

Until All Are Fed: Assessing the Need

Time: 45 minutes depending on discussion

Materials: Bible, VA Synod Webinar: <https://youtu.be/7nnkngktPQ>, download the ELCA Accompaniment Resource <https://tinyurl.com/4tw6bmb7> and the ELCA World Hunger Feeding Ministries Guide <https://tinyurl.com/fm3ub2bw>.

Introduction

Caring for the poor and feeding the hungry have been central tenants of most world religions ever since history has been recorded. For Christians, Sarah and Abraham's hospitality to strangers is recorded in Genesis 18:1-15. In Mark 6:30-44, the disciples ask Jesus to send the crowd away, only to have Jesus reply "You give them something to eat."

Food is one of our most important needs and is a basic requirement for life. Without adequate and nutritious food, we cannot accomplish our best work, learn effectively, or have enough energy to care for ourselves and others. For most Americans, food is plentiful but in 2020, 22% of Virginians experienced food insecurity. Twenty-nine percent of families were not eating enough to maintain good health and function. For people experiencing food insecurity, there is no guarantee that there will be enough food available to last the whole week.

What Do You Think?

Read Mark 6:30-44.

What feelings may have prompted the disciples to want to send the people off to find food? How do you think the disciples felt after hearing the words of Jesus in Mark 6:37?

If we pray that the people of Virginia would have enough to eat, what words would Jesus likely have for us?

What Do You Think?

Read Genesis 18:1-15.

How do Sarah and Abraham show hospitality? What are some of the elements of their hospitality?

In what ways has your congregation supported the hungry people of your community and the world? How does your congregation express hospitality towards its members and towards strangers?

Feeding ministries are one of the many ways that congregations and communities can address hunger and food insecurity. Starting a feeding ministry can be a satisfying and community building endeavor for congregations. One of the first steps in starting a feeding ministry is assessing the needs of the community and/or a specific population.

You should get to know the population that you think may be in need of additional food. Do you live in the area where the target population lives and are you aware of the population's basic characteristics such as income level, ethnicity, age structure of the population, housing, type of transportation system, availability of food for purchase and other factors? If you don't live in the community that you would

like to serve, you may want to join with other individuals who do live in the community to gain this information, and ask them what major food/nutritional problems they have observed and that need to be addressed.

Another way to begin to work toward the solution of a community's hunger problem is to identify an existing feeding program, and see if this program will allow you to join with them and assist them with their efforts. This may allow them to increase the scope of their efforts, and it will allow you to learn how to deliver services by "on the job" experience. There is often "strength in partnerships" where they already exist such as in schools, social service agencies, churches, feeding programs and senior programs. (See Webinar 36:06-37:33).

Part of the assessment process is to determine what resources are available such as money, donated food, volunteer personnel, available government or community support, and grants are available. Your program could fail without a basic plan and infrastructure.

If you decide to begin a program, it is probably advisable to start small and build and expand slowly to determine how it goes over time. Assessment of both nutritional needs and the impact of your program need to continue as your feeding program expands. You have to work to keep the momentum going over time.

What Do You Think?

What might be some dangers or pitfalls to starting a feeding program without thoroughly assessing the need? Do you have any examples of programs that have failed? If so, do you know why?

Virginia Synod Hunger Team member, Chuck Hays tells a story from his time in Africa. Missionaries and aid programs there had determined that there was a great need for transportation. People in Europe and the U.S. were willing to ship vehicles of different types to help people in Tanzania. After a while, however, abandoned cars and trucks were seen in yards and along the roadside. Although the recipients were grateful for the vehicles which enabled them to get to work and school, they did not have the knowledge or finances to repair the vehicles when they broke down. The critical need for maintenance and spare parts had been overlooked!

Sometimes we forget to ask the stakeholders what they need. We assume that we know what others need. Betsy Liljeberg, another hunger team member tells a story from her time in Guatemala. A well-meaning church group decided to donate and install an air conditioner in a small church after noticing that its members, sitting close to one another, were sweating and using hand held fans. The congregants were excited to have the air conditioner, but once the church group left, it rusted from disuse because the congregation could not afford the electricity to run it. Perhaps if the congregation had been asked first, they might have asked for seeds or fertilizer for crops.

What Do You Think?

Who was left out of the planning and decision process in the above examples?

The ELCA encourages congregations to use the idea of accompaniment when starting and maintaining feeding ministries. Accompaniment acknowledges the interdependence and mutuality of people and communities. It acknowledges that the people in the community served have gifts and resources to offer

others. Those doing the serving and those receiving, each have valuable gifts to bring to the table and to offer each other. We can learn from one another! Accompaniment means walking together in partnership, sharing decisions, and outcomes.

What Do You Think?

How are these ideas of accompaniment different from ministry models that you may have seen or been a part of?

ELCA World Hunger Feeding Ministries Guide

Look at the diagrams on pages 4 and 5 of the Feeding Ministries Guide. Discuss how attitudes of people sharing ministries using the first model (p. 4) might differ from those using the accompaniment model (p. 5).

What Do You Think?

What bible story might be used to illustrate accompaniment?

The ELCA World Hunger Feeding Ministry Guide discusses the importance of building relationships and how the strength of relationships within the community can determine the success of a feeding ministry. Read pages 4 and 5 of the guide.

What Do You Think?

How have you seen relationships in your congregation make or break a ministry? What are some of the questions brought up on page 4 that you might not have thought of or might have helped with ministries you have worked on?

~What do you think is meant by “intentional listening” highlighted in the blue circle on page 5? In the webinar, John Stramiello discusses the importance of balancing the number of volunteers with the work to be done (29:11-29:34)

In the hunger team webinar, several of the speakers discuss how to assess your congregation or volunteer workforce. What are some of these important points?

John Stramiello (24:10-27:11) discusses the importance of personal passion and balancing the needs of the community with the gifts of the congregation. Why is this balance so important? What happens when passion for service or a particular ministry is not present?

Read Acts 6; 1-7.

Who is falling through the cracks in your congregation, community, or the world? How did the disciples handle their own feelings of being overworked or overburdened?

In the webinar (39:40-40:30) Virginia Vann talks about how teachers discovered the needs of their students. How might you use these skills to discover the needs in your congregation or community?

Before embarking on a feeding ministry, it is important to ask some hard questions about who will do the work and will the workers be in it for the long haul? Take some time to consider Pastor Heidi David-Young's questions from the webinar (20:33-22:40).

And finally, listen to the words of John Stramiello about the importance of prayer (31:50-33:25).

Resources

ELCA Accompaniment Resource <https://tinyurl.com/4tw6bmb7>

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