

200,000 REASONS

to fight childhood hunger

GETTING STARTED TOOLKIT

Prepare | Discern | Pray | Take Action

This Toolkit is designed to help the local church discern how they can best be effective in alleviating childhood hunger in their local neighborhood. Throughout this toolkit are scripture verses and prayer to help guide the process.

- PREPARE -

*"If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the
noonday."*

(Isaiah 58:10 NRSV)

Just who are the hungry? Many people believe they have a good understanding of hunger in America and in Arkansas, but are subsequently surprised at how many myths they have actually come to believe. Research shows that there are many misperceptions as well as a general lack of understanding of the real nature of hunger among the public.

Some facts about hunger:

- ☑ FACT: Statistics show that 1 of every 4, or nearly 200,000 children, in Arkansas experience food insecurity and hunger each day, which is higher than the national average of 1 in 5.
- ☑ FACT: Without proper nutrition, children experience problems in education, cognitive development, and overall health.
- ☑ FACT: Children of parents with higher education are less likely to be hungry than children of parents with a high-school degree or less. Education matters in the battle against hunger.
- ☑ FACT: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the leading program in the fight against hunger. The program has reduced the severity of childhood hunger by over 20%.
- ☑ FACT: Nearly 30% of families that are eligible to receive SNAP benefits do not participate in the program. The main reasons cited are stigma, cost of time and travel to apply or recertify, and perceived low benefit amounts.

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A few of the myths that surround the issue of hunger:

- ☒ MYTH: Children are hungry because they have "deadbeat" parents that rather live off welfare than work.
 - Nearly 85% of families that use food pantries and receive SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) have at least one person in the household that works full time. Incomes have not kept up with rising costs in recent years.
- ☒ MYTH: Hunger mostly affects families of color.
 - While a higher percentage of families of color experience hunger, "white" families make up a larger percentage of the actual number of families who live with food insecurity.
- ☒ MYTH: All families that live below the poverty line experience hunger.
 - Poverty and hunger do not always go hand in hand. Some families in poverty have more access to affordable food than others.
- ☒ MYTH: The "Food Stamp" program is full of fraud.
 - The old Food Stamp program was totally redone. The new program - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - has a very low rate of error which is mostly attributed to human error in administration. With benefits now delivered via an Electronic Benefits Transaction Card (EBT), it is very difficult for people to sell or trade their benefits.
- ☒ MYTH: People who use food pantries receive enough food for a month.
 - The average value of food received from a food pantry per month is estimated at only \$50.
- ☒ MYTH: Long term alleviation of Childhood Hunger is an issue that is easily solved.
 - If that were the case, we wouldn't need hunger programs!

Pray:

Heavenly Creator, you gave us a planet full of "every plant yielding seed" and "every green plant" to provide food to mankind as well as "to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life". (Genesis 1:29-30 NRSV) Yet we have too often wasted this gift while others go without. Help us find a way to overcome our greed and bring justice to the inequity of this problem in our world. Amen.

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Factors which have a profound impact on hunger identified by Craig Gunderson:¹

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- Participation in SNAP has an overall positive effect.
- Benefits received can represent a substantial part of the total income for a family.
- Usage of SNAP brings about a marked decline in the U.S. poverty rate.
- SNAP has led to reductions in obesity and improvements in general health.
- SNAP is 6 times more effective at alleviating hunger than food pantries.

2. National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)

- The NSLP is an important method of delivering nutritionally balanced food to children who otherwise may go hungry.
- Over 31 million students in over 100,000 schools and child care institutions participate in this program, half of whom qualified for free meals.
- The NSLP can reduce childhood hunger by as much as 9%.
- The program not only provides lunches, but may also provide after-school snacks.
- The effect of the School Breakfast Program (SBP) on hunger has not yet been measured, but the impact on hunger is assumed to be comparable to that of the lunch program.

3. Food banks and food pantries

- Food banks are essential in providing emergency food to pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters.
- Feeding America oversees 80% of foodbanks which in turn serve tens of thousands of agencies.
- Food pantries have taken on the important role of informing their clients about SNAP and helping users apply for benefits.

4. Availability of Low Priced Food

- Food prices across the U.S. vary significantly. Availability of low priced food, especially in urban "food desert" areas, has a direct positive impact on reducing hunger.
- Advocating for large-scale food retailers in low-income areas and for the abolishment of sales tax on food leads to higher food security.

5. Financial Management Skills

- It has been shown that households with better Financial Management Skills are less likely to experience hunger.
- Financial skills allow families to optimize their food purchasing by identifying sales and using coupons (getting more "bang" for their "buck").
- Better money skills help households see the need for saving money as a cushion to weather the hard times and to have for use in an emergency.

