

How can we live in solidarity with the 1 billion people living in extreme poverty?

Here are some ways we can express solidarity as a family:

- Take off our shoes before entering a room. In many countries ( Japan, China, India), removing your shoes is a traditional and cultural practice that shows respect for the place that you are entering. It also has the practical purpose of keeping the room clean, especially in a place where shoes have been walked in through unpaved, dusty streets where there are poor sanitation systems. Also, if you are going to be sitting on the floor, with your feet underneath you, taking off your dusty shoes will help keep your clothes clean!
- Sit on the floor and do not use the furniture. Have you ever considered your classroom desk a luxury? Can you imagine sitting with legs folded while balancing books on one leg, and taking notes on a pad of paper that leans on your other leg? Or taking a test this way? How does your back feel after a half hour of sitting on the floor?
- Turn off the lights, and try to work by natural light. Many schools and churches in developing countries depend on natural light, and sitting outside is often the best way to ensure enough light. In many U.S. schools, large windows provide a good source of natural light, but in the developing world glass is expensive and perhaps hard to come by. Many classrooms are built with only small windows or slats in the wall to allow some light in, but to also keep out most raindrops. How much is spent on electricity at your school or church? How much does it cost to light your classrooms? Do we always need to have the lights on?
- Sleep on the floor. A good night's sleep, on a bed, in the silence, security and privacy of your own bedroom is a luxury not available to most of the world. Many homes in developing countries do not have multiple bedrooms, let alone the space for a permanent bed with a mattress and box spring. Many sleep on a mat or cot that can either be rolled up or used for other purposes. Even if you choose to sleep on your floor for one night, you can still count many ways that your night's sleep will be better than people sleeping on their floors in poorer conditions.
- Shower by filling a bucket with water and use a cup to pour water over you. The national average of water used for showering in American homes is 24 gallons. Imagine how much water you would save if you showered with the bucket and cup method that uses about two gallons a person. According to the World Bank, 1.1 billion people lack access to clean water.
- Turn off or turn down the heat or the AC. How much energy and money do we spend heating our homes in the winter, and running the air conditioning in the summer? The luxury of living in a controlled temperature environment is something that we take for granted, and it is easy to become annoyed if we find ourselves in an environment where we are "too cold" or "too hot." Experiencing the discomfort of a cold or hot house for a few hours may help us appreciate the comfort of indoor heating and cooling that we take for granted.
- Fast from technology that we sometimes use to shut out the present moment, including: TV, cell phone and Internet. By turning off our TV, our cell phone and Internet, we are

experiencing the reality of life for the majority of the world that does not have access to these modern conveniences. Though these items bring us together in innovative ways, sometimes our lives, our attention spans, our creativity and our relationships can be negatively affected by the fastpaced instant gratification of these technologies. Often quality personal interaction between people-especially family members-suffers. Turning them off for one evening allows us the opportunity to control how we use those tools in our lives, and to not be controlled by them. In their absence, there is more time to talk around the dinner table or play a game together.

- Go vegetarian for the week. For most of the 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty around the world, the opportunity to eat meat is an unimaginable luxury. Going an entire week without eating meat and preparing simple foods for all meals can be a powerful reminder of how many of our brothers and sisters live. About 66 percent of grain produced in the U.S. is used to feed cattle, and 37 percent of the world's grain is used for animals, not people. Be sure to research healthy meatless eating before you choose this option; changing your diet should be done with careful thought.
- Take public transportation, ride a bike or carpool to school. Or better yet, WALK! Most of the world's children do not ride in cars to school. Sharing a ride to school can serve as a clear reminder of how much more effort others have to make to receive an education. Additionally, finding a more energy efficient way to travel to school is a great opportunity to reflect on our daily environmental impact.
- Pray for those around the world living in poverty.
- Sponsor a child or young person. Visit [www.walkwiththepoor.org](http://www.walkwiththepoor.org) to choose a student and help them have the necessary resources to finish school and rise out of poverty. Write your sponsored friend letters to let them know you care about them and are living in solidarity with them. Your support and encouragement means the world to them. You will also get to know an individual student in a developing country personally, learn about their culture, about their hopes and dreams and learn about their challenges and daily reality. You'll get to know them as individuals and probably be surprised by how much you have in common.