



# International Day for the Elimination of Poverty

## 17 October

### 1. Thinking About Poverty

#### 1.1 Low Income

Traditionally, poverty has been understood in terms of low income. Poverty can be measured in *absolute* or *relative* terms. An absolute measure judges a person to be living in poverty if they do not have sufficient income to purchase a given basket of goods in a particular year. A relative measure judges a person to be in poverty if their income is below a certain percentage of median household income. ACOSS's *Poverty in Australia 2012 Report* used the measure of 50% of the disposable income of the median income household.

Read more: [http://www.acoss.org.au/uploads/ACOSS%20Poverty%20Report%202012\\_Final.pdf](http://www.acoss.org.au/uploads/ACOSS%20Poverty%20Report%202012_Final.pdf)

**For Reflection:** How much income do you think a family needs to live decently in your community?

#### 1.2 Deprivation

Poverty can also be seen as being deprived of items that society considers no one should have to do without. The Social Policy Research Centre has described as *multiple deprivation* the lack of at least three out of 20 items that they identified as essential. Their list includes:

1. a decent and secure home;
2. a substantial meal at least once a day;
3. up to \$500 in emergency savings;
4. dental treatment; and
5. heating in at least one room of the house.

Read more: [https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Report14\\_06\\_Experience\\_Poverty.pdf](https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Report14_06_Experience_Poverty.pdf)

**For Reflection:** What do you think are the essentials of life that no one should have to do without?

#### 1.3 Capabilities

A *capabilities approach* sees poverty as a lack of capabilities to do or to be certain things of value. Nussbaum suggests that the most central human capabilities are:

1. Life e.g. being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length;
2. Bodily health e.g. being able to have good health, be adequately nourished, have adequate shelter;
3. Bodily integrity e.g. to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence;
4. Senses, imagination and thought e.g. being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education;
5. Emotions e.g. to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger - not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety;
6. Practical reason e.g. being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life;
7. Affiliation e.g. being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction;

8. Other species e.g. being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature;
9. Play e.g. being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities;
10. Control over one's environment (political and material) e.g. being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers (Nussbaum, 2000)

**For Reflection:** What do you think are the things that a person must be capable of doing or being in order to lead a fully human life? Do any of your programs or activities relate to any of the capabilities mentioned above?

#### 1.4 Social Exclusion

A focus on *social exclusion* or, more positively, promoting *social inclusion*, stresses the social and contextual nature of experiences of poverty and disadvantage. The Australian Social Inclusion Board defines social inclusion as having the resources, opportunities and capabilities needed to:

- Learn (participate in education and training);
- Work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities);
- Engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities); and
- Have a voice (influence decisions that affect them)

Read more: [www.socialinclusion.gov.au/about/what-social-inclusion](http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/about/what-social-inclusion)

**For Reflection:** How would you define social inclusion?

#### 1.5 Integral Human Development

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference recently issued a statement for Social Justice Sunday called *Lazarus at our Gate: A Critical Moment in the Fight Against World Poverty*. It says:

"Poverty is more than simply a lack of money. It is multi-dimensional: it concerns access to health, education, social services, human rights, freedom, life opportunities and the ultimate goal of the development enterprise – happiness." (p 6)

Catholic Social Teaching promotes integral human development, that is, the development of the whole person and of all peoples. It places having and doing at the service of being. It goes beyond meeting basic needs to enabling people to achieve their full potential – to become the people God made them to be. It is about the fullness of life. It is a person centred approach which recognizes that there are many dimensions of poverty beyond a lack of income or essential items. Catholic teaching insists that truly human development embraces the spiritual dimension of life and the social nature of human beings. This is why Catholic development agencies favour community development approaches that involve communities and social relationships rather than focusing on individuals alone, and they are always open to the transcendent.

Many of the programs and activities of Catholic educational, health and social service organizations contribute to combating poverty by actively seeking to build up capabilities and to promote social inclusion. They help people to have more and to do more in order to be more.

