



A Place at Our Table

OVERVIEW

This strategy is intended to raise awareness of the reality of hunger in our nation and world. Creating a place mat for their family's dining table allows the young people each to take home a vivid reminder of the scandal of starvation and malnutrition in a world of plenty. Their families are challenged to respond by making a place at their table and in their life for those who struggle with hunger.

Suggested Time

About 90 minutes

Group Size

This activity can be done with any size group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ table knives, one for every four to six people
- ☀ a hard surface such as a piece of poster board, if needed (see procedure step 1)
- ☀ newsprint and a marker
- ☀ masking tape
- ☀ small bowls or paper plates, one for each person
- ☀ large bowls of popcorn, one for every four to six people
- ☀ teaspoons
- ☀ Styrofoam or paper cups, one for every four to six people
- ☀ copies of handout 1, "Hunger in a World of Plenty," one for each person
- ☀ a Bible (optional)

PROCEDURE

- ☀ 12-by-18-inch pieces of poster board, one for each person
- ☀ a variety of art supplies, such as scissors, markers or paints, used magazines, and colored paper
- ☀ clear self-adhesive paper (optional)

Preparation. On newsprint, list the following questions:

- ☉ What is your favorite food, and when was the last time you enjoyed it?
- ☉ When was the last time you ate so much that you were stuffed?
- ☉ What kind or kinds of junk food do you tend to eat too much of?
- ☉ What foods do you crave?
- ☉ When was the last time you missed a meal and were really hungry?
- ☉ What is your least favorite food, and how do you deal with it when it is on your plate?
- ☉ What is your idea of a perfect breakfast?
- ☉ If you had to do without one type of food that you regularly eat, what would you want it to be?

Post the newsprint where everyone can see it.

You may want to create a sample place mat or two, as described in procedure step 7, to demonstrate some options to the young teens.

1. Form groups of four, five, or six young people and direct them to sit in a circle. Put a table knife in the middle of each circle. Provide a hard surface such as a sheet of poster board if the knife is on carpet, and give the following instructions in your own words:



Someone in each group is to spin the knife. When the knife stops, the person it is pointing at is to answer one of the questions listed on newsprint. Then someone else in the group is to spin the knife, and so on.

Allow this activity to go on for about 5 minutes.

2. Give each person a small bowl or paper plate. Place in the middle of each group the following items:

- ☉ a large bowl of popped popcorn
- ☉ one teaspoon if the group has four members, or two teaspoons if it has five or six members
- ☉ one Styrofoam or paper cup

Direct the participants to pick up one of the items from the center of their group. One or two people in each group will be left without anything. Tell the young people not to eat the popcorn until directed to do so.

3. Lead the group through the following process of distributing the popcorn, waiting until one step is completed before moving on to the next:

1. The person with a cup takes two heaping cupfuls of popcorn from the large bowl and empties them into her or his small bowl or plate.
2. The person or people who did not take anything from the center of the circle take one handful of popcorn and empty it into their small bowl or plate.
3. The person or people with a teaspoon scoop out as many pieces of popcorn as will fit on the spoon and put them into their small bowl or plate.
4. The person holding the large bowl of popcorn places the bowl in the center of the group without taking any for herself or himself.

4. Distribute copies of handout 1 and read some of its information with the young people. Point out that the statistics represent the reality of hunger on a global scale. In a world of six billion people, one billion are forced to struggle with hunger and starvation every day.

5. Remove the large bowls with the surplus popcorn from each group, and ask the groups to talk about the unjust distribution of popcorn and come up with some way for each member of the group to have enough.

6. Read or tell the story of Lazarus and the wealthy man (Luke 16:19–31). Lead the young people in a discussion of the following questions:



What do you think Jesus is telling us in this story?

How could the rich man fail to notice a starving man at his gate?

Where do hungry people live, and who helps them?

Why are there so many starving people in a world where some have more than they really need?

What can you do to remind yourself and others to stop, and notice and share with those who are starving?

