HUNGER
AT OUR DOORSTEP
A Study-Action Guide for Wisconsin Congregations

WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

2nd Edition
The Wisconsin Council of Churches

WCC is a community of Christian denominations that covenant to pray and work together for the unity and renewal of the church and the healing and reconciliation of the world. Tracing its roots back to the early 1940's with an inter-denominational recreational ministry for young people, the Council was incorporated in 1962 and now encompasses 16 denominations with approximately 3,000 congregations and over one million church members. The Council’s network of individuals and congregations reaches every corner of the state.

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African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, Armenian Church in America-Eastern Diocese, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Greek Orthodox Church, Mennonite Church, Moravian Church, Orthodox Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Diocese of La Crosse and Diocese of Green Bay sit as observer members on the Council’s Board of Directors. Benedictine Women of Madison, Church Women United, the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (Region 9) and the Madison Area Urban Ministry are Associate Members.

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All handouts and promotional materials can be downloaded from www.wichurches.org. Click on “Programs and Ministries” tab and scroll down to “Hunger at Our Doorstep”.

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Read this guide from cover to cover.

This will give you a sense of the flow of the study and how it is designed to lead your congregation to take action.

Visit the “Hunger at Our Doorstep” section of the Wisconsin Council of Churches website.

Go to www.wichurches.org, and find “Hunger at Our Doorstep” under the “Programs and Ministries” menu tab on the home page. There you will find handouts, posters and announcements for the class that you can download, as well as any updates or additional resources.

Invite the Pastor and lay leaders of your church, including members of any committees that focus on peace and justice issues or community outreach.

Their support and involvement will be important for carrying out an action plan to address hunger in your community – so get them engaged in the course from the beginning.

Partner with another congregation or community group in presenting this course.

Hunger and the issues surrounding it can look very different depending on a person’s background and situation. Enrich the conversation by reaching across racial and class lines as you plan and gather participants for this course. Involve persons who have experienced food insecurity themselves, if at all possible.

Talk with experts in your community.

In Session IV, your class will meet with someone who is an expert on hunger issues in your area. You will need to invite them well in advance and fill them in on your goals for the session. If you do not already know a local resource person, see the lesson plan for Session IV for suggestions on how to find someone.

Visit the “Hunger at Our Doorstep” section of the Wisconsin Council of Churches website.

In addition to the handouts and materials at www.wichurches.org there are links to sites and resources that will help you get a better understanding of the issue. You can also find a .pdf version of this study-action guide and all handouts, plus updated information.

Sign up for the Hunger Advocacy Network.

Contact the Wisconsin Council of Churches to receive alerts about public policies relating to hunger and find out what you and your congregation can do to be advocates for your hungry neighbors.
Introduction

Course objective

To prepare congregations and their members to actively promote public policies and direct service projects that will reduce hunger and vulnerability to hunger in their communities.

The study / action approach

The approach of this resource is to begin with study that leads to concrete action. Keep in mind that these five sessions are only the beginning. We are called to “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (James 1:22).

How to recruit a study / action group

The poster and announcements (on the website – see below) can be used to generate interest. Personally invite not only those who are already interested, but anyone who may resonate with this issue because of personal circumstances, or who can contribute because of expertise. Consider inviting other congregations in your neighborhood or community to join your study.

How to use this curriculum

This is a flexible resource designed to be tailored to the needs of your congregation or group. Some possibilities include:

- Five one-hour sessions. *(Add an extra half hour if optional exercises are used.)*
- Two three-hour sessions. *(Add an extra hour if optional exercises are used.)*
- Half-day workshop.
- Short, introductory programs. Use one of the sessions as the program for a congregational dinner or get-together.
- Church Council retreat.
- An Ecumenical Lenten Study involving several congregations in your community.

Each session will suggest “homework” activities participants can do between sessions. The handout “Hunger and Food Insecurity Online” lists websites – including videos and interactive exercises – that participants can visit between sessions. You can either hand this sheet out at the first session (with extras in reserve for later sessions), or cut it into separate sections to hand out at the appropriate session. (If there is time, participants can report on their “homework” at the beginning of the session; or they can be encouraged to draw on what they have learned at the appropriate points during discussions.)

Four sessions include a case study. These may be used in several ways: As an additional activity for each session; in place of one of the other activities; or as homework for the whole class or for a volunteer to present at the following session.

Note that Session IV involves inviting a resource person to talk about your community’s needs and resources. This session is crucial for enabling participants to move from study to effective action.

This curriculum is intended to be used in conjunction with handouts and resources available at [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org).

