility to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Solidarity invites us to remember that we are all children of God who share in one another’s joy and suffering. This is a key component of working together to seek justice for all God’s children. Being in solidarity with others lifts us from our individualism and offers us the opportunity to work together to address poverty.

Join us from February 6-9 for the first ever virtual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering! This year, we will pray, learn, and advocate together on the disparities revealed by COVID-19 and re-imagine new models of justice and solidarity.

Reflection: Take a moment to think of a particular person you know who is suffering as a result of COVID-19, poverty, or economic difficulty: think of the person’s name; recall his or her face and situation. Say this prayer for solidarity and for the grace to share in the suffering of our brothers and sisters who experience poverty, and for a deeper conviction to work for justice and peace.

MONDAY, JANUARY 4

Today is the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first canonized U.S. citizen. She was born in 1774 to an Episcopal family. She converted to Catholicism in 1805 after living in Italy with her husband. After her husband passed away, she was left a widow with five children at the age of 30, rejected by many family and friends because of her conversion. In 1809, Elizabeth began the first female religious order in the United States, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. She opened St. Joseph’s Academy, a tuition-free school, to educate children living in poverty. Her work laid the foundation for the American Catholic school system. To this day, her order continues her legacy of charity and education throughout the world.

Reflection: Women religious have played a significant role in the social ministry of the Catholic Church in the U.S. How can you follow the example of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in courageously following God’s plan in your life and his call to care for his children? Read more about how parishes and communities are working together to address poverty and injustice.
TUESDAY, JANUARY 5

The Gospel reminds us that we are called to root our lives of faith in the authentic love of neighbor. “If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Pope Benedict XVI reflects on this call when he writes about “the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 16). He continues: “One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God.”

Attending to the needs of persons in poverty is a grateful response to the unmerited gift of love that God first gives to each person—a gift which we are required to then share with others. Sharing God’s love includes offering spiritual care for those in need, providing help to meet immediate needs, and working together to eliminate the causes of poverty.

Challenge: How are you called to respond to God’s gift of love and compassion? Take a look at this Poverty Map that shows the levels of poverty in the nation and in your specific county. Read how Catholics at a parish in New Orleans and their sister parish in Nicaragua help each other in times of need in this We are Salt and Light success story.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6

The relationship between mental health and poverty is complex. Poverty can often intensify the experience of mental illness and may also increase the likelihood of the onset of mental illness. At the same time, experiencing mental illness may also increase the chances of living below the poverty line. For example, adults ages 26 or older who live below the poverty line are more likely to experience a serious mental illness than those living at or above the poverty line. The dignity of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God demands that we support and empower those who are poor and vulnerable, including access to adequate healthcare to promote good physical and mental health.
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**Challenge:** How can you respond to the call to care for our brothers and sisters experiencing mental illness? Read more about the ways mental health and poverty intersect and find out how you can get involved in this work in your community.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 7**

Poverty is not a catch-phrase—it is a serious reality that many are living. Over 34 million people live below the poverty line in the United States. Our faith challenges us to respond to the needs of those who are most vulnerable.

**Challenge:** Are you familiar with the facts about those living in poverty in the United States? Work to protect the life and dignity of the human person. Learn facts about U.S. Poverty and make two specific commitments to address poverty in your community this month.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 8**

Each year the Catholic Campaign for Human Development awards the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award to a Catholic young adult who works creatively to address the root causes of poverty in his or her community. Louis Damani Jones was the 2020 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award recipient for his commitment to sharing the good news of CCHD through his work in Belleville and St. Louis. How can you get involved in your parish or community’s efforts to address poverty?

**Challenge:** Can you think of any young adults (aged 18-40) who demonstrate leadership in working to address the root causes of poverty in the U.S.? Nominate a young adult you know for this year’s Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award. Also, share CCHD internship opportunities with young adult groups or campus ministries in your parish community for hands-on training and work with and on behalf of low-income persons in our communities.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 9**

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers is a theme of Catholic Social Teaching that is directly related to the migrant experience, especially here in the U.S. Groups like the Don Bosco
Workers seek to help migrants know their rights and create a just working environment where their life and dignity is upheld and respected.

Work is about much more than simply earning a living; it is a way of using our gifts to participate in God’s creation and promote the common good. Unemployment, underemployment, and failure to uphold the rights of workers affront the dignity we have as human persons. Our faith reminds us that we should never take advantage of others and must always prioritize people over profit. This is why all workers have the right to be treated fairly, receive just wages, and to have a healthy work environment. We must work to ensure that all persons’ rights are respected.

