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Making it Local

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Our picture of what hunger looks like is shaped early in our lives. I was speaking to a pastor recently who told me, "I always knew that there were Africans who were going hungry. That point was always driven home because if I left any food on my plate, I'd be reminded of the starving children in Africa. But now, I look back and realize that my family had food to put on my plate, but often just enough. It's taken me most of my life to realize that there are hungry people here in Arkansas, too."

Whether we picture hunger as those in line at a soup kitchen, students receiving free lunches at a school, or even children experiencing poverty abroad, we need to remember that our picture is not the full picture. Whatever our vision of hunger, it is often hidden in plain sight.

Hunger is present everywhere, but we often don't see it as such. As a campus minister, I was shocked to learn that nearly one in three college students is food insecure even when over 40% of those students have a meal plan. I knew students who asked for leftovers from our fellowship meals to take home, but surely they weren't hungry. My mental image of hunger did not include college students...it does now. So, how do we change our view and see a bigger picture of hunger?

We start locally. Think about your community. Where are the grocery stores? Are there areas of town where access to fresh, healthy foods would be limited? Think about your schools. What percentage of students receive free and reduced lunches? How many backpacks are sent home each week to provide weekend food? Think about your neighbors. Do your elderly neighbors receive meal deliveries?

Hunger is not what we often think. It is our neighbors. The classmates of our children. Single parents working hourly jobs. Retired church members on limited income. We do not have to look far to find someone we know, someone we go to school or church or work alongside, who struggles to make ends meet and to put food on the table for their family.

This season, churches across our state are participating in Ingathering. This is a time where we thank God for the abundance in our lives by sharing that abundance with others. Things have changed this year due to COVID-19. Districts are thinking locally about the influence they can make on people experiencing food insecurity.

Many districts are encouraging individuals to give where they live by finding a feeding ministry, food pantry, blessing box, or backpack program close by that you can support with your dollars or with your food donation. With donations remaining local, the impact we have on our community can be greater than ever before.

Find a way to give to Ingathering this year. Visit arumc.org/ingathering to learn about what's happening in your area. Remember that just because we struggle to see hunger in our community doesn't mean that it isn't there. We can all do something to make a difference for our neighbors.

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