

AGENTS OF MERCY: CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED

GRADES 4-6

Goal:

Students will be encouraged to explore the meaning of poverty here in the United States as well as around the world. What does poverty look like? Why is help for the poor central to Jesus' message?

Lesson:

Students will explore poverty. They will look at both extreme poverty, such as exists in developing parts of the world and practical poverty, as we have in the US in which even working families struggle to make ends meet. Pope Francis has called us to go out with the joy of the Gospel, to encounter people where they are. Like Mother Teresa, we are called to serve the poor by looking people in the eye, respecting their dignity, and by engaging in works of mercy.

Bible Story:

- Read [John 6:1-15](#). Consider having your students “popcorn read” (change readers every verse) to get them involved!
- Watch [a film rendition](#) of the story.

Discussion:

- Throughout the Bible, we hear Jesus talk about his great love for the poor. He means not only people who don't have anything to eat, but also people who are lonely (poor in spirit).
- Why does he spend so much time talking about these people? It is because people who are poor are open to receiving from others—there is a humility to their presence that invites us to be generous and merciful and share with them what we have. Jesus wants all of us to be open to giving and receiving help.
- The disciples of Jesus didn't want to feed the crowd and they thought it was impossible but Jesus loved the crowd and challenged them to ask God for help. How can we ask God to help those in need? How can we help Him to care for the poor?

Watch:

- We think about hunger as a problem only in developing countries and not here in the US. But, that's not true.
- Watch this [Kid President](#) video
- Watch [Kids Discuss Hunger](#) in the United States

Discussion:

- Were you surprised by the statistic about hunger in the US?
- What would you buy if you had to do this challenge?
- What is poverty? Can you give an example?
- What are some factors that can cause poverty?
- How can you help? What are some good ways to help someone in poverty?

Watch:

- Watch [Fatima's story](#) from Mary's Meal
- Encounter [Kumba](#) in Sierra Leone

Discussion:

- What can we learn from Fatima and Kumba?
- How do they want to help their families and communities? What challenges do they face?
- What is the difference between extreme poverty (developing world) and practical poverty (in the United States)?
- How does poverty and hunger affect the way children grow up? Does poverty and hunger have an impact on how children learn and grow?
- What can be done to help families get enough food to eat?

Activity:

- Poverty takes many forms. There is no clear dividing line between “poor” and “not poor”. It is easy to lose perspective of what other people face when we may live in a very different experience.
- Ask students to spend a few minutes thinking of all of the things they have.
 - Encourage them to write down or draw 3 things that they think they could not live without. Have them share with the class.
 - Lead a discussion based on what students share.
 - True things we could not live without: house, family, water, food, friends.
 - Things that are not truly necessary: TV, games, vacation, toys, candy.
 - Help students understand the difference between what is actually a necessity and what is an extra.
- Have students participate in the [One in Five](#) activity from Poverty USA.
- Decide on a way to help those who are living in poverty using this [Action Plan with ideas for every grade!](#)

Further Action:

Use the [Poverty USA Program](#) resources to challenge your class to do something about poverty and hunger in your community or visit the [Respect Life Office website](#) for local service projects!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
Open our eyes to the needs of the poor,
Teach us to be compassionate, to be your hands and feet.
Help us to encounter our brothers and sisters and to serve them with charity and mercy.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

