



KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: Worksheet and Guide



ELCA World Hunger

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God richly provides for our daily bread. Yet many still go hungry. ELCA World Hunger is the ELCA's collective response to hunger and poverty around the world and here in the United States. From health care to microloans, water wells to farms, food pantries to community gardens, the ELCA is committed to creatively and courageously addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty and building a world of justice in which all are fed.

Working through Lutheran churches around the world, congregations in the United States and other partners, ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to reach communities. We start by listening to our neighbors and learning how we can partner together to break the cycle of hunger and poverty. The ministries ELCA World Hunger accompanies are rooted deeply in their local contexts, relying on local strengths to respond to local challenges in ways that the whole church can learn from, engage with and support.

Knowing Your Neighborhood

Data are facts and statistics that help tell the story of your community and your ministry.

Statistics, numbers and other data can help communicate the impact of your ministry, encourage supporters and identify possible areas for growth or change. Data can help you and others know more about the challenges our communities face and the assets that are available. In the following pages, you will find methods you can use to gather the most up-to-date data for your community.

This brief guide will provide some suggestions for finding data related to several areas that impact food security: housing, employment and food access. Each section describes how to find the most reliable data and notes some limitations on the data.

While hunger is the key priority of ELCA World Hunger, we know that ensuring everyone in our community has enough to eat is not just a matter of food. It is also impacted by access to stable housing, sustainable employment and sufficient wages – as well as access to stores or markets that sell nutritious foods.

Two things are worth remembering at the start. First, data are only as good as their sources. The sources used in this guide are reliable and up-to-date. Many sources that can be found online, especially, can present statistics without context or may provide data that does not reflect the most recent information available. Second, numbers work best when they are combined with the more personal knowledge that comes from authentic relationships and listening to neighbors. Together, statistics and stories combine to give a full picture of a community.

What Can You Do With Data

- Learn more about the ways to grow or strengthen an existing ministry;
- Prepare timely, knowledgeable presentations;
- Share information about the context of a ministry with partners, volunteers, donors and other folks;
- Plan for the launch of a new ministry or the growth of an existing one; and
- See and share ways God is at work in the community and world!

Fill in the boxes below, using the data you find. Instructions for each line are included in this guide, starting on page 3.

Name of synod:

Geographic region (for example, state and county, if applicable):

Median monthly housing costs for renters:

Percentage of occupied housing units lacking complete plumbing facilities:

Percentage of occupied housing units lacking complete kitchen facilities:

Number of people experiencing homelessness:

Number of unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness:

Average unemployment rate:

Median household income:

Mean household income:

Percentage of people with income below the poverty line:

Percentage of people experiencing food insecurity:

Percentage of people eligible for SNAP benefits:

Number of people with low access to a large grocery store or supermarket, 2015:

Number of grocery stores, 2014:

Number of farmers markets, 2016:

Mapping Data

Follow [this link](#) to access a map of your synod. The map will show the range of household income for communities in the synod, as well as the locations of ELCA congregations in the synod. Note: Data are not available for all synods or for all geographic regions of all synods.



Part I. Housing

Source: American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau); Point-in-Time Counts (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)

Information to Find: Median renter housing costs, number of homeless individuals (sheltered and unsheltered), number of homeless veterans, change in homelessness rates over time

Why Is This Helpful? Housing costs are one of the factors that most deeply impact the amount of money a household can spend on other needs, including food. Knowing the housing situation in a community can point to the need for services related to affordable housing, safe shelter and the like.

