January, 2019

Dear Pastor, Missions Chair and/or Campaign Organizer,

My name is Debra Selby and I am a pediatrician in Paris, TN. I am serving as the hunger advocate for the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of The United Methodist Church. I would like to share with you and your congregation some experiences and information about the impact hunger has on our communities and our world. Please share this information with others who will help organize and support the 2019 Lenten Hunger Offering (LHO).

Our theme for 2019 is MERCY. Mercy is an often-used word, especially here in the south, but do we fully understand what it means? Mercy is the showing of kindness or compassion to the less fortunate and showing it without judgment. Throughout the Bible there are numerous illustrations of mercy. God demonstrates mercy at its finest in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are recipients of this ultimate mercy and it is our duty to extend mercy to our fellow humans. Showing mercy by feeding the hungry and food insecure is the goal of the LHO.

The 2019 LHO campaign’s goal is to decrease physical hunger – the feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by a lack of food coupled with the desire to eat. Medically, hunger results from stimulation of sensory nerves of the stomach by the contractions and churning of an empty stomach.

Why have a campaign about hunger when we live in the richest country in the world?! It might surprise you to learn that 1 in 8 people in the US struggle with hunger. That’s 41 million people – nearly 13 million children and more than 5 million seniors. Hunger knows no boundaries and affects people from all walks of life. Many Americans are one job loss or medical crisis away from food insecurity. Your neighbor, your child’s friends or even a member of your congregation may be struggling to get enough to eat. Imagine having to choose between buying food for the week and paying utility bills. People who struggle with hunger face those tough decisions every day. Decisions can have serious, long-lasting consequences.

Hunger and health are deeply, irrevocably intertwined. People who are food insecure are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. For children, food insecurity is particularly devastating, affecting not only physical and mental health, but also academic achievement and future economic prosperity. Hunger and food insecurity in young children are associated with delayed development and increased risk of chronic diseases like anemia. In older children, hunger is associated with anemia, decreased academic achievement and behavior problems such as anxiety and aggression. Imagine being a hungry child sitting in a classroom with a stomach that has not been fed since lunchtime the previous day. It is difficult to pay attention and learn.

As a pediatrician, I have had the privilege to serve our Lord on several mission trips to Sierra Leone, Africa. On each visit I encountered diseases directly related to hunger. I have seen malnourished mothers die in childbirth and witnessed starving children. The vast majority of illnesses I encountered could have been prevented by proper nutrition. Project Peanut Butter, one LHO recipient, has made significant gains in decreasing disease and death related to hunger.

What can you and your congregation do to help alleviate hunger and food insecurity? The Memphis Conference began LHO to combat problems on local and global levels. This furthers the mission of the conference to “discover, equip, connect and send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time.” Our conference distributes LHO monies to local neighbors such as food pantries in our four districts, Reelfoot Rural Ministries and United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis, as well as to global neighbors: Our Father’s House, Project Peanut Butter and feeding ministries in Mexico. This helps alleviate immediate problems of hunger, ultimately builds relationships and shares the MERCY we have received with a hurting world.

Your commitment to LHO is necessary to make it successful. Please review all campaign information and share it with the person or committee that will most enthusiastically support and implement the campaign in your congregation. Together we can make a difference in our communities and our world by showing mercy to the world!

Thank you so much for your time, attention and effort on this.
In Christ, Debra S. Selby, MD

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Luke 6:36

The mission of the Memphis Conference is to discover, equip, connect, and send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time.

www.memphis-umc.net/lentenhungeroffering