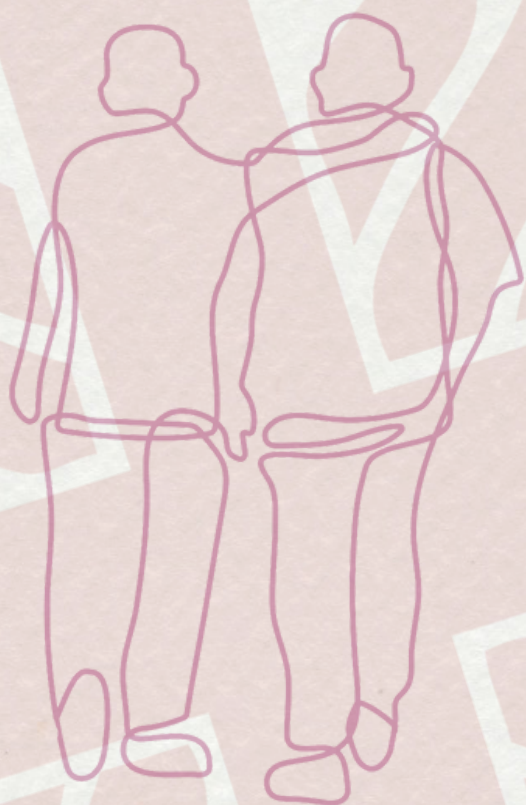


World Day of the Poor

Sunday 19 November 2023

Resources for schools, parishes and individuals



“A great river of poverty is traversing our cities and swelling to the point of overflowing; it seems to overwhelm us, so great are the needs of our brothers and sisters who plead for our help, support and solidarity. For this reason, on the Sunday before the Solemnity of Jesus Christ King of the Universe, we gather around his Table to receive from him once more the gift and strength to live lives of poverty and to serve the poor.”

Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of the Poor*, 2023

“Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labour and are burdened. Make us serve them truly, after the example of Christ and at his command. And may your Church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice, that all people may be raised up to a new hope.”

*Eucharistic Prayer for Use in
Masses for Various Needs, IV: Jesus, Who Went About
Doing Good*

Introduction

Sunday 19 November 2023 is the seventh World Day of the Poor, with the theme of not turning away. Pope Francis takes his inspiration from the elderly Tobit, who says to his son, “Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor” (Tobit 4:7). Whenever we turn away from those who are poor, we turn away from Jesus himself, who is forever associated with the most vulnerable in society (Matthew 25: 31-46).



Pope Francis goes on to celebrate the next door neighbours, “ordinary people who quietly make themselves poor among the poor. They do more than give alms: they listen, they engage, they try to understand and deal with difficult situations and their causes.” An important theme throughout the papacy of Pope Francis has been the need to do more than just relieve suffering (compassion), but to work to challenge the causes of suffering and do what we can to ensure it does not happen in the first place (justice).

In the Caritas Social Action Network, we have many ordinary people who do extraordinary work with those on the margins of our society, often deprived of the essentials they need - which is their right - to live a dignified life. Staff and volunteers in CSAN member organisations work with people who are hungry, who are destitute and seeking asylum, who are isolated and alone, people who are homeless, or trafficked by criminal gangs, or trapped in a vicious cycle of debt. They do more than give alms. They walk alongside people who are trapped in various forms of poverty - not always material deprivation - and try and help them to regain agency and dignity.

Introduction

The resources we have gathered here are offered to the Catholic community as a way of deepening our encounter with those who are poor, of examining our own conscience about our lifestyles and how our faith is expressed in loving action. In his message in 2017, the Pope asked Catholic communities in the week preceding the World Day of the Poor to engage in acts of encounter and concrete expressions of charity.

The focus is not fundraising, but encounter, accompaniment and change. We can sometimes 'subcontract' our charity by giving money to an organisation in the knowledge that they will do good. They will no doubt do good, but that approach may leave our hearts untouched by the lived experience of poverty. We are called to go 'beyond fundraising' on a journey of accompaniment with people in poverty, being converted ourselves in the encounter.

The See-Judge-Act exercise is designed primarily for group use in a parish or a school to discern what actions might be taken to build a better world. Do we know our community, who do we 'see' there, who do we not see, what is the Holy Spirit prompting us to do?

The novena is offered as a way to help us to prayerfully encounter in scripture God's constant care for those who are in various forms of poverty and to prompt in us a desire for more just relations in the community. The readings are not from the readings of the day (apart from the Sunday), this is a separate devotional exercise. It can be said individually or in school or parish groups.

