



## LEADER'S GUIDE for an Interactive Hunger Simulation



ELCA World Hunger  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

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*For supporting materials download the “Food for a Week Helps and Handouts” PDF.*

## SECTION 1: THE “FOOD FOR A WEEK” EXPERIENCE

It is estimated that 50.1 million Americans (14.9 percent of the U.S. population) live in food insecure households. This means that at some point during the year (this statistic is from 2012) household food consumption was disrupted or reduced because the household lacked money or resources to obtain food.<sup>1</sup> This is a simulation where participants will get a glimpse at what it is like to make decisions that a person living in food insecurity, or “very low food security,”<sup>2</sup> would face.

In this guide you will find instructions for how to plan a hunger simulation, where participants will be challenged to obtain enough food to feed a family for a week. The goal of the simulation is to provide an experiential, educational opportunity that explores issues of food access and availability. The simulation normally runs about an hour and a half (including time for introduction and debriefing), but that time varies based on the interests of the leader. By reading this guide the leader may be inspired to go in a certain direction and use the momentum from the Food for a Week simulation to explore how the group might respond to hunger and poverty in a local context. We hope the Food for a Week simulation can be an opportunity to enter into dialogue about food access and availability or spark some creativity for those who wish to respond to the issue of food security in their contexts. The instructions for running the simulation are outlined in different sections and require varying degrees of preparation and research.

This simulation has been run in different versions throughout the ELCA World Hunger network (notably in Minnesota, Delaware-Maryland, and the Rocky Mountain Synod). This guide is based on contributions from the Hunger 101 workshops in a joint project between the Hunger Task Force of the Delaware-Maryland Synod and Baltimore Lutheran Campus Ministry, and the contributions of “Minnesota Hunger 101...give us this day our daily bread.”

See the “Food for a Week: Helps and Handouts” PDF for reproducible items and other resources needed for running the simulation. Section A of the “Helps and Handouts” is a sample promotional flyer. Sections B through H contain handouts that can be used to both promote and run the simulation, while Sections I and J contain helpful information that could lead to discussion points following the simulation.

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<sup>1</sup> For the 2012 report: Alisha Coleman-Jenson, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, Steven Carlson, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2011,” Economic Research Report 141, [www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf), September 2012, v.-vi.

<sup>2</sup> As defined by the USDA. [www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx#.UZo6aLUj\\_ms](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx#.UZo6aLUj_ms).

## SECTION 2: MATERIALS

The following is a list of materials that will be needed for the Food for a Week simulation. These materials are separated into two groups. The first group of materials can all be found in “Food for a Week: Helps and Handouts,” a separate PDF that can be found on the resource page. All the handout materials in the “Helps and Handouts” document are ready to print. The Food for a Week Customizable Profiles word document, located on the resource page, contains customizable profiles so that the simulation can be a more contextualized experience (i.e., the names of local towns or neighborhoods can be inserted in the profiles). The other group is “Materials/resources needed,” which refers to items that will need to be obtained by the facilitator.

### MATERIALS IN THE “FOOD FOR A WEEK: HELPS AND HANDOUTS” RESOURCE

- Station signs identifying the grocery store, food pantry and human services office (Section B)
- Participant profiles
  - each participant in the simulation receives the profile of a character they will represent throughout the simulation (Section C)
- Food cards for grocery store (Section D)
- Food cards for pantry (Section E)
- One “debit card” for each household (Section F)
- Meal planning guide (Section G)
- A link to find your state’s SNAP<sup>3</sup> application (one for each household)
  - See Section H of the “Helps and Handouts” section for links to state websites where you can access or learn how to obtain your state’s SNAP application.

### MATERIALS/RESOURCES NEEDED

- Pens to fill out benefits application (one for each household)
- PowerPoint presentation, projector and screen
  - Or white board and markers or flipchart for notes if PowerPoint is not used
- Calculator
- Volunteers to run grocery store, food pantry, social service office
- Optional: Cardboard boxes
  - For food pantry (you may choose to have enough boxes for each household to receive one, or have slightly fewer)
- Optional: Representative from a local food pantry or social service agency if you wish to have this be a part of your Food for a Week event

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<sup>3</sup> SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and is formerly known as “food stamps.”

## SECTION 3: PLANNING FOR YOUR EVENT

This section will cover some of the logistics to help make your Food for a Week simulation run smoothly. The focus is less on the promotion of the event and more so on what needs to be done to make sure the participants can experience the event fully (i.e., items printed, supplies gathered, volunteers recruited). For the simulation **you will need at least three volunteers** to staff the three different stations that will be used during the simulation (the grocery store, the food pantry, the social service office).<sup>4</sup> Below you will find a description of how each role functions in the simulation.

