

Index for Instructor's Resource

Designed to give the instructor some background information on each subject as well as suggestions for implementation.

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POVERTY

US Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/povfacts.shtml>

Since 2000, the number of poor Americans has grown by more than 4 million. The official poverty rate in 2003 (the most current year for which figures are available) was 12.5 percent, up from 12.1 percent in 2002. Total Americans below the official poverty thresholds numbered 35.9 million, a figure 1.3 million higher than the 34.6 million in poverty in 2002... On average, one out of every three Americans, 34.2 percent of all people in the United States, are officially classified as living in poverty at least 2 months out of the year... Since 1999, the number of poor Americans suffering from "food insecurity" and hunger has increased by 3.9 million, 2.8 million adults and more than one million children. In 2002, 34.9 million people lived in households experiencing food insecurity, that is, not enough food for basic nourishment--compared to 33.6 million in 2001 and 31 million in 1999... In 2003, 7.6 million American families, 10 percent of all families, were in poverty.

A single parent of two young children working full-time in a minimum wage job for a year would make \$10,712 before taxes--a wage \$3,968 below the poverty threshold set by the federal government... About 40 percent of poor single-parent, working mothers who paid for child care, paid at least half of their income for child care; an additional 25 percent of these families paid between 40 and 50 percent of their incomes for child care.

To learn more about poverty in America, see

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/index.htm> Take a helpful "Tour of Poverty.

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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.

MENTAL ILLNESS

“The Nation’s Voice on Mental Illness”

Learn more about mental illness and specific disorders at <http://www.nami.org/>.

Normalcy is important to those with mental illness. They want to fit in like everyone else; they have typical goals and dreams. It’s important to learn about their disorders and to listen to them if they need to express their frustration and concerns. We can’t imagine how miserable it is to live with one of these illnesses, sometimes unable to cope with the smallest things, unable to go about their day or attain their goals. Compounding this personal frustration is a prevailing ignorance in society that doesn’t show as much compassion for these illnesses as it does for other physical illnesses.

Religious communities are in a unique position to combat stigmas and provide a message of acceptance and hope. Proclaiming the values of social justice, respect for all persons, and non-discrimination, faith communities reach out to individuals and families affected by mental illness in many helpful ways. The Faith Community is the place for support and discussion centered around spiritual values and the recovery process.

“Pathways to Promise”

<http://www.pathways2promise.org/>

This interactive site is designed for clergy and people in local congregations to get a "snapshot" of:

1. what to do when a person with mental illness or a family member comes for help or simply makes his or her presence known (see [Pastoral Crisis Intervention](#));
2. what activities and programs can be developed in congregations that are supportive of people with mental illness and/or their families (see [Helping the Family](#));
3. what agencies and organizations offer helpful resources and referral information (see [Resources](#)).

This site is intended for clergy, interested laity, people with mental illness and their families, friends and supporters and mental health professionals interested in working with the faith community.

People with an ongoing mental illness are often isolated. Very often their loss of self-esteem or the symptoms of the illness exacerbate the tendency to withdraw. For that person it is tremendously affirming to have a relationship with a pastor or someone in the congregation, because too often that person may have no other friends or support systems. The pastor should reassure the person that God knows, loves and understands the person's needs even if he/she is too ill to express them to God.

Alienation: People with mental illnesses sometimes feel alienated and misunderstood. Many factors contribute to these feelings. People with the illness may have little awareness of the process of the disease. Their own thoughts and feelings may be disturbing and opposed to what they have learned to expect of themselves as persons of faith. They sometimes judge themselves as unacceptable to the faith community. Or, they project their own judgments on the congregation and perceive that people are condemning them for their lack of faith. As a result, they pull away from the congregation (Uken, 1986, 7).

Punishment or Judgment: Individuals suffering from depression and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness because of their illness may focus on religious themes of judgment. Some believe God to be punishing them or why would God have them in this situation. Depressed persons feel guilty and see themselves as failing others and themselves. These persons believe God's punishment is deserved. They may feel excessive guilt or shame, or believe themselves unworthy or incapable of accepting comfort and forgiveness for past failures. People who suffer from paranoid symptoms may focus on religious themes of persecution and the fear of being punished or abandoned by God and others (Weisinger, 1991, 32-33).