Look for “Hunger at Our Doorstep” on the Home Page or under “Programs.” For each session, you will find the handouts and charts to download and print, links to websites, and other resources. If you need help in accessing these materials, please contact the Council office at 608-837-3108.
Tips for leading discussions

This study will raise issues that may be controversial and arouse strong feelings in participants. Some participants may have personal experience of hunger or food insecurity, in the present or in the past. It may be helpful to post or briefly review some “ground rules” for discussions at the beginning of each session:

1. Each person gets a chance to talk.
2. One person talks at a time. Don’t interrupt.
3. Help the discussion leader keep things on track.
4. Listen carefully and with respect.
5. It’s OK to disagree, but show respect for one another.
6. If someone says something that hurts or bothers you, say so, and say why.
7. Speak for yourself, and not for any other person or group. Don’t put words in other people’s mouths.
8. Any personal story told by someone in the group is not to be repeated outside the group unless that person gives permission.

Materials for every session

Opening prayer and closing litany (below), written on large sheets of paper. (Post them where everyone can read them.)

Something large to write notes on that can be posted in front of the class next session – a large newsprint pad or sheets of butcher paper – and a marker

Opening Prayer

Ask each participant to pray for the process, the members of the study group, those who are hungry or food insecure, and those who serve and advocate for them. Copy the following prayer onto a large sheet of paper (flip chart or butcher paper) and use it to open each session:

God of justice and compassion, you open your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.

Open our hearts and our ears to those who do not have enough to eat, and those who worry about how to feed their families.

Help us to open our hands and share our food with them.

Teach us to open our mouths and speak to our leaders on their behalf.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the bread of life who summons us to acts of justice and mercy. Amen.

Closing Litany

Psalm 146:5-9 (NRSV)

One: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
Many: who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
One: who keeps faith for ever;
Many: who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

One: The Lord sets the prisoners free;
Many: the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
One: The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
Many: the Lord loves the righteous.
One: The Lord watches over the strangers;
Many: he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
Goal

To recognize hunger and food insecurity as real problems in our community, to which we are called to respond as a matter of faith.

Materials Needed

- Bibles (encourage participants to bring their own)
- Small paper lunch bags; small cookies, candy bars, or other small treat
- Copies of the following (downloaded from the website):
  - Handout #1, “Hunger in Wisconsin: A Quiz” (for everyone)
  - Handout #2, “Who is Hungry in Wisconsin?” (for everyone)
  - Handout #3, “Who is Hungry in Wisconsin?–Discussion” (one for each small group)
  - Handout #4, “Hunger’s Impact on Children and Others” (for everyone)
  - Handout #5, “Hunger and Food Insecurity Online” (for everyone; hand out the sheet for all five sessions, or cut it up and hand out the appropriate section at each session)
  - “Economic Inequality in Wisconsin” (one copy)
  - Case Study #1 (for everyone)
  - Opening prayer and closing litany (p. 4), written on large sheets of paper (Re-use from the first session; before class, post them where everyone can read them)

Introduction

(5 minutes)

Introduce the entire study-action series, making the following points:
- We will learn about the issue of hunger and access to food as it relates to our own community.
- We will examine the causes of hunger, its effects, and what is being done about it in our community.
- We will explore how we as individuals and as a congregation can take action against hunger in our community.
- We need to listen carefully and speak honestly but respectfully to one another. (See “Tips for leading discussions” in the Introduction.)

Have the members of the class introduce themselves. Ask them to tell a little about themselves, or to say why they have come to this discussion and what they hope to get out of it.

Have everyone read the opening prayer in unison.

Introduce this session:

God’s concern for feeding the hungry is a pervasive theme in scripture. God “has filled the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53) and Jesus had compassion on the hungry crowd (Matthew 15:32). We are to pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11).
Session 1 » Hunger at Our Doorstep

We read again and again that caring for the poor and feeding the hungry is a basic responsibility of God’s people (see, for example, Proverbs 22:9).

God’s concerns should be our priorities as Christians. How should we respond? Are there hungry people in our own communities? Why? What does it mean to be hungry in America today? What about people who may not be hungry now, but can’t always be sure where their next meal is coming from? This session will help us learn the answers to these questions, so that our congregation can help eliminate hunger in our community.

Quiz on Hunger in Wisconsin
(Optional - 15 minutes)

Distribute Handout #1: “Hunger in Wisconsin: A Quiz” and pencils or pens. Ask the class members not to look at the back of the sheet, and give them about 5 minutes to fill out the quiz. Then go over the answers on the back of the handout.

(If you choose not to use this exercise in class, you could post or distribute it beforehand as part of your advertising and recruitment for the series. Or, you could hand it out at the end of this first session as “homework.”)

