



The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to touch all parts of our society, bringing economic and emotional stress to many families. However, families and individuals in poverty may experience this crisis differently from those at higher income levels, due to factors like:

- Having a job that can't be done from home, leaving them vulnerable to layoffs or loss of income
- Having a job that does not provide sick leave or paid time off
- Being unable to work due to childcare needs, with schools and daycares closed
- Higher risk of exposure to illness because they rely on public transportation, or share household space or childcare with family members, friends, or neighbors
- Not having means to stock up on essentials
- Lack of emergency savings -- already living paycheck to paycheck
- Existing health risk factors associated with poverty, like asthma or chronic illness
- Extra stress from all of the above, heightening mental health challenges like depression or anxiety

However, in spite of those challenges, families and individuals who've experienced poverty may have resources and wisdom that others do not:

- They have survived crisis before. In fact, crisis may be something they face daily.
- They are used to navigating broken systems and government mandates.
- They know how to rely on and how to support their family, friends, and neighbors with things like childcare or rides.
- They know how to stretch limited resources.
- They are used to making difficult choices, like whether to report to work and risk illness or stay home and risk loss of income.

In light of these observations, here is some guidance for the Church to support families in poverty in these days:

- Relational support may be the most important support of all. Don't underestimate the importance of checking in, asking how people are doing, and praying for one another.
- Be creative. You will figure out a way to take care of your family in this crisis; figure out a way to maintain relationships with neighbors in poverty.

- Local community organizations may be setting up emergency funds for help with rent, utilities, and food. Find out what's already available so that you can help connect families with those resources. (Your local United Way is probably collecting this information.)
- Investigate before you rush to meet a need. While we might think of providing lunches or help with utility bills, for instance, other community organizations may be giving out lunches, or utility companies may be withholding shutoff. It's also OK to ask questions to vet a need, and offer to connect them with another resource to meet it.
- Before you go into lower-income neighborhoods to offer assistance, reach out to churches in those neighborhoods to find out what needs they are seeing, and help through those channels first.
- Help provide good information to families you know. Misinformation is flying around social media, causing confusion and additional fear. You can help direct families to trusted resources, like Health Department updates.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13