



Discussion guide for

# End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin

## About This Resource

This discussion guide is a tool for members of congregations to learn and reflect on the issue of child poverty in Wisconsin in the light of their core religious and moral convictions. It includes an outline for two one-hour study and discussion sessions, based on “End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin,” a document that includes a theological statement and a policy statement that have emerged from a series of “Faithful Citizenship” forums held around the state beginning in 2014. (Information about and from these forums can be found online at <http://www.wichurches.org/resources/combating-poverty/> )

Your congregation can use this resource in any of several ways. For example:

- As one or two one-hour adult forums before or after weekly worship;
- As a two-hour evening or weekend educational event;
- As an opportunity to get together with other congregations to study and discuss the topic in an ecumenical setting;
- As a retreat topic for your congregation’s leadership or its social concerns committee.

## Tips for Discussion Leaders

Be sure to advertise the event well in your congregation or community. Personally invite individuals who might have a special interest in the discussion, or who can contribute to it from their own expertise. Be sensitive to the painful associations this issue may have for some people.

Begin and end your session with prayer. Praying together will underscore the fact that, despite our disagreements, we belong to the same household of faith. Encourage participants to listen for what God may be saying to them through this conversation.

In order to have a fruitful and civil conversation about such a controversial and emotion-laden topic, be sure you set – and enforce – ground rules that will promote mutual respect and understanding. Post in a visible place a set of ground rules such as the following:

- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don’t interrupt.
- Help the discussion leader keep things on track.
- Listen carefully and with respect.
- It’s OK to disagree, but show respect for one another
- If someone says something that hurts or bothers you, say so, and say why.
- Speak for yourself, and not for any other person or group. Don’t put words in other people’s mouths.
- Any personal story told by someone in the group is not to be repeated outside the group unless that person gives permission.

As you facilitate the discussion, ensure that each person gets a chance to talk without being interrupted. Don’t allow name-calling, put-downs, or attributing to someone feelings or ideas that he or she has not expressed. Encourage people to recognize points of agreement even between those who are on opposite sides of the issue.

The two documents will be discussed in turn, although they frequently overlap with and parallel each other. Thus, a question that could be raised in connection with a passage in one document may not be raised at that point, but may be raised about the parallel passage in the other. So you can postpone discussing a question someone raises about the first document if you know it will come up later, or you can choose to discuss it at the time and skip it later.

### **Preparing to Lead the Discussion**

The discussion guide is available in two formats, for one and two sessions. Only the leader needs the discussion guide.

Each participant should have a copy of the document, “End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin,” which contains the full text of both the interfaith theological statement and the public policy statement. It may be helpful to make the resource available in advance, so participants can read the statements prior to the discussion.

Also, at the beginning of the sessions, give each participant the handout, “Statement Summaries and Discussion Questions.” In addition, you can use the PDF by the same title to present the same material as a slideshow. (Even if you use the slideshow to present the summaries, participants will need the handout for discussion questions.)

All these resources are available on the Wisconsin Council of Churches website at:

<http://www.wichurches.org/resources/combating-poverty/> .

### **Collect Endorsements of the Goal Statement**

Following the discussion, invite participants may to endorse the statement of the goal to cut child poverty in half.

If it’s possible, we encourage you to have one or more computers available at the end of the sessions, connected to the online form at [www.endchildpovertywi.org](http://www.endchildpovertywi.org), so that class members or others can endorse the goal statement on the spot.

Or, you can make copies of the signature form at the end of this document for participants to sign. Please mail the signatures to: End Child Poverty, Wisconsin Council of Churches, 750 Windsor Street, Suite 301, Sun Prairie, WI 53590.

The link to the endorsement form also appears at the end of the participant resources.