Ask:

» What did you learn? What surprised you? Can you think of any other actions that congregations can take to respond to hunger in their communities, in addition to the ones listed in question 9? Do you think any of the suggested actions are not possible or inappropriate for churches?

Case Study #1
(Optional - 15 minutes)

If you have time to do the case study during the session, hand out copies now. Give participants time to read, reflect and write on their own or in pairs or small groups. Then discuss the questions as a group.

If you don’t have time during the session, hand out the case study at the end of the session as “homework.”

Handout: Who is Hungry in Wisconsin?
15 minutes

Leader Presentation


Explain to the class:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers food and nutrition programs like school meals and SNAP (what used to be called food stamps), uses the term “food insecurity” where we might say “hunger.” The word “hunger” refers to an uneasy or painful feeling caused by lack of food. It is hard to measure and people can have very different ideas about what counts as “hunger.”

The term “food insecurity” covers a wide range of household circumstances. In the most severe cases of food insecurity, household members, even children, do experience hunger. Not everyone in a food insecure household goes hungry,
and households that experience food insecurity usually do so occasionally or periodically, rather than year-round. But, as we’ll see later, even in less severe cases, food insecurity carries serious risks for the well-being of many of our neighbors.

Also, while people often think of “food security” as protecting our food supply from sabotage, in this study we will be using it as it is defined in the handout.

Review the sections, “How Many People are Food Insecure?” and “How Many Households Experience Very Low Food Security?” Tell the class:

While hunger and food security can be difficult to measure, and statistics may vary according to the time period studied and the research methods used, these numbers do give us a good picture of the scope of the problem and help identify who the most vulnerable people are.

Review the sections, “Who is at Risk of Food Insecurity?” and “Who Else is Food Insecure?” Point out to the class:

Note that there is an important difference between identifying which characteristics are most likely to put a household at risk of food insecurity, and which characteristics are most “typical” of food insecure households. For example, while households where no one is employed and whose incomes are below the poverty line are at a much higher risk for experiencing hunger or food insecurity, most food-insecure households are above the poverty line or have at least one person working.

Group Discussion

If the group is larger than 8-10 people, split into smaller groups of 4-5 people. Give one copy of Handout #3, “Who is Hungry in Wisconsin? – Discussion” to each group to discuss. If there is time, you can have each small group briefly report back to the entire class on the main ideas, questions, or observations that they discussed.

Scripture Study: Wealth and Poverty

20 minutes

Introductory Exercise: Unequal Distribution

(10 minutes. Based on an exercise in “Hunger 101” by the Atlanta Food Bank, www.acfb.org)

Prepare in advance: Have enough small, identical brown paper lunch bags for each person in the class (don’t use transparent bags) and divide them as evenly as you can into five groups. Put 6 treats (candy bars, small cookies, etc.) in one-fifth of the bags. Put one treat in each bag of another fifth. Put two treats in each of the remaining bags.

In class: Hand out the bags at random (if there are fewer people than you expected, just make sure that at least one person gets the 6-treat bag and that at least one person gets a one-treat bag). Don’t let anyone peek before all have received their bag. Then, instruct all the participants to open their bags.
Session 1 » Hunger at Our Doorstep

Ask the class:

» What did you discover about your bags? How much did each of you receive? How does the person who received 6 treats feel? How do those who received one feel? How do the others feel? How does the class feel about the unequal distribution?

Reading: Luke 1:46-55  (10 minutes.)

Leader Presentation

The distribution of the bags created three groups within the class: the have-somes, the have-littles, and the have-lots. (If feasible, have the participants rearrange themselves so that the members of each group are sitting together.) The following reading shows God’s concern for the relationship between the rich and the poor. We will hear the Magnificat, spoken by Mary when she was pregnant with Jesus. Distribute Bibles to any class members who did not bring their own. Have someone read aloud Luke 1:46-55 from their Bible while the others follow along.

Group Discussion

While you were listening to the reading:

» What thoughts or feelings did those of you who received the one-treat bags have?
What thoughts or feelings did those of you who received the six-treat bags have?
What thoughts or feelings did the rest of you have?

Leader Presentation

Hold up the “Economic Inequality in Wisconsin” chart and explain it to the class using the information sheet you downloaded with the chart.

Group Discussion

1. What does this Bible passage suggest about God’s response to the way resources are distributed in our country and community?
2. How would you apply these words to your own life situation?
3. If you identify with or can put yourself in the place of the “have littles,” do you feel angry, guilty, envious, resentful, or something else? If you identify yourself with the “have somes” or the “have lots,” how do you feel? Proud? Grateful? Guilty? Defensive? Responsible? Or something else? Which of these reactions do you think are most likely to lead to an appropriate Christian response?

