Poverty: A Harsh Reality
By Mark Malkowski

Purpose
In this session, the participants gain an understanding of the injustice of poverty. It is designed for high school youth in a group of about 15 to 30 participants. Youth will have a chance to explore various components of the issue. They will also have an opportunity to explore a theological perspective on the issue in addition to reflecting on ways in which they can address this injustice.

Component: Justice

Session at a Glance
7:00pm  Welcome
7:05pm  Introduction
7:08pm  News Clip
7:15pm  Exploration Stations
7:45pm  Large Group Discussion
7:50pm  Catholic Social Teaching Activity
8:05pm  Closing Prayer
8:20pm  Announcements and Refreshments
8:30pm  Close

Extend the Session
How Do We React? – Meal and Discussion (45 minutes) To extend the session, have the group share a meal and discuss their experiences. Note to Leader: Consider inviting the participants fast from eating prior to arriving at the event in an effort to further highlight the issue. Introduce this portion of the program by saying:

As was we have talked about at various times today, we all have a responsibility to do our part to raise awareness and create change for the injustices in our society. This is what our faith tradition is calling us to do. We are going to have a discussion on ways in which we can take action to do something that creates change and/or raises awareness for the injustice of poverty. While we discuss, we will be sharing in a meal together. The meal will consist of only a bowl of soup and a small sandwich – designed so that we may stand in solidarity with those who often times have to go without food or who have very little to eat. Solidarity is also a Catholic social teaching principle and a way to take action on an issue.

In a moment, we will get our meal. Please return to your seats after you have gotten your food. Please don't begin eating until all are seated again.

Invite attendees to serving line to get their meal. Once all have their meal and are seated, ask a participant to lead the group in a prayer before beginning to eat. Invite participants to begin eating following the prayer.
During the meal, hold a discussion on different ideas and options to take action and raise awareness for the injustice of poverty. Emphasize that the entire group can decide on one option and work on it together or that smaller groups can decide to work on individual projects. Some ideas for taking action include: service at a local homeless shelter, packaging meals, developing a pamphlet to distribute, and creating an awareness event. Take the ideas and energy from this discussion and present some opportunities and ministries that may be of interest to them.

**Taking It Home: Connecting with Families**

- Provide families with links to the videos that were utilized during the session, along with a list of discussion questions that families can use to engage in conversation at home regarding the realities of poverty and ways families can combat the issue.
- Provide families with various community organizations that serve the impoverished and ways they can get involved with those organizations such making or serving a meal.
- Encourage families to discuss the principles of Catholic social teaching. A potential resource is the CST 101 Video Series produced by the USCCB and Catholic Relief Services. This resource is available at: [http://www.crs.org/resource-center/CST-101](http://www.crs.org/resource-center/CST-101).

**Materials Needed**

- Nametags
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Art supplies (construction paper, colored pencils, etc.)
- Technology equipment for viewing of website (e.g. iPad, laptop, etc.)
- Audio/Visual equipment for videos
- 7 candles for prayer and matches
- Booklet and pen for prayer
- **Handouts 1-3, Passages and Quotes for…**, one handout per small group
- **Handout 4**, one copy for all participants and leaders
- **Resources 1-3, Exploration Stations**, one copy of each for each small group leader
- Internet access to YouTube videos:
  - **Servant Song**
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkwYAnOTdg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkwYAnOTdg)
  - **Anthem**
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUdrid_jAMI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUdrid_jAMI).
Prepare in Advance

- Prepare and secure the space, tables, and chairs for this session.
- Duplicate an appropriate number of copies of resources and handouts for the participants.
- Prepare other adult and/or youth leaders to assist with prayers and small groups. They should also offer hospitality and welcome participants as they arrive.
- Set up check-in table with nametags and markers.
- Set up audio/visual equipment for videos
  - Set up the three distinct spaces for the exploration stations. It’s best to spread the stations throughout room to minimize noise and distractions from other stations. Prepare each stations with chairs and tables. Each station will need a small group leader. These leaders should become familiar with their respective resource from Resources 1, 2, and 3, Exploration Stations. Station 2 will need markers and newsprint and Station 3 will need some technology equipment setup for the viewing the website.
- Prepare the prayer table with a tablecloth seven candles, and booklet/pen. The candles will represent Catholic social teaching principles.