### THE GROCER

On a table in this station the food cards replace what would be grocery store merchandise. The grocer should be seated at some location in the station, preferably near the door. The grocer will have to be aware of customers who are ready to check-out and instruct them how to do so when they are ready. The primary job of the grocer is to check people out of the store by calculating their total food bill. If participants have visited the human services station, their debit card should indicate how much their SNAP benefit will be. This should be taken into account for their weekly total and to help with the calculation the grocer should have a calculator and maybe a pen and paper. The grocer may need to direct the customers to form a line if there is a bottleneck at the checkout station.

### THE FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEER

The primary role of the food pantry volunteer is to distribute boxes of food (or food cards, depending on how the station is set up) to the participants (see “Helps and Handouts” Section E for food box contents).<sup>5</sup> If boxes are the chosen means of distribution, there are a couple different methods possible. One method would be for a volunteer to simply give the boxes out as the participants come. Another option would be to set it up so that the households can meet with the volunteer one at a time. In this way the volunteer can ask some questions and do a brief assessment of the household to find out a little bit more about the family and their particular needs.

Additionally, it is important to note that food pantry workers vary in their attitudes toward those who are looking to get food. In order to capture this, it may help if the volunteer is one who can do a bit of acting and come off as either slightly uninterested and judgmental or very warm and understanding.

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<sup>4</sup> You may need more volunteers depending on the number of participants in the simulation. Three volunteers should be enough for a group of up to 40 people.

<sup>5</sup> The advantage of the boxes, even if they don't have any real food in them, is the symbol that it communicates as well as the minor annoyance they create in having to be carried around. However, the boxes may not be necessary and it might be that food cards are more preferable.



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Another option to stock the food pantry would be to involve the participants of the simulation. One way to do this would be to print off a food pantry list and distribute it to the participants ahead of time, instructing them to bring in the items when they come to the simulation. Or, they can just be told to bring items that will be donated to the food pantry. These can be boxed up and put in the room that will serve as the food pantry for the simulation. During the simulation the participants would not just receive an empty box with food cards, but they would receive a box containing the food they brought for the food pantry. This could provide an educational opportunity, not only because they have a box full of food to carry around, but also because they get to think more critically about the food they contributed.

### HUMAN SERVICES OFFICE VOLUNTEER

The volunteer at this station will have a stack of applications that are the actual applications that someone seeking nutrition assistance in the state would have to fill out (See Section H in the “Helps and Handouts” document for links to state websites). When the participants come in they are given the form and a pen and instructed to fill out the form as completely as possible. If they fill out the form they can bring it up to the volunteer, who then has a few options:

1. The volunteer can consult the chart provided (Section I in the “Helps and Handouts” document) to determine the size of the monthly benefit the applicant will receive. This amount can be written on the back of the participant’s debit card and then used at the grocery store.
2. Once they have completed the application, participants can be told to wait 5-10 minutes for processing. Then the weekly benefit amount can be calculated, either using the chart provided (Section I) or another method.<sup>6</sup>
3. Applicants can be told they have to wait 2-4 weeks for their application to be processed, in which case no benefit is given immediately.

Facilitators may find it helpful to meet with the volunteers together so that they know what the others are doing (especially if the grocer needs to be on the lookout for SNAP amounts that have been added in).

The Food for a Week simulation itself usually lasts about an hour and a half, but the level of preparation is dependent on the direction the facilitator has in mind. Here is a brief list of tasks to be accomplished in the preparation of the Food for a Week event along with a suggested timeline:

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<sup>6</sup> You may wish to refer to the state SNAP website (Section H of “Helps and Handouts”) or other information in Section J of “Helps and Handouts.” Alternatively, a web search for “interactive SNAP map” may help you find information relevant to your state and county.

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**TASK****HOW MUCH TIME BEFORE EVENT?**

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| • Promotion (signs, announcements)                                  | weeks                        |
| • Recruiting volunteers   | week/days                    |
| • Reserving space for simulation                                    | weeks/days                   |
| • Getting boxes for food pantry                                     | week/days                    |
| • Becoming familiar with leader’s guide and PowerPoint presentation | days                         |
| • Printing out and cutting “Materials included”                     | day before/day of simulation |
| • Finding/printing state SNAP application                           | days before                  |
| • Setting up rooms  | day of simulation            |

Keep in mind that this simulation can be a great opportunity to start discussing how your group can respond to hunger and poverty in your community. Sections 5.1 and 6 of this guide offer some possible discussion points that could supplement your Food for a Week simulation. You decide what direction you want to take with the simulation. Just remember that any direction you choose could potentially affect your preparation time.

