Community Food Assets: Taking an Inventory

Youth Group Hunger Education Activity

from the Presbyterian Hunger Program

Theme: Delve into the challenging issues of hunger and poverty using a proactive approach. Rather than just feeding the hungry, ask "Why are people in our community hungry?" and "What can we do about it?" This interactive group study is designed to be a fun, informative way for youth to learn about food insecurity, food assets, and root causes of hunger in your local community. *Note: There are a few possible ways to lead this study. Like a "choose your own adventure" book, consider your group's preferences to do this study over either one or two sessions. Some adaptations are suggested.*

Time allotted: Minimum 75 minutes, could be broken into 2 shorter sessions. Could also be expanded into 2-3 lessons, especially if inviting a guest speaker on hunger.

Materials/resources needed:

- ☐ Internet access for three groups (Option B: internet access for youth leader)
- ☐ Copies of Appendix A for each participant
- ☐ Markers and newsprint
- ☐ Chairs/work areas for three groups of youth
- ☐ Map of the city/town/area for one of the groups
- ☐ Index cards and pens/pencils for each youth
- ☐ Bible, or print-out of Matthew 25:34-40
- ☐ Optional set-up for final activity with computer, projector, internet access (or downloaded map), and whiteboard with markers

Leader preparation in advance of the session:

- ☐ Read over the session and make any adaptations needed for your group.
- ☐ If small groups will not have internet access, print resources designated in advance.
- ☐ Find and have ready web site addresses for your church and your presbytery to give Group Two. (Alternatively, provide a copy of the church annual report, with any mission/justice programs related to hunger.)
- ☐ If the pastor or a church member active in hunger ministries is available (or someone in the presbytery who works on these issues), ask them to be a guest speaker.
- ☐ If possible, call your local Food Bank in advance of your meeting to learn about the deliveries of food in different parts of town. Bring this information to Session 1. (One way to find a food bank is at feedingamerica.org).

Opening *10 minutes*

Read Matthew 25:34-40.

Invite the group to consider that Jesus asks us to pay attention and to help those who are hungry, sick, in prison. It is part of loving God to love other people. As we discuss hunger issues, there are many ways to help those who are hungry. We can give people physical food (like at a food bank). However, a harder but really important other way to help feed people is to help people get access to food. In this session, we look at the obstacles that make people hungry and keep them hungry, the things that are unfair in our society that are some "root causes" of why people are hungry in the first place. Invite youth to brainstorm a few reasons why people might be hungry. Then, begin the activity explaining that we are going to look at a reason some people in our own community might be hungry—because access to food is very different in different parts of town!

Small groups—taking the inventory

Divide youth into three groups. *15 minutes in small groups.*

Option A. With access to the internet for youth during youth group time

- **Group One:** Find out what "food deserts" or "food apartheid" means. Go to USDA resource "Food Access Research Atlas" at www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas. Look on the map and compare where "Low Income and Low Access" checked boxes compare to where you live, go to school, and go to church (use paper map, if helpful). What do you notice? Answer *Appendix A Inventory Discussion Questions* 1 and 2
- **Group Two:** Using the internet and your church and presbytery web sites, annual reports and/or talking to your pastor or a leader at your church, find out the hunger programs of your church and presbytery. Answer *Appendix A Inventory Discussion Questions* 3 and 4.
- **Group Three:** Find the healthy food resources in your area (farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture, etc.) at www.localharvest.org. Search "All" and write down as many as you are able, including what it is (co-op, farmers market, CSA, etc) and where in your area it is located. Answer *Appendix A Inventory Discussion Questions* 5, 6 and 7.

Option B. Without access to the internet during the youth group time

Leader creates hand-outs in advance for the small groups to work from.

- For **Group One**, print out applicable resources from http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.
- For **Group Two**, print out any relevant hunger information from church and presbytery web site, have annual reports and/or speakers ready to share.
- For **Group Three**, print out applicable resources from www.localharvest.org.

