

World Hunger Gathering aims for accessible food for all

by Deborah Tidwell, St. John Lutheran, Farmersburg

The ELCA held their World Hunger Leadership Gathering Feb. 1-4 in Houston, Texas, and I had the opportunity to attend representing the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

This was my first time at such an event, where Lutherans from across the country came together to learn about effective programs addressing hunger, attend workshops, participate in discussion groups, engage in networking, and spend time collaborating with colleagues from their ELCA region. At first, I really didn't know what to expect, but what I found was a group of amazing people driven by their vision for making food accessible for all. They had a strong sense of camaraderie and were open and friendly, making it very easy for me as a newcomer to participate.

While there isn't space to share all the insights I gained from this World Hunger gathering, I would like to highlight experiences that had a real impact on my thinking. One was a workshop on grant writing for hunger, and the second was a session on advocacy for hunger.

In the workshop on developing grants, an experienced grant writer provided us with a survey of needs in world hunger (global and local) as well as a list of potential funding sources. She also provided insights on what makes a grant proposal effective, then shared examples of previously submitted proposals that were funded. From small local grants to larger international funding proposals, we all walked away from this experience thinking how we could move forward in developing proposals for our own area and state.

ADVOCATE BY THINKING SMALL

My second insight came from a presentation on the concept of advocacy, which has always been a struggle for me in understanding where to start. The idea of becoming an advocate for world hunger often seemed overwhelming. What I learned changed my thinking about the nature of advocacy within my own life.

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They explained that as the community of Christ, ELCA is informed by the World Hunger program around economic issues and economic justice. What is it that causes hunger? The session raised the issues of high housing prices, healthcare costs, and quality food costs. If people don't have wages that pay enough, they are unable to afford their own safe place to live, health care to stay well, or decent food to nourish their bodies. Advocating for world hunger issues is the church's call to seek justice that has many facets and complexities. In this advocacy roll, we aren't asking anything for ourselves—we are asking for our neighbors.

In terms of advocacy, when people say they don't know where to start, it means they haven't really found their one thing yet. That thing is that piece of the puzzle which speaks to them. It was suggested in this advocacy ses-



sion that to think about advocacy is to think about what seems important and compelling—it can be worldwide, nationwide, statewide or local. What is it that needs changing or improving? They pointed out that when the focus is on a particular issue that can make a difference—the smaller it gets, the fewer people are required to make a difference.

This really helped me to answer some of my own questions about advocacy: Where do I begin? How do I start? What is enough to help? What I learned was that the smaller you start, the more influence you can have faster—one's enthusiasm can come from a genuine place.

I now see advocacy as a process of thoughtful selection, taking an issue one step at a time. To start one's own advocacy focus begins with brainstorming those pieces about hunger that one finds important. Focus on just one of those pieces and break it down into key elements or parts. Then, take one of those parts as the focus for advocacy. This helped me to see how we can pursue our passions to support and help with hunger issues in a realistic, yet meaningful way. By finding that niche of interest, it enables us to step in, support and make a difference in the needs of the people around us. It helps us to see the world through our lens of faith and to continue through our advocacy to live the life that Jesus reminds us to be.