

Faith and Poverty

Module 1: A Biblical Response

This nine-week session program lays the theological and biblical foundation for responding to poverty in our communities, so that we might engage in action in a way that honors the image of God in those we seek to serve. In this program, participants explore these two questions:

1. What tools does my faith have to offer regarding huge questions around poverty and injustice?
2. In light of poverty and other forms of human suffering, what is the Good News of the Gospel?

Participants will emerge from this program with a transformed understanding of who they are as God's child and how God is calling them to use their lives. Except for the first session, which will be about 90 minutes, the sessions run about 2 ¼ hours.

Books:

- Barking to the Choir by Gregory Boyle
- The Little Book of Biblical Justice by Chris Marshall
- The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right by Lisa Sharon Harper

Overview of Sessions

Getting to Know You: this pre-session will occur on the first day the class meets. It is an opportunity to begin to get to know the other participants.

Session 1: Holy Conversation versus Debate — In today's polarized world, it can be difficult to talk about important and controversial subjects such as poverty. This session gives participants practical tools for engaging in conversations around difficult topics, equipping them to transform heated discussions into expressions of worship.

Session 2: Compassion versus Tolerance — Throughout Scripture, the Kingdom of God is described as all people united to one another and to Godself; therefore, the Gospel beckons us to widen our circle of care and compassion beyond those who look and think like us. In this session, participants discern how a biblical understanding of Kingdom could transform their priorities and decisions.

Session 3: Awe versus Judgement — Fr. Gregory Boyle writes "Here is what we seek: a compassion that can stand in awe at what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment at how they carry it." This session challenges participants to look beyond their assumptions in order to encounter the divine image within all people.

Session 4: Abundance versus Scarcity — Whether in regard to money, time, love, or security, it's easy to worry that we don't have enough and that there isn't enough to go around. In this session, participants explore how a scarcity mindset prevents them from giving and loving generously, and how a mindset of abundance can cultivate joy in their spiritual lives and community.

Session 5: Equity versus Equality versus Social justice — In the first half of the session, participants hear from a guest speaker from the local community. They then explore the relationship between privilege and justice.

Session 6: Working For versus Working With — Those who are poor have unique gifts and wisdom to offer our communities. In this session, participants discern how to engage in ministry and service that involves reciprocity and mutual respect. Immersion Experience in the Local Community — see above for more information.

Session 7: Reading Scripture with the Poor — Jesus chose to live not among the rich and powerful, but among the marginalized. We encounter Jesus in this same context still today. In this session, participants explore how solidarity with the poor draws us closer to Jesus himself.

Session 8: Action versus Apathy — Participants explore barriers which keep Christians from community engagement, and then they discern ways to eliminate them, both in their personal lives and in their faith communities.