

# *Just* Faith NETWORK



This document is for members of the JustFaith Network.

Do not copy, share, or forward without permission.



[www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org)

(502) 429-0865

In partnership with:



**bread**fortheworld  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

January 2019



Not many of us may know it: January is the **Poverty Awareness Month**, also called the National Poverty in America Awareness Month. JustFaith Ministries want to honor this month and provide some material for our members to reflect on the reality of poverty in the U.S. in particular.

January is also the month of Martin Luther King Day (we will provide some material next month on racism); it is appropriate that the Poverty Awareness Month coincides with the commemoration of the work and life of this tireless advocate of social justice. Dr. King launched the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, calling for an end to economic injustice and poverty; it was his last campaign and he saw it as deeply rooted in racial issues in the U.S.; Rev. William Barber revived the Poor People's Campaign in 2018 for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, calling us to address the same issues that Dr. King identified in 1968.

This month you will find:

-A discussion guide and some background information offered by one of our JustFaith graduates, John Strazzabosco, who recently published a book on poverty, *Ninety Feet Under, What Poverty Does to People* (Word & Deed Publishing Incorporated, 2018). John provides you with a brief summary of his book and some reading questions you can use to guide your own reading or use for discussion in a small reading group.

-John illustrates the content of his book by sharing with our members one of the stories that are at the inception of his writing project on poverty. This story can be found in a separate document.

-Finally, you can find below a few resources and a prayer addressing the issue of poverty. If you can, suggest to your congregation/community to dedicate one Sunday during the month of January to the issue of poverty and use some of these resources.

1) Here are a few websites of interest to help you explore the issue of poverty if you wish to be engaged in changing the reality of poverty in the U.S.:

- Basic [information](#) about the Poverty Awareness month;
- Visit our partner's [page](#), Bread for the World explaining how poverty is the #1-cause of hunger;
- Poverty USA [webpage](#) with important data and calls to action to help eradicate poverty;
- Material for the Poverty Awareness Month provided by the [USCCB](#), including liturgical tools;
- The Poverty Program [website](#) is also an important resource on poverty and actions one can take to end poverty;

- Visit the Ecumenical Poverty Initiative’s [page](#), working on tax fairness, health care access, and other issues related to poverty.
- The [report](#) on poverty in America by U.S. special rapporteur Philip Alston;
- The Poor People’s Campaign [website](#) for a very timely grassroots movement fighting poverty.

2) Keep in mind that the first phase of our new JustFaith program, **Living Compassionately – Caring for the Poor** is an 8-week program entirely dedicated to the reality of poverty and wealth inequality in the U.S. context; we encourage you to consider bringing this conversation to your community! Visit our [page](#) for more information.

**“Prayer for an end to poverty”**

*Creator God,  
you loved the world into life.  
Forgive us when our dreams of the future  
are shaped by anything other than glimpses of a kingdom  
of justice, peace and an end to poverty.*

*Incarnate God,  
you taught us to speak out for what is right.  
Make us content with nothing less than a world  
that is transformed into the shape of love,  
where poverty shall be no more.*

*Breath of God,  
let there be abundant life.  
Inspire us with the vision of poverty over,  
and give us the faith, courage and will to make it happen.*

*Amen!*

—Web resource from [Christian Aid/UK](#)



## *Short Biography for John Strazzabosco*

John Strazzabosco is the author of *Ninety Feet Under—What poverty does to people* (Word & Deed Publishing Inc., 2018), for which he offers to our members a discussion guide in this monthly resource. He has also served as a JustFaith co-facilitator at the Catholic Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, NY and shares with you a little bit of his experience with JustFaith below.

A retired High School math teacher in the Pittsford Central School District, Strazzabosco and his wife volunteered at a children's drop-in center at St. Andrew Catholic Church (since closed) in a densely impoverished Rochester neighborhood. He began to research and categorize what he was seeing in an effort to understand it, and was able to identify ninety serious impacts that acted in tandem to overwhelm people who lived in poverty. Eventually he would include in his book heartbreaking personal stories of impoverished kids and adults he knew, in order to relate the ninety impacts directly to the people he was writing about. His book was six years in the making.

Strazzabosco has also mentored children and adults who lived in poverty, trained mentors, tutored GED students and others in a self-sufficiency program run by Rochester's Action for a Better Community [[www.abcinfo.org](http://www.abcinfo.org)], and currently mentors one long-term incarcerated youth.

Visit the John's website to learn more: <https://johnstrazzabosco.com>.

*John's JustFaith experience and how it led him to work to address poverty in his community:*

In the fall of 2007, I began co-facilitating a JustFaith group of about twelve people at the Catholic Church of the Transfiguration, in Pittsford, New York. Maybe a dozen of us prayed, read, studied, discussed, and got to know each other. I was a bit nervous about getting started with JustFaith, in no small part because I was new to the Catholic faith, having gone through RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults] nine years earlier.

As we began the JustFaith experience, I knew little about poverty, though nearby Rochester was home to the worst extreme poverty in the country, and now twelve years later the journey I started back then has resulted in my researching and writing a book, *Ninety Feet Under—What poverty does to people*.

