

## Until All Are Fed: Hunger Advocacy

**Time:** 45 minutes depending on discussion

**Materials:** Bible, Introduction to Topic, References that can be used for discussion or for before or after the presentation, embedded questions designed for further discussion.

**NOTE:** All statistics in this presentation are as accurate as we can make them at this time. Your Hunger Committee will endeavor to keep this important information as updated as possible.

### Introduction

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8*

Scripture teaches us that seeking justice, showing kindness, and living in God's presence is a requirement of our faith. It is not enough to just feed the hungry, our faith requires us to seek out and support solutions to hunger issues. Our ELCA's Advocacy Statement lays out clear reasoning for a commitment to advocacy. Seen through the church's position, advocacy is not political but rather a Christian commitment to do justice.

*Why is advocacy important? Isn't our direct service work enough?*

*As the ELCA, we believe God is calling us into the world to serve together. Through our direct service, we aid immediate needs before us. Through our advocacy work, we impact systemic, long-lasting change.*

Find the full Advocacy Statement Here: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy>

### *What Do You Think?*

We have discussed the ELCA statement on Advocacy but how do you define advocacy?  
How do you see advocacy working in your daily life? Do you have a plan for implementing advocacy?

The public policies our officials write, amend, and ultimately adopt can have ongoing effects on our neighbors who are struggling with hunger and living with poverty. By advocating for justice and the passing of fair laws, we show how legislation that reflects our commitment to justice can help create opportunities to "overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, and defend God's creation."

Advocating for change with your political representatives at the local, state, and federal levels unites us with all peoples of faith who are concerned about how public policies affects everyone not just a privileged few. Again, from the ELCA Advocacy Statement...

*In its very first social statement, "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective," from 1991, our church committed to "work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of creation."*

Your advocacy on hunger issues is not a violation of the separation of church and state but rather a right given to you by the First Amendment of our Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech. Specifically, the ELCA *Church in Society* social statement describes our church's relationship with governments as one of "institutional separation and functional interaction." Advocacy helps us to tackle solutions for change rather than just meeting immediate needs. Remember the example often given of teaching someone to "fish." That is advocacy in action.

#### *What Do You Think?*

Some people object to advocacy saying that it is political and the church should stay away from politics. Do you believe that this is so – why or why not? Support your position with scripture references.

What do you think the phrase "institutional separation and functional interaction" means? How would you do this?

The ELCA has several offices which address different types of advocacies. For hunger issues, the ELCA Washington Office facilitates a network of ELCA members advocating on federal policy issues that affect the hungry. In addition, State Public Policy Offices speak out on hunger related issues such as food deserts at the state level.

The Hunger Committee of the ELCA Virginia Synod recently held three sessions on the topic of advocacy. We would encourage you to view each presentation; however, for group discussion each recording has been reviewed and a few highlights have been pulled to facilitate discussion.

<https://www.vasynod.org/resources/world-hunger/#tab-a948fc1c0293836704e>

**Session One** focused on the work that Virginia Interfaith Power and Light is doing. Their co-directors, Faith Harris and Kendyl Crawford discussed food injustices, the intersection of water, transportation, and food deserts and spoke about ways individuals can advocate in their local communities. The mission of Virginia Interfaith Power & Light is to collaborate among people of faith and conscience to grow healthy communities by advancing climate and environmental justice.

This presentation focused on the basics of environmental justice. In the presentation, the following graph was included. (See Snippet 15:11-19:42)

This graph shows that there is not a fair distribution of benefits and burdens among the people of God. The ones who are called to be advocates for change are the ones who enjoy the benefits of wealth, environment, and opportunity.

#### *What Do You Think?*

List some ways that power and education could be used to benefit the ones in need.

Who among us can go to our city/county council to advocate for those without voice?

In Genesis Chapter 1, God gives humans dominion over the earth, all its creatures, and its bounty. With God's blessing how do we as Christians advocate for the earth and all

dwells upon it? How can there be more green spaces? Better water? More awareness of climate change?

**Session Two** discussed how to best talk to your government officials. This was a conversation with Virginia State Senator John Edwards who represents the 21<sup>st</sup> District and serves on the Courts of Justice, Privileges and Elections, and Transportation committees.

