

## POVERTY PROGRAMMING IDEAS: Observe a fast

### Isaiah 58:6-7

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free?”

### WHY FASTING?

In the United States in 2008, 49.1 million people lived in hunger. Of those 49.1 million, 38.9 million were living in poverty. The correlation between the poor and the hungry in our country is strong and undeniable. By observing a fast, you allow yourself to enter into a time of intentional awareness of those who are struggling each day to stay fed. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that serves as a constant reminder of where our focus should be: each time we feel a hunger pain, we remember and pray for those who have never known life without hunger.

By observing a fast in a group, you will be able to discuss your experiences within your faith community and decide how you can act to help prevent poverty in the United States. Below you will find some guidelines on how to organize a fast in your Bible study or small group.

### STEP ONE: Choose a date

- Make sure your group has discussed and is comfortable with the idea of a day-long fast. Choose a day when you can all comfortably participate. You are welcome to participate on different days.
- Plan ahead to meet at the close of the day, or the next time your Bible study/small group meets, to discuss your experience of fasting.
- At the gathering before the fast, have resources available for the group to familiarize them with poverty in the United States. Find resources and fact sheets by clicking [here](http://www.nccendpoverty.org/resources/resources.html) or going to <http://www.nccendpoverty.org/resources/resources.html>.

### STEP TWO: During the fast

- Go about your day as planned, remembering to be especially mindful of those living in poverty.
- Make sure to keep water or small snacks handy in case you begin to feel woozy.
- Send an e-mail or an encouraging text message out to the participating members of your group reminding them to try and stay prayerful and thoughtful throughout the day.

### STEP THREE: After the fast

- Find ways get active after the fast is over. After observing a poverty fast, remember that there is hope and that you can make a positive change. Look for local charities or

advocacy organizations. Have information (pamphlets, print-outs, etc.) available at your next group meeting, or even plan a trip as a group to a local organization.

**Potential discussion questions**

- What did this fast make you realize about yourself?
- What did it make you realize about others, particularly those struggling in situations of poverty?
- How were your daily tasks affected by the constant feeling of hunger?
- Do you think a fast is an effective way to create mindfulness about hunger and poverty? Why or why not?
- Besides fasting, what are other ways we as a faith community can keep ourselves aware of those in need?
- How can you share what you've learned with others? Has this experience inspired you to become active in a local charity?