

Reflection: Our Brothers and Sisters in Need are not Strangers

(45 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

Objective

Through this activity participants will:

- reflect on their reasons for attending this Food Fast; and
- consider the act of fasting in light of the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity.

Activity Summary

This activity should be done towards the beginning of the Food Fast. Through a process of journaling and sharing, participants will connect their fast to the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity.

Materials Needed

- Paper
- Pens
- Flipchart paper
- Markers

Procedure

Distribute paper and pens to each participant. Ask the participants to sit down and to quietly write down their answers to the following questions:

- Why are you here? What made you come to this Food Fast?
- What do you expect to happen at the end of the next 24 hours?
- What will you do to ensure that you meet these expectations?

Post 3 sheets of flipchart paper on the wall, one for each question. After a few minutes ask the participants to share their answers with the group by writing down a word or phrase for each question on the paper. After everyone has finished affirm everything that has been shared and include the following points:

- We came to this Food Fast for various reasons. Our reasons may include: because a friend invited us, because we want to prove that we can fast for twenty-four hours, because we want to make a difference.
- As we begin our Food Fast it is important that we articulate our reason for being here. Whatever these reasons may be, the most important thing to remember is we said yes to that invitation, and that initial act has made a difference.
- Many things can happen during the next twenty-four hours. We hope to meet your personal expectations as much as we hope that together we will meet our shared expectations. One of our expectations as organizers of this Food Fast is that at the end we will have a deeper understanding of what it is like for people who live with hunger each day of their lives, and that we as people of faith will consider what commitments we can make to make a difference in their lives.

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FACE THE FAST

Invite a participant to read the following aloud to the group:

- In his Message for Lent 2009, Pope Benedict XVI encourages the practice of fasting to help us “keep alive a welcoming and attentive attitude towards our brothers and sisters”. He stated: “fasting is an aid to open our eyes to the situation in which so many of our brothers and sisters live. In his First Letter, Saint John admonishes: If anyone has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, yet refuses him compassion – how does the love of God abide in him? (3,17). Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother. By freely embracing an act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that our brother or sister in need is not a stranger.”

Invite participants to share their thoughts on the following question:

- What thoughts came to your mind as you heard the message from Pope Benedict?

Ask participants to spend a few moments responding to the following question.

- More than 963 million people around the world went to bed hungry today. What does it mean for us that as Pope Benedict XVI says, “our brother and sister in need are not strangers”?

If there is time, close the activity by inviting participants to share their responses to the last question with the group.

Reflection: Claim the name Christian

(45 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

Objective

Through this activity participants will reflect on our Christian call to service.

Activity Summary

Participants will reflect on the Christian call to service in light of Matthew 25: 31-46 and a quote from the U.S. Catholic Bishop's pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- Flipchart
- Markers
- Journals
- Pens
- Instrumental music for reflection
- CD player
- *Faces of the Fast* presentation
- Computer
- Projector

Note: If it is impractical for you to use a computer presentation, you may print the pictures from the CD-ROM and post them or pass them around in a circle for the reflection.

Procedure

Set a quiet, reflective space for this activity or use *Creating a Fasting Atmosphere: Prayer and Reflection Space*, with soft instrumental music playing in the background.

Once the participants are seated comfortably, write the following questions on flipchart paper and invite participants to spend a few moments answering each question in their journals.

- Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?
- What do you consider to be essential characteristics of being a Christian?
- Do you feel that it is sometimes difficult to stay true to your Christian values?

Have a participant read Matthew 25: 31-46 aloud.

After the reading, ask participants to raise their hands if they included our Christian call to help the "least among us" in their list of the essential characteristics of being a Christian. Facilitate a group discussion on the following questions.

- What thoughts came to your mind as you heard this reading?
- In what ways can we be more mindful of the presence of Christ in others, especially in those in need?
- How can we assist each other in doing this often difficult task?

Invite participants to think about these questions as you show the Faces of the Fast presentation (or display the printed pictures around the room and invite participants to walk around and look at them).

Reflection: Claim the name Christian

(45 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

Afterwards, share with the group:

The U.S. Catholic Bishops released a document in 1986 that states, “No one may claim the name Christian and be comfortable in the face of the hunger, homelessness, insecurity, and injustice found in this country and the world.” (*Economic Justice for All*, #27)

Write the following questions on flipchart paper and invite participants to spend a few moments responding to one or more of them in their journals.

- How should we assess our own lifestyles and consumption, as well as the contributions we have to offer, in light of the needs of a hungry world?
- How can we make concern for “the least among us” a central consideration in our lives?
- What things can we do to help each other to “claim the name Christian” by staying true to our call to serve those in need?

If there is time, ask the participants to share some of their responses aloud with the group.

Reflection: Solidarity – Why Not?

(60 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

Objective

Through this activity participants will:

- explore what it means to be committed to the Catholic social teaching of solidarity; and
- think about concrete things they can do after the Food Fast to respond to the issues of global poverty and hunger.