Spiritual Isolation: In this situation, people feel cut off or distant in their relationship with God.

This issue has been voiced repeatedly by those who have experienced a close relationship to God in the past. Suddenly they find, in the midst of their emotional distress when they sense very desperately a need to reach out to God for support, God is not there as before. They recall God was very close and involved in their lives in a meaningful way. Now God seems distant, removed and unmoving to some people undergoing the pain of mental illness (Wagner, 1985, 80-81).

Physical Isolation: Physical illness makes it impossible for some people to tolerate the stimulation of being in a worshipping community. They may be unable to socialize and visit as often as is expected in church. Sometimes they cannot think clearly. Bible reading may be more confusing than helpful. Prayer may seem impossible. They may even feel they are losing faith.

Loss: A consumer describes his sense of loss:

My hope is often shaken by my periodic episodes of depression

Delusions: Some people may have frightening experiences such as having delusions of being either Christ or the devil, or hearing special messages from God or demons. They may conclude they are evil, God is abandoning or punishing them, or they are lost. These persons need to be reassured in concrete ways that God is with them, the congregation is supporting them and praying for them when they cannot pray. They may still feel threatened, judged, punished, abandoned and isolated (Uken, 1986, 7).

Worthlessness: Willard Wagner (1985, 82) describes a case where a pastor's wife characterized her life prior to coming to the hospital as a life of giving to others. For years she had taken an active part in church programs. She taught a bible study, called on shut-ins and was involved in the activities of the parish. What caused her the most distress and contributed to her sense of worthlessness was that although for many years she had taught others that they should trust in God, she now found that she had great difficulty in trusting in Him because she felt that she was totally cut off from Him. Along with the loneliness of being disconnected from God she also experienced the loneliness of being out of touch with other people and with herself. She believed that all she had attempted to contribute in the past was meaningless and worthless. She came to a point where she gave up going to church, one of the things she had previously enjoyed.

Elation: People experiencing mania or a delusion may feel euphoric and elated because of their condition. They may have an elevated sense of self-importance or an exaggerated opinion about their relationship to God. They may lack an appropriate sense of shame, guilt or self-control.

When working with someone who has a mental illness, the pastor should try to think of what the person may be experiencing that may account for these symptoms. If the pastor has some history with the person, he/she should try to identify what happens when the person becomes ill. Then the pastor should structure limits, behaviors and responses in an appropriate way. He/she should try to avoid focusing on the details of the person's behavior. He/she should try to keep the interaction as normal as possible. The pastor should use statements that give his/her perspective rather than imposing perceived behavior on the person. For example, instead of saying "You are not interested," try "I am concerned because you seem disinterested."

The pastor should use an open, caring, accepting manner that is genuine. People with these illnesses pick up on false behavior that can be demeaning or threatening to them. When the pastor listens to the person, it should be true listening that encompasses both verbal and nonverbal responses. The pastor should try to understand what is being said and what is not being said from the person's perspective. Remember that the pastor's concern and interest is very important to the person, even if he/she is unable to show it. The pastor should remind the person that God cares for him/her. If the person expresses an interest in the illness and its consequences, the pastor can work with the person to learn about it. The pastor should be a resource for information and referral. If the person wants to have a serious discussion, the pastor should attempt to do it remembering that many severely ill people are rational as much of the time as they are symptomatic or psychotic.

Symptomatic Behavior and the Appropriate Responses

- [Hopelessness](#)
- [Apprehension and fear of failure or rejection](#)
- [Low self-esteem and the resulting lack of motivation](#)
- [Withdrawn behavior](#)

- [Relapse](#)
- [Difficulty in processing information](#)
- [Anxiety, agitation or aggression](#)
- [Regressive behavior](#)
- [Bizarre behavior](#)
- [Hallucinations](#)
- [Delusions](#)
- [Feelings of depression](#)
- [Disorganized thinking and slow responses](#)

SINGLE PARENTS

“Heartlight”

Suggestions from Heartlight: <http://www.heartlight.org/>

What can we, the body of Christ, do to help?

