



## POVERTY AWARENESS MONTH 2015

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

Today, on the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis calls us to reflect on the theme “Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters.” The horrifying reality of [human trafficking](#) is that 20.9 million of our brothers and sisters are victims of slavery (International Labor Organization, 2012). Pope Francis urges us to fight against human trafficking, which increasingly forces children into violence, isolation, and poverty. Visit the [World Day of Peace webpage](#) to find resources and learn more about how you can be involved in ending human trafficking and its root causes.

**Challenge:** Read this [two page handout](#) which includes a summary of Pope Francis’ World Day of Peace message, action ideas, and a prayer.

### FRIDAY, JANUARY 2

45 million people live in poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The number of people in poverty in the United States is larger than the populations of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada and Nebraska... combined. What is your reaction to the number of people in the U.S. in poverty? Will you remain silent? Pope Francis says, “Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor” (6/14/13).

**Reflection:** How can you hear “the cry of the poor”? [PovertyUSA.org](#) and [PobrezaUSA.org](#) have great resources to help you learn and educate others, take action in your community, give of your time and resources, and pray to end poverty. Be sure to share these resources—and this calendar—with others!

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 3

The [Catholic Campaign for Human Development \(CCHD\)](#) lives out the Gospel call to bring good news to those in poverty ([Luke 4:18](#)) by working for long-term solutions to end the root causes of poverty. [Watch this video](#) to hear Bishop Soto of the Diocese of Sacramento speak about the mission of CCHD to eliminate the cycle of poverty for families.

**Challenge:** What do you know about poverty in your community? At [PovertyUSA.org](#), explore poverty rates by state or county with the interactive [Poverty Map](#). On the map you can also locate CCHD funded organizations across the nation working for long-term solutions to end poverty in their communities.

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

Imagine yourself trapped in an unsafe community. The threat of gang violence is constant and you have a low-paying job that cannot provide for your family's basic needs. Should you stay and keep your family in this threatening environment or leave? Would you go on a perilous journey to seek safety and opportunities for loved ones? Today begins [National Migration Week](#). This week, reflect on the Week's theme, "We are one family under God," and pray for our brothers and sisters who have been forced to leave their homelands.

**Action:** Use this [prayer card](#) throughout the week to offer prayers for those fleeing their homelands.

## MONDAY, JANUARY 5

In the Body of Christ, "if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it. If one part is honored all of the parts share its joy" ([1 Cor 12:26](#)). This week we live in solidarity with the suffering members of the Body of Christ who are displaced, including refugees far from their homes. Let us also joyfully recall the inspiring efforts of organizations across the country working for comprehensive immigration reform, worker rights, economic development, safety, and community development. Last year alone, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) invested over \$4 million in immigrant communities around the country. One [grant recipient](#) was the Hope Border Institute, which works to promote a culture of life, economic justice, justice for immigrants and environmental justice along the Mexico-U.S. border.

**Challenge:** Check out the [CCHD Immigration map](#) to learn more about CCHD's work to seek justice for immigrants.

## TUESDAY JANUARY 6

The Epiphany of the Lord celebrates how three wise men came to offer their finest gifts to the king of kings. One gift we all possess is the gift of our voices. Like the three wise men, we can offer our own gifts--our voices speaking for justice, peace, and respect for the dignity of all people. The [USCCB Action Center](#) provides opportunities for advocacy on issues of human life and dignity such as poverty, religious liberty, and immigration.

**Reflection:** How do you offer your gifts to help bring forth God's kingdom on earth? How can you use the gift of your voice to speak for human life and dignity?

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7

Many of our brothers and sisters are forced to flee their homelands to seek economic security in other lands, but once they arrive, they are often greeted with hostility and prejudice in the workplace. [Gaudium et Spes](#), a document from the Second Vatican Council, states, "When workers come from another country or district and contribute to the economic advancement of a nation or region by their labor, all discrimination as regards wages and working conditions must be carefully avoided."

**Reflection:** What attitudes do you have about workers from other countries or states? Do these attitudes recognize their dignity as children of God?

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

[Bethany Welch](#) was awarded the [Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award](#) for her leadership in engaging her parish to fight poverty and injustice in her community through community organizing, advocacy, service for the immigrant community, urban immersion experiences and revitalization projects, like community gardens.

**Challenge:** Can you think of any young adults (ages 18-40) who demonstrate leadership in working against poverty in the US? Nominate a young adult you know for the [Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award](#).

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 9

Pope Francis chose the theme "Church without frontiers, Mother to all" for his [Message on 101<sup>st</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#). He writes, "The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind."

