

Instructor's Guide to
Connecting with the Disconnected

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<i>Section</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Description</i>
I. Introduction	5 minutes	Introduce objectives
II. Lecture	30 minutes	Present the power point, conduct poverty quiz, and distribute Single Adult Survey
III. Church Assessment Tool	10 minutes	Pass out Church Assessment Tool and discuss students' answers.
IV. Ponder discussion Questions	5 minutes	Give students time to consider the questions before discussing them in the larger group.
V. Group Discussion	15 minutes	Discuss the questions
VI. Action Planning	5 minutes	Let students ask questions about homework

Total Time: 70 minutes

Preparation Guide

Read “Instructor’s Notes” to prepare for the presentation. These notes give background information and suggestions for further research into the topics to be discussed.

Make copies for each student for

- Poverty Quiz
- Single Parent Quiz
- Church Assessment Tool
- Discussion Questions
- Homework Assignment page

Check the classroom for

- Computer with power point capabilities
- Projector

Print off a copy of the “notes” from the Power Point presentation. This is done by clicking “View” and selecting “Notes Page.” These are the notes that appear at the bottom of each slide when the power point is not in “slide show” mode, but “normal” mode.

Objectives

(These appear on the power point presentation.)

- Discuss the theological imperative for “connecting with the disconnected”
- Communicate the situation of those in poverty, with mental illness, and single mothers through the use of
 - Statistics
 - Testimonies
- Encourage the students to begin thinking proactively about how to treat the disconnected and assimilate them into the body of Christ
- Assess the practices and ability of your local church to reach and include

Poverty Quiz

The answers to this quiz are listed below. The point of the exercise is to see how sensitive the group is to the needs of the poor and the specific challenges they face. The quiz is also designed to expose any wrong assumptions people may have about poor people in the United States.

Poverty quiz:

1. The number of people living in U.S. poverty decreased in 2003.

False. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of poor people increased by 1.3 million last year from 34.6 million to 35.9 million. One out of every eight Americans is living in poverty.

2. Most Americans could get out of poverty if they only had a job.

False. Most Americans living in poverty are too young, too old or physically incapable of working due to illness or disability. In fact, nearly two-thirds of all Americans living in poverty have to depend on someone else in the household to bring in money to live.

3. Asian Americans experienced the greatest increase in poverty.

True. The number of Asian Americans living in poverty rose the greatest among all groups to 11.8% and 1.4 million people in 2003, an increase from 10.1% in 2002. For Hispanics, the poverty rate was 22.5% in 2003, unchanged from 2001. For African Americans, the rate rose only slightly to 24.4%, up from 24.1%. Still, nearly one out of four African Americans is living in poverty.

4. The government says a family of four is poor if it earns less than \$35,000 annually.

False. The federal government puts the poverty threshold at \$18,810. However, a 2000 poll revealed that a majority of Americans believe it takes at least \$35,000 annually to provide adequately for a family of four.

5. The "working poor" in America are growing even poorer.

True. The working poor in America grew poorer during 2003, with incomes dipping farther below the poverty line than in any other year since 1975, the first year for which such data was available.

6. The rate of child poverty in America is higher than it is in most of the world's industrialized countries.

True. In fact, the U.S. child poverty rate is two-to-three times higher than other major industrialized nations.

7. The federal minimum wage is now \$5.15 per hour.

True. But for a mother who works full-time at minimum wage to support one small child earns \$10,712 a year, which is \$1,303 below the 2003 poverty threshold for a family of two.

8. The elderly poverty rate is higher than any other age group.

False. The poverty rate for America's elderly population, those people over 65, stands at 10.2%, or one out of every ten seniors, while the child poverty rate is 17.6%, or one out of every six children in America.

Single Adult Survey

This is a resource for your church. Distributing a survey to your church's adults could be a good first step in assessing their needs. If you conduct the survey, pay particular attention to the answers single parents give. This tool can help you better meet their needs.

