

Until All Are Fed: Feeding Our Neighbors

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Bible, *On the Freedom of a Christian Life* by Martin Luther, *Changing the World One Backpack at a Time* by Hodge & Franz, Webinar: <http://youtube.be/7nnkngktPQ>, ELCA Ministry Guide

We are called to feed the hungry

The Bible is filled with instructions concerning feeding the hungry and assisting those in need. This is evident in both the Old and New Testament book

Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. Isaiah 58:10 NLT

Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor. Proverbs 22:9 NLT

And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded. Matthew 10:42 NLT

What Do You Think?

With these Biblical instructions, the question we need to ask ourselves is what are the needs in our community?

Martin Luther also speaks about our need to help our neighbors in his book titled, *On the Freedom of a Christian Life*. In the Christian life, Luther explains, God doesn't need our good works; however, our neighbor does. Since Jesus has done everything, we need for salvation, it is possible for us to focus our works and efforts on serving our neighbor.

I will, therefore, give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me. On the Freedom of a Christian Life, Martin Luther.

What Do You Think?

How do you interpret this passage about God not needing our good works but our neighbors do? Can you give examples?

In the United States, in 2009, 1 in 4 children went to bed hungry. Imagine, 25% of children in this country didn't have a choice in the matter, they went to bed hungry. Today's statistics are somewhat better, but still unacceptable. More recent statistics show 1 in 7 children go to bed hungry. Check out the Feeding America's website for statistics about state, district, county and community hunger needs. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2019/overall>.

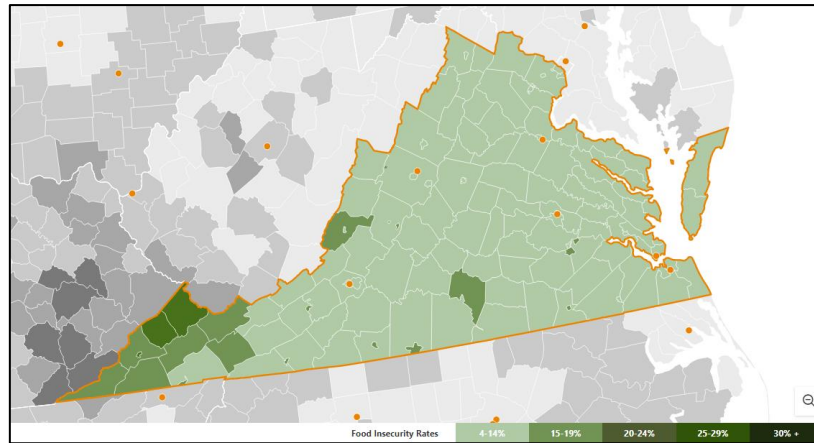


Figure 1: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2019/overall/virginia>

What is our starting point?

To begin acting on the need for helping our neighbor the first important step is to listen to what our neighbor has to say. To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The first service one owes to others in a community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives God's Word but also lends us God's ear... We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them." (Life Together, <https://www.lutheranpeace.org/articles/dietrich-bonhoeffer-24-quotations/>)

What Do You Think?

What do you think your community needs are? How did you arrive at this response?

Following up on your ideas and discussions. use the following outline to assess needs and steps towards finding the resources for a successful feeding ministry.

Identify The Need (see <http://youtube.be/7nnkngktPQ>, 7:10 to 10:16)

- Evaluate current resources and community funding sources.
- Demographics, Community Health Assessments, local hospitals/community planning departments, research local sources such as newspapers and social media, try the "ecumenical" approach.

What Do You Think?

What are some other needs to consider?

Where do you begin?

How do you determine who to service?

Do you focus on a single group or try to enlarge the circle?

Financial Resources (see <http://youtube.be/7nnkngktPQ>, 14:00 to 16:54)

- Local, regional and national grants/foundations, Check with local fund-raising/philanthropic organizations, Grocery chains, Hospitals, Banks and Major local businesses – often have community giving programs, Vendors/Markets, Local gardens.

