

YOUTH 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 what’s known as a “food insecure” household. 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 in a corporate faith community and decide how you can act to help prevent poverty in the United States. Below you will find some guidelines for how to organize a group fast by planning an overnight lock-in for your youth group, Bible study, or small group.

STEP ONE: Before the Lock-in

- **Set a date and time frame!** Consult with other church groups, youth leadership, and parents about a time frame that would be best for all involved.
- **Talk with core youth leadership about the goals of the lock-in.** Make sure the youth group understands exactly what the lock-in is about. The tone of this event will be a bit more somber than some of the more energetic things a youth group might be used to. Extended reflection on hunger issues is usually more appropriate for high school students than a younger crowd. Keep a positive and empowered outlook, emphasizing that young people play an important role in the advocacy world!
- **Advertise!** Put fliers up around your church. Reach out to other churches in the area, and encourage youth to invite their friends.
- **Plan ahead for activities!** A few ideas:
 - o Plan to talk about the group’s perception of what poverty is, who experiences it, etc. Have fact sheets ready to distribute with statistics and information. Talk about the ways the group’s ideas match up/do not match with the facts you’ve distributed. Discussion groups are good at the beginning and end of your lock-in,

to talk about the way students' perceptions of poverty have changed over the course of the night.

- Bring in a speaker representing a local food bank or homeless shelter to talk to the youth about the experience of working with people in poverty every day. Contact an organization in plenty of time in order to allow for scheduling conflicts. Schedule the speaker toward the beginning of the evening, as you're more likely to secure a speaker at 6:00 PM rather than 8:00 PM.
- Assemble a small group of students to lead a worship service, including student-led music, that is centered around poverty and our responsibility to those in need. Have the students plan which songs they would like to lead, verses they would like to read, etc. If you've just been on a mission trip or have a student who regularly volunteers, you might ask a few students to share their personal experiences as they've experienced the impacts of poverty.
- Build a candlelight vigil into the lock-in time. See resources for this at www.nccendpoverty.org/takeaction
- Plan a time of letter writing. Have the students write letters encouraging their legislators to act in favor of fighting poverty. You can find a sample letter at www.nccendpoverty.org/takeaction, or allow the students to use their own words.
- Check out more ideas at the World Vision 30 hour famine website: www.30hourfamine.org

STEP TWO: During the Lock-in (Evening)

- Lead your activities as planned. Try to keep events somewhat tightly scheduled so as not to allow the youth group to become lethargic and sluggish. Keep all activities low-energy, but highly involved.
- Try to make conversation as youth-led as possible. It might be wise to designate some leaders from your youth group to facilitate discussion or lead activities.
- Always keep small snacks (nuts, fruit, cheese and crackers, etc.) on hand in case anyone starts feeling lightheaded or nauseous from not eating. Have plenty of water available.

STEP THREE: After the Lock-in (Morning)

- A celebratory breakfast (literally breaking the fast) the next day is a great way to lift spirits. It should be a reminder that we are joyfully called and sent forth by God to be the hands and feet of Christ for those who are most needy.
- Provide ways for youth to get active after the lock-in is over. After observing a vigil of poverty, you'll want to leave them with hope that they can make a positive change. Point them in the direction of local charities or advocacy organizations. Have information (pamphlets, print-outs, etc.) available, or even plan a trip as a youth group to a local organization.