FOOD SECURITY & economic justice
A Faith-Based Study Guide on Poverty & Hunger
LEADER’S GUIDE

NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE CONFERENCE
FORWARD

This handbook serves as a resource for leading a discussion on Food Security & Economic Justice: A Faith-Based Study Guide on Poverty & Hunger. The Study Guide is created for individuals to read and reflect upon their own, but it is also suitable for small groups, particularly parish or church groups. In a time of rising food costs, and the real possibility of sustained high food prices for some time to come, poverty and hunger concerns will continue to challenge us as a people of faith.

As these concerns intensify, the solutions to reducing hunger will be broadly argued and examined. What is the best course of action? How can local communities stay informed and engaged while these debates take place among national policymakers and world assemblies?

An effective way to learn is to gather with a small group and thoughtfully discuss this critical issue. The problem of hunger is a particularly important one for the faith community. This Leader’s Guide, along with the Study Guide, will outline the steps to a significant discussion on how food is produced and who gets to eat.

This Leader’s Guide assumes you are already familiar or experienced in facilitating group discussions. Together with the Study Guide, this handbook is useful in grappling with poverty and hunger from a faith perspective, moving the group discussion along in a focused way, and keeping track of agreed-upon actions. More than anything, this is a guide for group action.

A word about our perspective: The Study Guide on Food Security and Economic Justice has a decidedly Catholic voice to it. We pull from the teachings and writings of the Holy See and Catholic bishops to explain our approach, but we also draw from other faith traditions as well. We hope readers of various faith-based traditions will find value in the information presented in our Study Guide and resource materials.
Food Security & Economic Justice: A Faith-Based Study Guide provides a process or way to examine poverty and hunger as it appears in our world today. This companion handbook is meant to help you, as a discussion leader or facilitator, guide a faith-based group through this learning process in a smooth and effective way.

The key is preparation. This handbook will help you prepare, both in understanding the content of the Study Guide and pulling together the materials and resources you will need for the group’s use.

Another key principle is to apply what we learn because “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17). It is important for your group to conclude their study and reflection with an action. The Study Guide provides suggestions, such as:

- A prayer service or special liturgy remembering the poor and hungry.
- A church campaign on hunger and economic justice issues.
- A group or church effort to contact legislators about solutions to hunger.

When you have a sense of some possible courses of action, then you can begin to effectively prepare for a group discussion. That begins with a thorough reading of the Study Guide and preparing notes along the way. You will see various websites to check for more information about poverty and hunger.

This is not to say you need to become an expert! Gathering as a group and going through the Study Guide together is part of the learning experience for everyone, including you. It just helps if you are a step ahead with additional information.

Once you have a good sense of the Study Guide, then it is time to prepare for the group discussion.
Group Discussion & Dynamics

After welcoming everyone and introducing yourself, take a moment to let group participants identify themselves and briefly say why they are there. This helps set the tone of the group – and warms people up for a group discussion.

Briefly explain the flow of the study session, including the amount of time for major parts of the session. (Approximate times are suggested throughout this handbook.)

Be aware of the difference between younger, perhaps student, groups and older, more informed groups. Adjust your style accordingly.

Set simple ground rules for discussion: all voices will be heard, all opinions respected, and no one should try to dominate the discussion. The leader will recognize those who want to speak, then end discussion as required by time.

Note: In the Study Guide, there are three kinds of discussion: the situation of hunger in the world, the teachings of the Church on hunger, and a call to action to end hunger. It is important for everyone in the group to understand these different kinds of discussion. As described in the Study Guide, the learning process is meant to move from Observing and Discerning (discovery of truth) to Acting (what now must we do).

Things You’ll Need:

• People who are interested in learning by discussion (up to 20).
• Three hours of time (either all at once with a break or three separate sessions centered on Observe, Discern, Act).
• Copies of the Faith-Based Study Guide on Poverty & Hunger (everyone should read the guide before coming together).
• A Bible, or the Scriptural passages you plan to use.
• Ethics of Eating and Food Security cards (available from NCRLC).
• Handout on Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (see end of this handbook).
The opening section of the Study Guide – *For I Was Hungry* (pages 5-7) – creates a faith-based context for looking at hunger and poverty issues. It also lays out the process or method by which the group will work through the Study Guide.

