

Who are Our Neighbors?

During the next year, The Office Of Peace and Justice is placing emphasis on learning more about our “neighbor,” particularly those suffering in poverty, through a curriculum entitled “Who are Our Neighbors?”

Each month will offer an opportunity to discover something new about people in our world– our neighbors. The first half of the year will emphasize people living in the United States. The second half of the year we will explore our international neighbors.

Each month the includes:

- A topic objective
- An opportunity to meet a real “neighbor” through a vignette or statistics
 - Background information on the topic
- How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic
 - Questions for reflection
- Resources for response and action
 - A closing prayer



August: Who is My Neighbor?
Exploring all types of people and exploring solidarity

September: What work does my neighbor do?
Exploring the challenges and choices of those in our country who struggle to make ends meet

October: Where does my neighbor come from?
Exploring immigration and the plight of the immigrant

November: Where does my neighbor live?
Exploring the struggle of locating affordable housing which is adequate, healthy, and safe

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Luke 10:2

All people are sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. People do not lose dignity because of disability, poverty, age, lack of success or race. This emphasizes people over things, being over having.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching,
U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

December: Does my neighbor have children?
Exploring the statistics and hearing stories of children who live at or below the poverty line

January: Do I respect the life and dignity of my neighbor?
Exploring how my lifestyle affects my neighbor. Does it enhance my neighbor's dignity of life?

April: How do my neighbors suffer as a result of strife and war?
Exploring global humanitarian issues

May: How can I help my neighbor?
Exploring how we can advocate for our neighbors both domestically and globally

Look for more information on the Peace and Justice web page at www.dioceseofraleigh.org

Or contact Catholic Charities Diocese of Raleigh Office of Peace & Justice 919/821/9751 jurski@raldioc.org www.dioceseofraleigh.org

February: How does my neighbor stay healthy?
Exploring the challenge to attain and maintain health.

March: Where in the world is my neighbor?
Exploring parts of the world where my neighbor is struggling

Who are Our Neighbors Series

August: *Who is My Neighbor?*

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective:

We will meet some people in need, learn about their struggles, and discover what our Catholic faith tells us about our responsibility to help people in need- even people we have never met or seen.

Let’s meet two neighbors:

An American Neighbor:

(Summarized from Just Neighbors Curriculum by Family Promise):

Ralph and Gledy Armas share a cramped apartment with their 2 sons in California. The family has one room in which to cook, eat, study, watch t.v., and sleep. The boys have beds and the parents sleep on the floor. Ralph has a steady job at a security firm, where he has worked his way up to a dispatcher position. He brings home \$300 a week. His wages haven’t kept pace with the skyrocketing rents, yet the family makes too much to qualify for the state-run medical program. His company offers insurance but the cost is too high. Gledy has been doing minimum wage retail work, but the transportation and child care costs were cost prohibitive. She has decided to get a college degree, made possible by a generous financial aid package. Now she works part time while going to school and hopes that this will mean a brighter future for her family.

A Global Neighbor:

(Summarized from Bread for the World website- www.bread.org)

My name is Mwenzi. I am from Zambia, which is slightly larger than Texas. The life expectancy in my country is 40 years, and the HIV/AIDS prevalence is 16.5%. There is a high risk of infectious diseases, such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, malaria, and the plague. Neither of my parents can find a job, although both want to work. The unemployment rate here is 50%, and the poverty rate is 86%.

Four out of five people over the age of 15 can read and write. Zambia received \$640.6 million in development aid in 2002. Our telephone facilities are aging, but are among the best in Sub Saharan Africa. Internet service is widely available, although few people have computers.

Background information on the topic:

Source information: povertyusa.org and bread.org.

- Just over 12% of Americans live in poverty (that is 1 in 8).
- 1 in 6 children in the United States lives in poverty.
- In 2006, the “poverty line” for a family of four was \$20, 614. (as determined by the government.)
- In the south the percentage of families living in poverty is nearly 14%.
- 60% of the world population lives in a low income or “developing” country.
- In developing countries, people spend more than 80% of their income on food. This number is rising as food prices increase.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

“If there is among you anyone in need, a member of the community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you do not be hard hearted or tight fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need whatever it may be.”

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Luke 10:2

As Catholics, we must come together with a common conviction that we can no longer tolerate the moral scandal of poverty in our land and so much hunger and deprivation in our world.

The principle of solidarity reminds us that as members of one human family, we see every "other" as our neighbor, who must share in the "banquet of life to which all area equally invited by God."

In the Catholic tradition, concern for the poor is advanced by individual and common action, works of charity, efforts to achieve a more just social order, the practice of virtue, and the pursuit of justice in our own lives. It requires action to confront structures of injustice that leave people poor.

Our Church's commitment to find a place at the table for all God's children is expressed in every part of our country and in the poorest places on earth...Our faith gives us the strength, identity, and principles we need to sustain this work.

The table we seek for all rests on these four institutions, or legs: (1) what families and individuals can do, (2) what community and religious institutions can do, (3) what the private sector can do, and (4) what the government can do to work together to overcome poverty.

Excerpts from “A Place at the Table,” USCCB, 2002.

A consistent theme of Catholic social teaching is the option or love of preference for the poor. Today, this preference has to be expressed in worldwide dimensions, embracing the immense numbers of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and those without hope.

[Sollicitudo Rei Socialis \(On Social Concern\)](#), Pope John Paul II, 1987

Questions for Reflection

- In speaking to Mwenzi or Ralph and Gledy what would you say to them?
- What does our faith have to do with learning about persons in these situations?
- Can you share an experience when you responded to a person or persons who was different for you in some way?

Resources for Response and Action

- Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website: http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org
- Catholic Relief Services website: crs.org
- Bread for the World website: bread.org
- Catholic Campaign for Human Development Website: povertyusa.org

Possible Action

- Visit one of the above websites to learn more.
- Visit a food pantry.
- Investigate what your local parish is doing for our “neighbors” both locally and globally.
- Find a poverty group and support their needs.
- Find an opportunity to meet a “neighbor” who is in need.
- Think about how you spent your money last week.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

“Praying and expecting everything to come from God and not doing anything yourself is not praying. This is laziness; this is alienation. This is passivity, conformity. This is not the time, dear brothers and sisters, to say: It is God’s will. Many things happen that are not God’s will. When people can contribute something of themselves to improve the situation and ask God for the courage to do so, then there is prayer.”

