

We are joining hundreds of other faith communities throughout the Southwestern Pennsylvania region to focus attention on the problem of hunger in our midst. Some 370,000 people in our region suffer from hunger. We know that many of you follow Christ's message to "feed the hungry." We ask you to consider that we need to do more. For four weeks we are focusing on the issue. Today:

Hunger and the Elderly

- ⇒ Nationally the percentage of poor and near poor elderly who were hungry has more than doubled in recent years→ from 4.7% to 10.1%
- ⇒ In our region, by one estimate, over 50,000 elderly are hungry.
- ⇒ These are the most frail among us, for whom hunger can mean:
 - a prolonged and incurable illness or death
- ⇒ The prospect of hunger for a senior citizen, who is also often alone or trying to care for an elderly spouse means a loss of security and hope at a time of life when security is more important than ever.
- ⇒ Right now: many elderly are spared the suffering of hunger by people who volunteer through their local departments of aging and related social service agencies to deliver "home-delivered meals" – the old "Meals on Wheels" program. But many eligible for such help do not receive it.
- ⇒ Right now: many elderly receive SNAP (the old Foods Stamp program) benefits that help them to buy the groceries they need. But many eligible elderly do not apply, or are rejected on technicalities when they do apply.
- ⇒ What can we do:
 - Volunteer to help deliver home –delivered meals
 - volunteer at senior centers
 - help elders apply for aid they are eligible for such as food stamps
 - Encourage government to increase support programs that help feed the elderly who are hungry; programs such as food stamps and commodity surplus Food Programs.

- Join the Southwestern Pennsylvania Food Security Partnership – a new initiative in our region, supported by Christian Associates of Western PA. For information about the Partnership, contact (the Pastor? Other? The Partnership – 412-466-7711)

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Hunger and children

- ⇒ Over 50,000 children in the 12- county region either go to bed hungry or go to school hungry.

- ⇒ 80,000 children in the region – poor and near poor - are obese; with health problems associated with obesity.

- ⇒ Hungry Children:
 - are 2 times more likely to require Special Ed.
 - have 2 times more school suspensions
 - have 1.5 times more school absences
 - are 1.5 times more likely to repeat grade

- ⇒ All these impacts of hunger on children add up to developmental delays that create life long challenges - from unemployment and underemployment to poor health throughout adulthood.

- ⇒ Right now: Many children receive food assistance through free or reduced price breakfasts and lunches at school; at summer programs; from nutritious diets provided through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and through the SNAP (food stamp) program

- ⇒ What we can do:
 - reduce barriers that keep families who are eligible for food stamps from accessing them.
 - close the gap between kids who receive nutritious school lunches and nutritious school breakfast (now as high as 4 or 5 to 1).
 - support increased funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program – which targets aid for pregnant women and women and their newborns.

- support and encourage community programs to offer healthy meals as part of after school and summer programs.
- Support local food bank drives
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Hunger and Veterans

- ⇒ One of the cruelest developments for men and women who have served their country is to face the daunting challenges of hunger and homelessness.
- ⇒ Estimates of unemployment among veterans range from 10 to 20 percent.
- ⇒ What it means for veterans – and other adults – to be hungry:
 - 1.3 times more likely to be hospitalized and require longer inpatient stays.
 - 2.95 times more likely to have activity-limiting health impairments.
 - 3.5 times more likely to suffer from depression.
- ⇒ Right now: Many veterans receive assistance through SNAP (food stamps); through food banks and food pantries)
- ⇒ What we Can do:
 - Support food banks by volunteering and contributing to them
 - Call on government not to reduce, but to increase assistance – especially food assistance – to veterans.
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Hunger and Families

- ⇒ Hunger, along with homelessness, is the greatest crisis a family faces.
- ⇒ It can cross three generations affecting, children adults and elders.
- ⇒ It carries illness and prolonged illness into families
- ⇒ It drains meager financial resources; families facing hunger homelessness and related issues are forced to make choices – none of which are ideal
- ⇒ Parents who feed their children first are often forced to go to work or look for work while suffering from hunger.
- ⇒ Right now: Families obtain help through food banks and food pantries; through SNAP (food stamps), and through a variety of other programs
- ⇒ Right now: Even after those different sources of assistance, many families still cannot meet their families food needs

What we can do:

- Increase support for food banks.
- volunteer at food pantries and food banks.
- support government food assistance programs - that part of the safety net must take priority over other areas earmarked for cuts. In an era of government cutbacks, can we agree that programs that provide basic necessities such as food for families can be preserved.
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