



Day 7 – Poverty and Mental Health

Pray

St. Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997, Albania [now North Macedonia]) was a Sister who devoted her life to serving the poor and destitute around the world. She spent many years in Calcutta, India, where she founded the Missionaries of Charity. Despite an expressed joy demonstrated by reaching out to the underserved, many people are surprised that St. Teresa experienced great bouts of sadness and despair. [“Through the darkness she mystically participated in the thirst of Jesus, in His painful and burning longing for love, and she shared in the interior desolation of the poor.”](#)



Embracing Father,

You grace each of us with equal measure in your love. Let us learn to love our neighbors more deeply, so that we can create peaceful and just communities. Inspire us to use our creative energies to build the structures we need to overcome the obstacles of intolerance and indifference. May Jesus provide us the example needed and send the Spirit to warm our hearts for the journey. Amen.

[\(Prayer for Community\)](#)

St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us.





Learn

Struggling with mental health challenges isn't uncommon. About half of all Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness sometime in their life, with [one-fifth](#) of Americans experiencing a mental illness each year. However, for people living in poverty, struggling with mental health is much more common. For example, people living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by serious mental illness: while adults living in poverty account for around 10% of the U.S. population, they account for [nearly a quarter](#) of adults with serious mental illness.

Experiencing poverty affects almost every aspect of a person's life. Accessing quality and affordable housing, for example, is one major cause of stress and one key element to alleviating poverty and bolstering mental health. Over 40 million households spend more than 30% of their income on housing, with 20 million households spending [over half](#) their income on housing costs alone. After accounting for other necessities such as food, healthcare, and transportation, many families simply do not have money left to cover unexpected expenses. Constant exposure to stress from agonizing decisions such as choosing between paying for housing or paying for medications can degrade a p

Act

The best way to support the mental health of people living in poverty is to address the root causes of poverty. Helping people keep stable jobs with fair wages, strengthening family life,

and increasing access to affordable housing and quality healthcare can slow and possibly stop the descent into poverty that so often exacerbates a decline in mental and physical health. Organizations such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Charities USA provide direct services to persons in need as well as engage in public advocacy, along with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to change the structures that allow poverty to exist.

Additionally, [the Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) (CCHD) is the USCCB's national anti-poverty program that empowers communities to address root causes of poverty. It is funded by a [collection](#) which takes place in most dioceses on the World Day of the Poor in November. In its 50-year history, CCHD has used these funds to provide grants to support almost 12,000 community-based, grassroots organizations that work to end poverty.

Some CCHD groups also directly address needs related to mental health. For example: [Chicago Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Centers](#) organizes communities to advocate for local mental health resources, and [Dallas Area Interfaith](#) is leading an effort to normalize conversations about mental health and increase access to needed mental health services. To learn more or to volunteer with an organization supported by CCHD, you can find local CCHD groups by visiting [Poverty USA](#).