

Living With **HUNGER** In Nevada

Group Activity
And Advocacy
Handbook

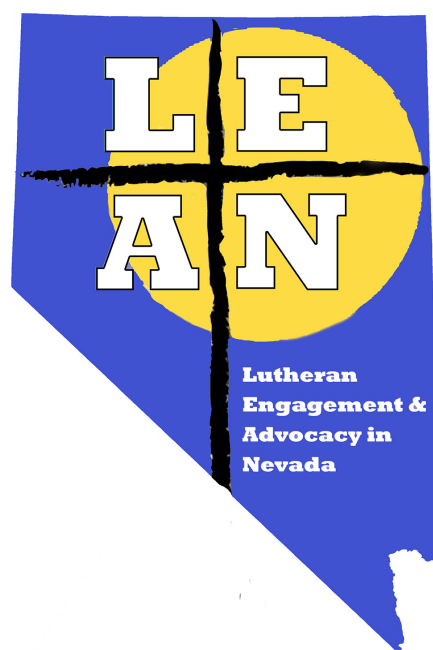


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Introduction ... And In Invitation

Welcome to LEAN's (Lutheran Engagement and Advocacy in Nevada) first-ever group activity and advocacy handbook dedicated to learning about the ongoing challenge of hunger in the state of Nevada, throughout the United States and around the world. Compiled largely from statistics and facts in HUNGER 101, a seminal and detailed teaching/learning/experiencing guidebook developed and distributed by the Community Food Bank of Atlanta, Georgia, this handbook is offered as part of a participatory exercise to give congregations insight into how families and individuals deal with systematic food insecurity, how they can access help from community and governmental organizations, and how faith communities can understand and help alleviate the scourge of hunger.

Representing member congregations of the Grand Canyon and Sierra Pacific Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, LEAN advocates for the common good and promotes public policies that reflect the Christian values of peacemaking, hospitality to strangers, care for creation, and concern for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger and disease.

In the two-plus decades since its inception as LAMN (Lutheran Advocacy and Ministry in Nevada), LEAN and its legislative advocates, advisory board members and supporting Lutheran and other Christian congregations have kept at the center of their efforts Jesus' words in Matthew 25 — the "Sheep and the Goats" passage:

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."

These words are central to the Christian ethic of compassionate care for all people, including the poor and disadvantaged, the young, the sick — our neighbors, our friends, perhaps members of our own families. Where secular society comes up short attending to the health and safety needs of our fellow citizens, we are called, as Christians, to offer help in any way we can, whether it's a meal from our own kitchens, a donation to a local food bank or church food pantry, volunteering — and, yes, advocating for the eradication of hunger and the dignity and care of all, including "the least of these," at every level of government.

Thank you for taking part in this experiential and educational exercise. Thanks to the Food Bank of Atlanta for their hard work. And thanks be to God for His blessings, and the work He asks us to do in the world. — *The LEAN Advisory Board*

DEFINING HUNGER, FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY

What is Hunger?

Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. Hunger is a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation. (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>)

What is Food Security?

Access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies). (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>)

Food banks often talk about hunger and food insecurity interchangeably. However, hunger is difficult to measure and requires more extensive research and data based on an individual's physical condition rather than a household's ability to access food.

Because of this, the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies recommended that the USDA make a clear distinction between hunger and food insecurity:

Food Insecurity - the condition assessed with a food security survey is a household level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

Hunger - an individual-level physiological condition (defined above) that may result from food insecurity.

What is Poverty?

It's difficult to talk about hunger and food insecurity without talking about poverty. Poverty is often defined as the state or condition of not being able to pay for basic needs.

The way we measure poverty was developed in the 1960s during the Johnson administration and has changed very little since then. The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty.

