

youthESource Youth Night

Servants with a Smile

by Kim Youmans

Servant at a Food Distribution Center

In our world, millions go hungry each day. Even in our country millions live below the poverty level. In every state there are hungry people, not by choice, but because they cannot afford the necessary amount of food on which to live. With the Lord's help and guidance we can help in a few individual cases.

Goals:

- To look at oneself and one's personal prejudices toward the poor.
- To see hunger as more than statistics.
- To view a Christian response to the hunger problem in one's community.

In order to achieve these goals some basic understandings need to be achieved. While there are many methods of food distribution, for the purpose of a youth group visit and participation, there are basically two types: meals and direct food distribution. Each has sub-types. Meal programs can be divided into regularly served meals (daily), occasionally served meals and transported meals. Direct food distribution sub-types are grocery bag distribution (or cash), government food distribution (butter, cheese, dry milk, etc.) and holiday baskets. Each method is appropriate in its own context.

By now you may be asking: "How do I find a hunger center or food distribution center?" "Do they allow visitors?" "Will they need help?" "Will we be safe there?" Many other questions will arise as you begin your own investigation, but you will also answer them as you plan for the event.

How does one go about finding a hunger center or food program? The poor have often been called the "invisible America." The most needy are the hardest to find, even for the churches and agencies feeding the poor. There are many reasons: shame, fear, lack of ways to receive information, lack of mobility to get to agencies, lack of knowledge about the programs and language barriers.

As you leaders, you have many ways to get in touch with several centers which feed the poor. Read the newspaper. Listen for public service announcements on radio and television. Search online for local agencies. Your pastor can direct you to civic or church agencies which deal with hunger. Check with your district social ministry committee, the local Salvation Army or your county welfare department.

Select several sites and types of programs to visit yourself (perhaps with a youth or two). This visit is just to see the program, meet the staff and plan with them your group's visit. The staff at each center will discuss what your group can expect and the help your group can provide.

Following the planning visit you will know more about the welcome and safety of the center. You will also know the types of volunteer work needed. (Note: planning visits might be best at the beginning of a month and the group visit at the end of the month since centers tend to be busiest at the end of the month. This is because the Social Security and welfare checks, issued at the beginning of the month, do not last the entire time. Most centers deal with other crisis needs and also can use related help.)

With this background you are ready to plan your servant event.

Try to use the cycle containing these four parts:

- a. Preparation
- b. Service
- c. Worship/Reflection
- d. Sharing

In a series of events of this type, each event could take you to a new level of service, worship, reflection and sharing.

PREPARATION

Begin your preparation with a word of warning from Jeremiah 22:21-23. These verses should also help prepare for the culture change, if not shock, the group will be experiencing.

We are conditioned to believe we will never be hungry or poor. We can take care of ourselves and long to be independent. We will never need to rely on someone else and never, never should we ask for help. Those who do are somehow below us. They were not brought up properly. They deserve to be in their condition and do not deserve the help we give them. Further, we must have strict rules because this kind of person has no morals and will cheat us at every opportunity.

The following questions should help us check this conditioning and the prejudices a little closer. Discuss these questions as a group. What do you expect to see? Will the people look poor? Will they dress poorly? Will they act poor?

Now ask group members to complete the following statements:

Being poor is being without...

- Nintendo
- color TV
- any TV
- food
- heat
- your own house
- a telephone
- a new car
- any car
- gas for your car

Poor people shouldn't...

- eat at McDonald's
- drive a car
- wear new clothes
- own their own homes
- have hobbies
- watch TV

Being hungry is...

- no chips for lunch
- skipping lunch
- casserole instead of steak
- no junk food

Poor people should...

- clip coupons
- eat generic foods
- drive clunkers
- work harder
- wear hand-me-downs
- rent small apartments
- have big gardens

I was hungry when...

- I came home from school and didn't get a snack
- I lost my money in a vending machine
- I worked through lunch
- I was sent to bed without supper
- I missed breakfast to be on time to school

Compare the responses to these questions before and after your visit. This exercise is an attempt to see our prejudices. All of the responses, however contradictory, have been laid at the feet of the poor and hungry. Why are they poor? Is being poor their own fault or choice?

Hungry centers are located in areas not usually visited by outsiders. As you travel, look around. What differences do you observe? Take a walk in the neighborhood of the hunger center. How do you feel? Why?

In your service, remember...

- God loves you and ALL people.
- God has redeemed you and ALL people.
- All are equal in God's sight.
- Most people are poor because they are born poor.

Also:

STOP your pre-judgments and your easy solutions.

LOOK at your surroundings, at your fellow workers, at those you serve.

LISTEN, really listen, to those you serve, to your host, to your feelings.

SERVICE

This will have to be planned with the center staff. You can expect jobs such as stacking food, packing bags, distributing food, checking identification, sizing clothes, entertaining children, handing out numbers, setting chairs, washing floors or preparing food. Encourage contact between your youth and the staff and clients of the center.

WORSHIP REFLECTION

If possible, this should be done at the center. Begin with a reading of Luke 6:25. This heavy judgment verse should be followed immediately with a litany, giving each participant an opportunity to add a personal luxury.

Leader:	When You were hungry, Lord,	Males:	We talked and talked,
Males:	We went to McDonalds,	Females:	We talked and talked.
Females:	We bought new CDs.	Leader:	When You were hungry, Lord,
Leader:	When You were hungry, Lord,	Group members:	(Share your own petitions)
Males:	We rented prom tuxedos,	Leader:	When we were hungry, Lord,
Females:	We blow-dried our hair.	Males:	You gave us Your body,
Leader:	When You were hungry, Lord,	Females:	You gave us Your blood.
Males:	We stockpiled nuclear weapons,	Leader:	When we were hungry, Lord,
Females:	We air-conditioned our churches.	Males:	You forgave us our sins,
Leader:	When You were hungry, Lord,	Females:	You gave us Yourself.

The Lord's Supper is shared.

The worship reflection should end with a reading of Psalm 146 in unison.

SHARING

Following the end of the reading and a short silence, move into the sharing. Review the "Being Poor Is..." exercise. This should enable participants to begin sharing. Discuss the sights, sounds, thoughts and feelings you experienced.

Let the Spirit lead you to other actions. Share what you have learned with others in your church. Write your congressperson about your visit and your concern about hunger. Visit the center on a regular basis, volunteering time or bringing food. Set a canned food goal for your church (one can per family per Sunday for a year, for example).

POINTS TO PONDER

- Ever center is different.
- Needs are different.
- Clients are different.
- Give your first fruits, not the leftover cranberries no one wanted.
- Fresh fruit is a treat.
- Peanut butter and tuna fish are high in protein.
- Your hunger center may need a freezer.

RESOURCES TO INVESTIGATE

Bread for the World, 425 3rd Street SW, Ste 1200, Washington, DC 20024, www.bread.org

Heifer International, 1 World Ave., Little Rock, AR 72202, www.heifer.org

LCMS World Relief, 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122

(Check your local library for current national/global statistics on hunger and poverty)

updated for youthESource March 2015

Originally published in *Resources for Youth Ministry* 84:4.