

Hunger Hits Home

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Hunger Network thanks Bethesda Lutheran, Jewell, for sharing this article about a hunger activity they hosted to help people learn what it is like to face hunger. Some 22 people participated, including members from Bergan Lutheran, Roland, and St. Petri Lutheran, Story City.

Tuesday Together Time is a weekly community potluck event ongoing since its inception in January of 2012. Each Tuesday members of the community gather at noon for food, fellowship, and some fun. The event is held at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Jewell, IA. Tuesdays in August were set aside for unique events all leading up to "International Day" on August 29th. The participants didn't know it, but they were about to experience a simulation of what the hungry of the world live out on a daily basis.

This day, two volunteers came to be known as "typical Americans", two were "children of Iowa", and all the rest divided into two groups, or villages. Village elders, Pastor John Sheahan, Bergan Lutheran, Roland, and Pastor Tim Malek, St. Petri Lutheran, Story City, led their village groups following maps to a "well" outside on the church lawn. All sorts of clean containers were provided for the villagers to use to fetch water from the "well."

"Well Man" Don Rastetter of Bethesda filled containers. The Village Elders arranged for others to bring water back for those who could not manage the "3-mile" hike for water through dangerous lands.



The two Americans had already started to enjoy their special meal starting off with a salad containing fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, and green peppers with a red wine vinaigrette dressing from preparer Kris Koehnk's garden. Each item was described for all and served at the beautifully set table with a pitcher of iced water and coffee poured to keep the cups full.

What started out for Shirley Isebrands and Nancy Johnson with statements of, "I'm so glad I volunteered to be an

American." and "Oh, my we are going to have such good food."; by the end of the meal turned into, "I feel so guilty." "I am eating and no one else gets to." and "I feel bad about this."



The entree provided was grilled herb-rubbed pork loin, cheesy potatoes, garden-fresh steamed green beans with bacon and onion and fresh bread and butter. The dessert following was a brownie topped with vanilla ice cream.

Two unknowing volunteers lived out the following "story" as the two children from Iowa: Their mother found herself pregnant at the age of fifteen and her parents lovingly supported her – at first. But, when she became pregnant a second time, the parents told her to leave the house and that she would be on her own.

She was struggling, could find nowhere to live with her two young children and they were living in her car. Because she could not afford the cost of daycare and did not have her GED, it was difficult to find employment. At last, she secured a 3-hour job at Sam's Club in Ames as a food demonstrator

and her supervisor allowed her two children to wait for her at the table in the employee break room providing they "made no noise and did not get into anything". If they did not observe those rules, the mother would lose her job. The children knew how important the job was, so they did not even talk during this time. Their only food that day would come later if there was "demonstration food" left that would have been thrown out anyway; their mother's supervisor allowed them to take it with them where they would eat in the car. This day, there was no food left after their mother's shift and, again, they would go to bed in the backseat with hungry stomachs.

This village, with Village Elder John, was about to set out with their water containers to find the well man. After finding water, they returned for their meal for the day.

Once both villages had returned from getting water, Pastor Joy Edeker, Bethesda Lutheran Church, Jewell, offered a meal blessing giving participants reason to ponder and proclaim the blessings given by God. Then the villagers and their leaders were given their ration for the day of cooked white rice. Villagers were told as they came for their portion served in a paper bowl with a plastic spoon, they would be walking by the two Iowa children, and they could not talk with them because their mother desperately needed to hold on to her job. Also, as they passed by the table with the two Americans, they should not pause or make eye contact with them as those Americans did not want to be bothered with knowing their plight or seeing their great need.



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A village resident, Eudene Lund, listens intently to what Bob Forte was saying.

After all had eaten their ration of rice, the speaker for the day was revealed. Mr. Bob Forte of Clive, Iowa, a volunteer at Food Bank of Iowa and volunteer at Clive Food Pantries, brought information about food insecurity of Iowans. Looking on in this picture is Village Elder Tim. Bob told of the need across Iowa for food, the lack of food pantries in some areas of the state, and how the Food Bank of Iowa reaches out to get food to those in need.

- The event ended with the two Americans leaving with stomachs full and hearts uncertain.
- The two Iowa children left with no food in their stomachs, no water to drink, and could not talk until they were outside the building.
- The villagers left with rice in their stomachs knowing their next meal would not come until tomorrow

Submitted by Donna M. Busch, Tuesday Together Time sponsor and founder.

Picture credit: Richard Steffen, Jewell