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Put yourself in the shoes of the poor

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

Fr. Larry Snyder, head of Catholic Charities USA, has a fairly brief blog post up about creating empathy for the poor.

Snyder writes:

With over 46 million Americans living in poverty, it is a critical piece of our work to be able to internalize the struggles of our brothers and sisters in need as we continue our work to end poverty. If we take the time to put ourselves in their shoes, we gain the empathy we need and a deeper understanding for how to truly help.

A couple weeks ago, prior to the National Poverty Summit, I participated in a poverty simulation, where each attendee was required to put themselves in the shoes of someone struggling to get by. For two hours I was immersed in a life of poverty, living as a father of two who had recently been laid off. I was skeptical as to how much impact two hours could really have in conveying the reality of poverty, but even in that short time, I could feel my stress level rising as I tried to navigate the bureaucracy of government programs, apply for jobs, and help my children stay in school. It was truly an eye-opening experience.

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