

A LENTEN JOURNEY THROUGH THE DESERT OF POVERTY



Previous week: Global Poverty (March 17-23)

This week: Local Poverty (March 24-30)

EDUCATION

REFLECTION

CHALLENGE

SUNDAY
Food & hunger

Hunger and poverty affect 1 in every 6 people in the greater St. Louis region, including over 172,000 children. 85% of students enrolled in St. Louis Public Schools rely on free or reduced-cost meal programs - a common marker of poverty. A lack of nutritious and regular meals has negative effects on job/school performance and can continue to set one back further in the struggle to get out of poverty.

“If you can’t feed a hundred people, then just feed one” - Mother Teresa
Where do I see hunger in my community? How is the struggle for quality food being improved or made worse?

When doing your weekly grocery shopping try to stay within the budget allotted by government food assistance programs for your family size. [USDA modified thrifty food plan](#)

Consider meditating on a Scripture passage about food & hunger - Jesus talks about it a lot!

MONDAY
Housing

The struggle for housing in the city & parts of the county has 75% of extremely low-income households spending over half of their income on rent. Even if one can qualify and move off the waitlist for public housing assistance programs, they may still only have financial access to areas with heavy crime or units in need of maintenance or pest control.

“The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person...knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head. We can imagine what Joseph must have been thinking, how is it that the Son of God has no home?” - Pope Francis, in Washington DC in 2015
What would I have to give up if I had to spend half of my income on housing? Are there other needs I would want to put before housing? Do I have empathy or judgment for folks who are chronically homeless?

Read [Segregation in St. Louis: Dismantling the Divide](#) a community driven report on segregation and housing in St. Louis released by The For Sake of All project at WASH U.

TUESDAY
Education

In the US, over half of public school students come from low-income families. Paying for private school is often out of the question, and programs to send students to better performing districts can be competitive to get into. St. Louis Public Schools serve predominantly low-income students and the district has faced a multitude of challenges in past decades. However, they regained their accreditation in 2017 and test scores were the highest in 10 years.

“Do you want to do a good deed? Teach the young! Do you want to perform a holy act? Teach the young!” -St. John Bosco

Try to limit your use of electronics today keeping in mind the disparities in resources among schools in our community.

What education did I receive, and how did my financial state affect the opportunities I was given? How often do I thank God in prayer for the gift of my education? How often do I remind myself that the cycle of poverty impacts a person’s access to education in ways that may not have affected me?

WEDNESDAY

Access to healthcare & mental health

Healthcare needs frequently go unaddressed when living in poverty. Treatment for mental illnesses and substance abuse often comes with higher out-of-pocket costs than chronic illnesses like diabetes. Without health insurance, costs become an even larger barrier in accessing proper treatment. Over 223,000 people under age 65 in the St. Louis Metro area live without any health insurance, 12% of them children.

“For the needy will never be forgotten, nor will the hope of the afflicted ever fade.” Psalm 9:19
What are the healthcare needs of the poor in my community? Am I aware of the factors that put poor people at greater risk for physical or mental health problems? Do I pass judgment on a person’s situation as a result of untreated mental illness? Do I love the sick as Christ did?

Attend Father Bill’s Lenten talk about poverty

THURSDAY

Poverty Rate

The poverty rate in the St. Louis area is 11.4%, slightly below the national level of 12.3%. However, poverty is not evenly distributed within the counties that make up the Metro area (in both MO & IL). In St. Louis County, less than 1 in 10 people are living below the poverty level. However in St. Louis city, 1 in 4 people live in poverty - a rate of 24.3%.

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Matthew 19:21-22
What are the economic “possessions” I have? Am I too attached to having a very nice job, house, car, etc.? How would I react if Jesus called me to share or give those away?

Make a conscious effort to go to church, out to eat or any other errand in a neighborhood that has a higher poverty rate than your neighborhood.

FRIDAY

Safety & trauma

Life in poverty is a recipe for chronic stress resulting from financial struggles, unsafe or frequently changing living conditions, violent neighborhoods, and a lack of social support. Poor children are exposed to a number of risk factors for stress and trauma that have negative health effects. A greater number of adverse childhood experiences raises a person’s chances of suffering from chronic illnesses such as heart problems or depression

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” Revelation 21:4
What are the current stressors in my own life? What would these be like if I lived in extreme poverty? Are the things I am concerned about essential or do they come with having more financial freedom?

Say a rosary for all those living in chronic stress and unsafe living conditions.

SATURDAY

Family demographics

Single mothers are at the highest risk for living in poverty. About 40% of single mothers live below the poverty line, 16.4% of single fathers and 6.3% of married couples.

“Rich and poor have a common bond: the Lord is the maker of them all.” Proverbs 22:2
How is God calling me & my family to solidarity with the poor? How is God calling us to support the single mom, the single dad, the married couple living in poverty? Ask God to help you loose judgment of those living in poverty and to see them as he does.

Whenever you are out running errands do a simple act of kindness for someone who looks like they are working hard to raise a family. Maybe buy a gallon of milk for them or open the door for them.