Challenge: Watch the CST101 video and read this reflection on the dignity of work and the rights of workers from Archbishop Coakley, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10

Today we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of Jesus. Through our Baptism, we share in Christ’s mission of love and service as the people of God. “The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office; it spreads aboard a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise” (Lumen Gentium, no. 12). This mission and the grace we receive through Baptism challenge us to follow in Christ’s footsteps to “to bring about glad tidings to the poor... proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18).

Challenge: Read the short reflection, Baptism: Incorporated Into Christ’s Body, Sent on Christ’s Mission and reflect on how you can live out your baptismal call to imitate Christ’s mission in Luke 4:18. Learn more about the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and how it’s been living out this call and working to break the cycle of poverty for over 50 years.

MONDAY, JANUARY 11

The consequences of poverty are devastating in many ways. Today, on National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, we reflect on forced labor and human trafficking. Poverty renders many children, women, and men vulnerable to being trafficked. The reality of forced labor and human trafficking is a symptom of a culture that places economic profit above the dignity of the human person.
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Pope Francis writes: “an economic system that puts profit above man” is the result of “a throw-away culture at work that considers humanity itself, human beings, as a consumer good, which can be used and then thrown away.”

Challenge: Find out about your slavery footprint and learn more about how your purchases can empower people experiencing poverty. In your family, school or parish, use the SHEPHERD Program Movie Guide to learn about the systemic problems that create the conditions for forced labor and trafficking.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12

The CCHD Creating on the Margins Art Contest in 2020 focused on homelessness and access to affordable housing with the theme of “More than a Roof.” Read about the winner of last year’s contest and learn more about her three-dimensional art piece, “Trapped Under a Broken Roof.” Reflect on the situation of housing and homelessness in your community.

Action: How can you get your local schools and parishes involved in the Creating on the Margins Contest? This year, the theme of the contest is "Rebuilding Together at the Margins" and contest materials focus on the social and economic disparities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic and how we can rebuild just structures that allow all communities to thrive.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13

The disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color and persons in poverty has revealed and exacerbated long-existing inequalities. Throughout the last year, the Church has called attention to these disparities and advocated for the protection of persons in poverty.

Action: Register to participate in the Feb. 6-9 virtual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering to pray, learn, and advocate with people of faith on the disparities revealed by COVID-19 and new models of justice and solidarity.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 14

“Local individuals and groups can make a real difference. We are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. . . . Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds” (Pope Francis, On Care for Our Common Home [Laudato Si’], nos. 179, 219).

People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens: “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation” (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel [Evangelii Gaudium], no. 220, quoting United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, Nov. 2007, no. 13).

How we organize our society -- in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The church teaches that every person has a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Challenge: What are you doing in your family and community to encourage others to participate, especially in the work to address the systems and structures that keep people in poverty? Explore the resources for Faithful Citizenship to learn more about what you can do to make a difference in your community.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15

Our faith calls us to care for God’s creation as the adverse effects of global climate change devastate many poor communities who do not have the resources to protect themselves or adapt. The University of Notre Dame launched a Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) that summarizes a country’s vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience. The matrix created illustrates that the poorer countries are the most affected and the least resilient. Our faith requires us to do our part to protect our brothers and sisters and care for creation.
Challenge: Read this story about the connection between poverty and climate change in Bangladesh. In the U.S., communities are also responding to the creative ways—for example, one parish formed Green Teams, an Ohio high school introduced new programming, and a diocese held a Year of Creation. What can you do at home and in your parish community to better care for God’s creation?

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16

God empowers all, especially those who are vulnerable, to stand up for themselves and protect their dignity. Subsidiarity—the participation of the people directly affected by a problem in the solution-making process—is a way for us to affirm the dignity of all persons, especially at home in our communities. A key element of breaking the cycle of poverty is empowering low-income and vulnerable communities to learn how to raise their own voices and practice self-determination. In Catholic social teaching, subsidiarity is always paired with solidarity. Higher powers or institutions, such as government, must provide help and resources so that communities have the resources to address the problems that affect them.

Challenge: Read about how the Sisters of Mercy of South Central and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word co-sponsor ARISE, an organization that enables community members in South Texas to accomplish their goals, supporting and maintaining the agency of immigrants.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17

The problem of poverty is very dynamic, and its solution is multi-faceted. The Two Feet of Love in Action describes two unique but complementary ways to respond to poverty in our communities. One “foot” is social justice—eliminating the root causes of poverty, and the second “foot” is charitable works—responding to the immediate needs of those who are vulnerable. Watch this video to learn more and reflect on the ways you can walk with two feet of love in action.