Church Assessment: Discussion

1. How does wealth (or lack of it) seem to affect the relationships people have at church?
2. Are most people at church of the same socio-economic background?
3. Are church leaders selected on the basis of their financial status?
4. Name the top three restaurants groups of people from church will choose to eat at together:
5. How much does it cost to go on the church retreat? Church camp? Seminars? Is there assistance available for those who can't pay?
6. What is the dress code at church? How do the majority of people dress on Sunday morning? Formal or informal? Does everyone dress similarly?
7. Are there as many opportunities for fellowship for those who are single as there are for those who are married?
8. Are small groups comprised of couples? Is there an option for an all ladies' group? A singles' one?
9. Would a single mother feel looked down upon or judged by the people of your church? Would she find fellowship?
10. Is your church schedule consistent: times, order of service, weekly events?
11. Are schedule changes announced well in advance?
12. Would someone who was homeless or mentally ill feel comfortable participating in Sunday School at your church?
13. Is there any way for people to get to church who cannot drive or walk?
14. Is your building handicap accessible?

Questions 1-6 are designed to assess how welcome poor people would feel at your church. Addressing these specific issues, especially in board meetings or leadership training sessions is important.

Questions 7-9 target your church's sensitivity to single parents. Again, intentionality on the part of the church's leadership will greatly help.

Questions 10-12 target how sensitive your church is to those with certain mental illnesses. Intentionality will be required in responding to the mentally ill.

Questions 13-14 address more generally how well the church is tuned into the needs of outsiders, especially “disconnected” ones.

Group Discussion

Read over these scenarios and brainstorm how to handle each situation. List the specific needs you will want to address. Also brainstorm about what *not* to do and why. We will discuss everyone’s answers as a group.

Scenario 1:

During a church potluck, a lady at your table begins to share with the group that she struggles with homosexuality. She wonders, “Why did God make me like this and then forbid it? Where is the place for intimacy with another person in my life?”

This woman is a newcomer. She does not have a church background, but she has come to faith. How do you respond to her?

Scenario 2:

A man in the community has contacted your church. He is very interested in attending, but he has no way to get there. He does not drive, does not get around easily by himself, and lives in a group home due to his schizophrenia.

What can be done for this man? If he does come, how will your church welcome him and address his needs best?

Scenario 3:

You’re teaching Sunday School to a group of ten people. One of the ladies in the group is autistic. As you teach, he will sometimes burst out with comments that may or may not be relevant to the lesson. How do you handle it?

Scenario 4:

The local homeless shelter is going to be busing in men who are interested in attending your church. Will they be welcome? How will the way others dress make them feel? How can they best be incorporated into the community?

Homework options

Homework is optional, of course. But it helps students connect with the disconnected on a deeper level. There needs to be some action along with the reflection that the class should provide.

I. INTERVIEW

Option 1:

Volunteer to serve a meal at the local Rescue Mission. Eat with the people you help serve and ask them if they wouldn't mind answering a question for your homework project. Then ask them to describe what their ideal church would be like. Also attend their religious service if they conduct one. What was it like? How does the service intentionally connect with them?

Option 2:

Do your laundry at a local Laundromat. Chat with other customers until you come across a single mother. Ask her what she looks for in a church. How can the church best minister to her? Does she currently have a church? If so, what are the elements that drew her to it? What, if any, are the turn-offs about church for her?

Option 3:

Interview someone you know who is homebound or lives in a nursing home. Ask them how the church can minister to them. Would they like to receive tapes of services? Regular communion? Does anyone visit them regularly? Would they be interested (if capable) in hosting a small group (if homebound)?

Write up your observations in a two page paper. Comment on what you learned, how you felt about the experience, and how you felt it could have gone better (if applicable). In your estimation, how could your church best minister to those you interviewed?

II. BOOK REPORT

Choose from the list, read, and write a book report.

Amos, William E. *When AIDS Comes to Church*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988.

Howe, Michele. *Going it Alone: Meeting the Challenges of Being a Single Mom*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.

Ransom, Judy Griffith. *The Courage to Care: Seven Families Touched by Disability and Congregational Caring*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1994.

Vander Broek, Lyle D. *Breaking Barriers: The Possibilities of Christian Community in a Lonely World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002.