This opening section briefly explains the three-part method of social justice action. Some know this as *See, Judge, Act*. In the Study Guide, we refer to it as *Observe, Discern, Act*. Take 5 to 10 minutes to review this process and let the group know how much time will be spent on each part. This could be roughly 30 minutes for each part equally, but you may need to devote more time upfront to review the situation of hunger and poverty, or to take the time to determine as a group what actions to take.

Sources to learn more:
- [http://vinformation.famvin.org/2010/05/see-judge-act/](http://vinformation.famvin.org/2010/05/see-judge-act/)

*Important Terms to Know* are presented near the beginning of the Study Guide (pages 8-9). These are upfront so that participants can get a sense of what they are about to study. Similar to a teacher presenting an overview of major terms or concepts, this section quickly goes through terms dealt with in the Study Guide.

It is helpful to know if people have heard these terms before, so ask them:
- Do you know what these mean?
- Are the explanations in the Study Guide the same as what you thought they meant?

This brief exercise will help you to know how familiar participants are with these terms, and how discussions will likely go during the study session.

*Approx. Time: 10 Minutes*

*Helpful Hint: To learn more, search these terms on Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)*
I: Examining the Situation

Similar to a book club discussion, group participants will need to read through the Study Guide prior to gathering together. A necessary section to read and think about beforehand is Part I: Examining the Situation (pages 11-17). As group leader, you will also want to look over the websites listed on page 12 of the Study Guide. These are links to important international programs on global food security.

The Study Guide itself cannot provide all of the details and aspects of poverty and hunger that are needed. Therefore, consider inviting a knowledgeable speaker to talk to the group. Just make sure that they review the Study Guide and address the points and perspective raised there.

Another option is to watch a video documentary or an online video. (See page 18 of the Study Guide for web-based video sources.) Depending on the length of the video, you might have to organize two sessions: the first for Examining the Situation and the second for Discerning and identifying Actions.

Recommended websites with online videos:
- CARE: www.care.org/features/index.asp
- Oxfam America: www.oxfamamerica.org/multimedia/video
- Catholic Relief Services: http://orb.crs.org/resources/interactive-resources/
- Food First: www.foodfirst.org/en/press/audiovideoarchive

Interactive websites with educational information:
- Bread for the World: www.bread.org/help/church/
- World Food Programme: www.wfp.org/hunger
- World Food Day USA: www.worldfooddayusa.org
  [Annual World Food Day Teleconference, on or near October 16]

The format for Examining the Situation might be:
- Overview of where hunger persists in the world and the U.S.
- Reactions to the Facts & Realities (page 13 of Study Guide).
- Discussion on Seeking the Right Course of Action.
How to grapple with Seeking the Right Course of Action

This part of the Study Guide (pages 14-17) may be a new way for some group members to think about hunger and food issues. The two courses of action – Current and Alternative – are very much debated by international groups and policymakers trying to ensure global food security. The study guide cannot get into all the details of these two courses of action, but the purpose here is to show that two major paradigms are presenting themselves as the way to “feed the world.”

How to engage the group in understanding the differences in the two courses of action:

1) Divide participants in half (or ask them to self-select)
2) One half to discuss Current course and identify key features
3) Other half to discuss Alternative course and identify key features
4) Come back together and inform each other of what they learned

As the group leader, you can help to identify the main differences in the two courses of action. Be prepared to write these on a blackboard or poster paper. Then engage the group in what they believe is the “right” course of action.

*Insist on thoughtful responses.* Don’t let people just share their feelings or opinions without providing reasonable arguments. Use the “pros and cons” model; argue for a position, and then argue against it.

*Manage personalities.* Specifically, ask the quieter members what they think of the topic. As kindly as possible, rein in the dominating members who don’t let others speak. Make sure every participant has an opportunity to be heard.

*Discussion questions* are listed on pages 18-19 of the Study Guide. It is not necessary to address each of the seven questions. Choose the ones appropriate for your group or as time allows.