### One 60-minute Session

5 min	<p><b>Open</b> with prayer. <b>Ask</b> each participant to introduce her- or himself. <b>Hand out</b> the document “<b>End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin,</b>” and “<b>Statement Summaries and Discussion Questions.</b>”</p>
15 min	<p><b>Introduce</b> the End Child Poverty campaign and the statements by reading or paraphrasing the introductory paragraph on p. 1 of the document. Explain that you will be presenting key points of the two statements using the handout (or slide show), but that the complete statements are provided for reference and background.</p> <p><b>Tell</b> participants “We will first look at how the interfaith theological statement on poverty answers the question: ‘Why is reducing childhood poverty an urgent priority for people of faith?’”</p> <p><b>Read</b> aloud the statement summary for “Our Commitment as Faithful Citizens to Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin,” use the slide show, or have the class take turns reading the statement paragraph by paragraph.</p>
10 min	<p><b>Questions for Discussion</b></p> <p>Have participants discuss the starred (*) questions on the summary handout in pairs or small groups. Allow about 2-3 minutes per question, with time for each group to share one or two highlights of its conversation with the whole class. If you have eight participants or fewer, discuss as a group.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does it mean to you to respect someone as being made in God’s image, especially someone from a different racial or ethnic group or who may be less affluent than yourself?</li> <li>2. What do you think the scriptural passages quoted tell us about our responsibility to address poverty in our time and place?</li> <li>3. If God’s gifts are sufficient for everyone’s needs, why are there some communities that lack the resources they need to survive? Why do some members of your community lack resources?</li> </ol>
15 min	<p><b>Tell</b> participants, “Now we will ask, “Where does Wisconsin go from here?”</p> <p><b>Read</b> aloud the statement summary for “End Child Poverty: Poverty Reduction Goal,” use the slide show, or have participants take turns reading it paragraph by paragraph.</p>
10 min	<p><b>Questions for Discussion</b></p> <p>Have participants discuss the starred (*) questions on the handout in pairs or small groups. Allow about 2-3 minutes per question, with time for each group to share one or two highlights of its conversation with the whole class. If you have eight participants or fewer, discuss as a group.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think persons who have not experienced poverty can and should learn from those who have? What can be done to ensure that the voices of persons in poverty can be heard when actions or programs to address poverty are discussed?</li> <li>2. How would “flipping the script” – evaluating policies by whether they achieve measurable progress toward a specific goal, rather than by whether they fit a particular political party’s platform or just “sound good” -- make a difference in the way we try to solve a major public problem like poverty?</li> <li>3. What is your faith community doing to address child poverty in your area? Is public policy advocacy – speaking to lawmakers and community leaders about the need cut in half child poverty –a role for you as a person of faith? What can your congregation do to help lead conversations among your members or in your community about solutions to poverty?</li> </ol>
5 min	<p><b>Conclude</b> with prayer. <b>Thank</b> participants for attending and for thinking about these important questions.</p> <p><b>Invite</b> them to endorse the goal of cutting childhood poverty in half in ten years. <b>Pass around</b> copies of the sign-on sheet at the end of this guide, or direct them to the online form at <a href="http://www.ENDCHILDPOVERTYWI.ORG">www.ENDCHILDPOVERTYWI.ORG</a>. The form can also be found on the Wisconsin Council of Churches website, <a href="http://www.wichurches.org">www.wichurches.org</a> at “Combating Poverty” under the “Resources” tab.</p>

## Two 60-minute Sessions

### Session 1: Why is reducing childhood poverty an urgent priority for people of faith?

5 min	<p><b>Open</b> with prayer. <b>Ask</b> each participant to introduce her- or himself. <b>Hand out</b> the document, “<b>End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin</b>” and “<b>Statement Summaries and Discussion Questions.</b>”</p>
15 min	<p><b>Introduce</b> the End Child Poverty campaign and the statements by reading or paraphrasing the introductory paragraph of the document. Explain that you will be presenting key points of the interfaith theology statement using the handout (or slide show), but that the complete statement is provided for reference and background.</p> <p><b>Tell</b> participants “Today we will look at how the interfaith theological statement on poverty answers the question: ‘Why is reducing childhood poverty an urgent priority for people of faith?’”</p> <p><b>Read</b> aloud the statement summary for “Our Commitment as Faithful Citizens to Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin,” use the slide show, or have the class take turns reading the statement paragraph by paragraph.</p>
35 min	<p><b>Questions for Discussion</b></p> <p>Have participants discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Allow about 4 minutes per question, with time for each group to share one or two highlights of its conversation with the whole class. If you have eight participants or fewer, discuss the questions in the whole group. Have a Bible available for each group (for question 5).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does it mean to you to respect someone as being made in God’s image, especially someone from a different racial or ethnic group or who may be less affluent than yourself?</li> <li>2. What does it mean to you, “we are created for life in community”?</li> <li>3. What do you think the scriptural passages quoted tell us about our responsibility to address poverty in our time and place?</li> <li>4. If God’s gifts are sufficient for everyone’s needs, why are there some communities that lack the resources they need to survive? Why do some members of your community lack resources?</li> <li>5. <i>Have someone read Isaiah 58:6-12 aloud.</i> What feelings, ideas, or images does this passage evoke? What do you picture in your mind as a “community of dignity, justice and well-being for all, a world in which every child has a bright and promising future”?</li> <li>6. In light of this discussion, do you think Wisconsin should set an explicit goal to cut the child poverty rate by half in 10 years, while also cutting racial disparities in child poverty in half?</li> </ol>
5 min	<p><b>Conclude</b> with prayer.</p> <p><b>Thank</b> participants for attending and for thinking about these important questions.</p> <p><b>Invite</b> them to return for the next session, which will discuss how Wisconsin can move forward as a state in cutting the child poverty rate in half. (You can also invite class members to take the participant resource home to study and bring it to the next session.)</p>

