

# 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 Six: ABUNDANT FAITH ( John 12:1-8)

*Devotion from Rev. Dr. Patricia Cuyatti, area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at The Lutheran World Federation.*

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### ***Instructions for leader:***

Welcome the participants and introduce the session's theme: ABUNDANT FAITH. This week, we will read the words of the Rev. Dr. Patricia Cuyatti, The Lutheran World Federation's area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean.

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



### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you invite all who hunger and thirst to your table, where plates and cups run over with your gifts. Bless us in our hunger, that we may be filled and learn to fill others at the tables in our midst. In the name of Jesus Christ, the bread of life who meets our every need, we pray. Amen.



### **Read (or invite someone to read) John 12:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

### **Read (or invite someone to read) Rev. Dr. Patricia Cuyatti's reflection on this verse:**

*Las iglesias atentas a este texto no se cansan de extender sus brazos y abrazar acciones para que las personas empobrecidas tengan los medios de salir de esa situación. Esto era lo que Jesús hizo a diario en su ministerio y caminar. En reconocimiento a la buena noticia de vida; buena noticia que movió a fe, María unta los pies de Jesús con el mejor y más caro de los perfumes y los secó con sus cabellos. Servir a las personas empobrecidas y, que generalmente viven en hambre y privadas de educación, acceso a salud, trabajo, etc. es una de las formas de expandir el perfume a los pies de Jesús. El servicio amoroso que la IELA hace a través del programa "Hambre en el Mundo" es la expresión de una fe profunda. Es en fe que muchas mujeres y varones son movidos a la generosidad de compartir, seguramente en la esperanza que esa acción pueda contribuir a restaurar la dignidad de las personas que sufren hambre. La alerta de Jesús "a mí no siempre me tendrán" invita a renovar la fe y servir para que la vida resurja de todo lo que impide vivir con dignidad. ¡Derramemos perfumes caros y de olor grato a Dios, hagámoslo siempre en fe!*

Churches that pay attention to this Scripture are never tired of opening their arms and embracing actions that give impoverished people the means to leave that situation behind. This is what Jesus did every day in his ministry and journey. Recognizing the good news of life in Christ that moved to faith, Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with the finest and most expensive oils and wipes them with her hair. Tending to the poor, who generally go hungry and are deprived of education, health care, jobs, and other needs, is a way of spreading the oil in the feet of Jesus. The loving service that the ELCA does through ELCA World Hunger is an expression of deep faith. It is in faith that many men and women are moved to share with generosity, surely in the hopes that those actions can help restore the dignity of people that suffer from hunger. The warning that Jesus gave us, "You will not always have me," invites us to renew our faith and to serve others so life can once again bloom out of everything that doesn't let us live with dignity. Let us pour expensive oils with a scent pleasing to God; let us do it always in faith!

# Ask

**Why does Judas ask about the perfume?**

**What is Jesus' response?**

**What does Mary's act mean for Rev. Dr. Cuyatti?**

**What does it express? (For example, Mary's faith and hope)**

**What do you think Rev. Dr. Cuyatti means by**

**"expanding the perfume on Jesus' feet"?**

Divide the participants into groups of five or six people, depending on the number of participants. Before explaining any rules, or discussing what they will be asked to do in this activity, have each participant find two random items that can be used in the activity. Any items will work, including keys, glasses, phones, small trinkets, closed bottles, etc. It will be best for each team to have a wide variety of items to expand their options throughout the game and to highlight the value of all individual contributions.

When all participants have returned and teams are together, have them place all the items in the middle of the group in a pile. Explain that these are the items from which the group may create during the game.

Call out a thing or item from the list of suggestions below, and instruct the groups to use their items to make what you have named. For example, if you called out "pizza," they will need to use their items to make a pizza.

Give them a time limit to put their items together. Usually, one to two minutes is more than enough time. When time is up, invite them to share with the whole group what they have created. Repeat this process several times, as time allows. You can also ask them for suggestions of what to make.

Here are some things to call out:

Pizza

Vehicle

House

Nativity scene

Robot

Animal

Halloween costume

New toy

After you have finished the activity and participants have returned to their seats, ask:

*Ask*

**What was the hardest thing to make?**

**What was the easiest thing to make?**

**What item was the most useful?**

**Were there any items that were not helpful  
for any of the challenges?**

**How would this have been different with fewer items?  
With more items?**

Each of us has gifts that are important to our community. Separate, we might not be able to use them to their full extent, but together, each part of the body of Christ contributes to success.

Rev. Dr. Cuyatti reflects on a time when Mary used her gifts to bless Jesus and invites us to think about how we might use our gifts in similar ways. Anointing the feet of Jesus might not be literally possible today, but the story does tell us one possibility for using our gifts: "You always have the poor with you."

At times, this verse has been interpreted to mean that poverty and hunger are unsolvable problems. But we know that isn't the case. Since 1990, people working together around the world have cut the global rate of extreme poverty in half. At the same time, rates of hunger have continued to fall. Poverty and hunger can be ended.

One way to read these words of Jesus is to see them not as a prediction but as a command. The church, when it is following Christ, will always find itself on the margins, with people who face economic challenges and who lack power. As Rev. Dr. Cuyatti points out, the church that is active in the world "radiates expensive perfume and a sweet aroma to God." Each of our gifts can contribute to the bouquet.

Now we will hear about a congregation that brought its gifts together to serve all.

**Read (or invite someone to read) the following story:**

The people of Faith Jubilee Community Church, an ELCA congregation in suburban Chicago, harvest more than vegetables from their community garden. They harvest joy and hope for the congregation's youth and seniors.

It's in an area with many economic challenges: Young people face high unemployment and seniors face high expenses. The congregation wondered how they could connect the generations for the benefit of both – and the congregation's community garden inspired an idea for making and nurturing that connection.

The congregation's elders teach the congregation's youth how to tend and harvest the organic garden, forming connections with an eye toward developing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the young as well as services for the congregation's seniors.

With the guidance of trained older adults, the young people are learning how to start up and operate their own landscaping, lawn care and snow-removal businesses – vital services for seniors who want to stay in their homes, maintaining the community ties they've built up over the years. A grant from ELCA World Hunger helped purchase equipment for the congregation to lease to the young entrepreneurs until they can afford to buy their own.

The project is still in its beginning stages, but the congregation's seeds of hope are already yielding a harvest of joy in deeper, richer intergenerational connections.

**What gifts did the youth and the seniors  
each bring to this project?**

**How did walking alongside each other and working together  
help make Jubilee's ministry better equipped to respond to  
the economic challenges of their community?**

**What does it mean for a church like Jubilee to understand Jesus' words –  
"you always have the poor with you" – as an invitation to accompany  
one another through economic challenges?**

*Ask*

**Jesus invites Judas Iscariot to see Mary's actions as a great service to God rather than an unwise investment. How does our faith call us to "see" service differently?**

**How has reflecting on what our church does through ELCA World Hunger this Lenten season changed how you see service? How has it changed how you see the church?**

*Ask*



### **Closing Prayer**

Loving God, in our hours of need, you come to us with soothing balm and saving grace. Move us to walk alongside our neighbors, to share their burdens, and to be enriched by their gifts. Bless us with perseverance to use our gifts to radiate a sweet aroma to you in each of our communities. In the name of Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord. Amen.