*Approx. Time: 30-45 minutes*

*Helpful Hint: Break into small groups (3 to 4 people) to first discuss the questions, then come back to the full group and share responses.*
II: Reflecting and Discerning

There are three sources to this section on faith-based reflections: Biblical Scriptures, the Holy See, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. As time allows, you can closely review all three, but be sure to give most attention to section A on Scriptural passages. The important factor here is to generate reactions from group participants as they go over the questions on page 23 of the Study Guide.

You may also want to go back to pages 18-19 and discuss some of those questions again. Ask the group how the Church might answer these. Or, in fact, how the Church has answered these, based on the reflections by the Holy See and the U.S. Bishops (pages 24-28 of the Study Guide).

There are various ways to highlight the reflections in this part of the Study Guide. One is to ask participants in the group to read aloud select passages from the words of Pope Benedict XVI or the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Then hold a brief discussion about the meaning or intent of these words. Which passages strike a chord with the participants? Why? What do these words call each of us to do as faith-based followers?

Another way to review the reflections presented in sections B and C is to ask everyone to read silently, then discuss or share reactions in groups of 3 to 4 people. After a few minutes, ask each group to share their more interesting or pressing reactions.

Be aware that additional discussion questions will be asked on pages 31-32 of the Study Guide, so don’t take too much time on this part. The idea here is to refresh everyone about their faith tradition and what we are taught about caring for the hungry and doing justice on behalf of the poor.

This part of the study discussion is also an opportunity to review the principles of Catholic social teaching (see pages 12-13 of this handbook). These principles can inform the group’s discussion on how to discern and then how to act.

*Approx. Time: 30-45 minutes*
III: Responding and Acting in Faith

This section begins with the telling of a Church dignitary speaking before an international body of government representatives. That scenario is meant to set up the Study Questions listed on pages 31-32 of the Study Guide. The questions are meant to be considered in the context of what the group learned in both Part I (Observe) and Part II (Discern). In other words, answer these questions in the light of Church teachings.

As group leader, take particular note of the question raised by the Church dignitary in the third paragraph on page 30, which in essence asks: How can rich nations always find a way to help themselves, but are unable to meet the needs of the poor and destitute? This is an important question to ask the group from a faith perspective. The Study Questions (pages 31-32) will further serve to link Church and Gospel teachings with our actions in the world today.

Discussion Format: Break into small groups; each group should take one question to discuss for a few minutes. Come back to the full group and share responses.

Beginning on page 33 of the study guide, participants will be asked to consider specific Actions to Fight Hunger and Injustice. Ask them to write down at least one action they will take. They can write down as many of the nine as they like. Invite them to share this with a fellow participant, and vice versa. They should briefly explain to each other why they chose the actions they did.

*Helpful Hint: See if there are common actions that many are committing to take. If so, perhaps they can form a group and work together.*

*Approx. Time: 30 minutes*
For *Advocacy Actions* (page 35), it will be extremely helpful to provide additional information or materials in order for participants to carry out the proposed actions.

To this end, NCRLC has produced two sets of handy materials that concisely articulate the issues surrounding *Food Security* and the *Ethics of Eating*. A set of these cards may have come along with this Leader’s Guide; you may want to order additional sets to distribute to group participants.

The information on these cards provide details about “voting with your fork” and making ethical food choices for the good of community and the care of creation. These cards also provide the language that would work well in an op-ed article, a letter to the editor, or a message to elected officials.

But for much more to say or write, take the time to review *What the U.S. Government Should Do*. The list of six points on page 36 of the Study Guide provides the key provisions for changes to our federal policy on food security. These points can be copied verbatim into a letter to an elected official.

For *Reforms to International Assistance Programs* (pages 37-39), this may be too policy oriented for some groups to fully handle. Feel free to leave this part of the discussion for another time or opportunity. But for those in the group that want to tackle these complicated issues, this information is worth reviewing and, if possible, using in an op-ed article.

Regardless of how you set up this part of the study discussion, be sure to end on *What will you do to make a difference?* (page 39). Having participants write down what they intend to do, and then share that with others, makes it much more likely that they will carry forward with their commitment to confront poverty and hunger.

*Approx. Time: 20 minutes*
Resources for Action & Prayer

This section of the Study Guide is for use in planning a parish, church or faith-based event. On page 41, you will find a list of Special Occasions that occur throughout the year. Your group may want to select one of these days for a special service. You can also create your own special occasion or day of service.

