

# Chapter 7: Justice and Poverty

## Getting Started

Introduce teens to the concept of poverty by summarizing, in your own words, the material on page 133 of the Teacher's Manual, "Introducing the Chapter." Optionally, you may also have them read the chapter summary on page 185 of the Student Text; or ask them to read about definitions of poverty on pages 160–161, the scandal of hunger on pages 168–170, and the preferential option for the poor on pages 173–176 of the Student Text. Then have them read the following story.

## The Story

*The author of this essay, Sister Helen Prejean, is famous for her work with death row inmates.*

### CATHOLICS SHOULD HANG OUT WITH POOR PEOPLE

*By Sr. Helen Prejean*

I was 40 years old before I realized the connection between the Jesus who said, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat," and the real-life experience of being with actual people who were hungry. Before that, when I read "I was hungry and you gave me to eat," I tended to rationalize, "There's a lot of ways of being hungry." "I was in prison, and you came to visit me,"—"There's a lot of ways we live in prison." . . .

Access the rest of the story at [www.uscatholic.org/2002/09/sb0209.htm](http://www.uscatholic.org/2002/09/sb0209.htm) from the September 2002 issue of *U.S. Catholic*.

## Discussion

*Lead the teens in a discussion of the following questions:*

1. What does the author say Christians who take their faith seriously need to do?  
*Be in contact with poor people.*  
Why?  
*Because we will find Christ in lepers, prostitutes, thieves—all the people society wants to throw away.*
2. What other aspects of social justice did the author mention in her discussion of poverty?  
*For example: dignity, respect for life, racism.*
3. The author described how she resisted "standing on the side of the poor" at first. What were some of the reasons she gave for her resistance?  
*She resisted growing in faith; also, contact with the poor eventually requires challenging the wealthy and comfortable.*  
For what other reasons do you think some people are reluctant to get to know and help out people who are poor?
4. The author says that our search for God in the poor must be coupled with reflection, prayer, and meditation. Why do you think these spiritual activities are so important?
5. What "spiritual riches" did the author discover through her work with the poor?  
*Working with the poor grew out of her tremendous energy and gifts that she didn't know she had, and it gave her the feeling of coming home.*
6. Who are the "throwaways" in your school or community? What would it mean to "stand on the side" of these people?

## Take Action

*Scripture hunt: The preferential option for the poor*

- In this activity, teens explore what the Scriptures have to say about society's "throwaways." You will need a bible for every teen, paper, and pencils or pens.
- Divide the teens into groups of three or four. Remind the teens of Sister Helen Prejean's original attitude toward what the Scriptures said about the poor, and invite them to explore what the Scriptures say about society's "throwaways" for themselves. Explain that you will be holding a contest to see which group can find

and record the most Scripture verses about the poor and society's "throwaways." Have each group assign a recorder to write down the Scripture passage, including a citation, while the other group members search.

- Give the groups ten minutes to search their bibles for appropriate verses.
- When the groups are finished searching, have each group share the verses they found. Write all the verses on the chalkboard or on newsprint. If teens suggest problematic verses (for example, verses advocating that murderers or adulterers be stoned to death), include those as well. When each group has finished sharing its verses, tally the total number of verses that the groups found.
- When all the groups have finished sharing their verses, declare a winner. Then discuss the teens' findings by asking the following questions: Can you sum up what Scripture has to say about poor people, society's "throwaways"? What are the most surprising or interesting verses here, and why? What would our society look like if it acted on these verses—not only as individuals, but also on a social and governmental level? If some of the verses are problematic, ask: Some of these verses seem to contradict the others; how do you think we can resolve that apparent contradiction? (Help teens to understand that Catholics interpret the Scriptures in the context of the whole of Revelation, and that the Bible overwhelmingly supports a preferential option for the poor.)

### *Additional Activities*

- Have teens conduct the group research project, "Where Did My Money Go?" on page 184 of the Student Text.
- Ask teens to complete the Scripture activity on page 173 of the Student Text.
- Have teens complete the worksheet on page 213 of the Teacher's Manual, "Types of Poverty." Explain the three types of poverty as described on page 136 of the Teacher's Manual.
- Have teens debate government-sponsored welfare as described in the Teacher's Manual on page 146.

### *Additional Resources*

For additional books, videos, and websites related to this topic, see pages 133–135 of the Teacher's Manual.