## SECTION 4: SETTING UP

This section contains instructions for setting up the Food for a Week simulation on the day of the event. There will need to be at least one volunteer in each of the stations (grocery store, food pantry, human services office). The number of volunteers depends on the number of participants in the simulation.

### ROOMS

There are four main rooms for the simulation:

1. A gathering space – used as a welcoming area and for discussion at the end of the simulation
2. Grocery store
3. Food pantry
4. Human services office

Having separate rooms is preferable, but the gathering space can double as one of the other rooms if necessary (in which case the human services office might be best room to share with the gathering room as it requires little set-up). While the rooms should be labeled (station signs in Section B of the “Helps and Handouts” document), but assigning the stations to rooms in different parts of the building may add an extra element of self-navigating to the simulation.

Gathering space – Seat participants as you see fit. The space should be conducive for discussion and be able to accommodate all the participants. The gathering space should be able to accommodate a **projector and screen** (if available) for the PowerPoint presentation, or a **whiteboard or flipchart** for notes.

Grocery store – At this station, participants will have the opportunity to choose from different kinds of foods. The **cards** (Section D in “Helps and Handouts”) indicate the type of food, serving size, calorie information and cost. Make sure to print enough cards; remember that each household may purchase multiple quantities of the same item. The cards should be distributed with enough room for participants to find them easily. The staff person at the grocery store should have a **calculator** in order to calculate all the purchased groceries. Alternatively, you can use real cans of food with the labels on them, or just the labels.

Food pantry – This is the station where the **cardboard boxes of food** (or **food cards**) are distributed. With this station in particular, using a room that may be out of the way or a little difficult to find gives participants an idea of what it is like to really search for these places. The contents of the food pantry boxes (Section E in “Helps and Handouts”) should be included in each box. Facilitators may wish to print food pantry cards on paper of another color in order to distinguish between these items from grocery store items.



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Human Services office – This is the station where the participants will fill out the state application to receive SNAP benefits. The **applications and pens** should be available here. A chair is needed for the staff at the human services table. Chairs are ideal for the participants while they're filling out the application (it is long!). The staff person should look over the application to have some knowledge of it before participants fill it out since they will most likely have questions. The staff person should also have the benefit amount (Section I of the "Helps and Handouts" resource) that each participant would receive upon completion of their application.

## SECTION 5: RUNNING THE SIMULATION

This section describes how the simulation could be organized over an hour and a half time-frame. Talking points are provided. This material is also included in the PowerPoint presentation.

### INTRODUCTION (10-15 MINUTES):

When the participants have gathered the leader should let them know that they are about to experience the **Food for a Week simulation** in which they are asked to **take on the role of someone who is trying to provide food for their family while living in or at risk of hunger and poverty**. Before the simulation starts, it is helpful to define hunger with the group. The “Food for a Week” PowerPoint walks through the introduction. The talking points are included here if access to the digital presentation is not possible during the simulation.

**Leader:** How do we define hunger? There are a few definitions like, “a compelling need or desire for food,” or “a painful sensation caused by lack of food,” or “a shortage of food; famine.” The definition includes both feeling and a state or situation. In recent years, both the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prefer to talk about the more measurable *food security* rather than *hunger*. Both organizations have a similar way of defining food security.

- **FAO** – Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
- **USDA** – Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life; includes at a minimum:
  - The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.
  - Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies.<sup>7</sup>

Since 2006 the USDA has tried to identify a food security continuum, ranging from **high food security** to **very low food security**. It is characterized as follows:

- **High food security** – Households had no problems, or anxiety about consistently accessing adequate food.
- **Marginal food security** – Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.
- **Low food security** – Households reduced the quality, variety and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#.Ub9cpvkp\\_ms](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#.Ub9cpvkp_ms)

- **Very low food security** – At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

The USDA has used these categories to conduct a national annual survey of U.S. households to measure the number of people living with marginal to very low food security.<sup>8</sup>

Let the participants know that **all of the people they are “playing” in the simulation have very low food security.** Then explain the simulation.