The Prayers, Blessings and Litanies are suitable for church services, but also can be used at gatherings as a way to bring a faith-based perspective to a meeting or event.

During your study session on Food Security and Economic Justice, you can also draw from this resource section to hold a “prayer break” halfway through the session or as a closing prayer.

Additional Resources

This last page of the Study Guide is mainly a reference section for leaders or participants to explore if they want to study more about hunger and poverty issues. The organizations and websites listed provide a great deal of information. Many of these organizations also plan special occasions or observances, so you may want to coordinate a study session in line with their advocacy work.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

The next two pages present the principles of Catholic social teaching: make copies to hand out to group participants.
Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Life and Dignity of the Human Person
The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the person is at the core of a moral vision for society. The sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of Catholic social teaching.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
Catholic teaching proclaims that a basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Solidarity
Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity means that “loving our neighbor” has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

Rights and Responsibilities
Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity is protected and a healthy community achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to material needs for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers
In a marketplace where too often the quarterly bottom line takes precedence over the rights of workers, the Church teaches that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative.
Participation
All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. Conversely, it is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

Community and the Common Good
In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, Church tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The Church teaches that the role of the government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good.

Subsidiarity
The principle of subsidiarity holds that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good” (Centesimus annus, 48; Pope John Paul II, May 1, 1991).

Stewardship of Creation
Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.
**Closing Thoughts**

Give the group at least 90 minutes to work through the Study Guide, but keep in mind that the best discussions – those that generate new questions and open new vistas of knowledge – take time to ripen and mature. Don’t forget to pray! If you decide to do a three-part series, take time at the end of each session to pray for those suffering from poverty and hunger, as well as for wisdom about which action(s) your group will take.

Some people feel that open discussions can drift into vague or useless talk. If you begin to feel this in your group discussion, do not hesitate to step in and ask the group as a whole: “How does this matter to those who go hungry?” Spend some time deciding which questions are worth pursuing, which aren’t, then dive back in.

You will want to conclude the group discussion in a definitive way. We highly suggest a summary of the Action (or Actions) that group members have committed themselves to take. Make sure there is a sign-up sheet or that you have everyone’s contact information. As time allows, you may want to nominate or elect a working group leader: someone who agrees to move the action forward and keep everyone informed.

Finally, take a moment to ask participants what struck them the most throughout their discussions. Or, you may want to consider the passage from Isaiah 58 shown on the Contents page of the Study Guide. Read the passage aloud and ask the group if anyone now sees this in a new light, or sees a meaning that did not strike them before.

Then close with one of the prayers listed at the end of the Study Guide.

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*An Evaluation sheet is included in the packet of materials sent along with the Study Guide. Please encourage participants to take a moment to complete the Evaluation and provide their feedback about the Study Guide. (You may want to have a second evaluation form for the study session itself.)*
This Leader’s Guide, along with the Food Security and Economic Justice study guide, was developed to help parish ministers and church groups study important agricultural, food and environmental issues in a faith-based context.

Related Titles

For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers

Published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, this booklet is available in print editions in English and Spanish and may be ordered by calling toll-free 800-235-8722. Ask for publication number 5-603 (English), 5-903 (Spanish). This publication is also available online: www.usccb.org/bishops/agricultural.shtml

Global Climate Change: A Catholic Response

Produced by NCRLC, this Study Guide uses a reflection/action methodology called Shared Christian Praxis. The process begins with identifying where people are in their life experiences, then engaging them in critical reflection on their experiences and relating those experiences to the Story and Vision of Christian faith. This process concludes by outlining the dimensions for future actions. Contact us for more details: info@ncrlc.com

Visit our website (www.ncrlc.com) to see other topics about food, agriculture and the environment. Our program areas include Stewardship of Creation, Rural Outreach and Ministry, Agriculture and Food, and Assistance for Catholic Campaign for Human Development Funds. News and commentaries are also regularly added to the site. We will have much to say about the next Farm Bill coming up in 2012. Check out our website today, become a fan on Facebook or follow us on Twitter and let us know how we can better serve you!