

A Place at the Table

Discussion Guide

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Primary resource: *A Place at the Table, The Crisis of 49 Million Hungry Americans and How to Solve it, A Participant Guide*. Edited by Peter Pringle, Published by Public Affairs, New York, 2013.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed- Matthew 13:31-32

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

Let us Pray, God of life, you have created the world and blessed it. You have given us food in good season and asked us to share. And You have sent your Son so that we might come to know and experience true generosity through his teaching in parables and his life. Help us to grow in our witness of your love, help us to grow in understanding of your will, and help us to grow in our commitment to do what you desire. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Now that you have viewed the film, *A Place at the Table*, whom do you see as demonstrating resiliency like a mustard seed?

Do you know anyone who is experiencing food insecurity? How is their life and struggle touched by God's presence? From the film, and from your experience, how do God's people manage to eat each day?

What connections can you draw between the stories of the people we met in the film or those whom you know, and your understanding of God's good news to the poor?
(Matthew 5:3)

Dr. Marina Chilton, founder of Witnesses to Hunger notes "Hunger doesn't happen just by itself, when everything else is fine. It happens when a family has to make a trade-off—and pay for rent when they need to pay for food, or pay for heat rather than groceries." Hunger has many components. From the film we can see four distinctive problems.

How is Hunger an economic problem?

What are some of the economic factors that contribute to hunger in New Jersey? How are people employed in your community, are their wages adequate? (Calculate the living wage requirements for the state of New Jersey at [livingwage caculator](#)).

In the ELCA social statement: [ELCA Social Statement, Economic Justice- Sufficient, Sustainable livelihood for all](#) we are reminded that “through human decisions and actions, God is at work in economic life. Economic life is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served. When this does not occur, as a church we cannot remain silent because of who and whose we are.” How do you see God at work in economic life at the current time? How does your faith call you into action?

Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry is a leader in The Anti Poverty Network of New Jersey, which is made up of over 200 organizations that collaborate to address poverty in our state. Review the economic needs in our state on their web page by going to the [Economic Empowerment](#) white paper. What can your and your congregation do to address some of the needs for economic development in your community?

How is Hunger a moral problem?

When Ronald Regan took office in 1981 there were only a few hundred emergency feeding programs in America, most of which were caring for single men. Now there are over 38,000 emergency feeding programs across America in the suburbs, rural and urban areas. Food pantries and soup kitchens served 37 million Americans in 2009, including 14 million children. Charity to combat hunger is well organized and stretched to a new level of service.

Forty-nine million people are at risk of hunger, this number is based on data related to family income levels that qualify for food stamps (SNAP). The charitable food sector would have to increase in size more than six fold to even feed all of these persons for one week every month. Bread for the World estimates that every worshipping community in the country would have to raise an additional \$30,000 annually to feed all of these families needing assistance.

How does distributing free food (over the long periods of time) impact local economies like grocery stores? How do large food banks that warehouse corporate excess address the need for healthy food distribution? How does this charity approach address the needs of the poor without stimulating dependency? How do you manage the tension between caring for people's immediate needs and addressing long term issues of hunger.

How is Hunger a public health problem?

“The Two Year Window” is an article about babies and brains published by *New Republic* in December 2011. The authors of [The Two Year Window Article](#) demonstrate that lack of proper nourishment and stimulation for infants not only stunts development but actually physically changes the architecture of the developing brain. This research allows us to understand that hungry children are becoming disabled and damaged in

ways that are completely preventable.

What are some of the health effects that are caused by poor nutrition in the lives of families that you know or those that you saw in the film? For more information on the cost of a healthy diet and eating while on SNAP benefits go to www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org. What can your congregation do to promote better nutrition and healthy eating? How can you witness to your neighbor about God's desire that all persons be nourished and physically well?

How is Hunger a political problem?

Hunger has been addressed at several times in our country. During the Depression, food price supports were put into place to stabilize the farmers and again in the 60's public policy programs for food assistance grew. In the film, did you learn anything new about how the current food commodity price supports create difficulties for those who are food insecure today?

Do you hear people discussing governmental nutrition assistance programs in your community? What are they saying? How does being a disciple of Jesus inform the way you respond in these conversations? How does your faith inform your understanding of the current crisis in hunger? How do you think you and your congregation might help the public gain a better understanding of the issues around hunger?

Review the Anti Poverty Network of New Jersey's call to action [Hunger White Paper](#). What might you and your congregation do to work to end hunger in New Jersey? Are there other learnings that you have gained from viewing this film that you would like to share with your congregation or with LOGM. Contact us at logm@njsynod.org.

The Parable of the Yeast- Matthew 13:33

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Let Us pray,
God of Abundance, we pray for all those who are food insecure this day that they may be fed. Help us to be yeast in the world, to advocate for good public policy that leavens our conversations with wisdom and justice so that all of your children may live healthy and meaningful lives.

Our Father...
Amen.