Session Outline

Welcome (5 minutes)
As the students arrive, greet them and invite them to fill out a nametag. They can gather and socialize as everyone arrives. Once all have arrived, ask the participants to sit in the chairs provided. They do not need to be in specific groups at this point.

Introduction (3 minutes)
Introduce the session by saying:

Welcome! Thank you so very much for taking the time to be with us today. The fact that you have decided to join us for this social justice program says so much about who you are as a person – that you have a great care and concern for God’s creation.

Throughout our time together today, we will be taking a look at the injustice of poverty - an extremely harsh reality for many in our society today. Did you know that in this county alone there are over 56,000 people living in poverty (over 10% of the population)? We don’t always realize the realities and extreme hardships that other people face, other people that live right here in our community.

It is our responsibility as Catholics to do what we can to combat this injustice. Can we solve the entire problem? No. But, we are called to do our part. That is why we are here today.

We will have the opportunity to explore major components of poverty. We will look at its causes and consequences as well as discussing the issue in relationship to our faith.
News Clip (7 minutes)
Invite students to move their chairs into a position that will allow them to best view the screen.

Read the following as an introduction:

We are going to start today off by watching a short CNN news clip that examines and discusses the current state of poverty in the United States. It will provide you with a general overview of this issue and give us a good starting point for tonight's activities.

Show the YouTube video, Poverty In USA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHsusyTLpAk

Ask participants to briefly name one word that describes how they feel about what they heard or saw in the video.

Exploration Stations (30 minutes)
After a few responses, thank them for their feedback. Introduce and describe the activity by saying:

Each of us here comes with our own ideas and notions of poverty – including why it exists, how it effects people, factors that contribute to the issue, and ways it can be combated. Some of our ideas may be the same as what others here feel; some may be different. We are now going to delve a little bit deeper into this issue and explore some of the thoughts you may have and help you develop an increased understanding of the issue.

Separate the participants into three small groups. Consider numbering them off from one through three. Explain that everyone will experience three stations by saying:

We will now number off into three groups. These will be our small groups for the rest of the program today.

Around the room there are three stations set up, each designed to allow us to explore the issue of poverty on a bit deeper level. Your group will be assigned a team leader that will guide you through the tasks at the stations. (three team leaders serve as group leaders for each small group, guiding their group through the station activities). You will have ten minutes at each station. We will then come back together for a brief large group discussion.

Assign the groups a station at which to start and ask them to move to that station to begin this portion of the event. Once all groups are in place, begin timing for ten minutes.
At end of the ten-minute time period, ask groups to rotate in a clockwise direction to next station. Repeat until each group has made it to every station.

**Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)**
After three rotations, invite participants back to seats for a large group discussion. Lead group in a conversation about what was learned during the exploration stations activity. Discuss any surprises, concerns, questions brought forth by participants. Team leaders may need to jump start discussion if there is a lack of response initially.

**Catholic Social Teaching Activity (15 minutes)**
Begin this portion of the session by asking students to gather into their small groups again. Invite them to move the chairs into small group circles. Continue by saying:

> As many of you may already know, our Catholic faith has provided us with a wonderful basis of how we should approach issues of social concern such as poverty. This basis is known as Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching is comprised of seven principles (see below). Each principle deals with a certain type of issue and some issues can fall within several of the principles.

We are going to be looking at three of the principles today and their relationship to the issue of poverty. Each small group will be assigned a principle. Group One will have Life and dignity of the human person. Group Two will have option for the poor and the vulnerable. Group Three will have the dignity of work and the rights of workers.