**Session 2. Since faith calls us to reduce poverty, how can we move forward as a state?**

5 min	<p><b>Open</b> with prayer. <b>Ask</b> each participant to introduce her- or himself. <b>Hand out</b> “End Child Poverty: Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin” and “Statement Summaries and Discussion Questions” to anyone who needs it.</p>
20 min	<p><b>Remind</b> participants of the background of the End Child Poverty campaign as described at the beginning of the last session, and briefly summarize what was discussed in the last session.</p> <p><b>Tell</b> participants, “Today we will ask, ‘Where does Wisconsin go from here?’ using the policy statement from the End Child Poverty campaign.”</p> <p>Read aloud the statement summary for “End Child Poverty Campaign: Poverty Reduction Goal,” use the slide show, or have participants take turns reading it paragraph by paragraph.</p>
30 min	<p><b>Questions for Discussion</b></p> <p>Have participants discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Allow about 4 minutes per question, with time for each group to share one or two highlights of its conversation with the whole class. If you have eight participants or fewer, discuss the questions in the whole group.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think persons who have not experienced poverty can and should learn from those who have? What can be done to ensure that the voices of persons in poverty can be heard when actions or programs to address poverty are discussed?</li> <li>2. How would “flipping the script” – evaluating policies by whether they achieve measurable progress toward a specific goal, rather than by whether they fit a particular political party’s platform or just “sound good” -- make a difference in the way we try to solve a major public problem like poverty?</li> <li>3. What is your faith community, state and local government, or other community organizations doing to address child poverty in your area?</li> <li>4. Do you see public policy advocacy – speaking to lawmakers and community leaders about the need cut in half child poverty – as a role for you as a person of faith? As a role for your faith community? Why or why not?</li> <li>5. What can your congregation do to help lead conversations among your members or in your community about solutions to poverty? What needs to be done to ensure that those conversations are constructive, inclusive, and civil?</li> </ol>
5 min	<p><b>Conclude</b> with prayer. <b>Thank</b> participants for attending and for thinking about these important questions.</p> <p><b>Invite</b> them to endorse the goal of cutting childhood poverty in half in ten years.</p> <p><b>Pass around</b> copies of the sign-on sheet at the end of this guide, or direct them to the online form at <a href="http://www.ENDCHILDPOVERTYWI.ORG">www.ENDCHILDPOVERTYWI.ORG</a>. The form can also be found on the Wisconsin Council of Churches website, <a href="http://www.wichurches.org">www.wichurches.org</a> at “Combatting Poverty” under the “Resources” tab.</p>



**I support this goal:** The people of Wisconsin need to set a goal of cutting childhood poverty in half in the next ten years. To guarantee greater equity, we also need to cut racial disparities in childhood poverty in half. These goals need to be accompanied by a commitment to evidence-based evaluation of progress.

**Add your endorsement on this sheet, or online at the link:** [www.endchildpovertywi.org](http://www.endchildpovertywi.org)

Name	Email
Address	Phone
Congregation:	Send me updates on the Combatting Poverty Initiative:    yes [ ] no [ ]
Name	Email
Address	Phone
Congregation:	Send me updates on the Combatting Poverty Initiative:    yes [ ] no [ ]
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