



Ten ways to Respond to Poverty in the World

We have all heard the statistics of the dire effects of poverty, the imbalance in the world's distribution of wealth. So often we feel powerless in the face of a huge problem. Yet we are not powerless. We are Christians who are empowered by God's love in Christ. We can and we must act to relieve the suffering of the human family. Here are ten steps to get started.

1. Choose a focus

There are so many trouble spots in the world where poverty has a hold over human lives. Choose one particular area as your focus. This doesn't mean that you can't give to other areas too, but choose one as your strongest focus. E.g., if your local parish supports a mission in Sudan, you might choose to make this your focus.

2. Stay informed

Get to know some of the people associated with this trouble spot. Stay informed about their plight. Talk or write to those who are involved. Make it your business to find out more. In the process of acquiring such knowledge, allow your heart to be drawn towards these people.

3. Develop a relationship

As your knowledge increases, note how you develop an antenna for news about the people living in this part of the world. Cut out articles/photos for your 'fridge door. Note how these people are no longer a 'charity' to you but are becoming part of your consciousness, your prayer, your life. They are teaching you.

4. Embrace in prayer

When you go to prayer, and especially in the Sunday Eucharist, take these people and their needs with you in your heart. As you ask yourself, "What more can I do" seek the direction of the Holy Spirit.

5. Plan ahead

In deciding to support your chosen cause—with funds, time, skills or prayer—bring structure to your giving. E.g., when drawing up the household budget or when making a major financial decision, bring your outreach into the picture. What things will you go without in order to accommodate this financial commitment?

6. Persevere with small steps

Proceed with small achievable steps which amount to more than 'handouts,' that challenge your lifestyle and thinking as well. E.g., radically simplify your grocery list. Take the time to cherish gifts like clean water. Pause before each meal to give thanks for this sustenance and to remember those who 'have not.'

7. Talk about it

Take up opportunities in everyday conversation to share your concern about poverty and your steps towards a constructive response. No need to put others on guilt trips. Simply witness with confidence and joy through your lifestyle choices.

8. Involve others

Invite friends or family members to join you in this outreach. Involving children is a wonderful way to educate and teach the continuity between faith and action.

9. Persevere

After initial enthusiasm wears off, fatigue and discouragement set in. Be prepared for this and develop practical antidotes. E.g., read an inspiring article. Talk to a friend who will encourage you. In prayer, seek God's strength. Acknowledge the difficulties, then recommit to the task.

10. Go with the Lord

Place all your efforts in the context of faith. We live with the imperfections of this world, with our mistakes and misunderstandings. Yet in God's love we find new life, hope, empowerment. Never lose sight of the bigger picture.

Helpful Hint

The Catholic Church, through its personnel, its local communities and official agencies, is a vital player in efforts to relieve poverty in the world. Subscribe to the mailing list of a Catholic relief agency (e.g., Caritas or Catholic Mission) and stay in touch with their various projects and ways that you can support them (e.g., with your funds, skills, prayer). Or become involved through the networks of your parish or school or the social justice projects of a religious congregation.