

# 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 Three: SETTING THE TABLE (I Corinthians 11:17-22)

*Devotion from Pastor Kwame Pitts, interim pastor for Redeemer Lutheran Church in South Holland, Ill.*

## LEADER'S GUIDE

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

Welcome the participants and introduce the session's theme: SETTING THE TABLE. This week, we will read a devotion from Pastor Kwame Pitts of Redeemer Lutheran Church in South Holland, Illinois.

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) I Corinthians 11:17-22**

<sup>17</sup>Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup>Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. <sup>20</sup>When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. <sup>21</sup>For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. <sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

**Read (or invite someone to read) Pastor Kwame Pitts' reflection on tables in churches:**

There is a lack of community in our global society, immersed in this creation, which seemingly had no boundaries. There is a lack of understanding or even listening to the risen Savior's words about loving one another. When you love another human being, it means you see after their very self: their health and wellness, their wholeness. It's sorrowful that Sunday after Sunday, people of faith enter into faith communities and churches, partake of what is freely offered at the table, and when they depart, they refuse to do the same for those who are wandering, rooted in the streets because that is home. There is no understanding that all of this belongs to the creator. So why wouldn't we share our food, which is birthed in creation, with those who are hungry or forgotten? In faces that I pass, I see the withering face of Christ in those who are starving, and I reach into my soul so that I too can invite them to eat good food.

**Paul finds fault with some of the Corinthians going ahead with their own meals while others go hungry. For Paul, this was not what Jesus had taught, and it actually made it harder for the community to come together. How does this practice differ from what meals in churches are supposed to be?**

**What does Pastor Pitts see as "sorrowful" in modern-day churches?**

**What does it mean, according to Pastor Pitts, to "love another human being"? How else do we show love inside our church?**

*Ask*

Divide the participants into small groups of three or four. Invite them to share with one another a story of a meal that was particularly memorable for them. Perhaps it was a significant holiday or a dinner with friends. Allow enough time for each member of the groups to share their story before bringing the large group back together.

*Ask*

**What were some of the meals you talked about in your group?**

**What made these meals special?**

**What seemed to matter more, the people at the meal  
or the food that was served?**

**Read (or invite someone to read) the following quote from Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:**

"The Scriptures speak of three kinds of table fellowship that Jesus keeps with his own: daily fellowship at table, the table fellowship of the Lord's Supper, and the final table fellowship in the Kingdom of God. But in all three the one thing that counts is that 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him.'

"To know Jesus Christ in the presence of these gifts – what does this mean?

"It means, first, to know him as the giver of all gifts ...

"Second, the fellowship acknowledges that all earthly gifts are given to it only for Christ's sake, as this whole world is sustained only for the sake of Jesus Christ, his Word and his message. He is the true bread of life. He is not only the giver but the gift itself ...

"Third, the congregation of Jesus believes that its Lord wills to be present when it prays for his presence. So it prays: 'Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest' – and thereby confesses the gracious omnipresence of Jesus Christ. Every mealtime fills Christians with gratitude for the living, present Lord and God, Jesus Christ." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Life Together" p. 66-67)

"Table Fellowship" is the way Bonhoeffer and others describe the ministry of Jesus and the life of discipleship. One of the things Paul points out to the Corinthians is that the Lord's Supper is a table that shapes us into the kind of people who make room for others and help make sure that everyone is fed. Because of this, Martin Luther calls Holy Communion "a sacrament of love." We come to the table aware of our own hunger, but we should also be aware of the hunger of other people at the table with us and the hunger of those who are missing from the table.

**How do we experience table fellowship during Holy Communion?**

**What might table fellowship look like outside of Holy Communion?**

**Where are the other tables in our church or our community?**

*Ask*

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

A free meal, time of prayer and opportunities to serve and be served are what is offered weekly at Shobi's Table – a food truck that serves homeless and near-homeless residents of St. Paul, Minn. Pastor Margaret Mary Kelley and Noah have both been there from the beginning. Noah, once homeless in the Twin Cities, was keenly aware of the limited dietary options for those living on extreme margins. Together, they worked to find a solution.

Their solution came in the form of a food truck – a vehicle that would allow them to serve freshly prepared meals and bring food to the community at a location that was a natural gathering place for many. Pastor Margaret and Noah have been able to serve around 75-100 neighbors a week since 2014. Their ministry is supported in part by ELCA World Hunger.

"When the church does community well, we do it well," shared Pastor Margaret. "We come around the table to gather for lunch and God's meal; people need a lot of both." Community is at the heart of Shobi's Table's mission. What is Shobi's Table's hope for the future? Their long-term goal is to acquire a bus that would offer indoor and outdoor seating to protect their patrons from the cold Minnesota winter months and to expand their offerings to include vocational training. Each plan is designed to lead them one step closer to accomplishing their mission – to provide food, friendship, faith and employment skills to the homeless and near-homeless people of St. Paul.

*Ask*

**What sort of table is created at Shobi's Table?  
What sort of community is brought together at the table?**

**Who in our community is not invited to be part of the  
"tables" in our communities?**



**Prayer**

Gracious God, you are the giver of life, who provides for our every need. Bless our tables, that we may open them to all of your people. Help us to see your face in each person we meet and to give thanks to you by giving to others. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.