Oscar Romero, 1979, El Salvador

We dare to imagine a world where hunger has no chance to show its face.
We dare to dream of a world where war and terror are afraid to leave their mark.
We long to believe in a world of hope unchained and lives unfettered.
We dare to share in the creation of a world where your people break free.
Dare we open our minds to difference?
Dare we open our lives to change?
Your kingdom come, O God.
Your will be done.
Amen.”

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, U.K.

Who are Our Neighbors Series

September: What Work Does My Neighbor Do?

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: We will identify some struggles of low wage workers and think about some strategies to assist these families attain economic stability.

Let’s meet two neighbors:

(Summarized from case studies in the Just Neighbors Curriculum by Family Promise)

The Doyle Family

Wes and Sharon Doyle live with their sons in a 3 bedroom home. Wes worked on a custodial staff at a government contracted facility. Recently the services were outsourced. Wes was re-hired by the outsourced contractor for less money and smaller benefits and retirement funds. He now works weekends and overtime to make up the difference. Under the new health insurance plan, Wes pays several hundred dollars a month extra to cover his family. Sharon worked in customer service for a credit card company until 2 years ago when her company moved to another state. She opted for early retirement and now works part-time at a local day care for \$6.55/hour. One of their sons is enrolled in a university and another at a community college. They are both commuting to school and working part time to pay tuition. Wes and Sharon are pursuing other jobs and are finding it difficult at their ages. They have recently had to dip into their savings for the first time and are concerned about their retirement.

The Johnson Family

Tanya Johnson is a 38 year old single mother with 2 teenage daughters. She held steady employment until the birth of her children, but has struggled since their birth balancing parenting and the demands of a job. She was on welfare for awhile. More recently she found a job at the office of a local contractor thanks to the help of a government sponsored job placement program. She brings home less than \$875/month before taxes. Her rent is subsidized at \$275. She and her children qualify for subsidized health coverage. Tanya’s oldest daughter is strong academically and is applying for college and scholarships. Her younger daughter is hanging out with the wrong crowd and Tanya often misses work for meetings with teachers and counselors. She feels that this is keeping her from attaining full time employment. In addition, Tanya feels that her lack of computer skills is an issue for her boss. She is considering taking a class 3 nights a week to get her GED and some computer skills training- but bus fair will cost her an additional \$100/month.

You can also read about the Armas’ who we met in the August lesson.

Background information on the topic:

(Summarized from Just Neighbors Curriculum by Family Promise)

Workers at every level have been affected by these trends:

- Businesses shifting production overseas
- Companies merging and downsizing
- Companies acquiring new technologies, causing employees to need to update skills
- Employee mobility in job market

(Background Information Continued)

Today's low-wage jobs:

- Are often temporary or part-time
- Are nearly all in service sector
- Pay less than manufacturing jobs which were mainstay of working families until the 1980's.
- Rarely offer retirement or health benefits

Statistics

- Current minimum wage is \$6.55/hour effective July 24, 2008.
- A full-time worker would have to earn \$9.90/hour to *reach* the poverty line for a family of four.
- One job in 4 in the United States pays less than \$9.90/hour.
- So, a minimum wage worker would have to work 68 hours a week to *reach* the poverty line for a family of four.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

“You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them”

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

Remuneration for work should guarantee people the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for themselves and for their families, on the material social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each worker, the state of business, and the common good.

Gaudium et Spes (Church in the Modern World), 1965

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is an expression of our dignity and a form of continuing participation in God's creation. All work is essential and equally valued. If the dignity of the work and the worker are to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. The economy exists to serve the common good of all people. The work is for the worker and not the other way around.

Catholic Social Teaching, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

See our Catholic Social Teaching webpage for more quotes on The Dignity and Rights of Workers. http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/social_teaching.aspx

Questions for Reflection

- What are the employment related problems that these families are facing? What employment issues are families facing in your community?
- What would help these families immediately?
- What would help these families in the long run?

Resources for Response and Action

- Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website: http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org
- Catholic Campaign for Human Development Website: povertyusa.org
- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting our working “neighbors.”

Possible Action

Visit one of the above websites to learn more.

- Investigate what your local parish is doing for our working “neighbors” locally. Does your parish have a job support program?
- Join a mentoring program.
- Find an opportunity to meet a “neighbor” who is struggling to make ends meet.
- Find out if your state has implemented the Earned Income Tax credit and contact your State Legislator, Senator, Representative or Governor.
- Investigate the concept of “living wage” and how poverty is measured in your state and our country.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Christ, Our Redeemer,
Show us the way to express dignity in all our work.
Empower your faithful to cry out for justice for all who strive to build up your creation.
May the misery of the lowly be lifted,
And our communities be reconciled to fulfill your law.
As the Good Shepherd, you served in humility
Call us in integrity to do the same,
Amen.

Creator God,
thank you for the gift of work
and the ability to participate with you
in bringing forth your Kingdom.
Provide our community and world
with the work needed to sustain
life and to create peoples
who reach out to one
another in service.
Keep us faithful on our journey
toward the dignity of work
for all our global family.
Inspire us to follow Jesus
more closely.
Amen.

(Christ the Good Shepherd Catholic Community Website, Spring, TX- http://www.cgscdogh.org/social_ministry.htm)

Who are Our Neighbors Series

October: Where does my neighbor come from? Exploring immigration...

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: To identify myths surrounding immigration, different types of immigrants, the issues they face and what our church calls us to do.

What misunderstandings do you have about the immigrant?

IMMIGRANTS DON'T WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH

FALSE

The development of English proficiency among non-English speaking immigrants today mirrors that of Nineteenth and early Twentieth century immigration, when masses of Italian, German, and Eastern European immigrants came to America. While first generation, non-English speaking immigrants predictably have lower rates of English proficiency than native speakers, 91% of second generation immigrants are fluent or near fluent English speakers. By the third generation, 97% speak English fluently or near fluently.

(Source: Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, “English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States,” Pew Hispanic Forum, Dec. 6, 2007. <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=82>; Janet Murguia and Cecilia Muñoz, “From Immigrant to Citizen,” *The American Prospect* (Oct. 23, 2005), <http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=10487>)

IMMIGRANTS DON'T PAY TAXES

FALSE

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Between one half and three quarters of undocumented immigrants pay state and federal taxes. They also contribute to Medicare and provide as much as 7 billion dollars a year to the Social Security Fund. Further still, undocumented workers pay sales taxes where applicable and property taxes—directly if they own and indirectly if they rent.

