

Deserving & Undeserving Poor

The Issue: Poverty in USA

Poverty is “the extend to which an individual does without resources”. Resources are the following: financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, role models, knowledge of hidden rules. (*Ruby Payne, A framework for understanding poverty, 2005*)

Key points to remember:

- Poverty is relative
- Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries
- Generational and situational poverty are different
- Poverty is not always visible

Who are the poor in the US?

% of people below poverty line in 2006-08 (defined for a family of 4 with 2 children as \$21,756/year in 2009) (www.census.gov)

	US	TX	Brazos	Bryan	CS
All	13.2	16.3	27.9	26	34.6
Families	9.6	12.8	18.3	19.2	14.2
Single moms	28.2	32.7	38.5	40	39.9
Children	10.2	22.8	23	32.6	14.7

Brazos has a rate of over 20% of poverty since 1960!

	% population	Texas ranking
Below poverty line	16.3	6
Uninsured	24.9	1
Over 65 in poverty	12.3	10
Children in poverty	22.8	9

In their words:

“It feels like you’re looked down on, regardless of the reason for poverty.”

“Being poor in America means working till you hurt and always coming up short.”

“It’s being scared and afraid not knowing what tomorrow will be like.”

“To depend on other people to feed and clothe your kids is horrible.”

- 8% of children live in extreme poverty (*National Center for Children in Poverty*)
- 84% low-income families have at least one working family member. (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2007*)
- In most areas, a family of four needs to earn twice the poverty line to provide children with basic necessities. (*National Center for Children in Poverty*)

What are the causes of poverty in the US?

There are a wide variety of reasons keeping people in poverty in the US. Often individuals or families may experience several of them. The list below gives some of the most common causes:

low wages, health problems, no job opportunities, lack of skills, no public transportation, no safety net, cost of child care, low education, substance abuse, bad luck, bad choices, dysfunctional family, absent parent, lack of affordable housing, natural disaster, discrimination, criminal background, lack of role-model

The story of Crystal: Crystal, a 30-year-old mother, has been on food stamps for more than three years. She sometimes skips meals so her three children can eat. She has been out of work for several years because all three of her children have medical conditions. Without much money, she's forced to make tough choices: if the kids need sneakers because theirs are too small, she has to choose between buying food and paying her gas bill to heat her home. She chooses buying food for the kids and then, the family has to sleep huddled around their stove or an electric heater when the gas is turn off.

Why do we care?

Poverty affects all of us: many Americans may experience temporary poverty because of the lost of a job, divorce or death of the main bread winner in the family; many services are affected and as users we are affected, etc....

Poverty can be reduced:

from 1959 to 1973, when most social services like Welfare and Foods Stamps were instituted, the poverty rate fell from 22.4% to 11.3% and again from 1993 to 2000 the poverty rate went from 15.1% to 11.3%.

What our Faith tells us

In the Bible: Mark 12:28-31, John 13:34-35, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 25:31-46

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25: 34-40)

7 Key themes of Catholic Social Teaching

1. *Life and Dignity of the Human Person*

2. *Call to Family, Community, and Participation*

3. *Rights and Responsibilities:*

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

4. *Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:*

“Solidarity helps us to see the "other" - whether a person, people or nation - not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our "neighbor," a "helper" (cf. Gen 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.....One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit.” (*On Social Concern, John Paul II, 1987*)

“Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice..... It is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption.” (*Centesimus Annus, John Paul II, 1991*)

5. *The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:*

“The modern business economy has positive aspects.... However, the fact is that many people, perhaps the majority today, do not have the means which would enable them to take their place in an effective and humanly dignified way within a productive system in which work is truly central. They have no possibility of acquiring the basic knowledge which would enable them to express their creativity and develop their potential..... Thus, if not actually exploited, they are to a great extent marginalized.... Aspects typical of the Third World also appear in developed countries, where the constant transformation of the methods of production and consumption devalues certain acquired skills and professional expertise.... Those who fail to keep up with the times can easily be marginalized, as can the elderly, the young people who are incapable of finding their place in the life of society and, in general, those who are weakest.” (*Centesimus Annus, John Paul II, 1991*)

6. *Solidarity*

7. *Care for God's Creation*

References for further reading

Websites:

- www.povertyusa.org
www.americanpoverty.org
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org and click on "Poverty campaign"
www.ahaprocess.com/ (by Ruby Payne about understanding poverty in the US)

Book:

"Nickel and Dimed" – On (Not) Getting By in America, Barbara Ehrenreich, 2001

What can You do

PRAY regularly for greater justice and peace

LEARN more about Catholic social teaching and the call to stand with the poor, and issues impacting people living in poverty in the US, in Texas and in our community

REACH across boundaries of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and disabling conditions.

LIVE justly in family life, school, work, the marketplace, and the political arena.

SERVE those who are poor and vulnerable, sharing more time and talent.

GIVE more generously to those in need at home and abroad.

ADVOCATE for public policies helping people to live out of poverty (i.e., join Bread for the World at www.bread.org)

ENCOURAGE others to work for greater charity, justice, and peace.

Prayers

Prayer For Those in Poverty (from *Education for Justice*)

God of justice and compassion,

We ask forgiveness for the widening gulf between rich and poor,

For the use of money as a measure of all things,

For the culture of self-gratification,

For the continuing disparities between those that have so much and those who have so little,

And for the suffering of those people who are excluded from the table of abundance.

Forgive us for our focus on material goods,

And our part in the worship of economic growth

In a world where resources are limited

and where we are already using more than our fair share.

Forgive us for going along with what is easy,

For failing to come to grips with the problems of change

And to engage in the complexity of social issues.

Fill us with a living faith that we may become lively seeds of your kingdom,

Continually growing in your way of love,

Instruments of personal and social reconciliation,

Vehicles for a new dawn when those in poverty
Are welcomed to the table where compassion and justice meet.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Prayer for the Work Against Poverty (*from Education for Justice*)

Christ, who showed great compassion to the poor,
give us compassion toward those in poverty.
Your wish is for all of your children to live with dignity,
with adequate food, shelter, health care and education.
Help us take up your work as a community of faith
and guide us as we seek just solutions to the poverty in our midst.
Amen.

Local volunteer opportunities to serve people in need

St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store: 300 N. Main in Bryan, 979-823-4369. Volunteers are needed to sort and price donations.

St. Vincent de Paul Society Conference: svdpvolunteers@verizon.net. Volunteers are needed to do home visits or help at the food pantry.

Good Samaritan Gabriel Life Center: 1314 E 29th St. in Bryan, 979 -822-9340.
Volunteers are needed to sort and organize donations, for administrative tasks and watch children while their parents attend classes.

Twin City Mission: 2505 S. College Ave. in Bryan, volunteer@twincitymission.org.
Volunteers are needed at the soup kitchen.

Habitat for Humanity: 119 Lake St. in Bryan, 979-823-7200, volunteer@habitatbcs.org.
Volunteers are needed on the construction site, at the Habitat ReStore, in the office and as Spanish translators.