FOOD INSECURITY FACT SHEET

Food Insecurity in the United States

- 37.2 million Americans live in food insecure households, including 26.1million adults and 11.2 million children.
- 11.1% of households (14.3 million households) are food insecure.
- 5.6 million households (4.3) experienced very low food security.
(<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf>)
- Households that had higher rates of food insecurity than the national average included households with children (13.9%), especially households with children headed by single women (27.8%) or single men (15.9%), African American non-Hispanic households (21.2%) and Hispanic households (16.2%).
- 8.9% of senior citizens living alone were food insecure.
(<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf>)
- 5.5 million seniors face hunger in the US.(Feeding America, 2018)
- Food insecurity exists in every county in the U.S., ranging from a low of 2.9% in Steele County, ND to a high of 36% in Jefferson County, MS. (<https://map.feedingamerica.org/>)
- One in five (20%) of households served by the Feeding America network has at least one member that has served in the military. (Feeding America, 2018)
- 1.5 million veterans live below the federal poverty line and an additional 2.4 million veterans live paycheck to paycheck.
(US Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2019)

- 39% of (167,000) surveyed college students were food insecure in the past 30 days. 46% had housing insecurity in the previous year. 17% reported being homeless at some point during the previous year.
(<https://hope4college.com/realcollege-2020-five-years-of-evidence-on-basic-needs-insecurity/>)

Nevada Food Insecurity

- According to recent Feeding America statistics, 373,370 people are facing hunger
- 122,450 of them are children
- 19.5% of children in Nevada experience food security regularly
- Nevada has the fourth highest rate of food insecurity among seniors in the U.S., tied with Texas. Nevada also has the second highest rates of very low food security among seniors in the nation, meaning they report skipping meals to cut costs
- People facing hunger in Nevada are estimated to report needing nearly \$200 million more per year to meet their food needs.
- The average cost of a meal in Nevada per person is \$3.11
- Churches and other charitable organizations help support those facing hunger through food pantries
- SNAP, formerly food stamps, provides temporary help for people going through hard times – providing supplemental money to buy food until they can get back on their feet.
- 35.5% of households receiving SNAP benefits have children
- A little over half of all seniors who qualify for SNAP benefits do not participate. Only 48% of those eligible for the program are enrolled

Government Responses to Hunger and Poverty

What are Government Responses to Hunger and Food Insecurity?

These are resources and services provided by the federal and state government to help meet immediate needs and find long-term solutions for those who are struggling with food insecurity and poverty.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

This program (formerly known as Food Stamps) helps eligible individuals and families purchase food. More than half of people receiving SNAP are children. To be eligible, individuals or households must have incomes at or below 135% of the federal poverty line and meet other strict criteria. SNAP cannot be used to buy essential non-food items (like diapers or soap).

Women, Infants & Children (WIC)

This program provides eligible pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children up to the age of 5 with increased access to nutritious foods, nutrition education, health care and social service providers in order to prevent nutrition-related health problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood.

School and Summer Meals

The School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) assist eligible students in order to improve their nutrition. These meals are available during the school year as well as during the summer months at a free or reduced price.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Provides food and other resources to assist children and adults participating in afterschool, emergency shelter, adult daycare and preschool programs.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Provides USDA commodities (foods that the government pays farmers to grow) to states that distribute the food through local emergency food providers like food banks.

Additional information about all of the above Federal Nutrition Programs can be found at:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/programs>

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

A tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. To qualify, taxpayers must earn income from working and meet other requirements. They have the opportunity for a refund of taxes paid if they file a tax return and the credit is more than taxes owed.

Additional information on the EITC can be found at: <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions-for-individuals/earned-income-tax-credit>

Community Responses to Hunger and Poverty

What are Community Responses to Hunger?

These are resources and services provided by individuals and non-governmental groups (like you) and organizations within a community. Some examples include:

Food Bank

A non-governmental, non-profit charitable organization that procures, stores and distributes food and other resources to community based organizations providing food assistance to individuals and families within a designated region. To learn more about food banks: feedingamerica.org

Food Pantry

A community-based food assistance program distributes food to individuals and families at no cost. Every community is different so there are many different kinds of food pantries. Some are in places of worship, some are in schools, community centers, etc. Pantries often acquire a substantial portion of their food supply from food banks.

Mobile Food Pantry

A pop-up distribution of food, usually in collaboration with an organization or event, that allows for the distribution of a large amount of food to a large number of individuals and families during a specific period of time.

Shelter

A community based program that temporarily houses people experiencing homelessness; meals are almost always served. Some shelters serve families and other individuals. Some shelters have the capacity to allow people to stay for extended periods of time and others can only serve people on a first come first serve nightly basis.

Community Kitchen

Used to be referred to as a soup kitchen, this is a community based food assistance program that serves meals at no cost to people struggling with food insecurity. Every community is different so there are many types of community kitchens. Some community kitchen programs operate out of places of worship and some are connected to organizations providing shelter or day care for children or adults.

