



We continue our series on building solidarity with the poor as we publish excerpts from Jack Jezreel's 1997 article, "Why the Preferential Option for the Poor is Not Optional:"

STEP 2: Ask questions and search for answers.

After the first step (directly connecting to the poor), our face-to-face contact may stimulate an appetite for some kind of information or education. As I continued to visit the soup kitchen, I started to ask myself, "Why are half the men here Vietnam vets?" (I still don't know the full answer to that.) I wanted to know why a great many of the visitors to the soup kitchen were mentally ill, and I wanted to know what opportunities were available to them.

These are simply the questions that come to us when we care for somebody else, and perhaps they stimulate other questions about poverty: Why are some people unable to escape the projects? Why are the people of El Salvador unable to feed themselves? Why do Third World countries export food when their own people are dying of hunger?

Sometimes I just read *Sports Illustrated*, but now I also read *Sojourners* and the *National Catholic Reporter* and Bread for the World newsletters. I occasionally get depressed reading this stuff. But I can't stop reading them. It would be like abandoning my heart at this point.

For some good ideas about things you can read, connect with your diocesan parish social ministry office for materials. Or just talk to the people who are already veterans of this stuff. They'll be your biggest help.

Also, keep an eye open for lectures or workshops offered in your diocese that pertain to matters of human suffering. I know it doesn't sound like a fun use of a free evening, but God is full of surprises.

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