# Generous Life Project – The Bread of Life

**Session 1**

**Theme**: Feeding people with both physical and spiritual bread as a sign of God present in the world

**Hook: Come, the Table is Ready**

**Text**: John 6:1-14, 25-35 and Isaiah 55:1-2

**Video**: Feeding Programs

**Learning Goal**: To discover ways to feed the hungry of the neighborhood with both

physical and spiritual bread

**Learning Activity:**  Introduce congregation and neighborhood analysis tool. Discover the opportunities for engagement where the resources of your congregation meet the needs your neighborhood.

**Sending**: Eucharist picnic with reading of Isaiah 55:1-2

**Preparation/Need**

1. Have HOOK written out on whiteboard, newsprint or screen
2. Newsprint or poster size paper for ongoing congregation and neighborhood analysis
3. Newsprint for tracking “Images of the Kingdom of God”
4. Markers
5. Paper for participants
6. Elements for Holy Communion present and ready
7. Area outside selected and prepared – if available

## Welcome

**Hook:** Come, the Table is Ready

**Theme**: Our focus will be on feeding people with both physical and spiritual bread as a sign of God’s presence in the world.

**Prayer:** God, you show your presence in the world with signs that give life to all. You call us to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry, so that nothing may be lost. With your grace, there is always more than enough. You give us the bread of life that endures. Help us to serve it to all our hungry neighbors. **Amen.**

## Video

Feeding Programs

### Relevant Quotes

Voiceover (VO): Today, many congregations of the ELCA's Southwest California Synod, acting as the Body of Christ, feed the multitudes. The story is Jesus' revelation of the Kingdom of God. And, it is a prediction.

VO: God's generous gifts: earth, the human mind and human hands provide abundance today. Humanity now produces more than 2,000 calories of food for every man, woman and child on earth

VO: Hunger is felt by everyone every day. Food is vital to our lives. But more than a requirement to stay alive, food has a deeper meaning. Food is sharing and well-being and generosity among our family and friends.

VO: To lose all that, to lose the ability to feed yourself and your family would be a disaster for the body, and for the soul.

VO: Today, there's a hungry multitude in the Southwest California Synod, near every congregation, in greater numbers than ever.

VO: On the last night, Jesus chose to share a meal with his disciples. He told them to take and eat the food saying it symbolized the essence of himself by which he asked to be remembered. The Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ lives in the congregations of the ELCA Southwest California Synod.

## Biblical Foundation

Was there a line from the video that spoke to you, or an idea you want to remember?

What Bible stories/verses does this video bring to mind?

Have someone read aloud John 6:1-6.

**1After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” 6He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.**

Who notices the hunger of the people and proposes a solution?

## Commentary

Jesus takes initiative, sensing their need even before they grumble or the disciples notice. God acts, we respond (Kysar 1986, 91).

John connects the upcoming miracle to the Passover. Why?

Possible connections (feel free to add your own): Kysar notes that this shows Jesus as the giver of divine nourishment. Old Testament overtones include the giving of Manna in the wilderness and the Passover tradition. “As the giver of life, Jesus gives more than has been known in the past” (Kysar 1986, 93).

Raymond Brown adds that the Passover meal had certain characteristics anticipating the messianic banquet: “But in the Galilee setting, he wishes to show that the banquet given to the five thousand just before Passover was messianic in a way that they have not recognized; it was a sign that Wisdom has come to give food to all who seek” (Brown 1966, 274).

## Biblical Foundation

Have someone read verses 7-14.

 **7Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” 8One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” 10Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.12When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” 13So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”**

## Commentary

A discussion of distributive justice could be appropriate here, see the second voiceover line in “Relevant Quotes” for a tie-in to the video.

## Conversation Starter

**Elbow Buddies**

When I say “the Kingdom of God,” what comes to mind? What images? What words? How does this miracle fit into your vision?

Generosity is one of the miracles of this story. The boy offers his food to feed the people. Perhaps that sparked more sharing. As people passed the food around, perhaps they added their own to the mix. Could it really be possible that only one person (the boy) had any food with him? How does generosity fit into your vision of the Kingdom of God?

Share insights and write them on a piece of newsprint. At the top put: “Images of the Kingdom of God.” ***Make sure you save this paper as you will be adding to this paper in almost every session.***

## Biblical Foundation

Have someone read verses 25-27.

**25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 26Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.**

According to this passage, what is the gift that the Son of Man has given us?

Have someone read verses 30-35.

**30So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”**

**35Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**

Commentary

Hunger and thirst symbolize the emptiness of existence without God (Kysar 1986, 101).

Augustine: “My soul is restless until it rests in thee.”

Jesus offers the woman at the well “living water” (John 4). And here he offers the bread of life. Both reveal the divine in Jesus (Brown 1966, 272).

This is the first of the seven I AM statements of Jesus. Each reveals another benefit of the gift of God that is Jesus: bread of life, light of the world, door of the sheep, good shepherd, resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life, and true vine (Kysar 1986, 101).

## Conversation Starters

**Elbow Buddies**

Jesus has revealed the essence of “food that endures for eternal life.” How do you experience this bread?

## Learning Activity

**Elbow Buddies**

How does your congregation physically feed the hungry outside your doors? Spiritually?

Use the “T” chart below to organize your thoughts.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  Physical |  Spiritual |
|  |  |

**Think, Pair, Share**

In your neighborhood, what are the signs that going without physical food is experienced as a “disaster for the soul?”

## Learning Activity

Congregation and neighborhood analysis.

Together you will begin to analyze your congregation and your neighborhood. You will be looking for possible opportunities where the resources of your congregation could be used to help meet the needs of your neighbors. You won’t finish this today***. Make sure you save your large group work because you will be adding to this every session.***

**Small Groups**

Handout a piece of paper for each group.

Directions: Draw a big circle on both the front and back of a piece of paper. In one circle, list the resources of your congregation. Encourage folks to go beyond the physical and financial assets (though these should be included) to consider the skills and passions of the people of your congregation. Be concise – one word or short phrase.

Next: Turn the paper over and list the needs of your neighborhood. Again, be concise.

**Large Group**

Directions: Draw two big circles with an intersecting area (see diagram). Ask the group to report their ideas for the resources of the congregation circle. Don’t repeat words – even if EVERYONE has them in their small group circle. If you want to show emphasis, make the word bigger or use a thicker stroke.

Next: Do the same for the needs of the neighborhood.

Next: Ask participants to consider if any of the resources of the congregation look like something that could be used to help meet the needs of the neighborhood? Place possible matches in the space where the circles intersect. These are Opportunities.

This is only the first week, so don’t worry if there isn’t much to fill in yet. It will grow over the weeks. ***Again, make sure you save your large group work because you will be adding to this in every session.***

## Sending

Eucharist: Process elements outside to a prepared spot for picnic style Eucharist.

Read Isaiah 55:1-2.

**Ho, everyone who thirsts,
    come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
    come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
    without money and without price.
2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
    and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
    and delight yourselves in rich food.**

Invite all to join in the Lord’s Prayer.

Proclaim the Words of Institution and Share the meal!

### Dismissal

**Leader: Go in Peace. Share the Bread of Life!**

People: Thanks be to God!

[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. References:

Raymond Brown. 1966. “The Gospel According to John” The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday

Robert Kysar. 1986. “John” Augsburg Commentary of the New Testament. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House,

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