What Do You Think?

What community resources are available?
Do we go it alone or establish a coalition of like-minded groups?
What points are made in the video about sustainability?

Community Partnerships and Engagements (see <http://youtube.be/7nnkngktPQ>, 20:43 to 25:00)

- School Adoption Network, Churches, businesses, community organizations, and families provide food donations, VA Synod and ELCA Hunger Grants, Colleges, technical schools, Local school divisions, Local and state governmental leaders, Student Council Members, developing leadership, marketing, speaking and fundraising skills, Special Projects (food drives, fund-raising, neighborhood activities), Media/Social Media Presence.

What Do You Think?

Are there other sources for collaboration in your community?

One resource is a book titled: *Changing the World One Backpack at a Time* by Jenny Hodge & Nancy Franz. The book chronicles the step-by-step instructions for anyone wanting to tackle community food insecurity. To quote Pastor John Wertz, Assistant to the Bishop of the Virginia Synod:

Micah's Backpack proves that when faith, compassion, generosity, and community come together, the results are remarkable. In Changing the World One Backpack at a Time, Jennie and Nancy do a wonderful job of walking the reader through the creation of a grassroots community organization working to make a difference in their community.

Micah's Backpack is a program developed by St. Michael Lutheran Church, Blacksburg, VA.

Nobody who gets enough food and clothing in a world where most are hungry and cold has any business to talk about 'misery.' C. S. Lewis, *Collected Family Letters*.

Another resource is *Six Lessons for Starting a Community Based Feeding Ministry* from the Micah's Backpack program.

1. **Clearly define the goal to be accomplished.** It is easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of need in the world. No individual or group can help everyone. In our area, there are other communities nearby where people are in need of assistance, but we realized that we couldn't help everyone. The initial planning team for Micah's Backpack picked the schools in our town as our service area and focused on delivering effective help to them. Instead of trying to extend our organization to the whole county, we made a decision to try and help others start their own programs. By focusing on a specific, clearly defined goal, we were able to more easily tell the story and build community support.
2. **Start small.** When we began, we delivered 5 bags of food per week to five students. There were more than 5 students who needed help, but by starting small, we were able to ensure that we could help the students all year long and we were able to learn valuable lessons that allowed us to grow successfully. Had we tried to start delivering 300 bags of food per week, as we do today, we would have failed.
3. **Find good partners and trust them.** We partner with local schools to deliver food to hungry students. The schools knew which students were in need and we trusted them to identify the students. We did not create an extra layer of paperwork or requirements

to get into the program. We simply allowed the school to use their expertise and tell us how many bags of food were needed.

4. **Provide help that is actually helpful.** We did survey work after we began to find out if the food, we were sending was actually food that people wanted. We allowed the people being served to teach us what was needed instead of assuming we had all the answers. Over time we have refined our menu to reflect what we have learned. When we developed a program to feed senior adults, we took this idea one step further and created a client-choice program, where the senior adults actually get to order the food they want from a menu. The client choice model doesn't work in every situation, but when it can be implemented, it helps preserve people's self-esteem and provides more effective assistance.
5. **Excellent mistakes happen.** Through the years we have made plenty of mistakes. Mistakes become 'excellent mistakes' when you learn from them. We tried three different approaches to provide food in the summer before we found something that worked. Each time we tried something and failed, the lessons we learned helped to inform our next attempt. Don't be afraid to try something. If you make a mistake, learn from it and try again.
6. **Say "Thank You!"** If you create a program that provides direct assistance, that has integrity and that makes a difference in the lives of others, you will have plenty of people who are happy to help you. If you say "thank you" generously and frequently, people will continue to help you. Something as simple as a timely, handwritten thank you note or an email, is a tremendous help in building and maintaining partnerships.

What Do You Think?

Are you ready to start a feeding ministry?

Resources

For more information on starting a pantry see: <https://www.simpletruthfoundation.org/start-a-pantry.html>

To purchase *Changing the World One Backpack at a Time*, see: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8n2pyv>