You will find more details of the diocesan Caritas agencies and independent charities that are members of Caritas Social Action Network on our website at www.csan.org.uk. These charities are engaged in different ways in tackling the causes of poverty, promoting justice and restoring dignity. You will find much inspiration from them for your own social action.

Caritas Social Action Network is an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales committed to tackling the causes of poverty, promoting justice and restoring dignity, specifically by convening and animating alliances of member charities involved in the social mission of the Church, leading on the formation of those involved in social action, and raising a prophetic Catholic voice in the public arena.

Novena for World Day of the Poor

DAY 1

Friday 10 November
St Leo the Great

*For those who
experience mental
anguish*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Antiphon

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

Psalm 23

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture reading

"Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

Luke 22: 41-43

Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the Holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to you in the here and now of your life in your community.

Jesus knew mental anguish in his earthly life. After the last supper with his disciples, he prayed alone in the garden of Gethsemane in a state of heightened mental distress. He knew he was about to be arrested and subjected to humiliating trial and excruciatingly painful execution in public. Jesus knew the depths of the human condition, the places of mental and spiritual darkness. He is with us in our deepest anxiety.

We pray for those whose lives are not flourishing because of mental ill-health and anxiety of all kinds. We pray for an understanding of their needs, for an understanding of our own fragility, for the grace not to judge, but to offer support and friendship whenever we can.

**Loving Father
your risen Son sent us out
into the world as ambassadors
for the kingdom of God;
inspire us with your Spirit
of compassion, justice and truth
to declare the Good News
to those who are poor, to work
for the relief, defence and liberation
of all who are trapped
in oppressive circumstances.
We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen**

"Christ was sent by the Father 'to preach good news to the poor...to restore the broken-hearted' (Luke 4:18), 'to seek and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10): in the same way the church surrounds with love all who are afflicted with human infirmity, indeed in the poor and suffering it recognises the face of its poor and suffering founder, it endeavours to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ."

Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 8



DAY 2

Saturday 11 November
St Martin of Tours

*For those who
experience destitution*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Antiphon

Give justice to the weak and the orphan,
maintain the right of the lowly and the
destitute.

Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Psalm 82

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is
now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.*

Scripture reading

“There was a rich man who was dressed in
purple and fine linen and who feasted
sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay
a poor man named Lazarus, covered with
sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger
with what fell from the rich man’s table;
even the dogs would come and lick his
sores. The poor man died and was carried
away by the angels to be with Abraham.”

Luke 16: 19-22

*Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the
holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart
and speak to you in the here and now of your
life, in your community.*

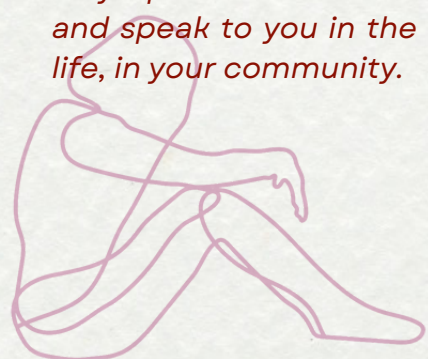
St Martin of Tours served in the Roman
cavalry as a young man, possibly in the
Emperor’s personal bodyguard. A
prestigious career lay ahead of him, but he
had already heard the call of Christ and
was undergoing instruction in the faith.
The story is told that one day in winter
while on duty he encountered a beggar by
the roadside, dressed only in rags. Martin
took his sword and divided his military
cloak in two, giving half to the beggar.
That night he had a dream in which Christ
appeared to him and said, “Today a mere
catechumen has clothed me.”

We pray for those who are destitute, who
do not even have enough for life’s
necessities: food, clothes, shelter, warmth,
safety. May we commit ourselves to a just
and generous sharing of resources so that
all may enjoy the fruits of creation.

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Amen**

“We cannot love God unless we love each
other, and to love we must know each
other. We know Him in the breaking of
bread, and we know each other in the
breaking of bread, and we are not alone
any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a
banquet, too, even with a crust, where
there is companionship.”

Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness, p. 28



DAY 3

Sunday 12 November
33rd Sunday in Ordinary
Time

*For those who are
discerning the best use
of their talents*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Antiphon

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked to cover them?

Isaiah 58: 6-7

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall
be, world without end. Amen.*

Scripture reading

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey,
summoned his slaves and entrusted his property
to them; to one he gave five talents, to another
two, to another one, to each according to his
ability. Then he went away. The one who had
received the five talents went off at once and
traded with them, and made five more talents. In
the same way, the one who had the two talents
made two more talents. But the one who had
received the one talent went off and dug a hole
in the ground and hid his master’s money.”