Food Drive

An individual, group or community - wide food collection and donation effort. These are often done to help ensure that a community based service provider (food bank, food pantry, etc.) has enough food to feed the community.

Community Garden

Gardens started and tended collectively by a community of individuals and families. Every community garden is unique and reflects the community and people who are part of it. Community gardens can increase both access to fresh vegetables and a sense of community collaboration. Some people grow vegetables and donate to charitable organizations like food pantries.

Advocacy And Being An Anti-Hunger Advocate

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something; one who argues for a cause; an advocate is a supporter; a defender; one who speaks on another's behalf.

What is an Anti-Hunger Advocate?

An anti-hunger advocate is someone who raises awareness about hunger and food insecurity and the people who are impacted by these issues. An anti-hunger advocate also works to support programs and policies that address these issues.

Advocacy and Hunger

Anti-hunger advocates are important in the work of connecting community voices and stories about hunger and food insecurity to elected officials and policy makers. Doing so, will raise awareness of people's lived experiences and what is happening at the community level. This will result in representatives making informed decisions.

Ways to Advocate

There are many ways to be an anti-hunger advocate. Advocates write letters, call or visit policy makers, educate their community on these issues, campaign for candidates they know support policies that promote food security.

Who Can Advocate?

EVERYONE! It is always possible to leverage energy toward raising awareness and building the kind of community engagement that leads to action around the issues of hunger and food insecurity. Elected officials love (and need) to hear from their constituents: the people who live, learn and work in their districts. If you stand up and speak up, people will listen.

Faith-Based Advocacy

LEAN invites all Nevada Lutherans, and indeed all people of faith, to exercise their right to advocate for the well-being of their neighbors — the hungry, the unhoused, those experiencing poverty or health issues or any other life circumstance that put them at a disadvantage in society.

GROUP ICEBREAKER: WHAT DOES FOOD MEAN TO YOU? (10 Minutes)

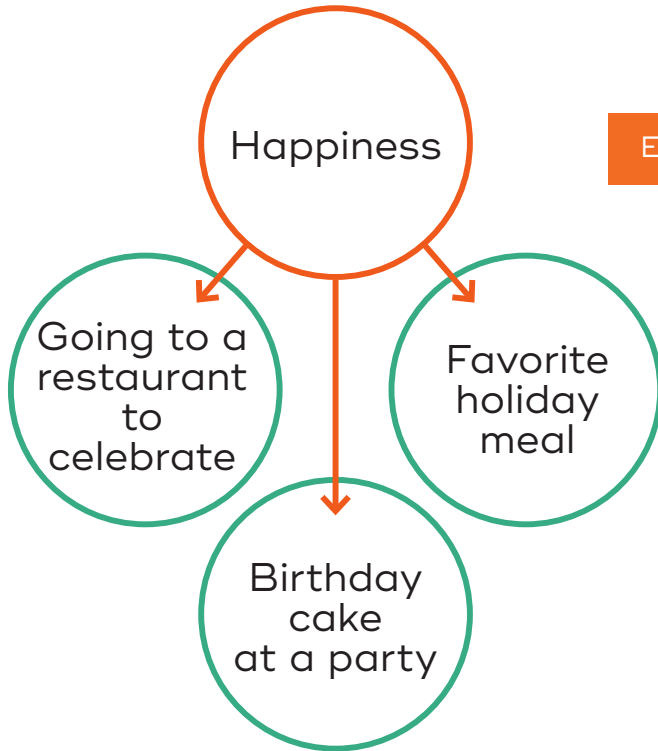
On the lines below, please write as many sentences as you can about what food means to you and/or your family. You can write about a particular event or holiday or your day to day life. You may also write about how food insecurity (not having access to enough food to lead an active healthy life) can impact a person, a family or a community. Do not spend too much time fixing errors, but instead concentrate on getting as much information from your mind to the paper as possible in the time allowed. Then share your thoughts with everyone in your group. **Ready? Set. Go!!!**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

FOOD AND LIFE CONCEPT MAP (10 MINUTES)