**Reflection:** What does it mean for the church to be "without frontiers"? How do you see the Church respond to those who are struggling, those who are poor or abandoned, and refugees?

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

The Mass ends with an invitation to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. Pope Francis takes this calling seriously saying "all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" ([Evangelii Gaudium](#)).

**Challenge:** How do you announce the Gospel of the Lord in your daily life? Do you step out of your comfort zone for the sake of the Gospel? Read [togoforth.org](#), a blog inspired by Pope Francis' challenge and our baptismal call to love God and neighbor.

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 11

Through Baptism, we are incorporated into Christ's body and part of the People of God. Christ's disciples "share the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" (Second Vatican Council, [Lumen Gentium](#)).

The sacraments call us forth to live out our Christian mission by incorporating us into Christ and his Church. This recognition of Christ's presence in our communities should lead to a stronger awareness of being sent on mission to engage in concrete, love-inspired action in the world. Want to learn more about how the celebration of the sacraments is connected to our social mission as followers of Christ? Read for free online or order print copies of [Sacraments and Social Mission](#). This booklet is very handy for parish catechesis, religious education, and sacramental preparation.

The [Catholic Social Ministry Gathering](#) brings together hundreds of disciples to live out their baptismal call to mission by responding to pressing current domestic and global challenges relating to poverty, war, injustice, and the promotion of human life and dignity.

**Action:** Join us for the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C., February 7-10, 2015 by [registering here!](#) Find out more about baptism and our social mission by reading [Baptism: Incorporated into Christ's Body, Sent on Christ's Mission](#).

## MONDAY, JANUARY 12

Jesus loves the poor so much that he tells his disciples "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" ([Matt 25:40](#)). Christ himself identifies with the outcasts of the community, with those whose dignity is threatened. These are our brothers and sisters. Jesus invites us to follow his example by carving a special place in our hearts for people who are hungry, living in poverty, or facing other vulnerabilities. The Church responds to Jesus' invitation by calling for an [Option for the Poor and Vulnerable](#). In the encyclical [Centesimus Annus](#), Saint Pope John Paul II states, "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*."

**Reflection:** Is there a special place in your heart for all your brothers and sisters in Christ who are hungry, living in poverty, or facing other vulnerabilities? How do you live out the option for the poor and vulnerable?

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

"Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use a metaphor, 'anoints' us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts" (Pope Francis, [Feast of St. Joseph the Worker and World Labor Day Audience](#), 5/1/13).

Our ability to labor is itself an imitation of the work of God. Decent work at a just wage not only respects a worker's dignity, but is also key for raising oneself from poverty to economic security. In fact, the [dignity of work and the rights of workers](#) is one of the [seven themes of Catholic social teaching](#).

**Challenge:** Read the 2014 [Labor Day Statement](#) to educate yourself about the current state of labor and unemployment in the United States and how our Catholic faith challenges us to respond.

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

12.4% of families in the United States live in poverty and almost 20% of children in the United States live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Is it hard to imagine what it would be like to raise a family on the verge of poverty? Will you have enough money to pay the bills, buy sufficient meals, or provide for your children's education? We believe God created us for [family, community, and participation](#), but the stress of living in poverty can undermine the strength and stability of family life and relationships in our community.

**Reflection:** What would it look like if your family was living in poverty? To better understand the stress of living in poverty, take the [Poverty Tour](#) at [PovertyUSA.org](#).

## THURSDAY JANUARY 15

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) [Multimedia Youth Contest](#) is a tool to engage young people in grades 7-12 in learning about poverty in the U.S., its root causes, and faith-inspired efforts to address poverty. This year's theme is "Do Justice, Love Goodness, Walk Humbly with God" ([Micah 6:8](#)). By encouraging young people to stand in [solidarity](#) with those who live in poverty, we remember that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

**Action:** Encourage your local school or parish to participate in the [Multimedia Youth Contest](#). See past winning entries [here](#).

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 16

We all have [rights and responsibilities](#). Every person has a fundamental [right to life](#) and a right to things required for human dignity. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to our larger society. Watch the [Meet Mary Video](#) to see an example of how the Catholic Campaign for Human Development helps communities work to preserve basic rights and responsibilities.

**Reflection:** What rights of others are being violated in your local and global community? What kind of responsibilities do you have to uphold the rights of others—particularly of those who are most vulnerable?