Matthew 25: 14-18

*Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the Holy
Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to
you in the here and now of your life in your
community.*

The parable of the talents in Matthew’s gospel is the third in a series of parables dealing with the proper attitude and behaviour in the light of the coming of the Son of Man. The message in each is that responsible activity is best in this situation. The emphasis is on positive action, as opposed to fearful action, or worse still lazy inactivity. The call is to be awake, alert, vigilant, spiritually active, not asleep, or evasive. The message is no-nonsense, almost brusque, a call to do what we can with what we’ve got.

We pray that we will be alive to the gifts we have and alert to the needs of the world, so that we may use our gifts, not for ourselves and our own advancement, but in the service of others. In that way, we will receive back a hundredfold.

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We make this our prayer
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Amen**

“For the Lord desires that the faithful laity also should extend his kingdom, the kingdom of ‘truth and life, the kingdom of holiness and grace, the kingdom of justice, love and peace’; in which creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21).”
Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 36

“I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing.”
Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273

DAY 4

Monday 13 November

*For those who
experience abuse and
violence*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Antiphon

I sought the Lord and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
Look to him, and be radiant;
so your face shall never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the
Lord,
and was saved from every trouble.

Psalm 34

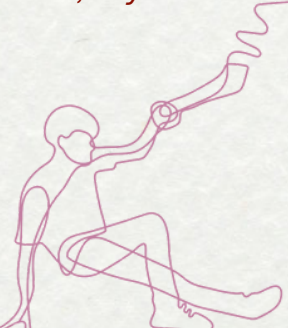
*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is
now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.*

Scripture reading

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? He said, ‘the one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’.”

Luke 10: 36-37

*Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the
holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart
and speak to you in the here and now of your
life, in your community.*



In Luke's gospel Jesus was asked “Who is my neighbour?” (10: 29), but this was to test him. It is a tricky question. If Jesus defines who is a neighbour, who is worthy of our care, then at the same time he has defined who is not a neighbour, and not worthy of our care. His answer is to tell the story of the Good Samaritan, the one who showed compassion for the helpless victim left for dead by the side of the road. When the religious figures of the priest and Levite were too fearful to help and walked on the other side of the road, the Samaritan intervened, at risk to himself, and committed himself to the recovery of the wounded stranger.

We pray for those who are victims of abuse or violence, whose lives are diminished by the pain inflicted by others. May we commit ourselves to building communities of peace and reconciliation, attentive to the causes of violence and to the needs of those who are its victims.

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Amen**

“In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan. Any other decision would make us either one of the robbers or one of those who walked by without showing compassion for the sufferings of the man on the roadside.”

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 67

DAY 5

Tuesday 14 November

*For those who
experience
imprisonment*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Antiphon

The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
The Lord is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.
The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

Psalm 145

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is
now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.*

Scripture reading

“When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.”

Matthew 27: 1-2

Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the Holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to you in the here and now of your life in your community.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, through whom all things were created, was betrayed and arrested. He was bound and taken to the house of the high priest and interrogated. False witnesses testified against him. He was accused of blasphemy, beaten and spat upon. He spent the night in a dungeon in the house of the high priest, which prisoners were lowered into on a rope. There was no light, his one companion was darkness.

We pray for those who are in prison in our society, whether justly or unjustly, who miss their families, whose families miss them. We pray for those who sit in judgement, who govern the prisons, that they will act with justice, mindful of the dignity of all, both the victims of crime and those who are accused. We pray that in our communities we will never judge those who are released from prison, but offer welcome and a helping hand as they try to rebuild their lives.

For more information on how Catholic parishes can sign up to be places of welcome for those coming out of prison, see:
<https://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/>

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Amen**

“And there are also people who suffer, who are discarded by society, at least for a period, and Jesus goes there to tell them: ‘You are important to me’. Jesus comes to serve us, and the sign that Jesus serves us here today, in the ‘Regina Coeli’ prison, is that he wanted to choose 12 of you, like the 12 Apostles, to wash your feet. Jesus takes a chance with each of us. Understand this: Jesus is called Jesus; he is not called Pontius Pilate. Jesus does not know how to wash his hands of people: he only knows how to take a risk! Look at this beautiful image: Jesus bent down among the thorns, risking to hurt himself by picking up the lost sheep.”