Report back *15 minutes*

Hand around the *Inventory Discussion Questions.* Give each group 5 minutes to share what they learned and have others record the answers. Designate one person to record group answers on a master copy to present at the church or community meeting!

Mapping and large group discussion *25 minutes*

Using the map of your area gathered and some markers and newsprint, draw a rough sketch of your community. *Note: this map does not have to "look" exactly like a map… it can be a creative, representative drawing that simply gives visual understanding of the distances and relationships between resources.*

(Alternative: project the USDA ERS Food Access map or even just a google map onto a white board so you can draw "on" the map by drawing on the projected image on the white board; this may be a fun option for those who have computer, projector, whiteboard and internet access.)

- Place your church on this "map" as well as some of your homes, if you wish.
- Place the food desert(s) areas researched by **Group One.**
- Place hunger ministries researched by **Group Two.**
- **Place** areas where fresh food can be found as researched by **Group Three.**
- If you think of other food resources (such as community gardens), include those on the map. *Leader*: if you were able to call the Food Bank, include that report here.

- **Notice and discuss** if the places that offer fresh produce are getting to people living in lower-income areas.
- **Notice and discuss** if there is overlap between food deserts and farms; sometimes the people who produce our food are actually hungry, due to poverty and the way our larger food system works.
- **Notice and discuss** if hunger ministries are getting food resources to hungry people, and if they tend to be programs that assist with immediate food assistance (food pantries, soup kitchens) or those that assist with people growing their own food or having resources in their own community (community gardens, community kitchens, neighborhood buying clubs, cooperatives, etc.).

Closing *10 minutes*

Hand out index cards and invite each person to choose one (or more) of the personal commitments from Appendix A or his/her own way to engage hunger. The group may also wish to choose a group commitment. *5 minutes.*

Close in prayer for those living in food deserts, those who are producing and preparing our food, and people working to get resources to the people who need them the most. 5 minutes.

APPENDIX A.

Inventory Discussion Questions

Write a sentence or two for each answer, including as much detail as possible.

Group

1) What is a "food desert?"
2) Where are the food deserts in relation to where you live and/or go to church?

Group

3) What, if any, hunger programs does your church support (giving money, doing volunteer work, participating in any way)?
4) What hunger work does your presbytery support?

Group

5) Where are the farm-producing parts of your area (farms, gardens)?
6) What parts of the city have fresh food available through these resources?
7) Can you tell if it is possible to use food stamps to purchase fresh food at these places?

Personal Commitment Suggestions

For individuals to choose and write on index cards, during the close of the session.

- ☐ Share today's learning with your family, class, or with the larger church.
- ☐ Start a hunger team at your church and consider becoming a Hunger Action Congregation. pcusa.org/hac
- ☐ Buy locally-grown food and support farmers by going to Farmers Markets.
- ☐ Volunteer at one of your church or presbytery hunger ministries.
- ☐ Host a hunger simulation to experience unfair food distribution. Email php@pcusa.org for ideas.
- ☐ Visit one of the food deserts, food producing areas, and/or hunger ministries and learn as much as you can about this part of town, its strengths and its challenges.
- ☐ Read about or listen to a video about the Youth Food Bill of Rights. Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhd6cL7jEj8 and website: https://cefs.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/FYI-What-is-the-Youth-Food-Bill-of-Rights.pdf
- ☐ Encourage a university system or college in your area to adopt the Real Food Challenge, or just learn about "Real Food." https://www.rfchallenge.org/
- ☐ Give, and invite others to give, to local, national or international organizations working to fight hunger, such as the Presbyterian Hunger Fund. pcusa.org/hunger
- ☐ Follow public policy decisions that affect food access through the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness. www.votervoice.net/PCUSA/home
- ☐ Get your congregation or youth group to do the *Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table* curriculum. pcusa.org/justeating
- ☐ Other:_____
  _____
  _____