

The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives. (Isaiah 58: 6-7)

This is what I ask of you, only this: To act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too. And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles. When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something lend it to him. You have heard that it was said, "Love your friends, hate your enemies." But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become children of your father in heaven. (Matthew 5:38-45)

If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people. (Mark 10: 43-45)

After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. I am telling you the truth: no slave is greater than his master, and no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice. (John 13: 12-20)

All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each needed. (Acts 2:43-45)

young and minority group members; 2) a dire shortage of affordable housing; 3) poorly planned deinstitutionalization; and 4) restrictions and decreases in federal poverty and disability programs.

## **Employment**

From 1960 to 1980, the country saw a 20 percent decrease in manufacturing jobs, which were generally middle-income positions with at least adequate benefits, such as health insurance and pensions. New jobs created during this period, and those currently being created, primarily have consisted of low-paid, often minimum-wage, retail, service, and assembly jobs without the same array of employment benefits.

With divorce rates higher in the last 20 years than at any previous time, women have become the head of household in millions of families. Yet, as the average salary for a woman in the United States is only 64.3 percent of that of men, and since more than half of the households in this country require two wage earners to make ends meet, single-parent, female-headed households have become a cliché of modern poverty.

The low minimum wage, the lower average salary for women as compared to men, and the dearth of adequate employment opportunities for unskilled workers and displaced skilled workers, all have contributed to the shocking phenomenon of the employed homeless. As our consciences accept that a person can work a 40-hour week and not afford a place to live, we must conclude that something is wrong with the economy.

## **Housing**

The combined effects of unemployment and underemployment, deinstitutionalization, and cutbacks in federal assistance programs have created a greater need for "housing of last resort," specifically "single room occupancy" hotels, rooming houses, and the like. But just as the need for this housing was reaching a peak in the early 1980s, urban renewal, abandonment, and gentrification had combined to produce the lowest level of available "last resort" housing in memory. From 1970 to 1982, 1,160,000 single-room units were lost, nearly half of the total nationwide.

## *Deinstitutionalization*

Nearly 30 percent of the homeless population is mentally disabled. The wave of deinstitutionalization, which saw the in-patient populations of psychiatric institutions fall from 505,000 in 1963 to 138,000 in 1980, is a component of this problem. At first, the deinstitutionalized patient often sought housing in single-room occupancy hotels, adult homes, or other similar facilities. However, the combined forces of eviction or other displacement of these individuals (often due to their inability to manage finances or other basic aspects of life) and the steady disappearance of "last resort" housing, produced a population without homes and without access to a living situation that compensated for their disabilities.

## *Cutbacks in Federal Assistance*

Just as the conditions for a wide-spread crisis of homelessness were reaching their peak in 1980, the cutbacks in disability, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Food Stamp benefits accelerated the problem. Since 1981, AFDC eligibility and payment standards have been tightened three times, removing large numbers of families from eligibility or reducing their benefits. As AFDC payments are cut, or fail to keep pace with inflation, families often are forced to choose between food and shelter. Exacerbating the horror of this choice is the \$6.8 billion cut in the Food Stamp program, resulting in reduced benefits for 20 million people, most of whom are children, and forcing one million people out of the program entirely. The average food-stamp benefit is now 55 cents per meal.

**Reflection  
Handout**

# The Scriptures Speak on Justice



Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner; remember that you were foreigners in Egypt. Do not mistreat any widow or orphan. If you do, I the Lord, will answer them when they cry out to me for help. (Exodus 22:20-24)

Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

All riches and wealth come from you; you rule everything by your strength and power; and you are able to make anyone great and strong. (1Chronicles 29:12)

But the Lord is king forever; God has set up a judgment throne and rules the world with righteousness, judging the nations with justice. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a place of safety in times of trouble. Those who know you, Lord, will trust you; you do not abandon anyone who comes to you. Sing praise to the Lord who rules in Zion! Tell every nation what God has done! God remembers those who suffer; God does not forget their cry, but punishes those who wrong them. (Psalm 9:7-12)

Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

God will teach us what we should do; we will walk the paths God has chosen...God will settle disputes among great nations. They will hammer their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. (Isaiah 2:3-4)