Pope Francis, Holy Thursday Homily in “Regina Coeli” prison in Rome, 2018

DAY 6

Wednesday 15 November

For those who experience disability

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Antiphon

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.

Isaiah 40: 3-5

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture reading

“Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’.”

Mark 2: 3-5

Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to you in the here and now of your life, in your community.

Many of our places of worship and events are still not fully accessible by people with a disability. A person with a disability once said, “I am disabled by society’s lack of willingness to accommodate me.” In the saying which is often used when discussing the needs of persons with disability, “Nothing about me, without me.” Persons with disabilities need to be seen and heard by those without disabilities and their voices should be at the heart of any discussion about greater accessibility. In the gospel, the paralysed man was able to reach Jesus with the help of his friends, but we shouldn’t have to take the roof off the church to make that possible.

We pray for those with disabilities of different kinds, whose everyday life is sometimes harder than it should be due to the inattentiveness of most of us to accommodate society to their needs. May we honour the dignity of every person, made in the image and likeness of God.

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Amen**

“Love is expressed first in being with before doing to someone. We have to continually renew our awareness of this because we can get caught up in a lot of the doing for. You see, if our actions do not first come from the desire to be with a person, then it really becomes just social work. When you are willing to be with a poor person you can recognise his need, and if your love is genuine, you naturally want to do what you can as an expression of your love. Service, in a way, is simply a means of expressing your being for that person – and often with the poorest people you cannot completely alleviate their problem, but by being with them, by being for them, whatever you do for them makes a difference.”

Saint Teresa of Calcutta, *A Simple Path*, p. 91

DAY 7

Thursday 16 November
St Margaret of Scotland

*For those who have to leave
their countries due to war,
poverty or fear of persecution*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Antiphon

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.

Psalm 31

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the
Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and
ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

Scripture reading

“When an alien resides with you in your land,
you shall not oppress the alien. The alien
who resides with you shall be to you as the
citizen among you; you shall love the alien as
yourself, for you were aliens in the land of
Egypt; I am the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 19: 33-34

*Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the Holy
Spirit to let the words touch your heart and
speak to you in the here and now of your life in
your community.*

Imagine having to leave your home with only what you can carry, because of fear of war, violence, intimidation, poverty, climate change. What would you take with you? Imagine having to walk for hundreds of miles in open country, worried about who is getting tired, who might not make it. Imagine encountering the high walls and stony faces of countries who do not want you. This is the experience of the refugee, the one who is forced to leave their home looking for a life elsewhere, looking for welcome in a strange land, looking for peace and dignity.

We pray for the grace to welcome the stranger, to see in them the suffering face of Christ. We pray for an understanding of how we live, of how the choices we make might contribute to the poverty of others, of how our lifestyle might contribute to the damage of the earth, our common home.

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We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen**

“Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarised by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate.”

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 129

DAY 8

Friday 17 November

St Elizabeth of Hungary

For those who experience homelessness

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Antiphon

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation,
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the
thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from
their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

Luke 1: 50-53

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture reading

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’.”

Luke 9: 57-58

Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to you in the here and now of your life, in your community.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, became poor for our sake, he emptied himself so that we might have life to the full. He knew days and nights in the wilderness, sleeping under the stars. He knew rejection from his own community. Yet he reached out to the ones beyond the care of a family, living on the edge of life.

We pray for those in our community who have no home, who sleep rough on our streets, or who are forced to go from place to place to look for shelter. May we be moved to do what we can to offer help, and work for a world where everyone has a place to call their own.

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Amen**

“The poor are not people ‘outside’ our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share, in an effort to alleviate their difficulties and marginalization, restore their lost dignity and ensure their necessary social inclusion.”

Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of the Poor*, 2021

DAY 9

Saturday 18 November

For those who experience isolation and vulnerability in old age

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Antiphon

Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity.

Psalm 68

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture reading

“As he taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearances say long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation.’”

Mark 12: 38-40

Silent reflection on the word of God: ask the Holy Spirit to let the words touch your heart and speak to you in the here and now of your life in your community.

The scribes were among the religious professionals at the time of Jesus. They were highly educated and often well regarded for their observance of the law. What Jesus is highlighting and condemning, however, is their unscrupulous predatory behaviour which would drive people into poverty, especially the most vulnerable in the society such as widows, by benefitting from payments for offerings and services. They are more concerned about how they are seen and regarded by others than their relationship with God. Their ego is in charge, they are the centre of their world.