#### **SIMULATION (30-50 MINUTES):**

Tell the group that you will hand out the profiles to the participants (alternatively, participants can be given the profiles and debit cards, for heads of household as they gather, however this may distract from the introduction). **Each participant should find a partner**, preferably someone they don't know well. If not everyone can match up with a partner there are two profiles with a group of three (the Holt Family and the Reader Family). When the profiles are handed out the participants should **review the profiles** which will give them some biographical and financial information about their family. The head of household (usually the eldest adult) will receive the debit card.

**The goal of the simulation is to feed all members of the household for one week** (estimating three meals per day) using the “debit card” they have been given. They must meet all members' calorie requirements. They may visit each station to try and fulfill these needs. The leader may or may not tell the participants the location of each station. Ask for questions and let the participants begin.

#### **MEAL PLANNING (10-15 MINUTES):**

**Leader:** Tell participants, “As you are finished with the simulation it's time to look at the food you've gathered. Take a few minutes to fill out the meal planning guide and see what meals you can come up with for your family.”

When everyone is finished they could be asked to complete the meal planning guide (Section G in “Helps and Handouts”) with their household. The participants will be able to look at the food they obtained in the simulation to find out if it is enough to last a week for their family. They will also be able to see what kinds of meals they will be able to provide.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2011 the food security survey covered 43,770 households. The representative sample found that in 2011, 85.1 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 14.9 percent (17.9 million households) were food insecure, that is, those with low or very low food security. Alisha Coleman-Jenson, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, Steven Carlson, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2011,” Economic Research Report 141, [www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf), September 2012, v-vi.

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This can lead into the Discussion and Reflection time. There are a couple of questions in the Discussion points (Section 5.1) that can be answered in relation to this meal planning activity.

#### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION (15-20 MINUTES):

**Leader:** Ask participants “**What were some challenges you faced during the simulation?**” or “**What did you learn?**” When participants are sharing some of their challenges have them share briefly something about the role they were playing during the simulation as well. Ideally these can be written so that everyone can see. Some possible challenges may be: lack of awareness and/or misconceptions about government programs; stigma, time and lack of transportation often create barriers to access; and administrative red tape in the application process, lost applications, unhelpful staff members, etc.

If more time for discussion permits, consider the additional discussion points found in Section 6.

There are **both government and community responses to hunger**. Ask the group to brainstorm some of each. You can explain each program as you write it down (or display it on a PowerPoint presentation).

#### GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Formerly known as “Food Stamps,” SNAP helps low-income individuals and families purchase food. More than half of food benefits recipients are children. SNAP funds cannot be used to buy important non-food items (like toilet paper or soap). Eligibility varies by state, but federal eligibility limits involvement to households with a gross monthly income of 130 percent of the poverty guideline or a net monthly income of 100 percent of the poverty guideline.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – This Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children provides low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children with nutritious food, nutrition education, and improved access to health care in order to prevent nutrition-related health problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood.

School and Summer Meals – The National School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, and Summer Food Program are subsidized programs that assist low income students to improve their nutritional status. These meals are available during the school year as well as during the summer months.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – Provides USDA commodities to certain nonprofit or public food distribution programs that distribute the food through local emergency food providers like food banks to supplement the diets of low-income individuals and the elderly.

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Community Food and Nutrition Program – Provides funding for anti-hunger and nutrition advocacy groups at the local, state and national levels to meet nutrition needs of low income individuals.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Food bank – nonprofit, charitable organization that acts like a warehouse or intermediary, gathering donations from retailers and individuals, then distributing food to other community or government agencies like food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters.

Food pantry/closet – place where food is distributed directly to those in need.

Meals on wheels – food distribution efforts and programs that distribute meals to individuals who are at home and who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals.

Food recovery programs – these programs focus on retrieving edible food that would otherwise go to waste and distributing it to those in need; this includes gleaning from fields, obtaining food from grocery stores, restaurants and other food vendors.

Community kitchens – Also called “soup kitchens,” these are efforts to provide hot, prepared meals to those in need and may sometimes be associated with shelters.

Food drive – an organized effort by organizations, congregations, groups or individuals to collect non-perishable food that is then stocked in food pantries or taken to a food bank.

Finally, ask the group what their own **individual response to hunger** might be? What are some specific and creative ways they can participate in both community and government efforts to make a difference in the community? Working against hunger can seem overwhelming, so it is important to remind participants that a communal or congregational response goes a long way and a congregational response that has community involvement can be particularly effective.

Becoming aware of the needs within your own community is a great place to start. If you’ve done some work ahead of time, now might be a good opportunity to point out some resources in your community where people can go if they need help. Check in with local congregations, and other agencies responding to hunger and poverty.