(Source: Immigration Policy Center, “Undocumented Immigrants as Taxpayers,” (November 2007), <http://www.aif.org/ipc/factchecks/UndocumentedasTaxpayer.pdf>; Eduardo Porter “Illegal Immigrants are Bolstering Social Security with Billions,” *New York Times*, (April 5, 2005), <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/05/business/05immigration.html?ex=1270353600&en=78c87ac4641dc383&ei=5090&partner=kmarx>)

IMMIGRANTS INCREASE THE CRIME RATE

FALSE

Recent research has shown that immigrant communities do not increase the crime rate and that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native born Americans. While the undocumented immigrant population doubled from 1994 to 2005, violent crime dropped by 34% and property crimes decreased by 32%. Furthermore, Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson has found that first generation immigrants are 45% less likely to commit violent crimes than Americanized, third generation immigrants.

(Source: Immigration Policy Center, “Immigrants and Crime: Are They Connected,” December, 2007, <http://www.aif.org/ipc/factchecks/CrimeFactCheck10-16-07.pdf>; Robert Sampson, “Open Doors Don't Invite Criminals,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2006, A15; Executive Office of the President: Council of Economic Advisors, “Immigration's Economic Impact,” June 20, 2007, http://www.whitehouse.gov/cea/cea_immigration_062007.html)

IMMIGRANTS TAKE JOBS AWAY FROM AMERICANS

FALSE

A recent study produced by the Pew Hispanic Center reveals that “Rapid increases in the foreign-born population at the state level are not associated with negative effects on the employment of native-born workers.” In fact, given that the number of native born low wage earners is falling nationally, immigrants are playing an important role in offsetting that decline. The Urban Institute reports that between 2000 and 2005 the total number of low wage workers declined by approximately 1.8 million while the number of unskilled immigrant workers increased by 620,000, thus offsetting the total decline by about a third.

(Source: The Urban Institute, “Trends in the Low-Wage Immigrant Labor Force, 2000-2005,” March, 2007, <http://www.urban.org/publications/411426.html>; Rakesh Kochhar, “Growth in the Foreign Born Workforce and Employment of the Native Born,” Pew Hispanic Center, August 10, 2006, <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.phpReportID=69>)

IMMIGRANTS ARE A DRAIN ON THE UNITED STATES ECONOMY

FALSE

The immigrant community is not a drain on the U.S. economy but, in fact, proves to be a net benefit. Research reported by both the CATO Institute and the President's Council of Economic Advisors reveals that the average immigrant pays a net 80,000 dollars more in taxes than they collect in government services. For immigrants with college degrees the net fiscal return is \$198,000. Furthermore, The American Farm Bureau asserts that without guest workers the U.S. economy would lose as much as \$9 billion a year in agricultural production and 20 percent of current production would go overseas.

(Source: CATO Institute, *CATO Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress*, <http://www.cato.org/pubs/handbook/hb108/hb108-63.pdf>; Executive Office of the President: Council of Economic Advisors, "Immigration's Economic Impact," June 20, 2007, http://www.whitehouse.gov/cea/cea_immigration_062007.html; Derrick Z. Jackson, "Undocumented Workers Contribute Plenty," *The Boston Globe*, April 12, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2006/04/12/undocumented_workers_contribute_plenty/)

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ARE A BURDEN ON THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

FALSE

Federal, state and local governments spend approximately 1.1 billion dollars annually on healthcare costs for undocumented immigrants, aged 18-64, or approximately \$11 in taxes for each U.S. household. This compares to 88 billion dollars spent on all health care for non-elderly adults in the U.S. in 2000. Foreign born individuals tend to use fewer health care services because they are relatively healthier than their native born counterparts. For example, in Los Angeles County, "total medical spending on undocumented immigrants was \$887 million in 2000 – 6 percent of total costs, although undocumented immigrants comprise 12 percent of the region's residents."

(Source: The Rand Corporation, "RAND Study Shows Relatively Little Public Money Spent Providing Healthcare to Undocumented Immigrants," November 14, 2006, <http://www.rand.org/news/press.06/11.14.html>; Dana P. Goldman, James P. Smith and Neeraj Sood, "Immigrants and the Cost of Medical Care," *Health Affairs* 25, no. 6 (2006): 1700-1711)

Background information on the topic:

(information found below is from the USCCB site www.justiceforimmigrants.org)

Who Is an Immigrant?

According to U.S. law, an immigrant is a foreign-born individual who has been admitted to reside permanently in the United States as a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR).

How Do Immigrants Get Admitted to Permanently Reside Here?

Typically, a foreign-born individual seeking to become an LPR can do so in one of three ways:

- Through **family-sponsored immigration**, a U.S. citizen can sponsor his or her foreign-born spouse, parent (if the sponsor is over the age of 21), minor and adult married and unmarried children, and brothers and sisters. A Lawful Permanent Resident can sponsor his or her spouse, minor children, and adult unmarried children. Our immigration system divides the family members eligible for sponsorship into two tiers. *Immediate relatives* of U.S. citizens—that is, spouses, unmarried minor children and parents, but not brothers and sisters or unmarried and married adult children—are admitted as their applications are processed.
- Through **employment-based immigration**, a U.S. employer can sponsor an individual for a specific position where there is a demonstrated absence of U.S. workers.

By winning one of a limited number of immigrant visas available in the annual **diversity visa lottery** that is open to immigrants from certain countries.

Who Is a Refugee?

A refugee is a person *outside* of the United States who seeks protection on the grounds that he or she fears persecution in his or her homeland. To obtain refugee status, a person must prove that he or she has a "wellfounded fear of persecution" on the basis of at least one of five specifically-enumerated and internationally recognized grounds. Those grounds include the person's *race, religion, membership in a social group, political opinion, or national origin*. A person who has *already entered* the United States, and who fears persecution if sent back to his or her country, may apply for asylum here. Once granted asylum, the person is called an "asylee." Like a refugee, an asylum applicant must also prove that he or she has a "well-founded fear of persecution" based on the same enumerated grounds. Both refugees and asylees may apply to become LPRs after one year.

Who Is an Undocumented Immigrant?

An undocumented immigrant is a person who is present in the United States without the permission of the U.S. government. Undocumented immigrants enter the U.S. either illegally, without being inspected by an immigration officer, or by using false documents, or legally, with a temporary visa, and then remain in the U.S. beyond the expiration date of the visa.

Who Is a Non-immigrant?