Read More: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/SJSandresources/2013-14-SJS-Statement.pdf>

**For Reflection:** Which dimensions of development are the most, and least, strongly addressed by your activities?

## 2. How the Society of the Sacred Heart Responds to Poverty

### 2.1 The Option for the Poor

In the Scriptures we see that God consistently shows special care for the poor. The widow, the orphan and the stranger - those who are destitute and at the mercy of others - are clearly close to God's heart. When we judge situations from the perspective of these people and groups, and give their needs priority, we are a clearer sign and more effective instrument of God's love in the world. This is sometimes called making an option for the poor.

Although the expression 'option for the poor' was coined in the mid-twentieth century, this commitment has always been part of the charism of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Here is how the Constitutions of 1815 express it:

"Though all the souls confided to the care of the spouses of the Heart of Jesus have apparently the same claim to their affection, nevertheless there are some for whom they are allowed to have a special attraction, namely, the children of the poor ... Their poverty, which makes them so closely resemble Jesus Christ, will give them additional claims to the tenderness and zeal of the spouses of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." (n 350)

And here is how the Constitutions of 1982 express it:

"Through humble prayer and through contemplating Jesus in His poverty, both in the Gospel and in the poor of today's world, we learn to open our hearts to the needy, to be at their service, to enter into their aspirations towards human dignity and to make this cause our own. We discover what they teach us about the Gospel and we recognize in them the face of the suffering Christ. Wherever we are, we commit ourselves to directing our energies, our resources and our choices towards the search for a more just and caring society." (n 55)

This special love for the poor calls us to solidarity, material simplicity, sharing, and a commitment to addressing the causes of poverty.

### 2.2 Material Simplicity & Sharing

Members of the Society of the Sacred Heart embrace simple and unpretentious lifestyles. They embrace voluntary deprivation in imitation of Jesus, striving to reduce their needs, to have less in order to share more (Constitutions of 1982, n 56 – 57). The section of the Constitutions dealing with financial administration insists on "a way of life consistent with our option of solidarity with the poor and oppressed" and "a genuine effort to bring about a more just distribution of the world's resources" (n 171). This commitment is corporate as well as personal – it is to be reflected in the ministries of the Society.

Those who wish to embrace the Sacred Heart charism are also challenged to express this spirit in their own lives and activities.

### **2.3 Community**

Our option for the poor calls for a solidarity that is more than just distant giving. It is relational; it calls for existential contact – knowing people’s experiences and aspirations by sharing their lives and friendship.

We respond to the poverty of social exclusion by actively building community. For us, building community is a Christian activity that witnesses to the unity of the human family as children of God – it can never be exclusive, elitist or turned in on itself.

### **2.4 Education & Human Development**

To educate is an act of justice and a way of addressing poverty:

“The educational dimension of our mission is, in fact, inseparable from our call to work for justice. In a world which does not reflect the demands of the Kingdom, in which people are often disfigured, used as tools, frustrated both in their basic needs and in their deepest longings, we pledge ourselves to seek solidarity with the poor, with those who live on the margin of society, and to work together for our mutual liberation which is growth in faith and love.” (General Chapter 1976, p 9)

By building capabilities through education we support people to do and to be more – to achieve their full potential as human beings. It is a response to poverty that respects the dignity and agency of those who are poor rather than treating them as passive recipients of other people’s charity or decision making.

### **2.5 We are in this Together**

Our liberation is bound up with one another’s. When we adopt God’s priority for those in the greatest need, the most marginalized and the most disempowered, we also address our own poverty.

When we share resources we address the poverty of our own selfishness as well as the needs of others. When we include the previously excluded our relationships are enriched. When we assist others in developing and exercising capabilities we become more fully who God created us to be – coworkers in building up God’s Reign.

We are all members of the one human family and we are in this together.

**For Reflection:** How do you express solidarity, material simplicity, sharing, and address the causes of poverty?