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI beckons us to [Care for God's Creation](#) asking, "Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of 'environmental refugees,' people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development." Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, like his successor Pope Francis, has been vocal about how degradation of the environment leads to degradation of human dignity and particularly severe consequences for those living in poverty.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development cares for God's creation by investing nearly \$2.5 million in community organizations working for environmental justice. Check out the [CCHD Environmental Map](#) to learn more about these organizations and how you can help. Visit the webpage of the U.S. bishops' [Environmental Justice Program](#).

**Action:** Take the [Catholic Climate Covenant's St. Francis Pledge](#) to care for creation and people in poverty.

## SUNDAY JANUARY 18

The right to life is the most basic of all human rights upon which all other human rights depend. A commitment to people in poverty presumes the [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#).

Saint Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical [Christifideles Laici](#), emphasizes that "the Church has never yielded in the face of all the violations that the right to life of every human being has received...The human being is entitled to such rights *in every phase of development*, from conception until natural death; and in *every condition*, whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor." Our call to justice for those who live in poverty is inextricably intertwined with respect for life.

**Reflection:** How are work to respect life and work for social justice intertwined? How are both responding to our Gospel call?

## MONDAY, JANUARY 19

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke prophetically about eliminating injustice for people who live in poverty and discrimination. He recognized the need to transform social structures that enable injustice. "We are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and

superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring" (Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence).

**Challenge:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called attention to unjust structures that plagued society such as racism and poverty and was a great voice for social change. Be inspired by his famous [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#) and check out this insightful [Reflection Guide to the Letter from Birmingham Jail](#).

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

As we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil Rights movement, we recognize the lingering link between racial and economic injustice today. Today in the U.S., 27.2% of the black population and 23.5% of the Hispanic population live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). As the diverse but united Body of Christ, let us always remember to celebrate the richness of [Cultural Diversity in the Church](#) and to fight for justice for all of our brothers and sisters.

**Challenge:** Watch this video on [Rebuilding the Bridge: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil Rights Era](#), featuring the Director of CCHD, Ralph McCloud.

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

Today is the [National Prayer Vigil for Life](#) at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. "Both as Americans and as followers of Christ, American Catholics must be committed to the defense of life in all its stages in every condition" (U.S. Bishops, [Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics](#)). Let us pray together for respect for life in our own country.

**Action:** Offer an extra prayer, fast, or sacrifice today as an act of solidarity with those who are young and old, those who live in wealth and those who live in poverty, and for all those whose life or dignity is endangered.

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

[Romans 5:8](#) attests to God's redeeming love for all: "But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." We are called to a Christ-like redeeming love that upholds respect for the life and dignity of all.

The Catholic approach to criminal justice reform and rehabilitative justice begins with the fundamental recognition of the life and dignity of all persons. "Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or re-integration of all into the community" (U.S. Bishops, [Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice](#)).

Punishment, therefore, must have a corrective and healing purpose oriented towards healing and rebuilding lives. We are called to uphold the dignity of inmates and victims and to overcome poverty, crime, and violence in our communities through [criminal justice and restorative justice](#). To this end, the U.S. bishops call for a reform of the criminal justice system to promote the common good, restore a sense of community, and resist the violence that too often engulfs much of our culture. The Second Chance Act would fund reintegration of inmates into their communities so that they can be productive members of society with education, job-placement, and substance abuse treatment. Read the [Criminal Justice - Restorative Justice handout](#) to find out more.

**Action:** In order to broaden support for this important legislation, encourage your senators and representatives to co-sponsor and support the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act. Visit [this webpage](#) to take action on this and other issues. Your Congresspersons care about the input of their constituents. You can make a difference!

### **FRIDAY, JANUARY 23**

Pay day lending and predatory banking threaten the [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#). Families on the brink of poverty seek loans to cover their everyday expenses, but are often overwhelmed by accumulated fees and debt which force them to borrow more money which they cannot pay back. Payday lending and abusive loan sharks exploit the vulnerable situation of families and individuals sliding into poverty. Pope Francis denounces this phenomenon: "When a family has nothing to eat, because it has to make payments to usurers, this is not Christian, it is not human! This dramatic scourge in our society harms the inviolable dignity of the human person" (1/29/14).

**Challenge:** Predatory lenders take advantage of hardship, in effect stealing from the poor for their personal gain. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2409](#) states that any unjust taking and keeping of property of another is morally illicit. Read this factsheet on the abuses of [Predatory Banking and Payday Lending](#).

### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 24**

Laura Kelly Fanucci's heart for justice motivates her to raise her children to have a faith which leads to concern for the poor. In word and deed, she teaches her three children how Christ cares for all, especially the poor. Laura fosters in her children a care for others and for justice. Laura served as an intern for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development in the Diocese of St. Cloud in 2009, an experience which opened her eyes to the work of CCHD and to every person's role in creating a just world. Find out more about the [CCHD intern program](#) and refer a friend who might be interested.

**Reflection:** How do you foster social justice and concern for people in poverty in your family? What can you do as a family to pray and act for justice for all people?

### **SUNDAY, JANUARY 25**

How can we live our Sunday worship through our weekday witness? [Isaiah 58](#) describes how true worship of God includes working for justice and caring for the poor and the oppressed.

Reflection: What is keeping you from going forth and putting love in action? Consider the different ways you can put [love in action](#) with this resource.

### **MONDAY, JANUARY 26**

Love challenges us to combat the injustice of homelessness that affects members of the Body of Christ. In 2014, the National Center on Family Homelessness found that nationwide 2.5 million children go without a home annually. [Economic Justice for All](#), a statement written by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1986, states, "No one can claim the name of Christian and be comfortable in the face of hunger, homelessness, insecurity, and injustice found in this country and the world."

**Reflection:** If I "claim the name of Christian," what does this mean about my relationship to those who are poor?

Am I "comfortable" with the state of poverty and homelessness?  
What is my commitment to those who experience homelessness?

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

As our country gets older and the baby boomer population ages, we are thankful for programs like Social Security and Medicare. These programs help to keep the majority of the elderly population out of poverty. According to the Supplemental Poverty Measure of the U.S. Census Bureau, 14.8% of senior citizens are in poverty; however, without Social Security 54.7% of senior citizens would be in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Check out the Poverty USA [Snapshots of Poverty](#) to get a small glimpse of the life of an elderly woman in poverty.

Government programs like Social Security, Medicare, and SNAP are responsible for large-scale reductions in poverty in the U.S. We must be aware of the limited yet crucial role that government plays in alleviating poverty in the U.S. The U.S. bishops, in the 2007 statement [Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#), state that our policy goals should “encourage families, communities, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation.”

**Reflection:** Do I take seriously my responsibility as a citizen and disciple to advocate for policies that respect the life and dignity of the human person?

## WEDNESDAY JANUARY 28

There are many myths about poverty in the U.S. that can deceive us about the identity of those living in poverty. Here are some facts:

2.8 million people in the U.S. work full-time, year-round and are still living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

In every state, for every 100 “deeply low-income” households, there are less than 35 units of available and affordable rental housing (National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2014).

Women are more likely to be poor and more likely to be in “deep poverty” (with an income less than half of the federal poverty line). 31% of households headed by a single woman are below the poverty line (USCCB Secretariat for Pro-life Activities, Poverty and Abortion: A Vicious Cycle, 2013)

**Challenge:** Take the [Poverty Quiz](#) to find out what you know about poverty.

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

[Project HOPE Spokane](#) is building green pathways out of poverty through programs that provide social outlets, job training, skill building and entrepreneurial opportunities.

**Challenge:** Read about the great work of [Project HOPE Spokane](#) for environmental justice and check out other [Stories of Hope](#) to read about CCHD groups working to end poverty in America.

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

Want to stay updated and educated about poverty in the U.S.? Sign up for the [Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development](#) newsletter [Notes for Neighbors](#). Follow the Catholic Campaign for Human Development on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

We have an important role to play in creating a culture and community that cares for the dignity of all of its members. Social media is an incredible tool to spread your passion for social justice, to help connect people to information and resources, and to motivate others to take

action to end the injustices in our communities. Connect your friends and family. Forward this [USCCB Social Media- Social Justice Flyer](#) to a friend or hang it in the office.

**Challenge:** Post about one of the above resources on Facebook or Tweet about a social justice issue in your community. You never know the impact or influence your passion can make!

### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 31**

In the apostolic exhortation, [The Joy of the Gospel](#), Pope Francis calls for a "church which is poor and for the poor." Pope Francis knows we have much to learn about how to be in solidarity with those who live in poverty. "We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them." Click here to explore more [Pope Francis Quotes by topic](#) on social justice issues.

As we end Poverty Awareness Month may we never forget this invitation and our Christian commitment to live in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters. Let us build relationships with one another and live out the Gospel call.

**Challenge:** Thank you for your active participation in Poverty Awareness Month. Don't let your work for justice stop here. Please continue to pray, learn, act, and advocate for justice for all.

#### **Stay Connected:**

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