A non-immigrant is an individual who is permitted to enter the U.S. for a period of limited duration. Nonimmigrants include: students, tourists, temporary workers, business executives, diplomats, artists and entertainers, and reporters. Depending on where they are from and the purpose of their visit, non-immigrants may be required to apply for and obtain a visa from the U.S. government. The application process entails an interview with a U.S. consular official in the nearest U.S. consulate, who has the sole authority to grant or deny a visa. Even if granted, the visa is merely a travel document. All non-immigrants—regardless of whether they have a U.S. visa—must also pass immigration inspection upon arrival in the U.S.

Who Is a Naturalized Citizen?

Lawful Permanent Residents are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship through a process called **naturalization**. To qualify for naturalization, applicants generally must reside in the U.S. for five years (three if they are married to a U.S. citizen) without having committed any serious crimes, show that they have paid their taxes and are of "good moral character," and demonstrate a knowledge of U.S. history and government as well as an ability to understand, speak, and write ordinary English.

Are Undocumented Immigrants Entitled to Any Federal Government Services?

While immigrants who are not here legally are ineligible for nearly all federal benefits, they are still eligible for certain very basic kinds of assistance, including: emergency Medicaid, immunizations, testing and treatment for the symptoms of communicable diseases, short-term non-cash disaster relief, school lunches and breakfasts, and certain other programs essential to public health and safety.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

Why does the church care about immigration policies? (from the USCCB site

www.justiceforimmigrants.org)

MANY more Biblical and Church resources are available on the above website.

The Catholic Church has historically held a strong interest in immigration and how public policy affects immigrants seeking a new life in the United States. Based on Scriptural and Catholic social teachings, as well as her own experience as an immigrant Church in the United States, the Catholic Church is compelled to raise her voice on behalf of those who are marginalized and whose God-given rights are not respected.

The Church believes that current immigration laws and policies have often led to the undermining of immigrants' human dignity and have kept families apart. The existing immigration system has resulted in a growing number of persons in this country in an unauthorized capacity, living in the shadows as they toil in jobs that would otherwise go unfilled. Close family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents must wait years for a visa to be reunited. And, our nation's border enforcement strategies have been ineffective and have led to the death of thousands of migrants.

The Church has a responsibility to shine the message of God on this issue and help to build bridges between all parties so that an immigration system can be created that is just for all and serves the common good, including the legitimate security concerns of our nation.

Questions for Reflection

In what ways are you currently intolerant of the immigrant? What steps can you take to address this intolerance?

Can you share an experience when you interacted with an immigrant? Was your interaction one of compassion and understanding?

How can you live your life in a way that better promotes the dignity of all human beings?

Resources for Response and Action

Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website: [http://
www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx](http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx)

USCCB Justice for Immigrants website: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/>

See what Bishop Burbidge says about immigration [http://
www.dioceseofraleigh.org/news/immigrants_pressconf08.aspx](http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/news/immigrants_pressconf08.aspx)

North Carolina Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants Statement [http://
www.welcometheimmigrant.org/](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/)

Possible Action

Visit one of the above websites to learn more.

Investigate what your local parish is doing for our immigrant “neighbors” locally.

Learn more about state and federal policy surrounding immigration and become involved legislatively.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Our God, you have given us in your word
the stories of persons who needed to leave
their homelands—Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, Moses.

You have chosen that the life of Jesus be filled with
events of unplanned travel and flight from enemies.
You have shown us through the modeling of Jesus
how we are called to relate to persons from
different nations and cultures.

You have called us to be teachers of your word.
We ask you, our God, to open our minds and hearts
to the challenge and invitation to model
your perfect example of love. Amen.

A Prayer

For Immigrant Justice

Blessed are You, Lord God,
King of all creation.
Through Your goodness, we live in this land
that You have so richly blessed.
Help us always to recognize our
Blessings come from You
and remind us to share them
with others, especially those who come
to us today from other lands.
Help us to be generous, just, and welcoming,
as You have been and are generous to us.
Amen.

Who are Our Neighbors Series

November: Where does my neighbor live?

The "lessons" in this series are meant to "wet your whistle" and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: To explore the struggles in our country regarding affordable housing and to explore how we are called to respond.

Background:

Below is all excerpted from the Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America Housing brief draft entitled *The Home is the Foundation*.

The Importance of Affordable Housing

"Access to safe, decent, affordable housing allows the parents to maintain jobs, children to thrive in school, and communities to remain vibrant. When a family cannot find or maintain affordable housing, they face a multitude of problems. Often, they have no choice but to make frequent moves. This type of instability makes it harder for parents to keep steady jobs. In turn, this can make it more difficult to increase earnings and afford better housing. Frequent moves also disrupt children's lives and contribute to poor educational performance and outcomes.

America's affordable housing crisis is solvable. We know what to do- what we need now is the political and social will to take action. Ensuring access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is one of our country's most pressing challenges. We must reaffirm the goal articulated in the Housing Act of 1949- "a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family.

In partnership with federal, state, and local governments, as well as nonprofit agencies and businesses concerned with ensuring that their employees have affordable housing available to them, we can have a future where EVERY American can access quality, affordable housing."

Statistics on the topic:

Excerpts from the Fall 2008 edition of *Charities USA*, a publication of Catholic Charities USA, "Housing America The Challenge We Face."

A worker would have to earn \$16.31 to afford rent in our country.

In 2005, 37.3 million households spent more than 30% of their income on housing. For housing to be affordable, a household should spend no more than 30%.

Funding for affordable housing has decreased 25% from 1999-2006.

For every section 202 elderly housing unit there are 10 eligible seniors.

Less than 1 in 3 families eligible for section 8 housing receive it.

2.5 to 3.5 million people experience homelessness each year. 2/3 of these families are minorities. 40% have families. 57% of these homeless persons have had a mental problem in their lifetime. 26% of the nightly homeless population is veterans, despite the fact that they are only 11% of the overall population.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

Questions for Reflection

"Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds- his name is the Lord- be exultant before him. Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in."

Psalm 68:4-6

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Luke 2:3-7

“There must be to all (people) everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing and shelter.”

Gaudium et Spes (Church in the Modern World), 1965

“In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII catalogues the rights of every human being, and one of the most prominent among them is the right to appropriate housing. So for Catholic Charities, helping people secure a decent home is more than an ideal- it is an obligation. It is not simply our civic responsibility that prompts us to serve in this area; it is also our moral responsibility.”

Father Larry Snyder, President Catholic Charities USA, *Charities USA Magazine*, Fall 2008

Resources for Response and Action

Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website: http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx
www.senate.gov or www.house.gov

Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org

Possible Action

Visit one of the above websites to learn more.

