

# A LENTEN JOURNEY THROUGH THE DESERT OF POVERTY



Previous week: Local Poverty (March 24-30)

This week: Trapped in the Cycle – walk a day in the shoes of someone in poverty (March 31-April 6)

## EDUCATION

## REFLECTION

## CHALLENGE

### SUNDAY

Will minimum wage cut it?  
What is an average wage?

The minimum wage in Missouri was recently raised to \$8.60. Working 40 hours a week for each week of the year, with no vacation or sick days, your gross yearly pay would be \$17,888. In 2017, there were 1.8 million American workers making at or below the federal minimum - 78.7% of them were above the age of 20. In an undeveloped country 70% of the population is considered poor and live on an income of less than \$2,000 a year or \$5 a day at the most. Three billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day. More than 1.2 billion live on less than \$1.25 a day.

Imagine you are an unskilled worker raised in poverty, who is taking a minimum wage job as a starting point. Ask yourself: How long will I have to work to gain skills & earn a wage raise? Will minimum wage be enough to sustain me as I built my experience? How will I pay for food, rent, transportation, and maybe even childcare while I'm at work?

The Catholic Social Teachings remind us that our faith calls us to believe in the dignity and rights of all workers. Is our society upholding this teaching?

Build a monthly budget based on different hourly wages (\$8.60, \$10, \$15) working 40 hours a week and allocate for housing & utilities, food, phone bills, insurance, and transportation.

### MONDAY

Does what you were born into really make a difference?

Statistically, 70% of Americans born into poverty never make it to the middle-income quintile. Children who grow up in persistent poverty are 13% less likely to graduate high school and 43% less likely to receive a bachelor's degree by age 25. The life expectancy in areas North of St. Louis downtown is 67 where as the life expectancy in chesterfield is 82. Life expectancy is driven primarily by a person education level and income, which a lot of the time is affected by the place you live.

Reflect on the situation you and/or your children were born into. Is there an opportunity to receive quality education? Access to nutritious food? Is the neighborhood you live in safe? Are there conditions you were born into that you take for granted?

Ask God to open your eyes to the privileges you were born into. Ask God to show you the ways to use your privileges in ways to lift up the voices of those in poverty.

Write out five things you have that those in poverty may not and include the benefits or opportunities you've received as a result. Use this list as a reminder for gratitude. Challenge yourself to find ways to advocate so that individuals in poverty can also experience those benefits.

### TUESDAY

What does the average day in poverty look like?

The average day for someone in poverty is full of hard decisions and stress. Many people in poverty work & often have to be up long before their shift starts to catch public transportation to get to work. Finding cost effective, reliable and safe childcare is a struggle. They will return home to a hungry family, but may only be able to afford a cheap meal. Rent, bills, medical expenses, etc. pile up & they might have to borrow money to make a payment, setting them back further in the future.

Reflect on your own average day. Think of the struggles you face that are similar to those of someone in poverty. How can you use those moments to better empathize with the poor? Now, consider the blessings and benefits throughout your day. How can you become more grateful & aware of these? Can you continue to build empathy with the poor who may have never experienced those benefits?

How often do you discount a story or someone's experience that is different than your own? Ask God to help you to listen and empathize with people that have different experiences than yours.

Read the [The Crisis Within](#) . While reading really try to empathize with those the articles speaks about.

**WEDNESDAY**

What is food distribution like in poverty?

Food deserts are areas where grocery stores are absent and the available options are fast food or junk food at convenience stores. Over 700,000 low income people across the Metro St. Louis region live in food deserts. For many, finding transportation to grocery stores is a challenge.

Globally, large amounts of food are readily available to 10% of the world's population while 70% has almost nothing.

Consider the distance to your usual grocery store and time of your average shopping trip. How would the trip change if you did not have your own car? If you had to walk, what would be the closest food establishment that you could get to?

Ask God to help you see your blessings and not to take them for granted. How is he calling you to look outside of yourself and think of the person who struggles to have the basic need of food easily accessible?

Cook dinner tonight using only ingredients that you bought from the nearest gas station. Bonus challenge: walk to the gas station in order to buy the groceries.

**THURSDAY**

Are all schools created equal?

Nearly half of public school funds in the U.S. come from local property taxes, creating large gaps in per student expenditure across districts. In the Metro St. Louis region, district expenditures vary by nearly \$8,000 per student. Children living in poverty especially minorities are at much higher risk to experience negative school discipline and school suspensions.

Reflect on what barriers to education are present for individuals in poverty in our city, country, and globally. Where can I give greater support to educational programs serving the marginalized? What are other education-related challenges that children face outside of the classroom? Is it fair that marginalized communities experience higher rates of suspensions?

God calls us to care for all his people. Ask God to help us look outside of our situation and to see how we have a responsibility for all children.

Explore what is being done in our St. Louis community to move to Restorative justice discipline in order to keep suspensions rates down and eliminating suspensions in grades k-3<sup>rd</sup>.

**FRIDAY**

What happens when you can't make ends meet?

Human basic needs are food, water, shelter, and safety. Making ends meet is a daily challenge when living in poverty, and it's often a compounding problem. You need to pay for a broken appliance at home, medical needs, and dinner, but you can barely afford this month's rent. Missing rent payments might mean eviction & moving to another neighborhood. Moving will change your bus route to work and you might have to find a new job. The area may not be safe enough for kids to play outside for exercise, causing further health problems. This is one of many examples of how struggling to make ends meet compounds.

In a fragile situation living on the poverty line, one problem can create a domino effect. What setbacks or hiccups have you experienced over the past year? How did you handle them? How would outcomes be different if you had less time & money to fix them?

Ask God to help you place your trust in him in times of need. Ask for him to help you to think and pray often of others and their struggles. How is he calling you to help someone from out of the enormous stress of poverty? Could you help someone to get ahead and how?

Go without heat or air conditioning in your car today in solidarity with those who can't pay their utilities or don't have the luxury of appliances.

**SATURDAY**

Does race really matter? Which countries are most affected by poverty?

Minority groups are 3 times more likely to live in poverty in the US. The poverty rates are 11-15% higher for Native American, African American, and Hispanic populations than for White and Asian Americans. The impacts of systematic oppression continue to play a role in the cycle of poverty, especially on people of color.

There is a concentration of poverty on the African continent that can be traced back to European colonialism and the slave trade. Countries in the Middle East, affected by war, also experience more poverty.

"Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice." -U.S. Catholic Bishops, Brothers and Sisters To Us

Ask God to open your heart and eyes to the way racism is still alive in yourself and our community. Ask for an open mind to see the realities of racism and the courage to speak out against it.

Read the 2018 Pastoral Letter issued by the US bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.