



## Kenneth's story – Milwaukee

*This discussion guide is designed to accompany the ELCA World Hunger video, "Kenneth's Story – Milwaukee." You can also download a handout on "Unemployment and Underemployment." Find the video and handout at [ELCA.org/hunger/resources](http://ELCA.org/hunger/resources) under the "Stories and Videos" tab.*

### INTRODUCTION TO SHARE:

In the past decade, the United States has faced great economic hardship, even to the point of a recession. Although the country is back on track in many ways, it is still facing an unemployment rate of 5.3 percent, as of June 2015.<sup>1</sup> That is more than one out of every 20 people nationwide facing the effects of joblessness. This statistic does not include those with part-time jobs who are seeking full-time work (see handout).

Kenneth Barron is one of the many Americans whose life has been deeply affected by joblessness. The place he calls home, Milwaukee, is one of the five poorest cities in the country, with more than 36 percent of its residents with an income below \$25,000 per year. Kenneth had several obstacles in his life that made it difficult to get back on his feet and find a job. But, with his hard work and the support of Cross Lutheran Church, he was able to find work and regain confidence in himself.

ELCA World Hunger supports the work of job readiness training because it addresses a key root cause of hunger – unemployment. Those who are victims of the unemployment crisis need help immediately to be able to attain their basic needs, but they also may need assistance in getting a job that helps them feed themselves and their families down the road. Through this training, people are able to strengthen their current skills and learn new skills to help them find employment that helps them and their community in sustainable ways.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/>

**WATCH VIDEO:** Length is 5 minutes, 34 seconds

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the causes of unemployment? What barriers might Kenneth have faced to finding a job? Are there connections between any of these obstacles?
2. Think about what Kenneth did when faced with the pressures of not having a job. What effect might extended joblessness have on Kenneth personally – mentally, physically and socially? What effect might widespread joblessness have on a community as a whole?
3. How might self-dignity be defined in this video? How did Kenneth's strengths help him be successful in the jobs program?
4. How is your congregation part of the economic life of your community? How can it have a positive influence on your local economy?



## **READ SECTION FROM ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENT "ECONOMIC LIFE"**

We tend to view economic life by how it affects us personally. The cross of Christ challenges Christians to view this arena through the experience of those of us who are impoverished, suffering, broken, betrayed, left out and without hope. Through those who are "despised" and "held of no account" (Isaiah 53:3) we see the crucified Christ (Matthew 25:31-46), through whom God's righteousness and justice are revealed. The power of God's suffering, self-giving love transforms and challenges the church to stand with all who are overlooked for the sake of economic progress or greed. Confession of faith ought to flow into acts of justice for the sake of the most vulnerable.

Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a theme throughout the Bible. The poor are those who live precariously between subsistence and utter deprivation. It is not poor people themselves who are the problem, but rather their lack of access to the basic necessities of life. Without such, they cannot maintain their human dignity. Strong themes in Scripture indicate that people are poor because of circumstances that have afflicted them (such as "aliens, orphans, widows") or because of the greed and unjust practices of those who "trample on the poor" (Amos 5:11). The basic contrast is between the weak and the greedy. The psalmist decries that "the wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy" (Psalm 37:14). The prophet rails against those "who write oppressive statutes to turn aside the needy from justice" (Isaiah 10:1-2). Their moral problem is that they have followed greed rather than God. As a result, the poor lose their basic productive resource (their land), and fall into cycles of indebtedness. Poverty is a problem of the whole human community, not just those who are poor or vulnerable.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. The section begins with a bold statement, "We tend to view economic life by how it affects us personally." Do you agree that this is true? What could be the harmful effects of having this mindset? What are ways we could shift our focus toward thinking about economic life affecting God's community as whole?
2. In what ways is your congregation or synod carrying out the ELCA's mission of ensuring a "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all?"
3. The social statement also says, "Our vocation is to seek what is good for people and the rest of creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future." How is your "job" related to your "vocation"? How can your vocation "seek what is good for people" and help those experiencing joblessness?

See handout on "Unemployment and Underemployment" for more information.