Renter Median Monthly Housing Costs

1. Visit the U.S. Census Bureau at data.census.gov.
2. Click “Advanced Search” beneath the search bar.
3. Choose “Topics” from the column “Find a Filter.”
4. From the topics that appear in the next column, click on “Housing.”
5. From the list that appears, click on “Owner/Renter (Householder) Characteristics.”
6. In the final list that appears, click on the small box next to “Owner/Renter (Householder) Characteristics.”
7. Click “Search” at the bottom of the screen.
8. There are two data sets in the results to look at: “FINANCIAL CHARACTERISTICS” and “PHYSICAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS FOR OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS.” Click on “FINANCIAL CHARACTERISTICS” first. (To make it easier to return to the results list, right-click and open this table in a new tab or window, if possible in your browser.)
9. There is a lot of information on this table. To make it easier to see, click on the double arrows at the top right of the Results column. Look in the first column for the heading “MONTHLY HOUSING COSTS.” (This may be shortened in the display. Hover your cursor over the heading to see the full title.) This is divided by ranges of amounts. Look for the “Median (dollars)” row. Once you find it, click on this row and then scroll to the right using the arrow keys on your keyboard to find the columns headed “Renter-occupied housing units.” The “Median (dollars)” number in this column is the median monthly housing costs for renters in the United States. To keep track of the row, click on the first box in the row and use the arrow buttons to scroll over.
10. Click “Geos” at the top of the list.
11. Next, click “County,” then select your state.
12. A list of counties should appear. Click on the small white box next to the county you are looking for. If your county does not have a small white box next to it, the data are not available. Click the “X” at the top right of the box to close it.



If you would like information about a specific racial or ethnic group, you can add a filter when using the advanced search from data.census.gov. After selecting the small box next to “Owner/Renter (Householder) Characteristics,” click on “Race and Ethnicity” under “Topics.” From the list, choose which racial or ethnic group you would like information on.

13. If you have successfully selected your county, it should appear at the top of the table.
14. Follow step 9 above for finding the median housing costs in this table. This table should now be filtered for your county. (NOTE: The display of the table may not show all the columns to the right. Scroll down to the bottom of the table to get the scroll bar that allows you to move the display to the right and see more columns. Click on the row to highlight it as you scroll.)



Mean vs. Median | “Mean” is the technical term for what is often called the “average.” The “median,” on the other hand, is the middle number in any set. Sometimes, these are the same. But when there are extremes in either direction — for example, one really high number or one really low number — the mean might not give an accurate picture. For example, if five households had monthly costs of \$300, \$400, \$500, \$600, and \$4,500, the mean would be \$1,260, which would overstate what most people pay. The median, on the other hand, would be \$500, which gives a more accurate picture.

Housing Facilities

1. Follow the steps 1-7 on page 3 to get to the search results, but this time, select “PHYSICAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS FOR OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS.” If you already followed the steps to get to the “FINANCIAL CHARACTERISTICS” table, simply click on “Results” on the left side of the screen and choose “PHYSICAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS FOR OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS” from the list.
2. In this table, you will be able to see what percentage of occupied housing units have complete kitchen and plumbing facilities. Scroll down to the row titled “COMPLETE FACILITIES” to see these data.
3. Follow the steps above to find information on complete facilities for your county.



In the “FINANCIAL CHARACTERISTICS” table, you will find “MONTHLY HOUSING COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS.” This is just below the “Median (dollars)” row in the first column. The percentages here are divided by household income. For example, the table shows what percentage of households with annual incomes between \$20,000 and \$34,999 pay less than 20%, between 20 and 29%, and more than 30% of their income for housing. The highest percentage listed — “30 percent or more” — is concerning. This means that the household is spending almost a third or more of its income for the costs included. This is the standard that the U.S. Census Bureau uses to determine housing affordability. For renters, this includes gross rent. For owners, this includes a variety of costs, such as mortgage, insurance, utilities and taxes.

Homelessness

1. Visit the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s information hub at hudexchange.info.
2. Click on “Resources” near the top of the page. The resource you are looking for is called “PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S.” Sometimes, this is listed as a featured resource at the top of the page. You can also search for it on this page. Be sure you select the most current year. (This will be the year prior to the current year; new estimates are released at the end of each calendar year.)

3. From the list on the next page, click on “Point-in-Time Estimates by State.” This typically has a range of years in the title. The link will open an Excel spreadsheet.



“PIT” stands for “point-in-time.” The PIT is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people on a single night in January. This carefully coordinated count provides a reliable estimate of homelessness throughout the United States. The PIT count of unsheltered homeless people happens every other year, while the count of sheltered homeless people happens annually.

4. If you opened a multiyear report, the spreadsheet will have a series of tabs at the bottom, one for each year and one additional tab for changes over time. Select the most current year for up-to-date estimates. If available, select the “changes” tab to see how the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has changed over time.

5. The numbers in the spreadsheet will tell you how many people in each state were homeless during the point-in-time counts.

There are a few acronyms in the table that can be confusing:

Sheltered ES Homeless — Emergency Shelter. These facilities accept guests experiencing homelessness, but only for short periods of time, often from one to seven nights.