These are folks who need love, help, and acceptance. They need a place to heal and grow. Here are some practical things we can do to help these hurting folks:

- *Make a point to call and include them in key activities.*
This will help ease the sense of isolation. Of course, make sure the activity is appropriate for single people. Don't put them on the spot.
- *Take the kids out for a day or half a day.*
Time without kids is like gold for single parents. They love their children, and many single parents literally live their lives for the well-being of their kids. At the same time, there are some things that can be accomplished quicker and easier without kids! This is also a great time for the children to feel special and valued.
- *Have your church hang out a shingle!*
Put up a sign that says “we love single parents.” Let your community know you value these folks and their kids.
- *Foot the bill sometimes.*
Money is tight for single parents. Occasionally paying a utility bill, or buying new shoes for the kids can make an amazing difference to a single parent.
- *Give the single parent some church service time alone!*
It's tough to worship while going for a drink of water, or to the bathroom every ten minutes. Carry a little totebag of Bible storybooks, crayons, and puzzles, and snag one of those kids from mom during church for an hour or so.
- *Listen in an open, nonjudgmental way.*
This is sometimes really tough! We are busy, and we often have lots of great advice to help “fix” a situation. Just listen to the single parent and they will tell you what is in their hearts. Advice is best given when we are asked for it.
- *Have at least a class and one fellowship event per month for the single parents.*
This is not too difficult, but takes some consistent effort. You can do it! An honest open Bible believing teacher with a heart of compassion makes all the difference in the world. And you would be surprised how often a hamburger cookout will uplift the spirits of single parents.

Question: Why are they single: out of wedlock? Divorce? Widowed? It will matter in your response. Some of them need help grieving.

Single Parents: A Vital Part of the Church

http://www.nazarene.org/ssm/adult/single/articles/single_parents2.html

By Linda Hardin

Workers in the children's department have an important role in the children's lives. These teachers must be aware of the questions children will ask and how to answer them. The questions center on why, love, and self-worth. Answer the questions honestly giving encouragement and building self-esteem. ...

It may be necessary to consult with the parent, making sure you don't contradict what's said at home. Make it clear you don't want to confuse the child or contradict the parent. Most parents understand and appreciate your concern. This consideration also allows you to befriend and encourage the parent.

The increase of single-parent homes provides the rationale for evaluating the criterion of contests and participation in activities. Can we deny a child winning a contest or participating in a musical or play because of absences caused by court-ordered visitations? The child isn't responsible for the decisions. The distance between homes may prevent attending practices. In a small church, both parents may be uncomfortable about being there for the same services.

The Sunday School teacher needs to remember birthdays and other special occasions. Spending time with single-parent children gives them a sense of importance. Teachers often fill a needed role. This includes attending sports, school, and other activities as often as possible.

Be aware of the children of single-parent homes as you plan trips, parties, retreats, and other activities requiring money. The single parent, especially the single mother, may be living on a limited budget. Some of the extras taken for granted by others often become luxuries for them.

As a result of court-ordered visitations, some children will attend your Sunday School on *irregular-regular* basis. The attendance may be every other week or just once a month. Recognize these patterns and work to make the child feel part of the class.

Some churches may opt to address single-parent needs during Sunday School. There are three basic philosophies:

1. Keep them in classes with all other adults regardless of marital status.
2. Put them in the single adult class or start a single adult class.
3. Begin a class designed for single parents.

One of the basic needs is for friends who listen. The single parent doesn't need platitudes or judgmental remarks. Their need is for a friend to listen while expressing emotions. They need someone to hold them accountable for attitudes and signs of self-pity. They need someone to pray for them and walk beside them during this dark time. They need hugs, pats on the shoulder, and words of encouragement--someone to tell them they have value and worth.

Another need is for assistance. Many single mothers face a dramatic change in life-style following death or divorce. Many live at the poverty level. They need scholarships for the children and themselves to attend camps, retreats, and other activities. This also includes many social activities whether as a class or as a part of a group. Many will need assistance when faced with house and car maintenance. They often need food and clothing. The holidays are difficult as they accept the difference between what was and is. While it may be court-ordered, many receive only partial child support payments. There is a large number that never receive any support payments. The never-married mother rarely receives any child support.

Parenting should be a team effort. The single parent faces responsibility for the household as well as the pressure from work. Here are some ways members of the congregation can minister to the single parent:

1. Volunteer baby-sitters to allow the single parent time alone.
2. Casseroles or surprise meals that free the parent of one responsibility.
3. Assistance with house and car repairs and maintenance.
4. Make offers for help specific, including date and time.

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