Action: Search for a local community organization working to end poverty and find out how you can get involved. Learn about the current policies that affect poverty in our nation.
MONDAY, JANUARY 18

Today begins the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, celebrated each year on January 18-25. The 2021 theme is “Abide in my love … you shall bear much fruit” (John 15:1-17). It was discerned by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. In choosing the 2021 theme, the Community of Grandchamp desired to share the experience and wisdom of their contemplative life abiding in the love of God and keeping his commandment of “loving one another as He has loved us.” They remind Christians worldwide about the importance of praying for the fruits of closer communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ and greater solidarity with the whole of creation.

Challenge: Read and reflect on this example of people of good will working to build unity with all creation. Think of Christians in your communities, your work, schools, friendships, and reflect on how you can promote unity with all creation in your life.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19

Yesterday was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Dr. King fought tirelessly to eliminate injustice and segregation from the minds and hearts of the American people. He understood that eliminating poverty is not simply a hand-out; it is restoring the respect that all persons deserve. Read more from Dr. King’s 1967 speech “Where Do We Go From Here?”

Challenge: Learn about—and join—Catholics in the work to address the sin of racism and end racial injustice in our communities.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20

Today is the inauguration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr. as the 46th President of the United States. St. Paul writes, “I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgiving be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity” (1 Timothy 2: 1-2). All of us - and especially elected officials - have a responsibility to respect the dignity of every person, defend the overall welfare of society, and lift up the poor and vulnerable.

Reflection: Join the Church in prayer for President Biden and all people being inaugurated into elected office today. Take some time today to discern how you can participate in the public square and hold your elected leaders accountable to their important responsibilities.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 21

Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton was the first African American to be ordained a priest for the United States. A former slave who was baptized and raised Catholic, Tolton studied formally in Rome and led the development and construction of St. Monica’s Catholic Church, known as the black “National Parish Church” in the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1893. “Good Father Gus,” as he was called by many, dedicated himself to ministering to his parishioners, many of whom were living in poverty, and empowered them with the Gospel message of peace and justice through adult religious education classes and catechism classes. Fr. Tolton’s simple example of perseverance and faith in a time of adversity and difficulty is an incredible example for us and the lives we are called to live now.

Challenge: Learn more about Fr. Tolton and other inspiring holy men and women who worked courageously to address racism in their communities and say this prayer to address the sin of racism.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22

Today is the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of the Unborn. Read about the connection between abortion and poverty and how our call to create a culture of life is tied to our call to empower those living in poverty. We must work together to protect the life and dignity of all persons, at every stage of life, promoting rights for all.

Pray: You can participate in this day through prayer or through special events offered by your diocese to observe the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. At this page, you can find liturgical resources for the Day of Prayer, including intercessions, homily notes, and more.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23

Throughout our lives, God accompanies us. In a very special way, God is close to those who suffer and are marginalized. Pope Francis reminds us that “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Corinthians 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 197).

Read about how one Philadelphia parish is empowering low-income, immigrant families to address poverty in their own community.
Reflection: Watch this video and reflect: What priority do those who experience poverty have in my heart? How am I promoting their rights?

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24

Poverty disproportionately impacts the elderly. Due to rising costs of healthcare, the 2018 supplemental poverty measure determined that 13.6% of people who are over the age of 65 live in poverty. Read about how the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) funded organizations such as the Massachusetts Senior Action Council have organized around issues such as healthcare, transportation, and voter engagement that are often challenging for the elderly to access, trapping them in a cycle of poverty.

Challenge: Take our Poverty Quiz and see what you have learned about poverty and the systems and structures that impact our communities. Then, discover a local CCHD funded group in your area and get involved in the work to end the cycle of poverty. Also, take the moment to pray for the protection of all lives, from conception to natural death.

MONDAY, JANUARY 25

Many face barriers to breaking the cycle of poverty due to discrimination or racism. Read and reflect on the U.S. bishops’ pastoral letter against racism, Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love. We are called to confront the evil of racism and journey together towards the conversion of hearts, minds, and institutions. How is this letter calling you to conversion? What stereotypes do you have that distort your vision of members of your local and global community?