Consequences of Hunger

15 minutes

Distribute Handout #4 on “Effects of Hunger” and give participants some time to review it or to read it aloud.

Ask participants:

1. Are there any effects of hunger or food insecurity that you think are especially important or surprising?
2. How might these effects of hunger or food insecurity cause other problems for individuals or families? How might they affect individuals’ or families’ ability to lift themselves out of hunger and poverty?
3. How will these consequences of hunger affect the child? The child’s family? The child’s schoolmates and playmates? The community? What effect will they have on the child’s future?
4. Can you think of other community problems to which hunger and food insecurity might contribute? (Examples: alcohol and drug addiction, crime, domestic violence.)

5. Have you ever gone a day or more eating no or very little food? If not, have you ever gone most of a day without eating? What effect did that have on you? How did it feel? How did it affect your emotions or your ability to work? Why did you go without eating – was it voluntary or involuntary? Do you think that made a difference? (Note: for some participants, this question may touch on painful or embarrassing experiences of hardship or poverty. They may be reluctant to speak about their experiences, and should not be forced to do so. If they do talk about them, they should be treated respectfully by the group. If you think it would be better to omit this question, you may do so.)

**Conclusion**

5 minutes

As “Homework,” encourage each member of the class to do one of the following:

» Complete the “Hunger in Wisconsin” quiz or the case study (if you did not use them in class).

» Visit one of the websites listed for this session on the “Hunger and Food Insecurity Online” Handout #5.

» Make a note of any news stories you read, see, or hear during the week that have to do with poverty and hunger in the U.S.

Thank the participants for coming, and encourage them to come to the following sessions, where they can learn more about the causes of and solutions to hunger in their community.

End with the closing litany. Post the sheet with the words where the class can see it, and ask them to read it responsively.

**Closing Litany**

Post the closing litany from p. 4 and have the class read it responsively.
Session 2 » Why Are Our Neighbors Hungry?

Goal

To understand how hunger and food insecurity can result not just from personal choices, but also from an individual’s or family’s circumstances, which in turn are affected by larger economic, social and political factors.

Materials Needed

Bibles for those who did not bring their own

Copies of the following (downloaded from the website):

» Chart #1, Economic Inequality in Wisconsin (one copy – re-use from last session)
» Handout #6, “Family Budget” (three copies – optional)
» Handout #7, “Causes of Hunger” (for everyone)
» Handout #8, “Community-Based Food and Nutrition Assistance” (for everyone)
» Handout #9, “State and Federal Nutrition and Other Assistance Programs” (for everyone)
» Case Study #2 (for everyone)

Something large to write on (a large newsprint pad and easel, large sheets of butcher paper and masking tape, or a writing board) with markers or chalk

Copied onto large sheets of paper:

» The discussion questions (p. 12)
» The quotation from the Wisconsin Council of Churches’ “Statement on Economic Justice (p. 13)
» Opening prayer and closing litany (p. 4), written on large sheets of paper (Re-use from the first session; before class, post them where everyone can read them)

Introduction

5 minutes

Have everyone read the opening prayer in unison.

Last session, we learned how many Wisconsin households are food insecure – that is, hungry or at risk of hunger. (Cite the percentage and proportion from Handout #2.) We also learned that hunger has serious consequences, especially for children’s health and mental development. (You may pass out copies of Handouts #2 and #4 to anyone who was not able to attend the first session.) Hunger is a serious problem in our community, and the purpose of this study is to help us find ways to contribute to solving it. But if we are to do so, we have to understand the roots of the problem. Why are so many of our neighbors hungry?
Scripture Study: Hunger and Injustice

15 minutes  Ask one or two members of the class to read aloud the following passages from their Bibles while the others follow along: Isaiah 5:8-9, Isaiah 10:1-4.

Leader’s Introduction  Read the following paragraphs or put the ideas in your own words:

Hungry people need food. But according to these passages, they need something else: Justice. “Justice” means more than catching and punishing criminals. It refers to the way in which a society is organized and operates to give each person what is due to him or her, to respect his or her rights. If this does not happen, the result is injustice. A society in which people do not receive what is due them, where their rights are not respected, is an unjust society.

As we see in these readings, the Bible connects justice with respecting the rights of the most vulnerable (widows and orphans), the poor, and the needy. The Prophets of the Old Testament — Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and many others — cried out against the injustices of their time. They saw how the powerful exploited the weak and the rich oppressed the poor. Those with political and economic power were able to use that power for their own advantage at the expense of those who were less powerful — often in ways that were “perfectly legal.” The weaker members of the community often lost their land — their home and means of livelihood — while the rich and powerful amassed huge estates. Those who had fallen on hard economic times and could not repay their debts might have to sell themselves into virtual slavery in order to get what they needed to live.