ELCA World Hunger is the ELCA’s response to hunger and poverty. Gifts to ELCA World Hunger support both domestic and international work. You can learn more about our work at [www.ELCA.org/hunger](http://www.ELCA.org/hunger).

If you have invited a local hunger agency staff person to be part of your event you might have them do a brief presentation at this point.

## SECTION 5.1: DISCUSSION POINTS

Some questions that may be helpful for further exploration include:

- What did you think when you noticed how much money you had for food each day?
- What were some of the barriers you faced in obtaining the food you needed?
- What additional barriers can you imagine that were not part of the simulation?
- How did you feel about filling out the benefits application?
- Think about what kinds of food you obtained:
  - What kinds of meals are you able to make?
  - Are the meals nutritious?
  - Did you meet the caloric requirement needed for your family?
- If you were not able to get all the food your family needed for the week, what else do you think you would have to do?
- One of the USDA characteristics of food security is the “assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” In your context, would going to a food pantry be considered “socially acceptable”? What about relying on benefits? Discuss some of the issues here.
- If you filled out the benefits application and found out that you qualified for SNAP benefits, what difference did that benefit amount mean to you?
- If there are children in your family, how important would school lunch and breakfast programs be? What would this mean for weekends and during the summer?



## SECTION 6: MAKING CONNECTIONS

The purpose of this section is to offer different topics that you may want to make connections to following your Food for a Week experience. Talking about food and hunger is never an isolated topic. The connections that can be made to other areas (e.g., health, transportation) can help identify potential areas of interest that may inspire a response from congregations or groups. Here you will find some suggested areas for further exploration.

### BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL

Read about the story of the Great Dinner that Jesus tells in Luke 14:15-24. Some discussion questions include:

- What behavior in this story would be considered unusual in our context?
- What does this passage teach about hospitality?
- How should we (individually and in congregations) understand what Jesus is saying about there being room at the table, and what does this have to do with hunger?

Other Bible passages to look at which address food security:

- Hagar and Ishmael exiled to the wilderness (Genesis 21)
  - After being cast out by Abraham, what options did Hagar have?
  - In a contemporary setting who most closely resembles Hagar and Ishmael?
- Joseph organizes a grain storage campaign (Genesis 41, especially vv.46-49)
  - How is food security addressed in this story?
  - The issue of access to food is an important one when talking about hunger. How do issues of access surface in verses 46-49 and how will access be impacted by famine?
- Ruth and Naomi gleaning in fields (Ruth 2, especially 1-7; 17-23)
  - What resources do Ruth and Naomi have and how does it impact their situation?
  - How is gleaning expressed in a contemporary setting?
- Greek widows left out of food distribution (Acts 6:1-4)
  - Why do you think ethnicity is an issue in this story?
  - What does it mean that the early Christians were concerned with resource distribution?
- Kindness to a neighbor in need (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)
  - Which of these instructions takes the most effort?
  - Suppose we have followed this instruction completely. What's the next step (become advocates, start an organization, etc.)?

Making connections between Scripture and our contexts can help deepen our response and engagement in addressing the community needs around us. Attention to Scripture helps orient us toward the Spirit's urging and God's action among us.

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## TIME AND TRANSPORTATION

During the simulation participants had the advantage of being able to access the grocery store, social services office and food pantry all within a short distance and manageable amount of time. The reality is that these places are not always so accessible for those who need the services, and can be especially difficult to get to for those who do not have a vehicle. Many people who rely on or qualify for benefits are employed as well, and a food pantry or human services office may only be open while a person is at work. Time is also an issue. The food pantry may be open only one day a week and only for a limited amount of time. Or the human services office may be difficult to find and depending on the process there may be a significant waiting time as well. The following discussion prompts can help focus on the issues of time and transportation:

- What challenges would someone in your geographical area face if they did not have a vehicle?
- What impact would it have on the person in your profile if the only time the food pantry or human services office was open was during work hours?
- Estimate how much time it would actually take if you had to do all of these activities in one day.
- What logistical issues would you face if you had to run these errands with children?
- What would be some ways that a congregation could respond to those for whom time and transportation are significant issues?
  - Think through some possible solutions: 1) look into the requirements of volunteering time to staff a human services office so that it can be opened longer or at hours that may be more accommodating to those with work schedules; 2) offer child care for those who need to run these kinds of errands
- Look at the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas to see a map of your area. The map is based on census data that takes into account household vehicle access (though not public transportation) and distance to grocery stores. (This map is an upgrade of the old Food Desert locator.)
  - Digging into some of the local issues can really help contextualize the Food for a Week experience for your group.