**Catholic Social Teaching Principles**
1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2) Call to Family, Community and Participation
3) Rights and Responsibilities
4) Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable
5) The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6) Solidarity
7) Care for God’s Creation

Explain the activity by saying:

> Each group will be given a list of Scripture passages and quotes from other Church documents that deal with their particular principle. Your group is asked to review the material and come up with a creative way to explain what Scripture and Church teaching say about your principle and how it applies to the injustice of poverty. You will have approximately ten minutes to do so and then each group will present to the large group. There are art supplies available if needed.

Distribute **Handouts 1-3, Passages and Quotes for...** to the respective small groups. These handouts have the Scripture passages and quotes they will need. Keep time for ten minutes.
At end of ten minutes, ask groups to join together in an area for the presentations. Each group will briefly make their presentation.

Thank the groups for their creativity. Close this activity by saying:

As you just discovered and as we’ve talked about before, we are called to uphold each other and all of God’s creation. As we come to the end of our time together, let’s each of us reflect and pray about how we can follow through on this call in our lives.

**Closing Prayer (15 minutes)**

Invite participants to move to prayer area that has been previously set up. They may be seated in any order. The room should be dim/dark. Once all are seated and quiet, the prayer can begin. A team leader distribute **Handout 4** that has the lyrics to the opening and closing songs.

**Gather**

Prayer leader invites all to sing *Servant Song* by Richard Gillard and Betty C. Pulkingham. The song can be played on piano, if musician and piano are available. Alternatively, you can play the YouTube video, *The Servant Song by Richard Gillard and Betty C. Pulkingham* at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkwdYAnOTdg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkwdYAnOTdg).

As the song is being played, the team leader lights the seven candles on the prayer table to represent the seven principles of Catholic social teaching.

Prayer leader begins by saying:

**(Sign of the Cross)**

Dear Father of All, we thank you for bringing this group of people together today. We have grown together, through you, and have learned more about the impoverished in our world. We ask you to bless and keep safe those who live in poverty. May they recognize your deep love for them. Lord, we pray too for the strength to do our part to combat and create change for this issue. We long to be your servants, Lord, but are reminded that without you, we can do nothing. May we always recognize your presence and be persistent in sharing your light with others. Amen.
Listen
Invite the reader to proclaim the reading from 1 John 3:11-18.

Respond
Participants are invited by the prayer leader to share out loud, in approximately two sentences, something they learned during the event and what they are going to do in their own lives to create change for the injustice of poverty. After participants share, they are invited to record their commitments in a booklet that is located on the prayer table. As they are writing in the booklet, they are encouraged to say a silent prayer asking God to guide them in their personal efforts to combat poverty. It is explained that this booklet will be on display for some time at the parish as a reminder of what can be done to combat poverty, and that parishioners will be asked to pray for the youth who made the commitments.

Send Forth
Prayer Leader continues by saying:

Heavenly Father, we have all just made a commitment to work for positive change in the lives of those who are impoverished. Give us the strength to see our commitments through. Inspire us, through your Son, to unceasingly work for justice. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

(Sign of the Cross)

Prayer leader invites all to look at lyric sheets and to join in signing Anthem by Tom Conry. This song can be played on piano, if musician and piano are available. Alternatively, you can play the YouTube video Anthem at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUdrid_jAMI.

Announcements and Refreshments (10 minutes)
Thank everyone for his or her presence and participation. Make announcements as necessary. Invite all to share in refreshments and snacks.

Links and websites in this session were accessed successfully on September 28, 2016.

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Handout 1

Passages and Quotes for Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Scripture Passages

- Genesis 1:26-31
- Deuteronomy 10:17-19
- Proverbs 22:2
- John 4:1-42
- 1 John 4:7-12
- Galatians 3:27-28

Church Documents

- “The dignity of the individual and the demand of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner.” From: Caritas in Veritate

- “Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God’s image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are.” From: Centesimus annus

- “Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh is entrusted to the material care of the church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church’s very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature.” From: Evangelium vitae

Passages and quotations taken from usccb.org
Handout 2

Passages and Quotes for Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable

Scripture Passages
- Exodus 22:20-26
- Sirach 4:1-10
- Proverbs 31:8-9
- Isaiah 58:5-7
- Matthew 25:34-40
- 1 John 3:17-18

