

Session 1

When Did We See You Hungry? (Matthew 25:37)

Focus

To initiate a discussion about hunger in the United States and worldwide, and begin to see the human face of hunger in new ways.



Preparation

- Refer to “For each session you will need” on page 4. Use the points as a checklist for this session.
- Prepare “Hunger and Poverty Definitions” (see “Useful Terms” at www.hungernomore.org) on newsprint, a transparency or as a handout.
- Make copies of the handout “When Did We See Thee Hungry?” so each participant will have one.
- Download the list of Millennium Development Goals at www.hungernomore.org or copy p. 31.
- Arrive early at the meeting place and make sure everything is set up and laid out in the order you will need the copies/books/materials/lists.

Welcome

In your own words, briefly welcome the group and invite them to be seated and quiet for the opening prayer.



Opening Prayer

The leader, or a chosen participant, begins:

(L) In the name of God, in us creating, for us redeeming, with us transforming (or, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). **(All)** Amen.

Ask each participant to say his or her first name and a brief, two or three word reason for being present. If there are more than twelve people, ask each person to share this with a person next to her or him.

(L) We have begun in God’s name and given each other our own name. Let us now pray:

Loving God, in your grace you have gathered us at this time and in this place to hear the word you are speaking this day in the voice of people who are hungry and poor. Open our hearts and minds to the power of that word. May we see with your eyes the vision of a world which knows no borders, no boundaries, no fear, but invites us again to live together the promise of abundance which is both your gift and promise. We ask this in the name of your own beloved son, who lives and reigns united in the love of your Holy Spirit, now and always. **(All)** Amen.

God's Story

See that everyone has a Bible. Various translations are fine. At some point you may want to have people compare translations of the selected text.

First, introduce the scripture lesson by reading aloud the paragraph below or paraphrase it in your own words:

The Gospel of Matthew is an interesting choice to begin this study of hunger and how we as the church are related to it, since it is the only gospel to actually use the word “church” to describe the community of believers. It was most likely written in a Jewish Christian community. The writer understands the faith of the church to be built on the Hebrew scriptures and traditions of the Jewish community. This passage is set in a scene in which all the nations of the world – the Gentiles – are envisioned around God’s throne. While the passage sounds like it is about the end of the world, remember that it was intended to speak to the church about what was then the present time. Hear now what the Spirit says to the church:

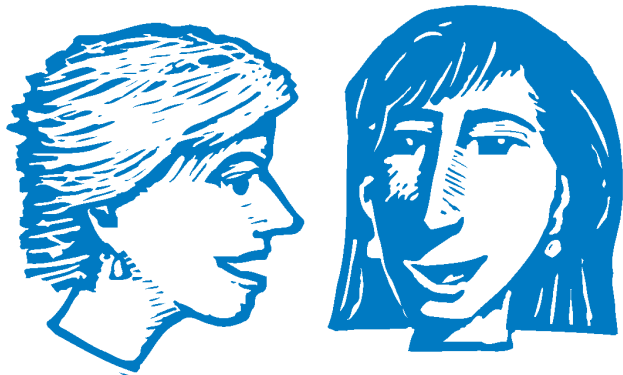


Next, have someone with a strong voice read Matthew 24:34-40 from the handout.

Then, lead the discussion with these questions:

- Matthew’s community thought it was already living in the “end time.” Do you think we are? Why do you think we begin this study with this particular story?
- In what ways is it true, or false, that when we see hungry people, we are looking at the face of Christ?
- This story doesn’t seem to mention anything about confessing faith in Jesus Christ. Why do you think that is? How is this story, whatever its original context was, really about us as the church?
- How do you feel inside when you hear these words? What do they make you think about in your own life? In our life together?
- Who do you think the “least of these who are members of my family” are today?
- How would you hear this story if you were rich? If you were poor?

It may be difficult to “break the ice” with a group discussion. If it looks like people are not ready to speak in the whole group, form groups of two or three, and let them talk in these small units. After the group is “buzzing” in these more comfortable discussions, call people back together to report on their conversations.



Personal Stories

Distribute the *When Did We See You Hungry* handout (folder pocket) to the group. Ask different people to each read one of the personal stories. If the group is large enough, divide it into smaller groups first (but preferably not the same small groups from the previous activity). Ask all groups to talk about the first story and assign each group one of the other stories as well.

Ask participants to use the following questions to guide the discussion. Provide paper for one person in each group to make notes of their conversation.

- What does “being invisible” to others mean? Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt this way? What did it do to you? How did it make you feel or react? How do you think being invisible affects those who are poor and feel this way?
- Ask each group to talk about the experience of the speaker in their story. What might a day look like for them? What would their fears and hopes be? How is their life different than or similar to yours?

Call the group back together for a very short summary of what was shared in the small groups.

The Hunger Story

The first hunger fact on the list is from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight items of the MDGs are spread throughout the handouts.

Ask people to take turns reading one of the hunger facts. Ask participants for their reactions to these statements (no more than one or two sentences). Then ask for opinions – again, no more than a sentence, as to why people think hunger and poverty exist on this scale. If they have difficulty coming up with reasons, ask whether some of the following might be responsible:

- greed,
- ignorance,
- neglect of Scriptures,
- racial differences,
- gender,
- immigration,
- destructive personal habits,
- lack of work,
- disabling conditions,
- natural disasters,
- inadequate socialization,
- inadequate support systems.



Go over the definitions of hunger – hungry, at risk of hunger, malnutrition, poverty – using the definitions at “Useful Terms” www.hungernomore.org.

Finally, ask for reactions to the statement: “Hunger could be cut in half if....”

Have the recording secretary note down what is said in summary or “bullet point” form.

Our Story

This study is not just about sharing information or opinions. It is about discerning God's call and our response.

Ask people silently to read "Our Story" in the handout.

Ask people to share what they are already doing as a volunteer. Make a list so every one can see how much is already being done. Affirm what has been/is and encourage what still can be.

Ask people to articulate some connections between the action possibilities and the study session. Invite comments or questions, including, "Can anyone think of any other actions we could do as individuals, families or as a group before our next meeting?"

Provide information on volunteer opportunities at food pantries, food banks and soup kitchens in your community.

Finally, ask for any questions or comments on the session. Then remind participants of the topic for the next session and suggest that they watch for articles about the topic for the next session.



Reflection and Closing Prayer

Ask the group to be quiet and centered for the closing reflection and prayer.

Beginning with the person on your left, **ask the participants to read** Matthew 25:34-40 aloud, each person taking one line. Take one more moment of silence at the end of the passage and then **invite the group** to join you in this short prayer, saying it three times, with the group joining after the first time:

O God, give us – all of us – this day our daily bread.



After the Session

Collect the notes made by the recorder(s). Jot down any unanswered questions, suggestions or requests made by the group. Note anything you would particularly like to remember for the next session (a comment, an idea, an issue). List for yourself anything that needs to be communicated to the larger parish or to the parish staff. Take a moment to pause and thank God for being with you in leading and serving this group.