Learn more about the housing situation in your community

Investigate what your local parish/community is doing for our “neighbors.” Does your parish or community have a group that legislates for affordable housing?

Write your representative or senators regarding public policy proposals surrounding affordable housing

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Jesus Christ Our Lord,

As an infant you were homeless;

As a child you were driven from your place of birth.

Shelter those who cry out for justice

That their basic needs may be met.

Grant us the power to speak your wisdom.

Bless us with the strength to provide hope to the oppressed

And warm our hearts to act with compassion and grace.

We ask this through the gift of your Spirit.

Amen.

Spirit of wisdom,

Gift us with the courage, like your prophets of old,

To proclaim your justice throughout the land.

May your wings lift up your people to rebuild the crumbling walls of our cities

So that we may rejoice together as one true community.

Bless and protect our leaders in government

That they may act with integrity and do what is right for all people.

As one holy people may we provide hope to those denied their basic needs.

We as this through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Who are Our Neighbors Series

December: Does My Neighbor have Children?

The "lessons" in this series are meant to "wet your whistle" and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: Identify essentials that all children need to survive and learn about programs and policies that will benefit children in poverty and their families.

Background: Children are our future... In the U.S. one in six children live in poverty (13million children). Many of these children do not have the basic elements they need for physical and emotional health. Children who are hungry, who lack medical care, who live in substandard housing and go to substandard schools are often doomed to repeating the cycle of poverty with their own children. Protecting our nation's children is the concern and responsibility of each child's family, but also of the government and larger community.

Statistics on the topic:

- Children in poverty are twice as likely to die in the 1st six months of life.
- They are 3 times as likely to have no regular source of healthcare.
- They are eight times more likely to be hungry, malnourished, or food insecure.
- Of all of the industrialized nations of the world, only Mexico has a higher percentage of children growing up below the median income than we have.
- Children in poverty are twice as likely to repeat a grade.
- More than half of all request for emergency help from food banks are for children.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him. Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets."

Matthew 7:7-12

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

James 1:27

"In Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord himself."

Pope John Paul II, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 1981

"Vulnerable, dependent, meek, innocent, children reflect most poignantly the humanity of Jesus Christ and his mission on earth. To live as Christ, to be faithful to the Gospel imperative it to care for, nurture, protect, empower, and "receive the little ones among us.""

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In Putting Children and Families First*, 1991

Questions/Activities for Reflection

- Brainstorm a list of essentials that children need to THRIVE (not just survive)
- Now brainstorm what the important “extras” are that are nice to have but not essential.
- Discuss or think about ways we as individuals, as parishes, as communities, and as a nation can truly impact the number of children living in poverty.

Resources for Response and Action

- Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website to learn more about how Catholic Social Teaching informs our stance on these issues (particularly the option for the poor and vulnerable: http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx)
- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting legislation benefitting children living in poverty
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org
- Children’s Defense Fund: www.childrensdefensefund.org
- Kid’s Count: www.kidscount.org

Possible Action

- Visit one of the above websites to learn more.
- Investigate what your local parish/community is doing for children in your neighborhood who are in need. Does your parish or community have a group that legislates for children?
- Give financial support for daycares or preschool programs.
- Join a mentoring or tutoring program
- Have your family members each choose one possession to give to someone in need.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Compassionate God, who nurtures us like a loving Mother,
You sent your son into the world as an innocent and vulnerable child.
May we act as children receiving your Word
So that we may stand up for orphans and widows of today.
Strengthen us to provide for hungry and homeless children,
The unwanted, babies addicted to crack, and children suffering AIDS.
May we put our love for you into action by speaking out
For those who cannot speak for themselves.
We ask this through your beloved Son,
Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Much of the content of this “lesson” was taken from the *Just Neighbors Curriculum* by Family Promise. <http://www.familypromise.org/resources/jnform.html>

Who are Our Neighbors Series

January: Do I Respect the Life & Dignity of My Neighbor?

The "lessons" in this series are meant to "wet your whistle" and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: Reflect upon individual choices and how they affect the most vulnerable in our midst and around the world.

Background: The gap between the rich and poor in the United States has widened dramatically in the past several decades. We as consumers can impact those in our midst who are struggling. Some of this situation has come about by government policies, corporate strategies, and is the result of bad choices. These choices can be changed and mistakes can be corrected. *The economy is a product of human decisions and can be changed by human decisions.*

Statistics on the topic:

(sources: Economic Policy Institute, Joint Center on Housing Studies of Harvard University, *Business Week*, U.S. Census Bureau)

- Top 1% of households won half of all financial wealth in America.
- One in five households have a net worth of zero.
- Despite numerical increases, the real value of minimum wage has shrunk.
- Twenty five years ago, one full time worker could keep a family of three above the poverty line. Now that worker cannot even keep a family of two above the poverty line.
- The "living wage" (the wage needed to keep a family of 4 above the poverty line) is over \$4 higher than the current minimum wage.

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How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

II Corinthians 8:13-15

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:6-8

What keeps you from giving now? Isn't the poor person there? Aren't your own warehouses full? Isn't the reward promised? The command is clear: the hungry person is dying now, the naked person is freezing now, the person in debt is beaten now-and you want to wait until tomorrow? "I'm not doing any harm," you say. "I just want to keep what I own, that's all." You own! You are like someone who sits down in a theater and keeps everyone else away, saying that what is there for everyone's use is your own. . . . If everyone took only what they needed and gave the rest to those in need, there would be no such thing as rich and poor. After all, didn't you come into life naked, and won't you return naked to the earth? (continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry person; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the person who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the person with no shoes; the money which you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help.

St. Basil, Fourth Century

Distributive justice requires that the allocation of income, wealth, and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material needs are unmet. The Second Vatican Council stated: "The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone. The fathers and doctors of the Church held this view, teaching that we are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of our superfluous goods." Minimum material resources are an absolute necessity for human life. If persons are to be recognized as members of the human community, then the community has an obligation to help fulfill these basic needs unless an absolute scarcity of resources makes this strictly impossible. No such scarcity exists in the United States today.

Economic Justice for All, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986

Questions/Activities for Reflection

- What structures and policies in our country seem to detract from human dignity?
 - Some examples- tax code, tax enforcement, bank lending corporate compensation, corporate strategy, subcontracted work, educational funding, others?
- How have you witnessed the "growing gap" either personally or in your community?
- Discuss the connection between economic injustices and lack of dignity/disrespect for life.