Church Documents
- “Still, when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration.” From: Rerum Novarum
- “The obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation.” From: Economic Justice for All
- “Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice.” From: Centesimus annus

Passages and quotations taken from usccb.org
Handout 3

Passages and Quotes for the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Scripture Passages
- Deuteronomy 24:14-15
- Deuteronomy 14:28-29
- Jeremiah 22:13
- Sirach 34:20-22
- Matthew 20:1-16
- James 5:1-6
- Luke 3:10-14

Church Documents
- “I would like to remind everyone…that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity.” From: Gaudium et Spes
- “All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions, as well as to organize and join unions or other organizations.” From: Economic Justice for All
- “In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment) or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.” From: Caritas in Veritate

Passages and quotations taken from usccb.org

Handout 4

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Closing Prayer

Opening Song: “Servant Song”
By Richard Gillard and Betty C. Pulkingham

Refrain:
Will you let me be your servant
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I might have the grace
To let you be my servant too

We are pilgrims on the journey
We are brothers on the road
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load

I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night time of your fear
I will hold my hand out to you
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping
When you laugh, I’ll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we’ve seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony
Born to all we’ve known together
Of Christ’s love and agony

Closing Song: “Anthem”
By Tom Conry

Refrain:
We are called, we are chosen.
We are Christ for one another.
We are promised to tomorrow,
while we are for him today.
We are sign, we are wonder.
We are sower, we are seed.
We are harvest, we are hunger.
We are question, we are creed.

Then where can we stand justified?
In what can we believe?
In no one else but he who suffered,
nothing more than he who rose.
Who was justice for the poor.
Who was rage against the night.
Who was hope for peaceful people.
Who was light.

Then how are we to stand at all,
this world of bended knee?
In nothing more than barren shadows.
No one else but he could save us.
Who was justice for the poor.
Who was rage against the night.
Who was hope for peaceful people.
Who was light.

Then shall we not stand empty
at the altar of our dreams:
When he promised us ourselves.
Who mark time against tomorrow.
Who are justice for the poor.
Who are rage against the night.
Who are hope for peaceful people.
Who are light.
Resource 1

**Exploration Station 1: News Clip Discussion**

The following questions are to be used for discussion of CNN News clips.

1. What was your reaction to the poverty statistics shown, especially as they relate to children?

2. What does the word “poor” mean to you?

3. What was your reaction the difference in living conditions found in Omaha?

4. What are examples of resources like Boys and Girls Club that are available in our community?

5. Do you agree that the only way to close the poverty gap is through higher education?

6. What can we do to help alleviate poverty in our community?
**Explanation Station 2: Justice Web**

The team leader assigned to the group explains the concept of the Justice Web by saying:

The Justice Web is designed to help us gain an increased understanding of either the causes or the consequences of a social issue. It creates a visual representation of how the different components of an issue are connected. Today, we are looking at the injustice of poverty and we are going to create a web based upon that.

The team leader shows the example below and walks the group through the process of creating the web using the following steps as a guide:

1. Decide if it will be a cause or consequence web
2. On newsprint provided, write POVERTY in large letters
3. As a group, come up with and list primary causes/consequences for poverty
4. As a group, come up with secondary causes/consequences (do up to four levels if time allows)
5. As a group, create connections with arrows between causes/consequences.

Have a discussion on relationships created with arrows.
Resource 3

**Exploration Station 3: PovertyUSA.org**

The team leader guides the group through the following sections of PovertyUSA.org: (Sections found under “Learn About The State of Poverty” tab on website)

1. Poverty USA Tour
   - Discussion Questions:
     - What surprised you most about the statistics given within the tour?
     - What do you think is the primary cause of poverty? Primary consequence?
     - What were your thoughts on the solutions provided at the end of the tour? What can you do to help?

2. Interact with the map for statistics nationally and at the state and county levels. Focus on your state and county and then look at national statistics as time allows.

3. Explore the scenarios found in Snapshots of Poverty.