Group Discussion  If there are more than 8 people in the class, divide into smaller groups of 4-5 people. Put up the large sheet of newsprint with the following questions for them to discuss.

1. What do Isaiah’s words imply about God’s response to:
   a. Relationships between the rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable today?
   b. The laws and business practices in our own communities?

2. What are the most important causes of hunger today?

If you have divided the class into small groups for discussion, ask each group for their answers to the first part of question #2 about the causes of hunger. Write their answers on the newsprint pad (or whatever you are using). If not, write the answers as they are given.

Conclude by reading: There are great differences between the economy and society of ancient Israel and those of our own time. In any time and place, the causes of hunger and poverty are complex. But poverty and hunger are still closely linked, and raise important questions of justice. Personal choices – good and bad – are important, but factors outside individuals’ control can limit their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Hold up the chart on economic inequality in Wisconsin. As we saw in the last session, the gap between the rich and the poor in our state is growing wider. (Cite the information from the chart comparing the trends for the highest and lowest income groups). Continue:

Remember, also, how African-American and Hispanic households are much more at risk for food insecurity. (Refer to Handout #2 if available.) The Wisconsin Council of Churches’ “Statement on Institutional Racism and Racial Justice” reviews forms of discrimination instituted in the last century by government agencies (Veterans’
Administration, U.S. Employment Service, Federal Housing Administration, urban renewal programs) and federal laws (Social Security Act, Federal Housing Act). (For the full statement, go to www.wichurches.org/resources/policy-statements, or contact the Council.)

The statement then notes that: “Today the effects of this past institutional discrimination can be seen in the enormous disparity in wealth between whites and people of color: ‘The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households.” A primary reason for this is that “most white families have acquired their net worth from the appreciation of property that they secured under conditions of special privilege in a discriminatory housing market.” (Sources of the quotations are cited in the statement’s end notes.)

Racial disparities in food security, unemployment, and children in poverty are even greater in Wisconsin than in the U.S. as a whole.

Case Study #2
(Optional - 15 minutes)
If you have time to do the case study during the session, hand out copies now. Give participants time to read, reflect and write on their own or in pairs or small groups. Then discuss the questions as a group.

If you don’t have time during the session, hand out the case study at the end of the session as “homework.”

Exercise: Family Budget
(Optional - 15 minutes)

Set the Stage
Divide the class into three groups. Give each group a copy of Handout #6, “Family Budget”. Read aloud, or have them read, the introductory paragraph. Briefly review the list of expenses. Assign each group one of the scenarios listed at the bottom of the sheet. Give each group ten minutes or so to come up with an alternative budget to deal with the situation presented in their scenario.

Large Group Discussion
1. Have each group report on its adjusted budget. What items did they cut, and why? What did they keep, and why? How might those cuts affect the family?

2. Where could the family go for help? Make a list on the newsprint pad (or whatever you are using). Why might they be reluctant to go to a food pantry, or to apply for benefits such as SNAP (food stamps)? What obstacles might stand in the way of their getting the help they need?

Handout: “Causes of Hunger”
10 minutes

Leader’s Introduction
Distribute Handout #7, “Causes of Hunger”. Start with the side of the page showing how “low income” and “high expenses” result in hunger and food insecurity. Explain:

This diagram shows how when people’s income can’t keep up with the cost of living, they may decide that food is the one place where they can economize.
The two main factors resulting in low household income shown here are unemployment and insufficient employment. Insufficient employment means a low-wage, part-time, or seasonal job. Four expense categories are shown: housing, transportation, childcare, and health care.

If there is time, you can go into more detail or invite participants to make their own observations about these factors.

Turn to the side with the “Barriers to Food Security” diagram.

» Review the information under “Lack of Income.” Point out to the class:

However, as this chart shows, lack of income is only one factor that contributes to people being hungry or food insecure.

» Review the information under the four headings – “Lack of Access,” “Lack of Knowledge,” “Lack of Participation,” and “Additional Barriers.”

» If there is time, ask the class if they have their own observations to make about any of these barriers, or if they can think of others.

» Additional causes of hunger and food insecurity you can mention include: Physical and mental challenges: age, physical disability, injury, mental illness, cognitive deficits, alcoholism, drug addiction; Family circumstances: divorce, death of spouse, incarcerated parent or spouse; domestic violence, single parenthood, not receiving child support; Personal history and circumstances: reentering community after imprisonment; not completing high school; being a veteran, being homeless; Natural and social circumstances: natural disasters; jobs without benefits; losing retirement plan or investments; absent or poorly funded safety net programs.

