

ELCA WORLD HUNGER'S 40 DAYS OF GIVING

Educational Series

Over the next six weeks, we will journey together through the season of Lent, reflecting on hunger, hope, and God's love in a world of both abundance and need. Each weekly session is based on a devotion from ELCA World Hunger's 40 Days of Giving, a special devotional for your congregation to use as you take up the challenge of responding to hunger through ELCA World Hunger together.

Each weekly session will have: an opening prayer, a Scripture reading, a devotion from a leader in the ELCA that introduces the session's theme, instructions for a group activity, a story from a ministry supported by ELCA World Hunger, questions for discussion and a closing prayer. You are welcome to adapt these sessions to fit your needs, perhaps by adding a hymn or writing your own discussion questions.

Weekly Session One: DISASTER AND HUNGER (Luke 13:31-34)

Devotion from Bishop Gordy, bishop for the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Instructions for leader:

Welcome the participants and introduce the session's theme: DISASTER AND HUNGER. This week, we will read the words of Bishop Julian Gordy of the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA.

Invite the group to join in a brief moment of silence before continuing with the opening prayer.

Materials needed:

- Projector with audio
- Computer to access online video
- Paper and writing utensils for participants



Prayer (adapted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 26)

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, that we may trust in your power to create and to restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Read (or invite someone to read) Luke 13:31-34

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.' ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"



Read (or invite someone to read) Psalm 46:1-3

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Read (or invite someone to read) Bishop Gordy's reflection:

The Northern Gulf Coast is not a place where Lutherans predominate. But when our family moved there in 1991 and our neighbors found out I was the new Lutheran pastor in town, several said, "Oh, we know the Lutherans!" Then they would tell me about how Lutherans swarmed to the coast in 1969 after Hurricane Camille devastated the area. "The Lutherans were the first to get here and the last to leave!" It was good to be greeted as a friend and helper.

Fourteen years later, when Hurricane Katrina washed away so much of the place that had become home for our family, the Lutherans were there again. Across the country Lutherans committed millions of dollars to the work of recovery through ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. Local congregations, with the help of LDR housed, fed and directed the work of tens of thousands of volunteers who came to help rebuild homes and lives along the coast.

They gave comfort and hope. We met Christ in them, and the raging waters did not have the last word.

Discuss:

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is urged to flee from Herod's wrath. He continues his work knowing the danger that he is in and laments the treatment of those God has sent to Jerusalem, "the city that kills the prophets." This is not the only time Jesus has been forced to flee persecution. In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph is warned in a dream that Herod (most likely the father of the Herod in Luke's story) is intent on finding and killing the infant Jesus. The family must flee to Egypt as refugees until Herod's death.

In 2005, residents of the Gulf Coast of the United States were forced to flee their homes, not because of a tyrant's threat, but because of the deadly threat of Hurricane Katrina. The flooding caused by the storm and the failure of levees washed away homes and businesses, and many people lost their lives.

How would your life change if a major natural disaster hit your town? What if it was a major human-caused disaster, like conflict or war?

How do Jesus' experiences as a person facing disaster affect how we respond to people facing disaster today?

What about Lutherans left such an impact on people in the town Bishop Gordy moved to? How did they view Lutherans?

What does it mean for God to be a "refuge"?

Ask



Watch:

Play the video "Can't Turn Away" from Lutheran Disaster Response. (This video still accurately describes the work the ELCA does together when disaster strikes, but it refers to Lutheran Disaster Response by its former name, ELCA Disaster Response.)

After viewing:

Hand out two half-sheets of paper and a writing utensil to each participant.

Instruct participants to write responses to the following questions on one sheet of paper:

How might disasters be connected to poverty and hunger?

Why do you think it is important for the ELCA to respond to disasters?

After everyone has finished writing, tell the group to crumple their pieces of paper and toss them around to each other a few times (may look similar to a “snowball fight”). After the pieces of paper have been thoroughly tossed around, have the group stop and hold one piece of paper. Have each participant read the answer to the first question on the paper they are holding. Inform the group that it does not matter if they ended up with their own piece of paper.

Here are some points you can emphasize during your discussion:

- The video the group just viewed refers to “ELCA Disaster Response.” Lutheran Disaster Response is the disaster response program of the ELCA now.
- Recovery efforts for many of the disasters featured in the video are still ongoing even though the disasters occurred several years ago. Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to long-term recovery efforts.
- People living in poverty are most affected by disasters. It is much more difficult to recover from a disaster and to prepare for future occurrences when there are limited resources available.
- Hunger and disaster are strongly connected. In many places where a disaster strikes in the world, it is people that are already experiencing hunger that lose crops and other stored food as a result of a disaster.

Because hunger and poverty are so often connected in a community, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response often work together to respond to a community’s needs. In the following story, we will hear about the cooperative response the ELCA is still supporting for people affected by Hurricane Sandy in New York.

Read (or invite someone to read):

“I was in shock, barely living day to day,” Gilbert Johnson says of the days and months after Hurricane Sandy tore a hole in his roof and flooded his home in 2012. Legally blind, Gilbert was unable to fill out forms and had found little help after talking with several people. His home had no roof, his electricity and heat had been turned off, and his septic tank had collapsed because of the storm. He had almost given up hope.

Fortunately, Gilbert sought help again and found it from a disaster case manager working with Lutheran Disaster Response. “I was skeptical,” he says, “but [the disaster case manager] proved to me that he will advocate for me – [that he was] on my side.” The case manager and the long-term disaster recovery committee walked with Gilbert on his journey to rebuild his home and his life. “I never could have imaged this, it is better than I ever could have dreamed,” Gilbert says. “Now I have hope.”

Thousands of people were in situations like Gilbert’s after the storm. Lutheran Disaster Response, working through local partners, is helping them recover, even now, more than three years after the storm.

This long-term recovery will help ensure that residents of New York, New Jersey and other areas affected will be able to rebuild their lives. But for many, the immediate needs for food and clothing are especially pressing.

To help meet these needs, Lutheran Social Services of New York's New LIFE Center food pantry on Long Island worked with Lutheran Disaster Response case managers after the storm to provide food for clients who lost their jobs, their homes or their savings. Many of those who were already vulnerable to hunger and poverty before the storm found themselves unable to provide for their families afterward.

The long-term recovery efforts of Lutheran Disaster Response partners gave them hope for tomorrow, and New LIFE Center, supported by ELCA World Hunger, gave them hope – and food – for today. For families with infants, the pantry also provides baby clothes, wrapped up carefully in gift boxes.

Together, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response accompany communities in the United States and around the world to meet both immediate and long-term needs, long after the news crews have left.

How might financial struggles have made Gilbert's situation more serious when Hurricane Sandy damaged his home?

What was surprising or new to you about the ELCA's response to hunger and disaster?

What benefits might there be to working with local partners in a community?

How can addressing hunger and poverty help a community be more equipped to deal with natural and human-caused disasters?

How do stories of Jesus' experiences with disaster call us to respond to human need in our own communities and communities around the world?

Ask



Prayer (adapted from "Prayers for the poor," Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 79)

God of compassion, we thank you for gathering us this day and helping us to learn how we can serve those most in need. Help us to see the ways in which we can work with our brothers and sisters in the world to make adequate food, clothing and shelter a reality for all people. By your Spirit move us to affirm the dignity of all people and to work for just laws that protect the most vulnerable in society; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.