Challenge: Reflect and learn more about how you can address injustice with the accompanying educational and pastoral resources for the pastoral letter. Resources include a study guide for individuals or groups, a bulletin insert, prayer materials, background information on systemic racism and activities for primary, secondary, and higher education classroom settings.
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TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

Poverty does not strike all demographics equally. Nearly all of the roots of systemic poverty such as lack of access to food, affordable housing, and quality education disproportionately affect communities of color.

Homelessness and food accessibility have been a problem in many American communities for years, but they’re especially prevalent in Los Angeles. In 2020, LA’s homelessness report stated that within city limits, over 41,000 people live in streets, cars, and shelters - a 14% increase since 2019. Even more unsettling is that Black people only make up around 8% of LA County’s total population, but account for 34% of its homeless population.

Reflection: Read more about how the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is working to address food inequality and homelessness. What does food insecurity and homelessness look like in your community? Are there ways you can get involved to address this dire problem?

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

Nearly one in four people in the United States with a disability live in poverty. Read about Living Hope: A Voice for the Vulnerable. CCHD provides funds to help Living Hope empower members of the disability community. They work to not only provide wheelchairs, safety, and community to people experiencing poverty and disability, but they also work to give them a voice and place in society.

Reflection: What gives you hope in God’s mercy? How can you use this hope to serve others? How can you join local efforts to empower those living in poverty in your community? Learn more about our call to have a preferential option for the Poor and Vulnerable and reflect on how you can empower the poor and vulnerable in your community.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis invites all people of good will to live out a discipleship built on love that fosters universal fraternity and social friendship. Challenging us to work together to create a society based on solidarity, Fratelli Tutti provides a starting point for renewing our commitment to caring for our neighbor and a global society built on justice and the common good: “We have the space we need
for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people’s troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveler in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen” (no. 77)

Challenge: How can you foster a solidarity that continually seeks justice in your community? This Lent, sign up to receive our six-part study guide for faith groups, families, and individuals to journey through Fratelli Tutti.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

In the Eucharistic Liturgy, we are united with the Body of Christ on the altar, and in our brothers and sisters in the assembly. Pope Francis reminds us, “In service of the poor, there is no room for competition. Rather, we should humbly recognize that the Spirit is the source of our actions that reveal God’s closeness and his answer to our prayers.” Read about how one parish in Arizona demonstrates this connection in their Sunday worship.

Reflection: Read Eucharist: Body of Christ, Broken for World. How does your participation in the Eucharistic liturgy open your eyes and heart to contemplate the needs of your brothers and sisters in poverty, and inspire you to respond?

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30

Restorative justice can help break the cycle of violence in our communities through a comprehensive response to crime that addresses the needs of victims and the community and those responsible for causing harm through healing, education, rehabilitation, and community support. Our faith requires us to go to the peripheries, cross borders, and reach out to our brothers and sisters in need—especially those in need of healing and forgiveness to transform their lives.

As the U.S. bishops stated: “A Catholic approach leads us to encourage models of restorative justice that seek to address crime in terms of the harm done to victims and communities, not simply as a violation of law... It recognizes that root causes and personal choices can both be factors in crime by understanding the need for responsibility on the part of the offender and an opportunity for their
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rehabilitation” (Responsibility, Restoration, and Rehabilitation: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice).

Learn about how Catholics are putting this call to restorative justice into practice and opposing capital punishment.

Reflection: How can you show God’s love and mercy to those in need of healing and hope? Are there any relationships in your life that need to be healed and restored? Consider participating in your parish or diocese’s prison ministry or join with a community organization working for restorative justice.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31

As we conclude Poverty Awareness Month, let us pause for a moment and reflect with Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development:

“As God declares to John in Revelation: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev. 21:5). God knows the challenges we face and the loss and grief we feel. The question to us is this: will we pray for and willingly participate in God’s work healing the hurt, loss, and injustice that this pandemic has caused and exposed? Will we offer all we can to the Lord to ‘make all things new’?”

Keep the conversation about poverty going with your family, in your neighborhood, and your parish by signing up to receive our newsletter Notes for Neighbors and other communications by the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development. Continue to learn more about Poverty in the United States and how you can work together with those experiencing poverty in your community by visiting PovertyUSA.org. Join the virtual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering from February 6-9 to pray, learn, and advocate with people of faith on the disparities revealed by COVID-19 and new models of justice and solidarity.

Reflection: What did you learn or reflect on during Poverty Awareness Month that was most impactful to you? How are you called to work with others to address Poverty?