How do we reach out to the poor?

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” Isaiah 60:1

As your small group has assessed their community, you may have seen definite signs of poverty. Poverty is usually defined as a “lack of means to provide material needs or comforts.” A look at the economic aspect alone of poverty will limit the scope of assistance that can be given, to help those who are poor to step out and deal with issues in their lives. The above verse talks about:

- Preaching/Sharing the good news – this brings heart transformation
- Binding up the brokenhearted – this addresses the need to walk beside the needy
- Proclaiming freedom to the captives – this involves giving hope and release to those stuck in life crisis. Hope for the future is a vital issue for the poor who many times are living day to day.

How do you know if a person or a family is poor?

Someone may share that they are poor and unable to make day-to-day payments – for a variety of reasons. Our first response is often to give them money or resources to change their immediate need, but more real needs must be assessed. The following questions should help to provide some clarification:

- Prior to your having this crisis right now were there similar problems/crises each month or each quarter over the past year?
- How did you make it through that problem?
- If you are short 500 dollars on your rent, what caused the shortfall in funds? How will this change next month? Do you have a budget or spending limits?
- What developmental needs will help that person to better be equipped to manage their life issues? Financial planning, vocational training, counseling, etc.
- What social services are available that you can point them to in order to meet several of these needs?

How should our small group respond to the poor?

- After getting to know the person/family in need and genuinely caring and sharing God’s love with them, you may help assess their needs with them, in response to their cry for help. With those in need, always maintain
confidentiality and respect for them as people that God loves and knows by name.

- Your baseline vision should be to see that all of their physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual needs are met in one way or another. Look at the whole person… giving a bottle of water to someone that is hungry is not a solution.

- Teaching the person/family that you all will be depending on God and praying for healing and solution is a key part to your meeting their needs. God is our provider, and we want others to learn to depend on him – not us.

- After looking at their needs – short-term and long-term – make known commitments on the spot! Over-committing and defrauding the poor is worse than not showing up at all. If there is someone hungry with no food options, however, getting them something to eat is critical.

- Research direct social service and local resources that could help assist this person/family. Do not do all the work for them; get them involved in this process as well. Dialing 211, for instance, will bring you to a Social Services Information center (Infolink) for Orange County where you can find close centers, facilities to assist the poor.

- A “Life Skills” 13-step course is available from your Local P.E.A.C.E. team to assist you in equipping and teaching the person/family how to do a budget, create a resume, manage money and rent and manage property. Email: localpeace@saddleback.net.

- Look at long-term solutions instead of one-time fixes. Most people that live in poverty have chronic issues that require assistance for a period of time – but it can bring change. It takes 21 days to create a habit.

- Local P.E.A.C.E. is about you and your small group doing and RESOURCING P.E.A.C.E. The church office cannot meet everyone’s needs. God has called you and your small group to make a difference in your world!