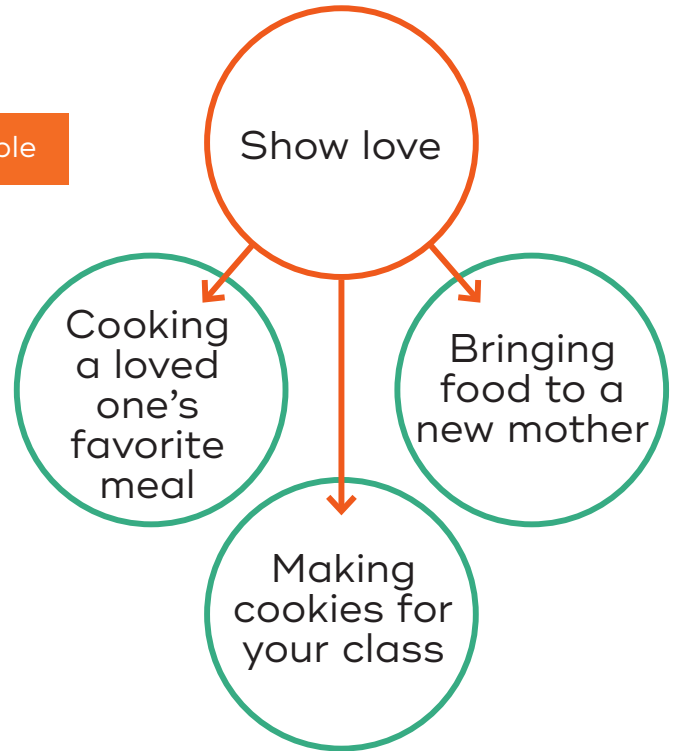
In each bubble, please write a word or a phrase that reflects what food means to you. Then share your responses with others in your group.

FOOD IS...

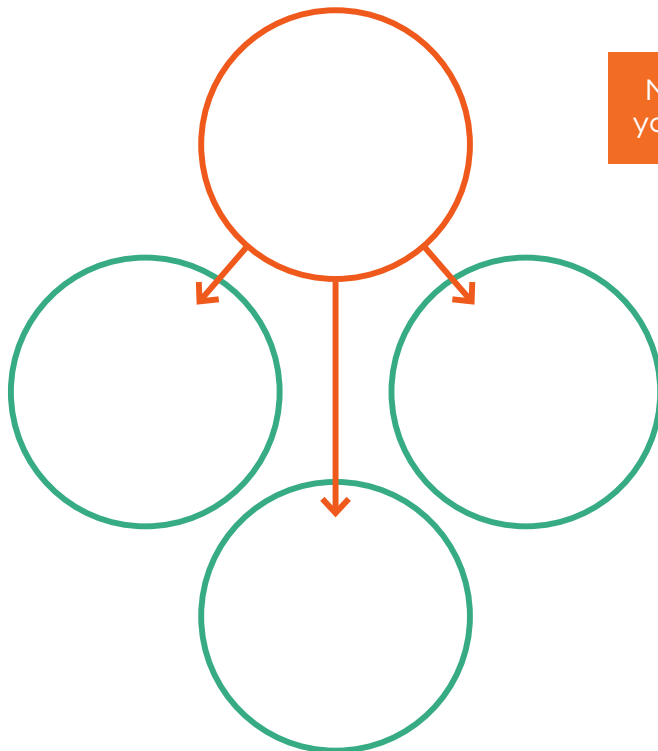


Example

FOOD IS HOW WE...

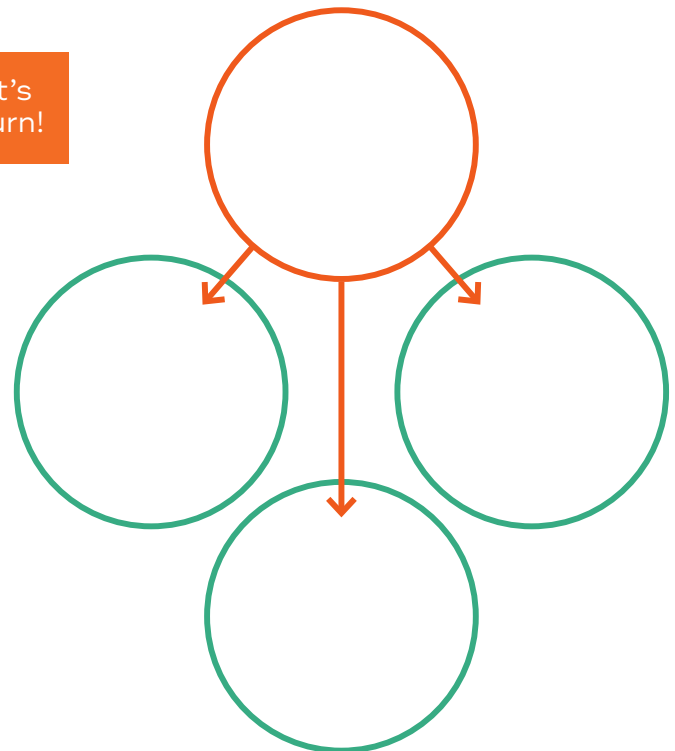


FOOD IS...