7. Announce that the young people will each have a chance to take the lessons that they have learned about global hunger home to their family by making a place mat for the family table. Display one or two sample place mats if you have made them.

Distribute a piece of poster board to each person. Make available other art supplies. Allow the young people about 45 minutes to create an eye-catching place mat for their family table. Encourage them to invent slogans, use scriptural quotes, and add statistics from the handout.

If you have clear self-adhesive paper available, help the young people cover their place mats to protect them from spills.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

8. Invite the young teens to show their creations to one another and explain them. Conclude with a prayer for the people who suffer from hunger in a world of plenty. End your prayer with these words from the Magnificat: "You have filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty" (adapted from Luke 1:53).

Encourage the young teens to take their place mat home, explain it to their family, and use it at their table as a reminder to share their daily bread with others.

- ☉ Use this activity as a project for Lent or Thanksgiving. Suggest to the young people's families that they set an extra place at their table, put an empty plate on the place mat, and fill the plate with canned or packaged food, or money, which they then donate to a service agency.
- ☉ Display the place mats in the parish or school foyer or youth room, or put together a more elaborate exhibit involving a table, the place mats, and place settings. Place a basket or box below or near the exhibit, for the collection of food donations.
- ☉ Use the place mats as part of a prayer service. Invite the young people to bring canned goods to the session. At the end of the session, pile the donated food on the place mats in the center of the room. Read the story of the loaves and the fishes (John 6:1–13), and conclude with a prayer for those who are hungry. Donate the canned goods to the local pantry.
- ☉ Make place mats to send to local and national leaders to challenge them to share national resources and increase aid to countries struggling with malnutrition.
- ☉ Include this strategy as part of a family night for the young teens and their parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives.

SCRIPTURAL CONNECTIONS

- ☉ Isa. 58:7 (Share your food with the hungry.)
- ☉ Luke 6:24–25 (The rich will go hungry.)
- ☉ Luke 6:38 (To those who give, much will be given.)
- ☉ Luke 14:13 (When you give a feast, invite those who have little.)
- ☉ James 2:14–17 (Faith must be accompanied by action.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



Hunger in a World of Plenty

- * Across the world starvation and malnutrition cause the needless deaths of children, women, and men at alarming rates:
 - Eighteen million people die every year.
 - Almost fifty thousand people die every day.
 - Over two thousand people die every hour.
 - More than thirty-four people die every minute.
 - More than eight people die every fifteen seconds.

(*Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights*, page F-4.)
- * One-half of the children's deaths around the world are related to hunger
(*Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights*, page F-3).
- * Chronic hunger is a daily reality for 34.7 million people in the United States of America (*Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights*, page F-3).
- * To provide basic health care and nutrition for everyone in impoverished countries would cost approximately thirteen billion dollars more than is currently being spent; seventeen billion dollars is spent each year on pet food in the United States and Europe (*Celebrate Jubilee and Justice!*).
- * An estimated 700 million people in impoverished countries suffer chronic hunger (*Operation Rice Bowl Lenten Program*).
- * One billion people worldwide—one-sixth of the total population—are forced to live on less than one dollar a day and suffer starvation and malnutrition (*Operation Rice Bowl Lenten Program*).
- * The world consumes six times more goods and services today than it did in 1950, but over one billion people still lack basic needs (*Celebrate Jubilee and Justice!*).
- * The United States gives less than 1 percent of its total budget as financial aid to impoverished countries (*Operation Rice Bowl Lenten Program*).

(The data in this list comes from *Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights: An Educational Packet*, by Jane Deren, Marissa Maurer, and Julie Vieira [Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 1998], pages F-3 and F-4, copyright © 1998; *Celebrate Jubilee and Justice!* by the Center of Concern [Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 1999], page 10, copyright © 1999; and *Operation Rice Bowl Lenten Program*, by Catholic Relief Services [Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services, 1998], pages 21–22.)