

AGENTS OF MERCY LESSON: CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED

GRADES 7-9

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. Finally, students will be introduced to the concept of development as a process improving not only a person's socio-economic situation, but also improving their emotional, intellectual, and spiritual opportunities as well. 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 engaging in works of mercy.

Watch:

- [Catholic Social Teaching 101: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable](#)
- Tour [Poverty USA](#)

Discussion:

- What is poverty? Can you give an example?
- Does our definition of poverty include the people we just learned about in the film? Why or why not?
- Why do we care about the poor? How is this tied to our faith?
- Whose job is it to end poverty? Whose job is it to help poor/hungry people?
- What are some things that you consider essential for living? Were any of those things missing from what the family living on the poverty line was able to afford?
- What are some factors that can cause poverty?
- In what ways do poverty and hunger affect children—their ability to play, work, learn?
- In what ways do poverty and hunger affect families?

Watch:

- [Living on One](#) Project Episode 3: Hunger and Tortillas
- Mary's Meals: [Fatima's Story](#)

Discussion:

- Do you think you could live off of \$1 a day?
- What are some of the problems they discovered that are facing the poor in Guatemala?
- Why do many people still go hungry if there is enough food produced on earth for 12 billion people each year?
- What is the difference between extreme poverty (developing world) and practical poverty (in the United States)?
- What would it be like to have to care for your family like Fatima has had to care for hers?
- 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 is meant by preferential option for the poor?
- What is our personal and cultural responsibility toward the poor and poverty?

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.
- If students have access to computers or iPads, have them try budgeting at the poverty line with [Interactive Poverty Experience](#) in the US.

Discussion:

- Did you make it through the month?
- What were the most important choices you had to make in the game? Why did you choose that?
- What surprised you about this game?
- Can we judge those who are poor? Why or why not?
- Do those who are poor have the same dignity and worth as those who have more? Why or why not?

Activity:

- Have the students break into groups and research a saint who cared for the poor (e.g. Mother Teresa, St. Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, Mother Cabrini, St. Vincent de Paul)
- Each group creates a poster including a picture of the saint, quotes from them, and ways that they helped the poor during their lifetime. Each group will present their poster to the class.

Further Action:

- Use the [Poverty USA Program](#) resources to challenge your class to do something about poverty and hunger in your community. Find other service opportunities on the Respect Life Office [website](#)!

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.

Lesson adapted from the plans on the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Life, Justice and Peace website