Exercise:
(Optional - 15 minutes)

This exercise is to help the class place a family’s or individual’s struggle for food security in a larger social context. On a blackboard or flip chart, draw a series of three concentric circles (p. 15). Write “HUNGER” in the center circle. Ask the class:

1. What are some of the factors in a family’s life that may cause them to be hungry or food insecure? (If the class needs prompting, recall the factors that were brought up by the budget worksheet exercise or listed on the “Causes of Hunger” handout). Write them in the first ring from the center. Then ask:

2. How might these problems, or the means to overcome them, be affected by what is happening in the wider society? What are some economic or political circumstances that can affect a family’s ability to reach food security? Write those in the outermost ring. (See the diagram as an example only – there are many other factors and conditions that could be mentioned).

Conclusion

Post the newsprint with the following passage from the Wisconsin Council of Churches’ “Statement on Economic Justice” and ask someone to read it aloud:

The plain fact of the matter is that since God provides all that we need and yet there are people who do not have enough to eat or drink or a safe place to sleep, then
we can only conclude that there are some who have too much and who have not adequately shared what they have been given.

(For the full statement, go to www.wichurches.org/resources/policy-statements, or contact the Council.)

Ask participants:
1. In light of what we have learned in this session, how do you react to this statement?
2. What can we, who have enough or more than enough, do to help ensure that all have enough? Does “sharing” mean only individual acts of charity, or can it also involve community action and public policy (that is, state and national legislation and government programs)?

As “Homework,” distribute copies of Handouts #8, “Community-Based Food and Nutrition Assistance,” and #9, “State and Federal Nutrition and Other Assistance Programs” and ask participants to review these and bring them to the next session. Also encourage each member of the class to do one of the following:

» Complete the case study (if you did not use it in class).

» Visit one of the websites listed for this session on the “Hunger and Food Insecurity Online” handout.

» Spend some time with the local telephone directory or look online to find organizations or agencies that a food-insecure household might turn to for help. Call to find out what services they offer, and what a person would have to do to apply.

Post the closing litany (from p. 4) and have the class read it responsively (with a different leader from the previous session).

Thank participants for coming, and invite them to return for the following session, which will look at ways to ensure that all our neighbors have enough to eat.
Session 2 » Why Are Our Neighbors Hungry?

**Barriers to Food Security**

- Economic downturn
- Lack of affordable housing
- Cost of health insurance
- Don’t know about SNAP (formerly “food stamps”)
- Unemployment
- Live too far from grocery store
- Lack of healthcare
- Can’t afford child care
- Heating costs
- Low wages
- Lack of jobs with good pay and benefits
- Lack of, underfunded, or poorly administered assistance programs
- Racial and ethnic discrimination
- Heating costs
- Lack of public transportation
- Can’t afford child care
- Low wages
- Don’t know about SNAP (formerly “food stamps”)
- Unemployment
- Live too far from grocery store
- Lack of healthcare
- Heating costs
- Low wages
- Lack of jobs with good pay and benefits
- Lack of, underfunded, or poorly administered assistance programs
- Racial and ethnic discrimination
Session 3 » What Can Be Done About Hunger?

Goal

To be aware of the main governmental and community programs that respond to hunger in Wisconsin, and the need for both public policy and direct service.

Materials Needed

Bibles for those who did not bring their own

Something large to write on in front of the class (a large newsprint pad and easel, large sheets of butcher paper and masking tape, or a writing board) with markers or chalk

Copied onto large sheets of paper:

» The definitions of “Justice” and “Charity” given below (p. 18)

» The heading, “Biblical Responses to Hunger” with two columns beneath, labeled “Justice” and “Charity”

» The quotations for the group discussion on pp. 18-19 (optional)

» Two or four large sheets of paper with columns headed “Family Economic Security,” “Access to Affordable and Healthy Food,” “Federal Nutrition Programs,” and “Emergency Food Assistance” (if you will be doing the optional exercise on pp. 19-20)

Copies of the following (download from the website):

» Handout #8, “Community-Based Food and Nutrition Assistance” and Handout #9, “State and Federal Assistance Programs” (a few copies for newcomers and those who did not bring their copies from last session)

» Case Study #3 (for everyone)

» County food security information for “homework” (for everyone; see the website section for Session 3 for instructions on how to get this information).

Slips for the “Needs and Responses” exercise. Make one single-sided copy of each page (download from the website) on different colored paper and cut along the lines.