Now it's
your turn!

FOOD IS HOW WE...



Activity: Family Budgets (40 minutes)

Learning

This activity explores the relationship between household income and food security. It also identifies both community and government responses to hunger and poverty. Learn about the daily challenges millions of people face in this country.

Objectives

This exercise will increase awareness about the gap that often exists between wages and expenses.

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the community and government responses to food insecurity in the United States.

Performance Tasks

Divide into "family" groups of three, four or five

Give each group a family scenario. Instructors should be sure that all five family scenarios are represented at least once.

Each scenario will describe a household and the household's size, health states, income and expenses.

It's important that groups remain on task and that all group members understand the objective and have equal opportunity to participate.

Ask participants to add up all their expenses and subtract these from their starting income. The amount left over is the income they can use toward food and other expenses.

After they have completed the activity, have participants share different scenarios and the challenges that each household might be facing. Have participants brainstorm what other expenses a family might have. For example, diapers, cleaning supplies, car repair, etc.

Together or in groups, select one or two of the scenarios and take the amount leftover at the end of the month and divide it by 30 to determine how much money there is to spend on food per day. Then take that number and divide it by the number of people in the household to determine how much each person has for food per day.

FAMILY SCENARIO #1

Who You Are

You and your spouse have three children ages 2, 5 and 8.

One of you works for \$12/hour and one of you works for \$14.00/hour.

You both work full time and your combined monthly income is \$4,160.

You were recently diagnosed with high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Your doctor recommended you reduce sugar, fat and salt in your diet and increase fruits and vegetables.

Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (three bedroom apartment)	\$2,100
2. Utilities (electricity, gas, water and phone)	\$350
3. Transportation	\$120
4. Childcare (one in day care, two in after school)	\$900
5. Medical (health insurance plus co-pays)	\$400
6. Taxes	\$650

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

FAMILY SCENARIO #2

Who You Are

You are married and have two young children, ages 3 and 6.

One of you works for \$7.25/hour (minimum wage) and one of you works for \$11/hour.

You both work full time and have a combined monthly income of \$2,920.

Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two bedroom apartment)	\$1,500
2. Utilities (electricity, gas, water and phone)	\$190
3. Transportation (two monthly bus passes)	\$120
4. Childcare (one in day care, one babysitter)	\$600
5. School & household supplies	\$75
6. Medical (health insurance)	\$50
7. Taxes	\$278

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

FAMILY SCENARIO #3

Who You Are

You are a retired couple.

You have a combined fixed monthly income of \$2,200 from Social Security.

You are both 71 years old and have been married 40 years.

Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two bedroom apartment)	\$1,500
2. Utilities (electricity, gas, water and phone)	\$200
3. Transportation	\$60
4. Childcare (help w/special homecare for grandchildren)	\$200
5. Medical (health insurance and two prescriptions)	\$420
6. Taxes	\$180
Total of expenses	\$

Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

FAMILY SCENARIO #4

Who You Are

You are a 60 year-old grandmother, raising three grandchildren, ages 9, 11 and 17.

You receive a monthly disability check of \$950, a special TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) payment of \$175 and you watch two children from your neighborhood for a total of \$500/month. Your total monthly income is \$1,625.

You have multiple health issues that have placed you on disability.

Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two bedroom apartment)	\$1,500
2. Utilities (electricity, gas, water and phone)	\$197
3. Transportation	\$60
4. Medical (state funded health insurance)	\$150
Total of expenses	\$

Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

FAMILY SCENARIO #5

Who You Are

You are a single parent of three children ages 3, 6 and 7.

You work full time earning \$12.50/hour and your monthly income is \$2,000.

Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (one bedroom apartment)	\$1,200
2. Utilities (electricity, gas and water)	\$80
3. Transportation	\$60
4. Childcare (one in day care, two in after care)	\$650
5. Taxes	\$150
Total of expenses	\$

Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

Discussion Questions

- What insights or surprises did you experience while working with your family scenario and budget? *Facilitator Note: I wasn't able to pay all my bills, I wouldn't have enough money to keep my lights on, I don't know how I would get to work?*
- What other necessary items would these families need each month? *Facilitator Note: Cleaning supplies, toiletries, vitamins, laundry soap and services, dental care, field trips, etc*
- In the 1970's, a parent earning minimum wage (the federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25) could feed their children and pay for housing. What has changed? *Facilitator Note: Expenses like housing, healthcare, food and fuel have all skyrocketed. Wages have not kept up with the cost of living. An increasing number of people don't have healthcare coverage with work and health care bills are now the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States.*
- How could some of the government responses to hunger help the families in this activity? *Facilitator Note: Many of these families have no money left over for food and SNAP and WIC are federal programs that increase access to nutritious food. Most of these families are in working households, the Earned Income Tax Credit for low to middle income working families might help create financial stability. Families with children may be eligible for free or reduced priced meals at school.*
-
- What are some challenges families might face trying to sign up for any of these government programs? *Facilitator Note: Families may not know about these programs or how to apply. People might not have internet access or transportation. If people are working, they might not be able to leave work to meet an appointment or to apply.*
- What community responses to hunger might be able to help these families? *Facilitator Note: Families might visit a food pantry or a community kitchen in their region to get some supplemental food; or they might find a community-based program that provides rent assistance or help with non-food necessities.*
- If you or someone you know needs food, how could you help? Do you know what community services are available near you? How might you find out?
- Where can you apply for the federal nutrition programs SNAP or WIC?
- How do you find out if you are eligible?
- What do you need to know and/or bring with them?
- Is there a food pantry near you? When are they open?
- Would you be able to visit a pantry or apply for SNAP and not miss work?

POVERTY LEVELS CALCULATED FOR NEVADA PER US GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS	MONTHLY INCOME	ANNUAL INCOME
1	\$ 1,133	\$ 13,590
2	\$ 1,526	\$ 18,310
3	\$ 1,919	\$ 23,030
4	\$ 2,313	\$ 27,750
5	\$ 2,706	\$ 32,470
6	\$ 3,099	\$ 37,190
7	\$ 3,493	\$ 41,910
8	\$ 3,886	\$ 46,630

SOURCE: <https://povertylevelcalculator.com/nevada/>

GROUP EXERCISE: GETTING HELP (15-30 Minutes)

If your group or organization has invited representatives from local community or government service providers, or recruited members of your congregation to stand in as a surrogate for those organizations, choose a “family” member to visit that organization’s information table at your location, or virtually if you are meeting via Zoom or another digital meeting venue.

1. Explain your family’s situation and need based on your Family Scenario activity and following discussions
2. Ask what documentation or credentials are needed to qualify and acquire services, how long it will take to secure them and how long they will last
3. Ask questions based on the information provided on pages 6-8, take notes if possible
4. Have the family representative return “home” and explain next steps, how they all need to help, etc.
5. If possible, have your group prepare a report for your congregation — the experience of being a food insecure family, what you discovered about services, needs and requirements, etc.

LEAN WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR FEEDBACK ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK AND EXPERIENCE. E-MAIL US at leanforjustice@gmail.com

National and Nevada Hunger Resources

Feeding America: www.feedingamerica.org

NORTHERN NEVADA

Food Bank of Northern Nevada: www.fbnn.org

Catholic Charities/St. Vincent's Food Pantry: www.ccsnn.org

No Kid Hungry: www.nokidhungry.org

SOUTHERN NEVADA

Feed the Hungry: www.healthysouthernnevada.org

Three Square: www.threesquare.org

Kind Traveler: www.kindtraveler.org

United Way of Southern Nevada: www.uwsn.org

Lutheran Social Services: www.lssnv.org

Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada: www.catholiccharities.com

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <https://dhhs.nv.gov>

EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit):

irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit

Medicaid: www.medicaid.nv.gov

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program

Women, Infants & Children (WIC): fns.usda.gov/wic

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, let us take our experiences and knowledge from this handbook, and these exercises, into the world as living and working embodiments of your loving spirit. Please keep us mindful of the presence of hunger and poverty in the world and our own neighborhoods, give us the strength, heart and willingness to help our neighbors out of hunger and into a more healthy life, and guide us as we advocate for "the least of these" within our families, congregations and in the community at large. AMEN