Pray:

God of Love and Mercy, your word teaches that helping the poor brings honor to you and blessings to us. Help us live more fully into your way of mercy for those who suffer. Help us remember that we are all your children and all equally precious to you. Amen.

¹ Craig Gunderson, *Addressing U.S. Food Insecurity* (ConAgra Foods Foundation, 2012).

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Is your church ready to help?

There is no such thing as a church that is too small or too poor to make a difference. God has given us all grace to build up the body of Christ.

"All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory."

(2 Corinthians 4:15 NLT)

Some common characteristics are found among churches who have demonstrated vitality in combating hunger. See if any of these apply to your church:

- Our church is **eager to learn** about hunger so that we can provide assistance.
- We may be small, but we have a lot of **love and compassion for others** to share.
- Our church has the **financial resources** to start a ministry.
- We believe that **partnering with area ministries** that already exist would have a bigger impact.
- Our church has a large number of **volunteers** who can start a ministry or sustain an existing one.

If one or more of the characteristics above apply to your church, you have the internal strengths and resources to make a difference.

Digging Deeper: Learning about hunger

Your church may be anxious to get started, or may already be active in a hunger ministry. But to be truly effective in anything, you must have a deep knowledge and understanding of the subject.

"Teach me good judgment, wise and right discernment, and knowledge, for I have believed (trusted, relied on, and clung to) Your commandments."

(Psalm 119:66 AMP)

Start with studies and curricula on hunger education designed to increase knowledge and awareness of the need for hunger ministries. These can be found in the **200KReasons Read and Learn Toolkit** which contains:

- The **200KReasons Recommended Reading List** which details many great books on hunger
- A listing of **200KReasons Recommended Websites** where a wealth of information can be found
- Resources available from organizations such as the **Arkansas Rice Depot, Heifer International, and Youth Service America.**

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- DISCERN -

Engaging the mission field: What we can do

The 200KReasons Hunger Initiative mission statement is:

100% of United Methodist Churches in Arkansas will participate in a 3-year initiative to significantly reduce childhood hunger through Feeding Ministries, Public Witness, and Education for Long-Term Stability.

In light of this mission statement, the task force has identified several **action areas** where local churches can have the most impact in alleviating hunger in the mission field, and will provide toolkits and other materials for each of these areas. Organize a task force in your church to review each of these action areas.

ACTION AREA: FEED

*"Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all."
(Mark 6:41 NIV)*

Prepared and ready-to-eat food are part of the **Feed** action area, which includes:

- **School Meals.** Child care or after-school programs may be eligible to participate in the NSLP (National School Lunch Program) which not only can provide meals but also after-school snacks.
- **Soup Kitchens.** Many households rely on "Soup Kitchens" to supplement their food needs.
- **Summer Meal Programs.** Children who rely on school lunches frequently lose weight during the summer break, a sure indication that they are not receiving enough to eat when school is not in session. Other school breaks affect childhood hunger as well.

Pray:

Christ, you frequently fed your followers. You frequently ate with those whom others outcast. You shared meals with those whom you were in ministry with. Let us follow your example of love. Amen.

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ACTION AREA: PROVIDE

He answered, "Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same." (Luke 3:11 CEB)

To **Provide** is to give food that is not prepared as a meal or offer other resources for getting food. Some of the options for Providing are:

- **Backpack Programs.** Backpacks containing child-friendly, nutritious foods are distributed on Fridays through the school counselor's offices to provide food for the weekend.
- **Food Banks.** From volunteering, stocking, and transporting, there are many ways to help food banks, and therefore help those in need.
- **Food Drives.** Food pantries rely on food drives and collections for 20-60% of their inventory.
- **Food Pantries.** Guides to start a food pantry and criteria to select a food pantry partner will be available.
- **Resource Centers.** Referral centers and help lines can assist people in finding the help they need.
- **SNAP.** As noted above, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the most effective method of reducing hunger, but many eligible families are not enrolled. The toolkit gives instructions on how to become an expert in the program and how to sign up as a SNAP Application site.
- **Other Programs.** Many businesses and non-profit organizations help to provide food to those in need. Learn how to support these agencies.

Pray:

We acknowledge that we sometimes fail to show compassion for those who are less fortunate than us. We even judge them instead, blaming their situation on their own failures without even knowing their personal stories. But you are the only one who should judge, Lord. Help us to remember that we need to share from our abundance. Help us to show love and compassion and not judgment. Amen.

