



## Poverty Awareness Exercise

### Supplies:

1. Power point presentation (provided) & a way to display it
2. Microphone for large groups
3. Table with 2 chairs for "Social Services"
4. Notebook paper
5. Pencils
6. Calculators
7. "Life Circumstance" cards that have been pre-cut (provided)
8. Copies of the "Poverty Exercise Scenario" (provided, 1 per group)
9. One page descriptions of social service providers in your area and federal programs (food pantries, temporary shelters, utility assistance, copy of SNAP benefits, copy of affordable health care benefits, free day care providers) Search the internet for services and print information off web pages.

### Exercise:

- 1. Divide the group into smaller groups of 4-5 people. You'll need 2-3 pages of notebook paper, two pencils, and one calculator per group.**

**Say,** "Although this exercise seems like a game, it is actually based on real Arkansas families and the daily struggles of living day-to-day on the poverty income line in Arkansas."

**Then, pray** for the exercise and especially for the real families who struggle. Ask to be made mindful of the needs of God's kingdom and more aware of the ways we can serve.

**Pass out the "scenario"** that gives them the background of the family they will be for the game.

- 2. Go through the first 2 days of the power point presentation.** Give the small groups time to realize that even after being paid, the family is behind in being able to pay all bills and buy groceries for the week. Take time to go around and visit with the small groups to problem solve. If they can't buy groceries, what would the family do? Encourage them to think about ways the poor receive food in their communities. If they can think of a food pantry, school pantry, etc., then let them add the amount of weekly groceries back into the budget.
- 3. Advance the Power Point to Day 3 and pass out the first "Life Circumstance" card.** There are 8 different families now as each of them is given a hardship that makes budgets stretch even more. If you have a very large group, you can repeat the 1-8 scenarios (so that you can have 16 groups of 4-5 maximum). Again, take time to go around and listen to the families with this new hardship. What are some tough choices they have to make? Remind them that selling the car is an option, but what happens next month? They won't be able to sell another car. And, remind them that the man has to get to work, so what will they do without a car? Most towns in Arkansas do not have public transportation. **You will repeat on Day 10 and Day 22 with cards that reflect the updates.**



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4. **Social Services**—You will sit behind a desk and let groups approach you to ask for help. Do not give them much advice; simply ask what they need. If they need food, tell them about SNAP. If they need health insurance, temporary housing, free childcare, etc., have information to give them about where to go and how much money they will need. When the line is about half way done, I announce that DHS is closed to mimic how hard it is for the working poor to get to these places on a day of work and how often the employees are gone or shut down early in the day.
5. **Day 5: GET CASH!** Here's where I offer payday loans! Later on in the exercise, there's day where they have to pay back those loans. Look at places around your town that have payday lending and see what the policies are. Usually, folks have to pay terrible fees that end up putting people in a worse bind.
6. **Weekend**—I remind them that weekends are difficult for families in poverty as they don't have resources for entertainment, and if kids are getting free breakfasts and lunches at school, that's an extra hardship on the family. I invite them to brainstorm what they would do over a weekend.
7. **New week means weekly bills.** The budget is already low, and some of the families have greater financial burdens because of the "life circumstances."
8. **Continue the exercise day by day giving time for the "families" to problem solve and make choices.**
9. **At the end of day 30, ask the groups to share insights or questions they may have.**
10. **Emphasize the need for social service providers in helping the working poor.**
11. **Refer to the 5 things that are most effective in decreasing food insecurity (provided).**

Thank you to the Rev. J. J. Whitney for creating this exercise and the accompanying materials.