Resources for Response and Action

- Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website to learn more about how Catholic Social Teaching informs our stance on these issues (particularly the option for the poor and vulnerable and dignity of work): http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx
- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting legislation about corporate responsibility.
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org

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Possible Action

- Learn more about opportunities to support local producers in your community. Perhaps you have a locally owned store or a farmer's market in the area.
- Examine your personal buying decisions. Are you supporting a corporation with practices which do not promote the dignity of employees?
- Encourage your legislators to support corporate responsibility (see contact info. in resource section).

Closing Prayer/Thoughts (From USCCB)

God of justice and love,

Strengthen our minds and hearts to believe in ourselves and to love you more clearly.

Remind us that in caring for your people we come to know you more deeply.

Provide us with courage to seek good for all members of our community, our nation, our world.

May we walk humbly in this journey of following your Son's path of reaching out to those most in need, and working with them in righting the wrongs of our time.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, who loves and reigns with you and the spirit now and forever. Amen.

Who are Our Neighbors Series

February: How Does My Neighbor Stay Healthy?

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

One of the Key Issue areas in Catholic Charities USA’s Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America is healthcare. All of the information in this “lesson” is from the website: <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org>.

Objective: Understand the struggles of those living without healthcare in the United States and identify those reforms needed to ensure all have access to healthcare.

Background:

Every person should have access to equitable and affordable health care. This is essential to safeguard human life, and is a basic human right. Special attention must be given to meeting the basic health needs of the poor and marginalized. Health care reform that addresses such needs is a matter of fundamental justice.

Statistics on the topic:

- 47 million persons in the United States do not have healthcare, including 9 million children.
- Trends in the uninsured also exacerbate racial disparities, with minorities disproportionately ranked amongst the uninsured, including Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans.
- The uninsured are twice as likely as the privately insured to be in fair or poor health. They even have a 25% greater mortality risk than those who are insured, and 18,000 persons die prematurely every year.
- Nearly one quarter of uninsured persons report having to cut meals or spend less on utilities, in order to pay for medical bills.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set him in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, “As for you, your sins are forgiven.” . . . he said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God.

Luke 5:17-25

Read the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* in Luke 10:25-42.

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Any plan to reform the nation's health care system must be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the unique needs of the poor. We support health care that is affordable and accessible to all.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium, 2000

Catholic teaching affirms the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and the inherent dignity of every human being. We insist that access to adequate health care is a basic human right, necessary for the development and maintenance of life and for the ability of human beings to realize the fullness of their dignity. A just society protects and promotes fundamental human rights and dignity, with special attention to the basic needs of children and the vulnerable, including the need for safe and affordable health care.

Letter from Bishop William F. Murphy to United States House of Representatives,
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, January 14, 2009

Questions/Activities for Reflection

- Have you or someone you know been without healthcare or health insurance? How did you feel about this?
- Why do so many people in our country not have access to health care and health insurance?
- What are the systems which keep them from receiving necessary health care?
- How do our church's writings reflect the living reality of many people today?
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Resources for Response and Action

- Office of Peace & Justice, Diocese of Raleigh website to learn more about how Catholic Social Teaching informs our stance on these. http://www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/peace_justice/index.aspx
- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting legislation on healthcare.
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org

Possible Action

- Go to the Catholic Charities USA site (see above) to read more background and policy positions on the following: [Medicaid and the Uninsured](#), [State Children's Health Insurance Program \(SCHIP\)](#), [Medicare](#), [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association \(SAMHSA\)](#). [On that website you can register for e-mail updates.](#)
- Contact your local Catholic Charities Office to see what kind of health care benefits and assistance they provide.
- In the Bible readings above, others took direct action to get the proper care for the sick and injured. What action can you take for someone in your family, your community, who needs help to receive necessary health care services?

Closing Prayer/Thoughts-

God of Healing,

we pray for those who are sick, those who are dying, that they may know Your loving presence in all who minister to them.

God of Love,

we pray for the millions of people who are uninsured, who are in need of health care and do not have the means to pay for it, that their fears and anxiety will be relieved and that our hearts will be moved to help them.

God of Justice,

we pray for the leaders of our nation that they will work to change unjust laws and systems by providing access to health care and health insurance for every person.

God of Compassion,

we pray this day for the voiceless among us, the unborn, the elderly, the sick, those who are ashamed or discouraged to speak on their own behalf and demand the right to health care.

God of Power,

we pray that all people will stand in solidarity with the uninsured and those who lack health care by working collaboratively toward the common good for our country.

God of All Creation,

help us to be instruments of Your healing and a catalyst for justice in Your world. Bless those who work in health care, upon all people we serve at Catholic Charities, especially those marginalized by society. United in our common dignity, may we grow closer in the human family and build a culture of life filled with reverence and love for all. Amen.

Who are Our Neighbors Series

March: Where is the World is My Neighbor?

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community. They alleviate suffering and provide assistance to people in need [in more than 100 countries](#), without regard to race, religion or nationality. The information in this “lesson” is taken from their website: www.crs.org.

Objective: Discover real ways to pray, learn and advocate for our neighbors around the world.

Background: The issues of our world are overwhelming. Catholic Relief Services approaches emergency relief and long-term development holistically, ensuring that all people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, are able to participate in the very fullness of life — to have access to basic necessities, health care and education — all within peaceful, just communities. Their six key areas of service are: emergency assistance, hunger, education, health, peace, and helping at home (advocating for change). These 6 key areas branch into a myriad of issues.

Statistics on the topic (MANY more can be found on the CRS website):

- An estimated 923 million people in the world go hungry.
- 16 million children die every year from preventable and treatable causes. Sixty percent of these deaths are from hunger and malnutrition.
- United Nations Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world's poorest people could be met for an additional \$13 billion a year. Animal lovers in the United States and Europe spend more than that on pet food each year.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

Woe to the legislators of infamous laws, to those who issue tyrannical decrees, who refuse justice to the unfortunate and cheat the poor among my people of their rights, who make widows their prey, and rob the orphan.

Isaiah 10: 1-2

No more mockery of justice, no more favoring of the wicked! Let the weak and the orphan have justice, be fair to the wretched and destitute; rescue the weak and needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked!

Psalms 82: 2-4

You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3: 12-13

Anyone who says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen. So this is the commandment that he has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4: 19-21

Consequently, the promotion of justice is at the heart of a true culture of solidarity. It is not just a question of giving one's surplus to those in need, but of 'helping entire peoples presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development'."

Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message 2001

The Gospel and Catholic teaching require us to serve those in need and to work for a more just society and world. The most challenging virtue of our time may be solidarity. This has been a defining element of Pope John Paul II's leadership and witness. He insists that whatever our national, ethnic, religious, or economic differences, we are all God's children, members of one human family.

A Place at the Table, USCCB, 2002

Questions/Activities for Reflection

- How do you currently answer your call to act in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world? How does your local parish?
- What is our responsibility in meeting the most basic needs of our neighbors around the world?
- What do the above readings mean to you personally?

Resources for Response and Action

- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting legislation affecting health care.
- Catholic Charities USA website: catholiccharitiesusa.org
- Bread for the World works for both domestic and international hunger issues: www.bread.org
- Justice for Immigrants clarifies the churches stance on immigration issues and offers many opportunities for education and action: www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

Possible Action

- Read on the Catholic Relief Services website about some ways you can impact policy with regard to our global neighbors.
- Brainstorm what your parish can do to better educate parishioners about the monumental global needs.
- Pray intentionally for those around the world who are suffering due to injustice
- Learn more about fair trade and how your power as a consumer can impact the lives of others around the world.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Blessed Are

*Blessed are those who are on the move,
transforming exodus and flight in energy for a new search.*

From the victims will come the protagonists of history.

*Blessed are those who, forced to wander without direction,
with wisdom learn and teach the lessons of the road.*

They will be the architects of a new time.

*Blessed are those who suffer pain, nostalgia and loneliness,
yet know how to make of every arrival a new beginning.*

They shall act with faith, hope and life.

Blessed are those who open borders
and mix the anthems, flags, races and creeds.

Without discrimination, they make the world everyone's home

Blessed the wayfarers of all roads

in the tears, sweat and the work of their hands.

They prepare a tomorrow of justice and right.

Blessed are those who open the door to pilgrims,
making solidarity the passport to our common homeland.

They are constructing a new citizenship.

Blessed are those who foment encounters and re-encounters,
sowing peace.

They will harvest flowers and stars in the new heaven and the new earth.

Blessed are the excluded, without opportunities and without voice.

They will be the first guests in the great banquet,
where bread will not be lacking on anyone's table.

Fr. José Alfredo Gonçalves, Brazil

From Prayer Without Borders, Celebrating Global Wisdom, © 2004, Catholic Relief Services

Who are Our Neighbors Series

April: How do my neighbors suffer as a result of strife and war?

The "lessons" in this series are meant to "wet your whistle" and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community. They alleviate suffering and provide assistance to people in need [in more than 100 countries](#), without regard to race, religion or nationality. The information in this "lesson" is taken from their website: www.crs.org.

Objective: Discover real ways to pray, learn and advocate for our neighbors around the world during times of strife and war.

Background: The issues of our world are overwhelming. Catholic Relief Services approaches emergency relief and long-term development holistically, ensuring that all people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, are able to participate in the very fullness of life — to have access to basic necessities, health care and education — all within peaceful, just communities. Their six key areas of service are: emergency assistance, hunger, education, health, peace, and helping at home (advocating for change). These 6 key areas branch into a myriad of issues.

Here are a few summaries of the effects of war in particular regions (source: <http://www.lenntech.com/environmental-effects-war.htm>):

- CONGO- Since 1998 over 3 million people have died (mostly of disease and starvation) and over 3 2 million people are now refugees. The effect on the environment is significant also. For example, the hippo population in one park has decreased from 30,000 to less than 900.
- Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan- Hundred of thousands have become refugees and genocide has devastated many populations.

And we all have seen first hand many other effects of the devastation of war in recent years...

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called "an enterprise of justice" (Is. 32:7). Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.

[The Church in the Modern World, #78](#)

Peace must be born of mutual trust between nations rather than imposed on them through fear of one another's weapons. Hence everyone must labor to put an end at last to the arms race, and to make a true beginning of disarmament, not indeed a unilateral disarmament, but one proceeding at an equal pace according to agreement, and backed up by authentic and workable safeguards. ... The problems of peace and disarmament have already been the subject of extensive,

strenuous, and relentless examination. Together with international meeting dealing with these problems, such studies should be regarded as the first steps toward solving these serious questions. They should be promoted with even greater urgency in the hope that they will yield practical results in the future.

[The Church in the Modern World](#), #82

It has also to be borne in mind that relations between States should be based on freedom, that is to say, that no country may unjustly oppress others or unduly meddle in their affairs. On the contrary, all should help to develop in others a sense of responsibility, a spirit of enterprise, and an earnest desire to be the first to promote their own advancement in every field..

[Peace on Earth](#), #120

Questions/Activities for Reflection

In what way is your life violent? What violent influences are in your life? Television? Toys? Language? Movies? Books? Others? Do we become numb to violence in our lives?

Below is the peace-building statement of purpose employed by Catholic Relief Services. How can you employ them in your life? How can you share them with your parish community?

Peacebuilding Statement of Purpose

Peacebuilding:

- Is a process of changing unjust structures through right-relationships
- Transforms the way people, communities and societies live, heal and structure their relationships to promote justice and peace

Creates a space in which mutual trust, respect and interdependence is fostered

Within CRS, peacebuilding is:

- Rooted in CRS' guiding principles and engages the local church, religious institutions, organizations and other actors in a mutual process of dialogue and transformation
- Is both a broad conceptual understanding that provides guidance for changing unjust systems and practices, as well as specific activities that change attitudes and behaviors to promote peace, tolerance and reconciliation

Essential for transforming the world through solidarity

Peacebuilding Principles

Peacebuilding:

- Responds to the root causes of violent conflict, including unjust relationships and structures, in addition to addressing its effects and symptoms.
- Is based on long-term commitment.
- Uses a comprehensive approach that focuses on grassroots while strategically engaging actors at middle-range and top levels of leadership.
- Requires an in-depth and participatory analysis.
- Provides a methodology to achieve right relationships that should be integrated into all programming.
- Strategically includes advocacy at local, national and global levels to transform unjust structures and systems.
- Builds upon indigenous non-violent approaches to conflict transformation and reconciliation.

- Is driven by community-defined needs and involves as many stakeholders as possible.
- Is done through partners who represent the diversity of where we work and share common values.

Strengthens and contributes to a vibrant civil society that promotes peace.

Resources for Response and Action

Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials and how they are supporting legislation affecting war/strife.

www.crs.org

Pax Christi USA: <http://www.paxchristiusa.org/>

USCCB Office of Justice, Peace & Human Development : <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/>

Possible Action

Read on the Catholic Relief Services website about some ways you can impact policy with regard to our global neighbors and how we can assist them in their dealing with war and strife.