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ACTION AREA: TEACH

"And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of wise words and strength, the spirit of much learning and the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:2 NLV)

Education is one of the most effective methods of helping those who experience hunger, specifically **teaching** in the following areas:

- **Financial Education.** The ability to manage income and plan for "rainy days" is crucial to becoming food secure.
- **Nutrition Information.** Many of those who hunger do not know how to prepare wholesome meals on a budget. Educational programs teach them these vital skills.
- **Shopping Education.** People need to learn how to read a food label or figure a price based on the measurement of the package in order to get the best value.

Pray:

God of all wisdom, you have given to some the gift of teaching. May this gift be used to impart knowledge to others which will lead them to fuller and richer lives, all to the glory of Your name. Amen.

ACTION AREA: WITNESS

*"We cannot be quiet. We must tell people about what we have seen and heard."
(Acts 4:20 ERV)*

Many experts contend that the best way to bring about a long-term solution to hunger is through Public **Witness** and/or Government Policy. The toolkit will provide information on volunteer opportunities, advocacy, and political action.

- **Volunteer.** The success of food pantries, food banks, and hunger organizations relies on volunteer workers.
- **Advocacy.** Raising awareness of programs such as SNAP, NSLP, and SBP TEFAP in your congregation and local area increases participation in these vital programs.
- **Political Action.** Legislation can greatly impact programs that serve the hungry.

Pray:

You, Lord, are King over all the Earth. It is your vision of justice which should prevail, yet under the hands of humans this vision withers. Give us the wisdom and the strength to speak up when Your vision of justice is being trampled upon. Amen.

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Factors with a low impact on fighting hunger

Gunderson's research not only yielded the factors that are most effective in alleviating hunger, but also pointed out the least effective actions which include:

- Encouraging the consumption of locally grown or organic produce
- Encouraging shopping at farmers markets
- Investing in community gardens

If your goal is to have a positive impact on the environment and your community overall, these are beneficial programs. However, if you are in the business of helping people who struggle with hunger, there are 2 problems with these programs, according to Gunderson.

- Locally grown or organic food is simply too expensive for those who are struggling to stretch their food dollar.
- Valuable resources expended could be better used in conjunction with the 5 vital factors in reducing hunger.

There are other experts, however, that disagree with Gunderson in the area of community gardens. If you are interested in pursuing a garden, download the **200KReasons Garden Toolkit**.

- TAKE ACTION -

Deciding on an action area

"Now there are many kinds of grace gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. There are many different ways to serve, but they're all directed by the same Lord. There are many amazing working gifts in the church, but it is the same God who energizes them all in all who have the gifts. Each believer has received a gift that manifests the Spirit's power and presence. That gift is given for the good of the whole community." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7 The Voice)

Deciding which action area is right for you - **Provide, Feed, Witness, or Teach** - takes discerning, discussion and prayer. It may be that more than one area best fits your gifts. Once you have decided on a course of action, the next step is to download the toolkit(s) that pertains to the area where you intend to serve.

- To start **Providing**, download the "**200KREASONS PROVIDE TOOLKIT**".
- The "**200KREASONS FEED TOOLKIT**" provides information on ministries that **Feed** those that are hungry. (*Toolkit to be available Fall 2015*)
- Start making an impact through your public **Witness** - download the "**200KREASONS WITNESS TOOLKIT**". (*Toolkit to be available Fall 2015*)
- Help others grow in knowledge. Download the "**200KREASONS TEACH TOOLKIT**". (*Toolkit to be available Fall 2015*)

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Taking action now

If you wish to do a project while deciding on the best avenue to serve, download **200KREASONS ACTIVITIES.PDF** which contains an activity of each of the 4 Action Areas.

1. **Funnelology 101** helps you to **Provide** by hosting a Pack Shack party.
2. A **Food for Kids** collection will **Feed** children over weekends when school is out.
3. Take the **SNAP Challenge** to **Witness** to the problem of hunger in America.
4. Throw a **Cooking Matters Shower** to provide utensils to those who **Teach** nutritional skills.

- PRAY -

Ever Loving God, just as you have put your faith, love, and trust in us, so we also put our faith, love, and trust in you. Guide us.

God of Grace, you have blessed us in so many ways. We return those blessings to you and entrust our time, money, and resources into your hands. Use them to lift up those who are hungry.

God of Strength, we acknowledge that, alone, we can do nothing. But with you, we can accomplish all things. Multiply our ministry so that your grace overflows to all the world.

God of Mercy, your son taught us that man does not live by bread alone. Use us to not only bring food to others to satisfy their physical hunger, but also use us to fill others spiritually with the love you have given to us.

We ask this and all things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(All guides and toolkits are available for download on our website.)

For more information, email 200KReasons@arumc.org
or visit our website www.200KReasons.arumc.org.