The JustFaith focus on Poverty and Justice helped launch a life journey for me. As for the other eleven or so members in our JustFaith group, every single one of them got involved with some volunteer work by the time the group officially ended. To highlight the efforts of a few, Robert helped needy people with tax-preparation. Lisa mentored a child whom she mentors to this day. Her husband Tim, not in the group, but inspired by Lisa's action, mentors that child's brother to this day. I volunteered with my wife at a drop-in center for disadvantaged kids. That led to my researching and developing a PowerPoint presentation that I have presented eighty times. But perhaps most touching was an anecdote of Bill's. He's an accomplished artist with sculpture, painting, furniture and more. He is a most patient, kind and sincere man. During JustFaith he volunteered to help with art classes for a Rochester group that helps adults with special needs. But he related to me one night, he felt bad because he was helping out here and there in that class as best he could but worried he wasn't making much of an impact. He had this wealth of knowledge and talent, and felt he wasn't able to get across the talents inside him. The day came when he pulled me

aside and related that before his most recent art class, he had gotten tied up at home and arrived late to class. When he snuck in the door, embarrassed, one of the guys in class said aloud, “Look, Bill’s here!” Then others took up the cry, “Look, everybody, Bill’s here! Hi, Bill!” Bill’s worry about being a non-factor ended that day, and thinking about his story still gets to me.

For me the power of JustFaith is that it makes you confront yourself. It urges you to listen to what I believe is the true call of your faith, that is, the whispers in every ritual you attend that say, “Go out and do something for someone else.” It sure worked pretty well in our group.

*Book premise and discussion questions:*

Ninety negative impacts are found to overwhelm those who live in poverty by striking all at once, all the time. The book identifies these impacts, explains them, and then shows the painful lived experience through stories of people I have known. The deceptive impacts of poverty range from inadequate vocabulary to hidden rules that govern meals. Thrown into the mix are heightened fear, shame, physiological setbacks, and eighty-five other factors—unrelenting in their assault. Most seriously affected are those who live in generational poverty (in poverty for two or more generations) but touched also are those living in situational poverty (in poverty for a limited period of time). The cumulative ganging up of all ninety of these impacts contradicts the stereotypic judgment, “Well, they should just pick themselves up by the bootstraps.”

The reader will find that these negative impacts and the real people who live them every day push us toward discussing the big question that might change it all. That is—Can we end poverty? Perhaps we must first understand it and what it does to people.

I want to recommend two related books that JustFaith participants might find helpful:

Robert Putnam, *Our Kids*, Simon & Shuster, 2015.

J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elogy*, Harper Collins, NY, 2016.

The layout of the book falls into the following four broad sections, which may be utilized for study guide focus and discussion questions. Facilitators or individual readers might want to mark the sections they prefer to focus upon. Decisions might also be made on whether to read the book at once and discuss it or read in sections. The guidelines should work with any reading schedule.

<b>Section 1</b>	Chapters 1-2	The ninety impacts are introduced
<b>Section 2</b>	Chapters 3–18	The impacts are explained with stories
<b>Section 3</b>	Chapters 20-21	Conclusions and actions for the reader
<b>Section 4</b>	Appendix	Potential outcomes are visually examined

## Section 1

As you read:

1. Observe how the author took the plunge beginning with tiny first steps.
2. Scan the lists of impacts in sentence, single word, and ladder forms.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you understand the impacts that are listed in Visuals 1, 2 and 3?
2. Can you identify listed impacts on the people you have observed who live in poverty?
3. Can you identify stereotypes that were previously used to describe people in poverty?
4. How might the entire list affect you and your family if you are born into generational poverty?

## Section 2

As you read:

1. Mark stories and characters you'd like to discuss/intrigue you the most.
2. Jot down questions about the science or other facts.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why might these ninety impacts have been hidden for so long?
2. What must it be like to try to climb the ladder every day?
3. What's gone through your mind when a person asks you for money?
4. How is a vow of poverty different from generational poverty?
5. Do you feel that people in poverty are to be blamed for their circumstances?

### **Section 3**

#### As you read:

1. Think about volunteer work that might be for you.
2. Jot down reservations you might have about volunteering.

### Discussion Questions

1. Would you feel comfortable mentoring a person in poverty?
2. How might Meditation help someone in poverty?
3. Do you think poverty can be ended?
4. Do you fear that efforts to end poverty might interfere with your own lifestyle, savings, investments, or possessions?
5. Can you be an advocate for the impoverished?
6. Do you have specific ideas on how we might proceed to end poverty in all its forms?

## Section 4

As you read:

1. Study the visuals in the Appendix.
2. Think about the power of the numbers of impacts over many years.
3. Think about educating kids who are immersed in these impacts.

Discussion Questions

1. What do the visuals point out to you, personally?
2. What changes result if we remove 20 impacts? Half of them?
3. How might poverty affect a child's education?
4. Does it seem that poverty is solely a problem of money?