Sheltered TH Homeless — Transitional Housing. These facilities provide guests with stable and sufficient housing and support to help them progress toward permanent housing.

Sheltered SH Homeless — Safe Haven. These facilities provide safe housing and support for people with severe mental illness, who may not have access to other support services.

6. HUD also collects data specifically on homelessness among U.S. military veterans. To access this report, follow steps one and two above. On the page listing the available reports, click on “PIT Estimate of Veteran Homelessness in the U.S.”
7. On the following page, you will be able to select an Excel spreadsheet estimating veteran homelessness either by state or by “CoC” (Continuum of Care – programs supported by HUD).



TIP

To share this data with others in a presentation or publication, use this format: “On a given night in January [year], x number of people in our state experienced homelessness.” This is the most accurate way to describe the data from point-in-time counts.

The COVID-19 pandemic made data collection difficult for many agencies. Some information for 2021-2022 may be unavailable or presented in a different way from previous years.



Part II. Employment and Poverty

Source: American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau); Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Information to Find: Unemployment rate, rate of individuals and families below the poverty line, household income

Why Is This Important? One of the biggest causes of hunger is poverty, and one of the reasons many people face poverty is lack of stable, sufficient employment. The data here can help give you a picture of employment in your area. The information may also point to the need for more programs that help people find stable and sufficient employment.

1. Go to data.census.gov.
2. In the search bar, type “unemployment.”
3. Click on the first result – “SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS.” The table that appears will be information for the United States.
4. At the top of the table, click on “Geos.”
5. Next, click “County,” then select your state. A list of counties should appear. Click on the small white box next to the county you are looking for. If your county does not have a small white box next to it, the data are not available.
6. Click the “X” at the top right to close the box and view the table. The county name should be at the top of the table.
7. In the table, look for these things:
 - a. “Unemployment Rate” – This is listed below the second instance of “Civilian labor force” in the first column.
 - b. “Median household income (dollars)” – This is about halfway down the table, below the “Total households” row, under “INCOME AND BENEFITS (IN 20XX INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS).”
 - c. “Mean household income (dollars)” – This is immediately below “Median household income (dollars).”
 - d. “PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES AND PEOPLE WHOSE INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS IS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL” – There are percentages listed for families, households and more here. Look for the



The “maps” function on data.census.gov makes finding employment and income data easy. Follow steps 1-3 on page 6 to get to the table for “SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS.” At the top of the table, click on “Map.” From the map, you can click on your state, or you can click on “Layer” at the top of the map and then on “County.” On the map, you can click on your state or your county. When the box appears, click on “View Profile” to pull up summary data for your region.

row titled “All people.” This will be the percentage of people in your geographic area whose household income placed them below the poverty threshold.

8. To compare income by sex, look for two rows: “Median earnings for male full-time, year-round workers (dollars)” and “Median earnings for female full-time, year-round workers (dollars).” These rows are just above the row “HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE.”
9. To see five-year averages of this information, look for a line below the title of the table that says the year and “ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles.” Click on the small arrow and select the most recent “ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles.” Once the table loads, the information will be averaged across the five-year period.



Part III. Food Security

Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); Feeding America’s “Map the Meal Gap”

Information to Find: Food security rate for the United States; child food security rate

Each year, the USDA releases its household food security report. Feeding America uses USDA data and other research to compile the data in its “Map the Meal Gap” resource, which is updated less frequently. Feeding America’s research tool allows users to explore food security rates at state and county levels.

Food Security in the United States – Nation and State

1. Visit <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>.
2. On the left side of the screen, click on “Key Statistics & Graphics.” The next page will have several sections with data on different areas of food security. There are also links to the definitions of terms, the history of the USDA’s report and the methodology used in the research.
3. To find the rate of food security for a specific state, scroll to the bottom of the “Key Statistics & Graphics” page. There is a link there to the latest “Household Food Security in the United States” report. (A link to this report can also be found at the webpage listed above.)
4. Click the link on the next page to open the full report. Table 4 lists food security rates by state averaged across three years. This is more accurate than a single year estimate.



TIP

The annual “Household Food Insecurity in the United States” report is released each Fall for the previous year. So, the report with information for 2021 was released in Fall 2022.



