

Living Lent through Service to Others

Our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church.

(Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Century of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1990)

The Scripture readings for each day of Lent remind us of our responsibility to work for justice and serve those in need. Here are a variety of ideas that your family can use to make Lent a special time to “work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers.”

Grow in Awareness of Justice

What can we do together as members of a family to increase awareness of justice issues and the ways to work for justice?

- ▶ Volunteer to work with other families to sponsor a program on a justice issue.
- ▶ Participate in a special speaker night on an important justice issue and at the entire parish.
- ▶ Eat for a week on a Food Stamps Budget. Plan your meal menu a week or month in advance as a family, then shop together for the food you need. Keep your meal budget to \$1.65 or less per person per day—the financial allotment provided to

families that receive U.S. Government food stamps. As you eat your simple meals, (and refrain from eating sneaky snacks on the side) think about and pray for those for whom this exercise is an ongoing necessity. Let the activity flow naturally into a discussion of the extent and causes of poverty locally and in the country.

- ▶ Collect “information nuggets” that family members find on various justice and service topics. A sample “nugget” could look like this:

DID YOU KNOW?: Every day in the United States, one in four children under 12 run short of food; most at risk are families headed by women with incomes less than 75% of the federal poverty level (Food Research and Action Center). Talk about ways your family can help.

- ▶ Participate in a movie night for families, or the entire parish, focusing on a “values video” or a justice-oriented theme.
- ▶ Participate in a school or parish-wide hunger awareness week (or another important justice issue) sponsored by your community.

Make Lifestyle Choices

What can we do together as members of a family to model a lifestyle of concern and solidarity with those whose basic human needs and rights are denied?

- ▶ Use your family purchasing power to support organizations and businesses who demonstrate social concern in your community, the United States, and the

world; and let them know why you are supporting them. Boycott companies whose business practices are unjust or who otherwise take advantage of the poor (e.g., pay workers wages that cannot sustain people's basic needs). Let companies know you are taking part in the boycott and why.

- ▶ Become more aware of how your town, state and country develop their annual fiscal budget. Monitor town, state and federal budget proposals, attentive to how they impact the poor locally, nationally and internationally. Let your elected representatives know where you stand on budget issues and hold them accountable for their voting patterns.

Serve Those in Need

How can we get involved as members of a family in programs which directly assist those whose basic human needs are unmet and unfulfilled?

- ▶ Participate in a service project for families or the entire parish to work in an organization that is directly meeting the needs of the poor through direct service, such as a local homeless shelter, clothing shop, soup kitchen or food pantry, or a group rehabilitating or building homes for low-income families (e.g., Habitat for Humanity).
- ▶ Participate in a service project for families or the entire parish to work with a local agency or organization that is working to change the situations that keep injustice alive and people in need, such as groups working to provide low income housing, employment opportunities, etc.
- ▶ Ask your parish for a listing of local service opportunities featuring practical ways that people can be involved as families or neighborhood groups.
- ▶ Participate in a paint-a-thon with other churches to help elderly families or low-income families, while raising money for

projects to help people locally and in the developing world.

- ▶ Work with local supermarkets to cosponsor a one-day food drive, turning over a percentage of the day's sales to local soup kitchens.
- ▶ Organize a parish/neighborhood food drive.
- ▶ Form a baby-sitting service to allow low-income mothers to look for jobs or go to school.
- ▶ Provide financial support to relief groups that work directly with the poor locally and globally, such as:

CARE, 660 First Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Heifer Project International, P.O. Box 808, Little Rock, AR 72203

Catholic Relief Services, 209 West Fayette Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-3403

Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, PA 17501

- ▶ Participate in a hunger walk or overnight fast program to raise funds to combat hunger. Information on hunger walks is available from CROP, *Church World Service*, P.O. Box 968, Elkhardt, IN 46515.

Be an Advocate for Justice

How we can get involved as members of a family to speak out against injustice and on behalf of those whose human needs and rights are abused or denied?

- ▶ Become familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people's basic needs and address justice issues. Visit, call, fax or write to your town, state and/or national representatives (U.S. senators and representatives) with your concern about a specific bill or proposal. Letters written by, or on behalf of, groups are more likely to get an immediate response. Contact the following organizations for information

about important legislation affecting basic needs:

NETWORK – A Catholic Social Justice Lobby, 806 Rhode Island Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20018
Children's Defense Fund, 122 "C" Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

- ▶ Write a "Letter to the Editor" of your local newspaper or school paper expressing your concern about the situation of those who suffer from injustice. A letter written in response to a particular news item or story is most effective. Letters written by, or on behalf of, groups are more likely to be printed.
- ▶ Organize a parish or school program and invite your elected representatives or candidates for public office to speak on the issue of government spending for the poor; for children, youth, and families, for alternatives to welfare, etc.
- ▶ Write letters to advocate for human rights around the world through *Amnesty International*.

Amnesty International USA, Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10001

Participate in a Service/Work Camp Experience

How can we get involved as members of a family with immersion or work camp experiences?

- ▶ Take part in a summer or vacation (Christmas or spring break) work camp experience sponsored by a local or national group. For information on immersion and work camp opportunities, check with your parish. One example of a national program is *Habit for Humanity*. Contact them at 121 Habitat Street, Americus, GA 31709-3498 (912-924-6935).

Support Social Change Groups

How can we get involved as members of a family to support organizations working to change policies that deny people their basic human needs, and organizations offering programs to help people meet their basic human needs?

- ▶ Create your own family "Gift Giving Guide" with suggestions (time, money, materials) on how your family can support local, regional and national organizations that work to change the situations that keep injustice alive and people in need.
- ▶ Support the *Campaign for Human Development*, one of the Catholic Church's efforts to support self-empowerment and self-employment projects by low-income groups both locally and regionally. Check with your local *CHD* to see what projects they are funding locally, then support them with your time and money.

Campaign for Human Development, United States Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194