Activity Summary

This activity should be done near the end of the Food Fast to help participants to connect their fasting experience with global hunger and poverty using the lens of the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity. Participants will then be challenged to think about concrete actions they can do after the Food Fast to take advantage of this experience as a way to answer the call to serve others.

This reflection follows *Learning Opportunity: Solidarity: A Vision of One Human Family*, which provides a visual understanding of solidarity and discussion on what the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity is.

Materials Needed

- Copies of *Solidarity – Why Not?* for each participant
- Pens
- Flipchart paper
- Markers

Procedure

Gather the group and invite them to seat themselves comfortably for this activity. Lead the group through a guided reflection using the following script.

Leader: How do you feel right now? What are your thoughts as we begin the final phase of our Fast, with ___ more hours ahead of us?

During this Food Fast we have been journeying with our brothers and sisters around the world who face the challenges of hunger and poverty every day. I congratulate you for accepting the challenge to participate in this Food Fast. You have made a choice to fast and to be here for 24 hours. There are too many people in our world who face hunger each day with no choice of an alternative. The question we ask ourselves now is what we can do for those in need after our Food Fast retreat is complete.

Distribute Solidarity – Why Not? to each participant.

Leader: Earlier in the Food Fast, we explored the vision of solidarity upheld by our Catholic social teaching. What do you remember from that session? How would you describe this principle in your own words?

Allow some time for brief reflection from participants. When they are finished, direct their attention to the definition provided at the top of the handout, Solidarity – Why Not?.

The principle of solidarity was given much focus in the teachings of Pope John Paul II. The Holy Father once wrote about solidarity in this way:

“This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” [On Social Concern, #38]

Reflection: Solidarity – Why Not?

(60 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

I invite you to take some time to reflect on this quote and the one provided by Robert Kennedy:

“There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not.”

As you do, respond to the questions on your handouts.

Allow participants time to answer the questions individually. Then form groups of three and ask participants to share their responses in small groups. After allowing 10-15 minutes for conversation, gather participants back into the large group and lead a discussion.

Leader: As Catholics we are called by our faith to be in solidarity with the poor, to go beyond merely feeling pity or sympathy towards them. The quote from Pope John Paul II speaks to a more demanding call: that we have to commit ourselves to the common good. We must recognize that we are responsible for each other and find ways to help the poor and marginalized to live and flourish in this world. That seems like a daunting task, right?

It is easy to be discouraged in the face of statistics. 963 million people are hungry. More than 2.8 billion people survive on less than \$2 per day. When we hear these things we ask ourselves, “why?”

But if we take the call to solidarity seriously, perhaps we should be asking ourselves, “Why not?” Why not imagine our world as it could be – a better world. Why not imagine a world where hunger and poverty are no longer prevalent; a world where all people have access to their basic needs and rights; a world where all are committed to the principle of solidarity? Why not?

By taking on the challenge of participating in this Food Fast you have actually taken a step towards making a difference, and have begun to think about what you can do to respond to the issues of hunger and poverty.

Now, please review the answers you have written for the last question on your handouts. Circle one action that you will commit to after this Food Fast. Sign your name, write the date and ask two friends to read what you have circled and to sign their names on your paper as a symbol of their solidarity with you on your continuing journey. These friends will promise to remind you about your commitment and to support you as you work towards it by sending you a text message or email after this Food Fast is complete.

Allow a few minutes for participants to sign the papers.

Aside from our individual personal commitments, we can also make some commitments to continue together as a group.

Ask the group to agree on one to three things that you can do together to affirm your commitment to make new roads in our world. List them on a flipchart and ask participants to sign their names to these commitments.

Leader: To end this reflection let us go around the room and each share aloud a word or phrase that summarizes our commitment to solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need.

Allow each participant to share a word or phrase.

Solidarity will transform the world, but working towards this transformation will often be challenging. However, our faith is a faith that reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus, that there is hope in the midst of challenges. By thinking about these issues of hunger and poverty, and by the commitments that we have shared, we accept the call to solidarity, and the challenge to transform our world.

Reflection: Solidarity – Why Not?

Handout

FACE THE FAST

Solidarity – Why Not?

A key Catholic social teaching principle is solidarity, a belief that we are all part of one human family. Pope John Paul II has defined solidarity in this way:

“This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” *[On Social Concern, #38]*

In many of his speeches, Robert F. Kennedy made the statement, “There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not.”

1. What does Pope John Paul II’s definition of solidarity mean to you?
2. What are some concrete ways that you can be in solidarity with the poor around the world, especially those who face chronic hunger?
3. What strikes you about the Robert Kennedy quote?
4. What “things that never were” would be necessary in a world where all people are committed to the principle of solidarity?
5. How will you continue to ask “why not”, and remain committed to living and acting in solidarity with the poor after our Food Fast is over?