

Pope's December Prayer Intention

That every country will protect the future of the very young, especially those who are suffering.



CENTER for MISSION

Society for the Propagation of the Faith / St. Paul and Minneapolis

Country Focus: Niger

It is not easy to be a child in Niger.

Out of 189 countries, the United Nations ranks Niger last when it comes to human development. Located on the edge of the Sahara Desert, Niger suffers from frequent drought, food shortages, poverty, disease and illiteracy. An increase of refugees from neighboring countries means there are even more people trying to use a very limited amount of resources.

Because of malnutrition and a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation services, many children in Niger die before their fifth birthday. Enrollment in elementary schools is extremely low, and 93% of students in grades 2 through 5 cannot read and do not perform well in mathematics. The lack of education and its poor quality make it hard for many children to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Although it is almost twice the size of Texas, Niger only has two Catholic dioceses. Of a population of almost 20 million, only about 25,000 people are Catholic. However, although small, the Catholic Church makes its presence in Niger felt in a big way. Catholic agencies like Catholic Relief Services and Caritas provide emergency food relief, health care, and education to those in need, creating a better future for Niger's children.



Promoting Knowledge of Faith

God's Word for Mission

"...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt 25:40).

"The Fathers and Doctors of the Church taught that men must come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their surplus goods. If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to get for himself what he needs out of the riches of others" (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 69).

Education for Community Life

Saint Spotlight: St. Nicholas of Myra



One of the most celebrated saints is one we actually know very little about: Saint Nicholas. We know that Saint Nicholas was made bishop of Myra, in what is now Turkey, sometime in the fourth century. But the remaining details of his life, and the stories that are told about him, might be more legend than fact.

It is said that the parents of Saint Nicholas died when he was young, and Nicholas, who had been raised to love God above all else decided to donate his parents' fortune to help the needy, sick, and suffering. The people of Myra were so inspired by Nicholas' actions that they made him their bishop. Nicholas spent the rest of his life caring for those in need, particularly children and sailors. He bravely defended his faith to the Roman Emperor Diocletian and even went to jail for being Catholic.

One of the most popular stories about Saint Nicholas tells how he cared for a poor man with three daughters. The man could not afford for his daughters to be married, so Saint Nicholas secretly tossed a bag of gold through the poor man's window three different times to help pay for each daughter's marriage. There are many other stories about the generosity of Saint Nicholas, and even though parts of these stories might not be exactly true, they remind us of the importance of caring for those in need just like Saint Nicholas.

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of children. We celebrate him each year on December 6.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



Homeless man living in shack in Jamaica

Although the Church calls this theme of Catholic Social Teaching the “**Option** for the Poor and Vulnerable,” there isn’t anything optional about it. Jesus teaches us to put the needs of the poor first, and spent much of his life demonstrating his special love for the poor by caring for the sick and outcast. In fact, it is so important to Jesus that we follow his example by putting the needs of the most vulnerable members of society before our own, that it is the basis on which we will be judged (Matt 25:31-46).

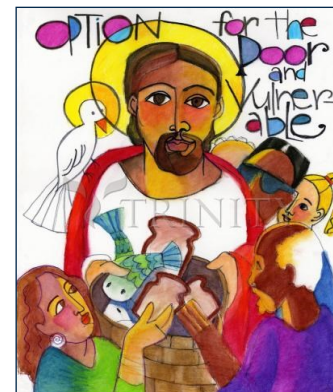
Caring for the poor and vulnerable means that we will take care of those who live in poverty locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. In addition to providing for their needs, like donating food to a food shelf or giving money to a charity

organization that provides help overseas, we are also called to create societies where the poor and vulnerable are protected. This means we should work with our elected representatives to make sure they pass laws that guarantee that those who are poor and vulnerable have access to food, shelter, healthcare and jobs.

In this month’s video, we will learn more about God’s great love for the poor and vulnerable, and the role of the Church in caring for all those who lack the resources to live a dignified life. As you watch the video, pay close attention to what is said about Jesus’ relationship with the poor, and what this teaches us about how we are to act in our own lives. What can you do in your daily life to live out this theme of Catholic Social Teaching?

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: [Click Here](#)>>

1. Jesus was born to a poor family in a poor village, and preached among the poor and about the poor. What does this teach us about our relationship with the poor?
2. What does it mean to meet the “person of the poor” as an equal?
3. What are some things you think contribute to poverty?
4. What are some things you can do to help the poor and vulnerable in your own community?



Mission Petitions

- ✚ Let us pray for the poor and vulnerable, that the Lord will answer their needs through the Church.
- ✚ Let us ask God for the wisdom to follow the example of St. Nicholas and care for the poor and vulnerable in our own communities.
- ✚ Let us pray for the children of Niger, that they will be cared for in a way that reflects their worth as a beloved creation of God.
- ✚ Let us pray for an end to systems that protect the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor, and for those who work for economic justice.

Dear God,
 Thank you for your servant, the good Bishop Nicholas. In loving the poor, he showed us your kindness. In caring for your children, he revealed your love. Make us thoughtful without need of reward so that we, too, may be good followers of Jesus. Amen.