The first point that Senator Edwards made was the importance of timing. If you know a bill is going to be brought up in a specific session, you need to think about addressing it before the session actually begins with as much lead time as possible. (See snippet 5:19-6:38). This gives your representative and his/her team more time to review the issue

Senator Edwards suggests that you present your argument on a single page spelling out your position, e.g., Vote YES or NO on Bill # (if known) but title and subject matter is more important. Be specific, concrete, and factual. Additional information, statistics, graphs, personal examples can be added to your package but a single page that advocates your position with straight facts is most effective. (See snippet 7:20-9:14). Specific examples are always appreciated such as: In our community (name it) we live in a food desert. People have to drive X number of miles to reach a grocery store.

*What Do You Think?*

Have you ever advocated for a cause or bill? Walked in a march, sent a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or wrote to one or more of your representatives?

**Session Three** was with Rev. David Street, a Deputy Director with Bread for the World. Bread for the World is a non-partisan, Christian advocacy organization based in the United States that advocates for policy changes to end hunger both domestically and internationally.

Rev. Street explains how advocacy from Bread for the World is broken up into two areas: State and Federal. The Federal level mobilizes around bills that are being considered in Congress such as those affecting SNAP, Farm bills, or Child Tax Credits. At the state level BFW works with organizations and groups to see that legislation is passed that helps local constituents. Bread believes this is where our leaders of tomorrow come from. (See snippet 9:00 – 10:32)

In addition, Bread for the World advocates for US policies that benefit food distribution internationally.

One of Bread for the World's signature project is an offering of letters to our representatives on the Federal level which advocate for social justice in the area of hunger issues.

*What Do You Think?*

Have you ever been involved in a letter writing campaign? Do you see this type of advocacy as worthwhile? Would you consider organizing or participating in such an event?

What are other ways to advocate for social justice issues. Do you think social media is an effective tool?

Today about 11 percent of the world's population are hungry. The ELCA World Hunger Appeal (based in Chicago, IL) was created to respond to the need of addressing this crisis. Using ELCA congregations, ELCA World Hunger responds by supporting solutions such as microloans, water wells, community meals, and governmental advocacy. Some basic facts to keep in mind about the state of hunger in our communities, nation, and the world.

- 821 million people around the world - that's more than 1 in 10 - can't access the food they need to live active, healthy lives.
- According to the most recent estimates, 736 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 per day. That's 10% of the world's population.
- At some point in 2017 (the most recent year available), more than 40 million people in the United States were unsure where their next meal might come from. (That is 12% of our population.)
- 39.7 million Americans were living in poverty in 2017. For a family of four, this means their annual household income was below \$25,094.

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger>

Knowing about hunger is not the same as doing. What does Christ say about hunger and advocacy?

*"Imagine the saints of the church; the missionaries and the fundraisers and the preachers and the public demonstrators who were even willing to go to prison rather than turn their back on the hungry and the poor people that Jesus made a point of eating with and saying the kingdom of heaven was prepared for. Imagine they looked at you and said, "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, siblings, beloved by God, that he has chosen you."*

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 The Rev. Carla Christopher Wilson Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Lancaster, PA.

Or, maybe we could also imagine ourselves to be one of the disciples of Jesus wondering how to feed the multitudes who had gathered to hear Jesus. We had said to Jesus, "Send the crowd away so that they can go into surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions". He challenged us saying,

*"You give them something to eat" Luke 9:13*

Or, maybe we might be among those who question Jesus.

*"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?... And Jesus answers, "Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me," Matthew 25:37-41*

WE are children of God who are called into advocacy for 'the other'.

**Resources:**

Virginia Synod World Hunger Team Website - <https://www.vasynod.org/resources/world-hunger/>  
ELCA World Hunger - <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger>  
ELCA Advocacy: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy>  
Bread for the World – <https://www.bread.org/>  
Bread for the World Offering of Letters - <https://tinyurl.com/2p835n7w>  
Virginia Interfaith Power and Light - <https://vaip.org/>  
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy - <https://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/>