Opening prayer and closing litany (p. 4), written on large sheets of paper (Re-use from the first session; before class, post them where everyone can read them)

Introduction

5 minutes

Have the class read the opening prayer in unison. Tell the class:

In the first session of this study, we learned about the extent of hunger in Wisconsin and its effect on people. Last session, we learned about some of the barriers to an assured supply of food that many families face — lack of sufficient income to meet their other living expenses; lack of ready access to affordable, nutritious food; lack of knowledge about efficient food purchasing and how to handle and store food safely; and lack of participation in food assistance programs. (You may pass out copies of Handouts #2 and #4 from the first session and Handout #6 from the second session to anyone who was not able to attend one or both sessions.)
In this session we will take a further step toward taking action to respond to hunger in our community, by learning about what forms of assistance to hungry and food-insecure people are available.

Discussion: Individual Solutions to Hunger?

(Optional - 10 minutes) (If there are more than 8-10 people in the class, form small groups of 4-5 persons to generate ideas, and reconvene to have the groups share and discuss their ideas.)

Ask participants: What would you do if you were unemployed for a long period of time, or had a job that didn’t pay enough to live on? How would you try to avoid hunger for yourself or your children? If anyone in the group is, or has been, in that position and is comfortable talking about it, they may offer to talk about some of their coping strategies — but don’t press anyone to talk about their experiences. Note the responses (in brief form) on the flip chart or blackboard.

Here are some examples you can use to prompt or fill out the discussion:

» Borrow food or money from friends or relatives
» Borrow money from a “payday loan” operation
» Beg money for food from strangers
» Put off paying non-food bills (rent, heat and other utilities, medical, etc.)
» Live out of a car or homeless shelter in order to save on rent money
» Move in with relatives
» Skip meals
» Rely more on cheap but filling foods such as pasta
» Plant a vegetable garden
» Go back to school or take classes to qualify for a better job
» Work an additional job or work additional hours
» Visit a food pantry
» Apply for an assistance program such as SNAP (food stamps) or school breakfast

When you have a list of eight to a dozen ideas, ask:

1. What are the advantages or disadvantages of each strategy?
2. Which of these strategies are the least workable? The most workable?
3. For the more workable strategies, what obstacles might a person encounter in trying to act on them? (Remember that many households consist of one parent and one or more pre-school age children.)

Charity and Justice: Biblical Responses to Hunger

20 minutes

Set the Stage

Post the pieces of paper with the definitions of “charity” and “justice” at the front of the class, and read them aloud:
Session 3 » What Can Be Done About Hunger?

Charity: A short-term, voluntary, individual response to people’s immediate needs.

Justice: A structural, community response to meet on-going needs; legally mandated responsibilities toward other persons.

Post the paper headed “Biblical Responses to Hunger” at the front of the class where you can write on it.

Leader’s Introduction

Once you are sure the class members have a good understanding of the distinction between these two definitions, tell the class:

The books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy tell how, after God had liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, God instructed them on how they were to live and organize their society in the Promised Land. The Israelites were mostly farmers, and each family group was assigned a portion of the land as theirs to farm to support themselves. But over time, those who did poorly might have to sell their land – or even themselves, as slaves – to their neighbors who had been more successful. We will now read some passages from these books of the Bible about how God told ancient Israel to respond to hunger and other forms of need.

Reading and Group Discussion

Have members of the class take turns reading aloud the following passages from their Bibles. After each reading, discuss which column best fits the response described. Write the passage citation (abbreviated book name and chapter and verse numbers) in one column or the other – or both, if there is no agreement or a passage seems to fit both.

Alternatively, you could divide the class into two or more small groups or pairs, and give each group one or more passages to discuss among themselves for five or ten minutes. Then, have each group report and write the chapter citations in the appropriate columns.

Lending: Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10-11

Year of Jubilee: Leviticus 25:8-12

Tithes: Deuteronomy 26:12-13

Debt Forgiveness: Deuteronomy 15:1-2

Gleaning: Leviticus 19:9-10

Sabbatical year: Exodus 23:10-11

Leader’s Commentary

Comment on these passages by reading the following paragraph, or restating it in your own words:

While these laws were for a particular ancient nation, they address fundamental, universal human needs for a decent life and participation in community. They guard against human failings of greed and exploitation as well as sloth and irresponsibility. The laws may not be applicable to our situation – and some (like the Jubilee) may not have been put into practice, but they express both basic values of justice and responsibility. They also express the recognition that justice and responsibility must be safeguarded by laws and institutional frameworks.