Brainstorm what your parish can do to better educate parishioners about the monumental global needs due to war and strife.

Pray intentionally for those around the world who are suffering due to war.

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.

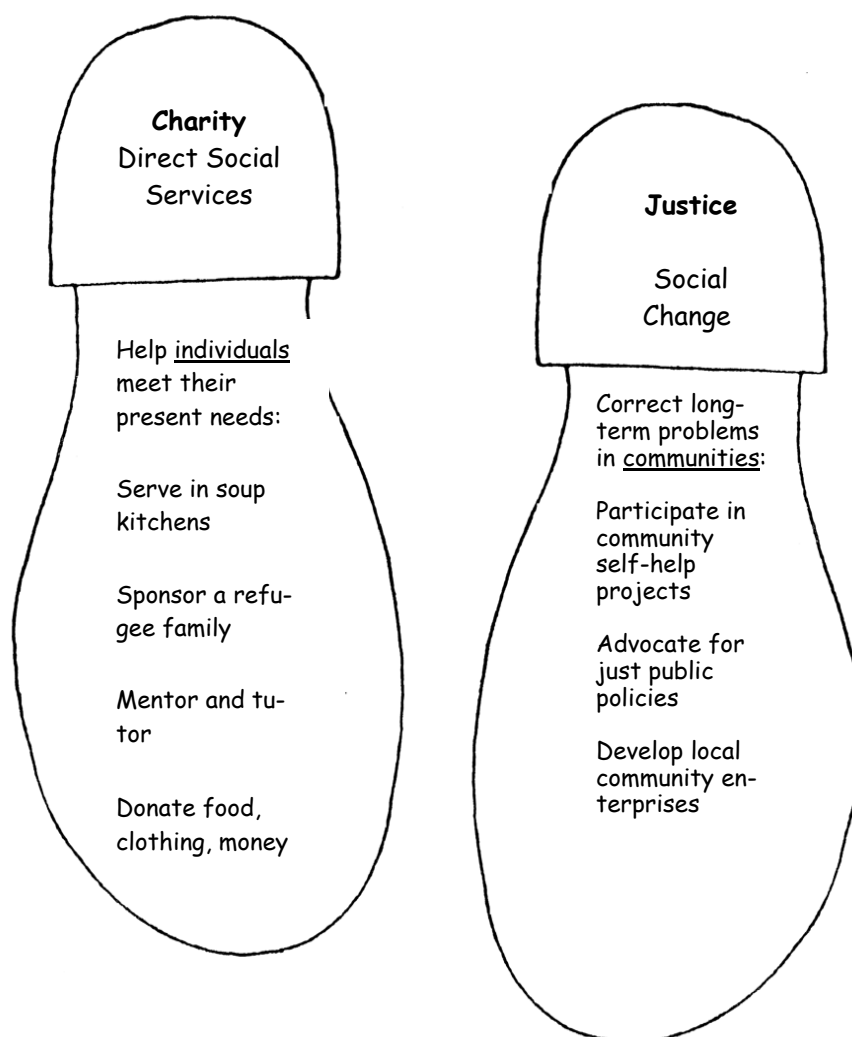
Who are Our Neighbors Series

May: How can I help my neighbor?

The “lessons” in this series are meant to “wet your whistle” and peak your curiosity to learn more. They may be shared with youth groups, individuals or small group faith formation studies, or, any other creative way. They may also be used for bulletin inserts. Let us know what is useful and how you use it!

Objective: This lesson will explore how we can advocate for our neighbors both domestically and globally and why this is important.

Background: Our Catholic tradition, as we have learned in previous lessons, calls us to assist our neighbor in need. This calls us to more than “charity” or short term change, but also to “justice.” See diagram below for a more detailed description:



**The rest of this lesson will explore how we can better walk with the
TWO FEET of Social Ministry!**

These 2 approaches are not in opposition to each other, but parts of a holistic view that is both/and. If we only do charitable work, we cannot free our neighbors from situations that oppress them. If we only work for institutional change, we are in danger of forgetting the everyday realities of poverty and oppression.

How our faith tradition (Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching) informs the topic:

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and the needy.”

Proverbs 31:8-9

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.”

James 2:14-18

“Christians... are called by God to be involved in the world in order to transform it according to the Gospel... these duties include positively contributing to the establishment of just laws and structure that foster human values.”

Pope John Paul II, Nairobi, 1980

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

Justice in the World, 1971

“The Direct duty to work for a just ordering of society...is to the lay faithful. As citizens of a State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity.”

Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict

Questions/Activities for Reflection

- **WHY ADVOCATE?** Here is a list of reasons why people advocate. Look at the list and reflect on which of these reasons are challenging for you? Which spur you to action?
 - Our faith calls us to advocacy.
 - Advocacy is part of our democracy.
 - Legislators need our help.
 - Advocacy provides important balance to lobbying.
 - Our organizational structure is ready-made or advocacy.
 - Advocacy makes a real difference.
 - Advocacy empowers.
 - Advocacy makes volunteering make sense.

- The list of activities below is largely “Charity” in orientation. Think about how you or your parish could transform these activities by adding a “Justice” dimension.
 - Passing out food baskets at Thanksgiving
 - Providing emergency shelter for homeless
 - Donating clothing to Goodwill
 - Providing Christmas gifts for families in need
 - Giving pocket change to a homeless person
 - Volunteering at a food bank
 - Tutoring low-income children

Resources for Response and Action

- Go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to learn more about your elected officials are making changes in laws

All 3 of the organizations below do advocacy work on a regular basis. They are a great resource to Catholics in the United States.

- International “arm” of the Catholic Church in the United States: www.crs.org
- Domestic “arm” of the Catholic Church in the United States: <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>
- USCCB Office of Justice, Peace & Human Development : <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/>

Possible Action

- Explore how your parish can better advocate for an issue using one or more of the following methods: letters, phone calls, visits, using media, letters to the editor, editorials, radio and television, or special events.
- Look at the ministries at your parish. What can you add to them in order to balance “charity” and “justice.”

Closing Prayer/Thoughts

God, Source of all light

We are surrounded by the darkness of injustices experienced by your people,

The poor who are hungry and who search for shelter,

The sick who seek relief,

And the downtrodden who seek help in heir hopelessness.

Surround us and fill us with your Spirit who is Light.

Lead us to be your presence to the least among is.

Teach us to se your presence in them as we work through

You to bring justice and peace to this world in desperate need.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.