

# Faith & Action Project Fall Event Video Discussion Guide

## Background

Each fall, the Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary hosts a public conversation about poverty featuring national and local experts and commentators.

This year's conversation featured best-selling author, TV commentator and former White House advisor Van Jones, who shared the stage with Eastern Star Church Sr. Pastor Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr.; Center for Leadership Development Dennis E. Bland; and Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana Vice President Betsy Delgado.

At about four-and-a-half minutes, this video features highlights from their conversation about the root causes of poverty and ways that we can work to turn it back in Central Indiana.

The following questions are offered as a guide to a conversation about poverty that uses the speakers' comments as prompts. It would be best to have at least one person designated as a discussion leader to guide the conversation. It is expected the total discussion could last from 45 to 60 minutes.

We encourage you to structure your conversation this way:

- **Introduction:** Defining poverty, and insights about poverty in Indianapolis.
- **Viewing the video:** Play the video from beginning to end.
- **Discussing key points:** Using the following questions as conversation prompts, you can either replay the video in segments, stopping it at indicated points to allow for conversation, or simply guide the conversation based on the single, complete viewing of the video.
- **Closing comments**

## Introduction

***Discussion Leader: Use the following notes to begin the conversation.***

A few years ago, Christian Theological Seminary and the Mike and Sue Smith Family Fund started the Faith & Action Project. Their goal – as we'll hear in the video – is straightforward: They want to eliminate poverty in Indianapolis.

Needless to say, that's an ambitious goal. But do we realize what that means?

First, let me ask you this: How do you define poverty? (Take answers from group.)

Those are all good answers, and they highlight the many ways we can define poverty.

Now, let's look at the "official" definition of poverty. The US government sets the poverty line for an individual as an annual income of \$12,490. For a family of four, the number is about double that, at \$25,750. Does that sound like a livable income to you?

Now, let me ask you this: What percentage of people in Indiana do you think fall below that poverty line? (Let a few people offer estimates.) Actually, nearly 21 percent of Hoosiers live below the poverty line.

Now; Do you think that's above or below the national poverty rate? (Let group respond.) The answer is that Indiana's poverty rate is more than 50% higher than the national rate: 20.8% compared to 13.5%. And in some areas of Central Indiana, the rate is much higher. For example, the 46218 zip code, in central Marion County, has a poverty rate of 40%.

So, we have many poor people among us. The question is, what can we do about it? Let's see what the speakers at the Faith & Action Project event had to say.

## View Video

**Discussion Leader: Play the video in its entirety.**

## Discussion Questions

**Discussion Leader: You may discuss the following questions on their own or replay the video in segments, stopping at indicated times, to refresh the group's memory about the speakers' comments.)**

### **Optional: Play video: 0:00 to 1:05**

- Van Jones says that "common pain should lead to common purpose," and Betsy Delgado says we have to join together to overcome poverty. How much do you think it is the responsibility of people living in poverty to create their own solutions? How much is it the responsibility of the community to work with them to overcome poverty? What keeps some people from "creating their own solutions"?
- Delgado says we have to get rid of the "mythology" that in America people lift themselves up by their bootstraps on their own. Do you agree that this a myth? Why or why not?

### **Optional: Play video: 1:06 to 1:32**

- Delgado notes the difference an education can make, and especially the difference it can make for children when the adults in their lives are educated. Why do you think this is?
- Dennis Bland says we need to give people "an education on education." What do you think he means by that? Do you agree that that's something we should focus on? Why?

### **Optional: Play video: 1:33 to 2:31**

- In this next section, Bland talks about character development and how that works to turn lives around. What do you think he means? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Jones is known for bringing opposing views together, and in this video he says "It takes liberal activist social programs to create that ladder [out of poverty], and it takes pretty conservative traditional values to climb that ladder." How do you feel about that statement? Do you agree? In today's polarized culture, is it possible to bring opposing views together to fight poverty? How would we do it?

### **Optional: Play video: 2:32 to 3:20**

- Jones argues that we need to look at our community differently, seeing distressed areas and populations as "huge sinks of genius." What do you think he means by that? Do you think

we underestimate the potential of young people? Is it realistic to think we could reveal new skills and opportunities simply by viewing them differently?

- If we are willing to view these populations differently, what must we actually do to make change happen? What should we do to show those young people the potential that our speakers say they have?

**Optional: Play video: 3:21 to 4:13**

- Jones said, “Sometimes it just takes one person to touch you and tell you that you matter ... and get you in a positive direction.” Do you agree with that? Do you think one person and one small action can turn a life around? Have you seen it happen?
- Jeffrey Johnson said one of his mentors told him, “Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.” Are we all equipped and called to come alongside people living in poverty? How do activities such as advocating for justice, mentoring, volunteering and championing low-income neighbors fit into this scenario?
- Johnson also said that even small acts of assistance can make a difference. Do you think we have a responsibility to come alongside others, even if in a small way? Do “small acts” have a downside? Do you think we have a responsibility to make bigger efforts if we have more resources?
- Johnson refers to our responsibility as a body of believers, and Brand said we should be knocking down the doors to get into Sunday school. What role does faith play in the way we interact with the poor? What does our faith compel us to do as a “body of believers”?

**Optional: Play video: 4:14 to end.**

- Johnson says we have to put it all together ... spirit, education and systems ... because, “the poor aren’t going anywhere.” How does that statement make you feel? What does it mean that, as Jesus is often quoted as saying, we will always have the poor with us? Recognizing the various theological and cultural ways that statement can be interpreted, do you see it as relevant to discussions about poverty today? Why or why not?
- At the beginning of the video, Christian Theological Seminary President David Mellott said the Faith & Action Project’s goal isn’t to provide poverty relief, but to eliminate the *need* for poverty relief. Do you think that’s a realistic goal? What would the world look like if we eliminated poverty?
- After watching this video, how do you feel called to take action? Is there something you will do differently as a result of what you heard from these speakers?

## Closing Comments

**Discussion Leader: Use the following notes to close the discussion time.**

Clearly, poverty is a serious problem in our community, and the speakers in this video suggest that we all have a role to play in working to reduce – or even eliminate – poverty among our neighbors and fellow Hoosiers. I hope that these speakers have helped you think of how you – and we, all of us, together – can work to eliminate poverty.

If you’d like to learn more about the Faith & Action Project, you can go to [CTS.edu/faith-action-project](http://CTS.edu/faith-action-project), or simply Google CTS Faith and Action Project. You’ll learn that the Faith & Action Project does two events each year, in the spring and the fall, and also provides grants to organizations dedicated to fighting poverty.