Group Discussion

(Optional - 10 minutes)

Post the sheet of paper with the following quotations and have the class pair off to discuss their reactions to them.
1. “The poor you will always have with you.” (Compare Mark 14:7 and Deuteronomy 15:11) (Class members should look up both passages)
2. “Justice is love operating at a distance.” – Joseph Sittler

Reconvene the whole group and offer an opportunity for people to report on their discussions.

Regarding question #1, you can point out that although this quotation is commonly used to argue that efforts to eradicate poverty are futile, both passages actually emphasize helping the poor.

For question #2, the context may help draw out the meaning of the quote: Read aloud:

“Real love grasps the hand that need holds out. And these needs cry out from millions I will never meet. Justice is love operating at a distance. When, for instance, my church tells me that millions of people are starving and that it is my duty to show my love for them by a helping action, I become aware of the trans-individual meaning of love. I cannot have affection in any immediate sense for two million persons. Love exercised in that context is an act of the acknowledgment of the neighbor in his [or her] need, and my love takes the trans-personal form of distributed food.” (From “An Open Letter,” Currents in Theology and Mission, October 1984).

Responses to Hunger Today
(Optional - 15 minutes)

Set the Stage

Post the sheets for the four “legs” of food security. Explain:

Food security rests on four “legs.” Each is necessary. None, by itself, is sufficient.

The first leg is Family Economic Security. As we have seen, food insecurity and hunger often result when a household’s income is insufficient to meet its expenses. This leg can be strengthened by increasing a family’s income or by reducing its expenses.

The second leg is Access to Affordable and Healthy Food. People in remote rural areas or inner cities may live in “food deserts” – places without good sources of nutritious and inexpensive food. This leg can be strengthened by making good food more readily available, and by giving people the knowledge and skills to prepare more safe and nutritious meals.

The third leg is Federal Nutrition Programs. When people lack income, these forms of assistance can step in to fill the gap. This leg can be strengthened through strong public policy education and advocacy to increase public awareness and outreach, reduce barriers to participation, and ensure adequate funding.

The fourth and final leg is Emergency Food Assistance. Food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters provide immediate, direct assistance to hungry persons when they can’t meet their food needs in other ways.
Session 3 » What Can Be Done About Hunger?

Distribute copies of handouts #8, “Community-Based Food and Nutrition Assistance” and #9 “State and Federal Nutrition and Other Assistance Programs” to anyone who did not bring theirs to class.

Group Discussion

Ask:
1. What different ways are there for relieving hunger in Wisconsin today? What categories do these different ways fall under? Assign each idea to one column or the other.
2. What strengths and limitations do you see in each category of response?
3. What would be the result of taking only one or the other approach to hunger?
4. Do you think communities can or should rely on one approach primarily or exclusively? Or are they connected or complementary in some way?

Case Study #3
(Optional - 15 minutes)

If you have time to do the case study during the session, hand out copies now. Give participants time to read, reflect and write on their own or in pairs or small groups. Then discuss the questions as a group.

If you don’t have time during the session, hand out the case study at the end of the session as “homework.”

Exercise: Needs and Responses

20 minutes

Set the Stage

1. Before class, make one copy each of the “Needs” and “Responses” sheets (from the website) on different colored sheets of paper, and cut the sheets on dotted lines.
2. Divide the class into four groups: (1) Hungry and food insecure persons; (2) Direct service hunger relief projects (food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.); (3) Churches, businesses and community service organizations; and (4) Local, State and Federal Government. Distribute the corresponding “need” and “response” slips to each group (the appropriate group number is on each slip)

The Process

1. Have the members of group (1) start reading their “need” slips one by one to the entire group. After each slip is read, ask if anyone in another group has a “response” slip that they think can address that need. If so, they should read the “response” slip aloud and give it to the person with the “need.” After the members of group (1) have read about half their “need” slips, rotate through the other groups, repeating the process with their “need” slips. Once groups (2), (3), and (4) have read all their “need” slips, group (1) can finish reading theirs.
2. As the exercise proceeds, responses can be “recycled” or used more than once; someone who has received a “response” slip from someone else can give it to a person in their own or another group if it is appropriate to that person’s “need.”
3. If no “response” to a “need” is forthcoming, set aside the need slip. At the end of the exercise, read it again – someone may realize that they have a good “response.” If not, do a short brainstorming session to think about what could be done about the problem.
4. When everyone has had a chance to read their own “need” slips, or time runs out, the exercise ends.
Session 3 » What Can Be Done About Hunger?

Group Discussion

Ask participants:

1. What were your reactions to the exercise? What did you learn?
2. Were there relevant responses that were not mentioned? