caritas
social action network

10th World Day of the Poor

15 November 2026



Resources for schools, parishes and individuals

“Certain questions inevitably arise, and on this 10th World Day of the Poor, we urgently need to let them resonate in our minds and hearts. Are we a sign of God who is a refuge for the poor? Are we aware of our own poverty, and do we prefer it to unjust wealth? Do we go where the poor are, experiencing their marginalization? Do we listen to their thoughts and share their hopes? Do we speak their names with divine tenderness? Does our charity reawaken and sustain in them the desire for justice and redemption?”

Pope Leo XIV, Message for Tenth World Day of the Poor, 2026

“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 15 November 2026 is the tenth World Day of the Poor, with the theme of "The Lord is the refuge of the poor" (Psalm 14:6). Pope Leo XIV, in his message for the day, invites the Church to an examination of conscience: "Are we a sign of a God who is a refuge for the poor?" How much more are we called to do – in our communities, in our nations – "on behalf of the poor and for their liberation." Echoing the words of his predecessor, Pope Francis, he reminds us that "we are the Lord's Church, a Church of the poor?" When we look at the Church in England and Wales, is this the Church we see, a Church of the poor. He quotes from his first exhortation, Dilexi te, with an even more direct challenge:

"God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord's words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ's Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the poor have a privileged place" (#21).

Do the poor have a privileged place in our parishes, in our schools, in our charitable organisations? That is a question for each community to consider honestly at the time of the tenth World Day of the Poor. It requires prayerful listening – in the synodal style, conversations in the Spirit – where the voices in the community, especially the voices of those on the margins and who experience various types of poverty, are heard and what the Spirit is saying to the community is discerned.

The synodal style can be combined with the **See-Judge-Act method**, enshrined in the teaching of the Church by Pope John XXIII in Mater et Magistra, whereby we 'see' as fully and as compassionately as we can what is going on in our communities, trying to be aware of how we see, how our own filters might be working to cloud our judgements with prejudice; then we judge, or discern, what the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching is telling us about what we see. Where is the hope, where is the scandal: what is of God and not of God? Then we are called to act – to do justice and, to challenge the structural causes of the poverty we see. We can do this with the resources we have, while working in partnership if needs be with men and women of goodwill from those from other faiths and none who share the same desire to build a more just and compassionate world.

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, this is a separate devotional exercise. It can be said individually or in school or parish groups. If possible, when not try and say the novena prayers at 12.05 pm each day, just after the Angelus?

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.

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 1 - Friday 6 November

For those who experience mental anguish

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

Antiphon - Psalm 23

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.

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.



Day 1

Scripture reading - Luke 22: 41-43

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.

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.

Day 1

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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 2 - Saturday 7 November

For those who experience homelessness

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

Antiphon - Luke 1: 50-53

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.



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.

Day 2

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.

Day 2

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We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 3 - Sunday 8 November

For those who experience isolation
and vulnerability in later life

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

Antiphon - Psalm 68
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.

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 - Mark 12: 38-40
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.



Day 3

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 and, they are the centre of their world.

We pray for those in our community who are exploited in vulnerable later life, by those in authority, by landlords, by corporate interests. May we be attentive to the needs of older people in our community and seek to understand the ways in which they are sometimes reduced to poverty and insecurity. May we campaign for better palliative care provision and better social care, so that the twilight of life can be a time of tranquility and dignity.

Day 3

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We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen

“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*

“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 anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”
Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, born on 8 November 1897, in New York

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 4 - Monday 9 November

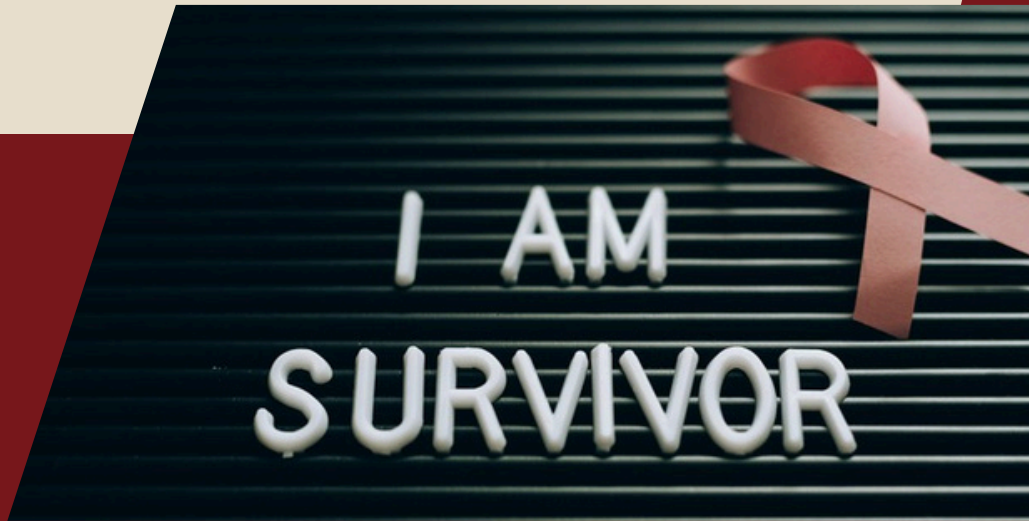
For survivors of abuse and violence
(Dedication of the Lateran Basilica)

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

Antiphon - Psalm 34
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.

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 - Luke 10: 36-37
“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’.”



Day 4

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 survivors of abuse or violence, whose lives are diminished by the pain inflicted by others, and for those who are disproportionately targeted due to gender, race or other identity. 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 living with its impact in their lives.

Day 4

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

“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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 5 - Tuesday 10 November

For those who experience imprisonment

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

Antiphon - Psalm 145

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.

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.



Day 5

Scripture reading - Matthew 27: 1-2
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.

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: www.welcomedirectory.org.uk

Day 5

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We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 6 - Wednesday 11 November

For those who experience material poverty
(Feast of St Martin of Tours)

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

Antiphon - Psalm 82
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.

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 - Luke 16: 19-22
“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.”



Day 6

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 someone begging for money 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 made 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.

Day 6

Loving Father
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of all who are trapped
in oppressive circumstances.
We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

“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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 7 - Thursday 12 November

For those who experience poverty due to their immigration status

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

Antiphon - Psalm 31

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.

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 - Leviticus 19: 33-34

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.



Day 7

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 the courage to confront rhetoric that stokes hatred, and policies that drive those who have come to the UK seeking peace into poverty. We pray for the children of parents who have migrated to the UK, who make up 40% of all children living in poverty, and for the ongoing proposals to extend settlement routes which will deepen this inequality.

Day 7

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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

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 8 - Friday 13 November

For young people who experience unemployment

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

Antiphon - Isaiah 40: 3-5
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.

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.



Day 8

Scripture reading - Matthew 20: 1-16

“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Cal the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first’.”

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 the UK, there are close to one million 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training, who have so far been denied a pathway to a fulfilling life and vocation. We know that poverty and disadvantage can impede the development of children. We also know that a lower rate of Universal Credit for young people is a further injustice, which reduces their chances of breaking the cycles of poverty and unemployment. Let us pray that our Catholic communities will be moved to use their resources – their time, talents, their empty church properties – to support our young people.

Day 8

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We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen

“Every young person is worth more than all the gold in the world.”

Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, born on 13 November 1882, in Belgium

Novena for World Day of the Poor

Day 9 - Saturday 14 November

That we all may be committed to building the kingdom of justice, love and peace

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

Antiphon - Isaiah 58: 6-7
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?

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.



Day 9

Scripture reading - Matthew 20: 1-16
He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,"

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.

Day 9

When Jesus announced that the ancient promises of liberty to captives and freedom for the oppressed were being fulfilled “today” by his presence as the incarnate God, and when he then went on to give examples of faith from the Gentiles, there was outrage in his community. They wanted to kill him. This was Joseph’s son, the carpenter. They could not cope with his new identity as a prophet, or his message of expanding the promises of God to all people.

We pray that the Spirit of God will come upon us and inspire us to renew the face of the earth, to build a world that God wills, not a world marred by our greed and desire to dominate others and to protect identities which depend on the exclusion of others. May we examine our hearts, be honest about what we treasure, and commit ourselves to lifestyles which allow for a greater sharing of the goods of the earth. May we see the world with the eyes of our compassionate God and work in solidarity with our brothers and sisters for the flourishing of all.

Day 9

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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

“A church that does not join the poor, in order to speak out from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them, is not the true church of Jesus Christ.”
St Oscar Romero, patron saint of CSAN and one of the patron saints of Caritas Internationalis

Questions for World Day of the Poor

What is poverty?



A useful question for any community to keep coming back to, before they consider what poverty looks like in their place, is to ask the prior question, what is poverty? To help our work, Pope Leo XIV provided an extended reflection in Dilexi te. First of all, he provides the scriptural and theological insight that, “on the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself” (#9).

He defines poverty as a “multifaceted phenomenon…with many forms: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalised and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom” (#9).

Who is poor?

Specifically, who are the people in our communities who experience the various types of poverty described by Pope Leo? In the section below, we provide some suggestions about how any group can approach the process of seeing-discerning-acting with those people who experience poverty.

How do we speak of those who experience poverty?

In the Church, it is usual to speak of “the poor”. Indeed, this is the phrase which we hear in Scripture. This in itself does not mean that this is the phrase we must use all the time ourselves. To English speakers today, using “the poor” can risk reducing persons to a collective, at a remove from us. At CSAN, we promote a “people-first” policy, so that we would refer, for example, to “people who experience homelessness”, rather than “the homeless.” This simple step can form part of an educational approach which sees every person as a child of God, with an inherent dignity, and not as part of an unfortunate group.



How do we promote and include the voices of people who experience poverty?

In the past, there was tendency to consider what was best for “the poor” without involving them in that decision-making. In recent times, with a new emphasis on the dignity of the human person and a preferential option for those who are poor, there is much more consideration given to hearing the voices of those who experience poverty and involving them in approaches to how they could experience more agency and a more fulfilled life. Pope Leo, quoting Pope Francis, sets this out clearly in Dilexi te:

“Popular movements, in fact, invite us to overcome ‘the idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a project which can bring people back together.’ If politicians and professionals do not listen to them, ‘democracy atrophies, turns into a slogan, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future.’ The same must be said of the institutions of the Church.” (#81)

How do we challenge the structural causes of poverty?

Another shift in the Church’s approach in recent years has been from compassion in the face of human suffering, to compassion with a determination to challenge and change the structural causes of that suffering. In Dilexi te, Pope Leo puts this very directly and succinctly: “We need to be increasingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty” (#94). This shift can seem quite daunting for the Catholic community, but there are some manageable steps to take with any system, or institution, by placing the human being at the centre and asking how their dignity – especially the dignity of the most marginalised – is promoted or undermined by how the system operates, how it treats people, how resources are allocated.

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.

Cathechism 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.

See-Judge-Act

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).

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 who we’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.

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? Or rather, how will we know if our actions have built up the kingdom of God in the ways we had hoped? 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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