Child Food Security — Child food security is very difficult to measure. The USDA relies on surveys of households and reports child food insecurity according to the number of children in households where food insecurity was experienced by one or more members. Often, adults will go without food so that children can eat, or older children will go without food so that younger children can eat. In this case, while the “household” experiences food insecurity, technically one or more children may not. So, when sharing this information, specify that the number or percentage represents “the number (or rate) of children living in food-insecure households.”

State and County Food Insecurity

1. Visit Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap" at map.feedingamerica.org.
2. There are two ways to access data about counties. To search, use the search bar near the top of the page. Enter the name of the county and the state to search. To use the map tool, click on the small arrow in the search bar and select your state from the drop-down list. The map will zoom in to the state. Click on the appropriate county to bring up the number of people who are food insecure and the rate of food insecurity.
3. Note: The numbers listed for eligibility for SNAP and other nutrition programs do NOT reflect actual participation in the programs. The estimated percentage of people eligible for SNAP and other nutrition programs is listed as "Below SNAP threshold." This will vary by state due to different state thresholds for eligibility.



Part IV. Food Access

Source: United States Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service

Information to Find: Number of stores and restaurants at the county level; access to supermarkets

Why It Matters: Limited access to food is one of the primary causes of hunger. Even if people have money for food, without access to suppliers such as local farmers or grocery stores, they may not be able to purchase fresh, nutritious food.

For all the statistics below, follow these two steps first:

1. Visit the USDA's "Food Environment Atlas" at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/>. Click on "Enter the Map."
2. The first map that appears is a county-level map of the number of fast-food restaurants. To select another map, click on "Select Map to Display."

Each map color-codes counties. The legend is at the bottom-right corner of the page.

Number of People With Low Access to Grocery Stores

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 in the box above.
2. To find the number of people with low access to large grocery stores or supermarkets, click the small arrow next to "Access and Proximity to Grocery Stores."
3. Select "Population, low access to store, 2015." The colors will indicate the number of people with low access.



"Low access" is defined as living more than one mile from a large grocery store or supermarket, if living in an urban area, or living ten miles or more from a large grocery store or supermarket, if living in a rural area.

Number of Grocery Stores (County)

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 in the box above.
2. Click on the small arrow next to “Store Availability.”
3. Select the map titled “Grocery stores, 2016.” This will provide a color-coded map that indicates the number of grocery stores available in a given county.
4. Click on “Select Map to Display” to open the list of maps.

Access to Local Foods (County)

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 in the box above.
2. Click on the small arrow next to “Local Foods” in the list of maps.
3. From this list, you can select maps that detail the volume of direct sales from local farms, the number of farms in a county and the number of farmers markets in a county.



Part V. Community Asset Mapping

Community asset mapping is a technique for identifying the assets within a community that can be leveraged as part of a local solution to challenges such as hunger and poverty. This kind of mapping takes a bit of time, but it is an important way to identify a community’s strengths rather than just its challenges.

The Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas has a great overview of community asset mapping and a useful tool for making your own map. You can learn more at <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/identify-community-assets/main>.

Sample Report: Macomb County, Mich. – Southeast Michigan Synod

- Median monthly housing costs for renters in Macomb County – **\$969**
- Occupied housing units lacking complete plumbing facilities – **0.2%**
- Occupied housing units lacking complete kitchen facilities – **0.4%**
- On a given night in January 2020, **8,638** people in Michigan experienced homelessness. This included **484** unaccompanied young people under the age of 25.
- From 2016 through 2020, Macomb County had an average unemployment rate of **5.6%**. In 2021, the unemployment rate was higher, at 7.6%. The median household income was **\$64,641**, and the mean household income was **\$82,277**.
- **46,253** households received SNAP benefits in the past 12 months (as of 2021).
- **9.9%** of residents were living in poverty each year from 2016 through 2020, on average.
- **11.4%** of Michigan residents experienced food insecurity on average between 2019 and 2021.
- **13.3%** of people in Macomb County experienced food insecurity in 2020, slightly above the state average.
- **63%** of food-insecure people in Macomb County were eligible for SNAP or other public benefits.
- More than **190,000** people in Macomb County had low access to a large grocery store or supermarket in 2015. The county had 125 grocery stores in 2016.
- Between 2013 and 2018, the number of farmers markets providing access to fresh food fell by more than **11%** in Macomb County. In 2016, the USDA counted eight farmers markets in operation across the county.