We pray for those in our community who are exploited in vulnerable old age, by those in authority, by landlords, by corporate interests. May we be attentive to the needs of the elderly in our community and seek to understand the ways in which they are sometimes reduced to poverty and insecurity.

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“The future of the world depends on this covenant between young and old. Who, if not the young, can take the dreams of the elderly and make them come true? Yet for this to happen, it is necessary that we continue to dream. Our dreams of justice, of peace, of solidarity can make it possible for our young people to have new visions; in this way, together, we can build the future.”

Pope Francis, *Message for Inaugural World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and Elderly*, 2021

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“Saint John Chrysostom’s admonition remains ever timely: ‘If you want to honour the body of Christ, do not scorn it when it is naked; do not honour the Eucharistic Christ with silk vestments, and then, leaving the church, neglect the other Christ suffering from cold and nakedness’.”

Pope Francis, *Message for First World Day of the Poor*, 2017

Love your neighbour as yourself: Poverty and love for the poor

What is poverty?

Poverty is an experience – of a person, a group or a whole country – of lacking one or more conditions necessary for an adequate standard of living. In our own country, where education is almost universal, an inadequate standard is often understood as struggling to cover the day-to-day basic costs of living. The most extreme form is destitution: when you have no foreseeable opportunity to access, for example, enough food to survive or basic health care, no accommodation, or are forced into degrading activities. Poverty may be a misery affecting the whole person, sometimes hidden in the experience of prolonged isolation, or subjection to wrongful discrimination.

Systemic poverty arises where social and economic structures leave some citizens cut off from what should be available to everyone. For example, the more oppressive the state, the tighter the control of day-to-day movement and free expression, with denial of education, work, property and welfare rights. Similarly, the less direct say that workers have in shaping and owning the business or market they are in, the more likely it is that exploitation can take root.

What does the Church say about our relationship with material goods?

God delights in every person: each is created good, with a deepest desire to live life to the full. When we pause to think what makes us most joyful, we recognise a connection with using our talents and possessions as gifts – freely received and freely given. My own good is realised best in adequate self-care and in being with – delighting in – other people. Material goods and wealth are neither good nor bad on their own. Catholic teaching upholds the right to seek profit from work and to acquire private property, while recognising the ‘universal destination of goods’. In other words, personal wealth is first to meet our own needs and those of family for adequate living; any extra should be considered available to our neighbours’ and community’s needs. This means we have to listen and seek to understand what is going on around us. Who is cut off or prevented from enjoying an adequate standard of living? How might my use of talents and material goods contribute in this state of affairs? Would a simpler way of living create more freedom to live well? The choice to live more simply is sometimes known as evangelical poverty. It is a conscious choice to be transformed – as my circumstances allow, and without intentionally becoming a burden on others – in seeking that everyone has what is adequate, starting in my home and looking ever wider in society.

Love your neighbour as yourself: Poverty and love for the poor

Why do Christians choose a 'preferential love' for the poor?

For the Christian, neighbour love is more than a reasoned calculation about adequacy and 'need'. St Paul explains (Gal. 3:28) that in Christ – that is, in choosing the way of love in its fulness – there is neither young nor old, slave nor free. All share a common call to life in one human family and a finite resource, a span of days on earth. In practice, I only have today to choose from my giftedness, either what builds up our life together, or enclosure within an idea of my identity that may build me only a bitter sense of injustice towards myself. Faith, hope, and above all love, Paul says, urge us (2 Cor. 5:14) to go beyond a minimum, legal obligation to our neighbour. Christ exemplifies this in his way of challenging poverty – in deep humility and reverence, to be with people who are most excluded from life by the oppression, laws and customs of his time – whether they are poor (for example, because of disability), rich (tax collectors) or turned too far in on themselves (the over-scrupulously religious). In the Catholic tradition, this is called the 'preferential option' for the poor. It is the way of Christ, a vital way of seeing and coming to know him, a path of true freedom and lasting joy: on this path we will never be alone:

Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defence, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2448

See-Judge-Act: a practical activity for school or parish groups

Pope Francis called upon the Catholic community – indeed the whole world – to respond to the crisis of the global pandemic with courage and imagination: “Now is the moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek...God asks us to create something new” (Let Us Dream, p. 6). The Pope argues that we cannot go back to a way of living in which so many were excluded from the “fruits of creation”. He argues that “We need a politics that can integrate and dialogue with the poor, the excluded, and the vulnerable, that gives people a say in the decisions that impact their lives. We need to slow down, take stock, and design better ways of living together on this earth” (Let Us Dream, p. 6). That call is all the more urgent now as we face an economic crisis which will see many people dragged into poverty and government policies which do not always have the needs of the most vulnerable as their priority.

The method the Pope suggests for discerning our priorities, which has a long history in the Church, is to “see clearly, choose well, and to act right.” This approach is called the See-Judge-Act method, sometimes known as the pastoral cycle, or review of life. What follows is an invitation for a group – in a parish, or a school – to engage in the See-Judge-Act approach, with particular attention to their local community, and where there might be people in the community living in various circumstances of poverty, and then to decide what might be done to tackle this poverty, promote justice and restore dignity.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis teaches that “at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others” (EG, 177). What is sometimes called the social mission of the Church is not something that should be seen as reserved for a few ‘activists’. The Pope says that “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society” (EG, 187). He stresses that this is the work of the Christian community. He takes his inspiration from the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark’s gospel, when Jesus says to the disciples who were panicking about what to do with the hungry crowd: “You yourselves give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).

See-Judge-Act: a practical activity for school or parish groups

This “liberation and promotion” of the poor is more than an act of charity to relieve suffering. That is important, but we are asked to go further, by seeking to understand why there is poverty in the first place and “working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor” (EG, 188). This is what Pope Francis means by “solidarity”, a key concept in Catholic Social Teaching, along with the preferential option for the poor. Both are key concepts in building a better world. Solidarity, for Pope Francis, “presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG, 188). Let us look at how you we might contribute to the building of a better world in our own place. Below are suggested questions for group discussion, to be adapted by the group leader depending on the context of the group. The questions are not set in stone, feel free to use your own to suit your group.

SEE CLEARLY

How well do we know our community?

What might we do to get to know the reality of our community better? What might we learn from going for a walk - in twos - around the community?

Where might we find the information – the ‘data’ - to help us? In the local press, local council, government statistics on local employment, housing plans, poverty levels.

Better still, who can we meet and speak to in order to understand our community better? Who can we invite in that we’ve never met before? People from another religion? Elderly people? People who live on a local estate? Bus drivers, refuse collectors, police officers, nurses, social workers, shop workers, refugees?

This is all about ‘seeing’ as widely and deeply as possible, seeing what we’ve not noticed before, noticing whowe’ve not noticed before?

Seeing involves feeling. What moves us in what we see, what is our instinctive reaction, what is our connection?

The group may decide there’s some ‘homework’ to be done to get to know the reality of the community and its experiences of poverty in a deeper way.

See-Judge-Act: a practical activity for school or parish groups

CHOOSE WELL

Having gathered in the stories, the reality, of the people in the community as much as we're able to, the next step is to see that reality in the light of faith, with the eyes of the compassionate God.

This is often called discernment. From what we've seen, what is of God and what is not of God? What looks as if it's part of a kingdom of justice, love and peace, and what is working against that? Where do we see human beings not flourishing, which is never God's will? It might be helpful to look back over the scripture passages in the novena.

Pope Francis has good advice for this stage of the process:

"To enter into discernment is to resist the urge to see the apparent relief of an immediate decision, and instead be willing to hold different options before the Lord... You consider reasons for and against, knowing Jesus is with you and for you. You feel inside yourself the gentle pull of the Spirit, and its opposite. And over time, in prayer and patience, in dialogue with others, you reach a solution." (*Let Us Dream*, p. 21)

ACT RIGHT

Having chosen what to do in order to try and build up the kingdom of God in our community, the next step is to work out the necessary steps for action.

Who will do what, according to their skills and qualities? Do they have the resources to do what needs to be done? Who do they need to speak to about this, who can 'open doors' for us?

Is what we're proposing to do an act of mercy, or the pursuit of justice? Have we thought about the difference?

When choosing our 'tactics', what is our inspiration? What will our 'voice' sound like when we enter into the public arena?

What do we think 'success' looks like? Are we thinking about measuring success at all? Is that the right mindset? Better still, what are the 'fruits' of our actions? Have they brought about an increase in justice, love and peace?

An important point is to review and reflect on what we've done. We will never get it all right. We must not be discouraged by setbacks. Reflect as a group on what we need to learn from our experience and begin the cycle over again, each time going deeper into the process so that we can see clearly, choose well and act right.

For a deeper reflection on how a Catholic community might become more involved in community development, or community organising, see the publication *Realities are Greater than Idea: Evangelization, Catholicism and Community Organising*. This can be found on our website:

<https://www.csan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Realities-are-Greater-than-Ideas.pdf>

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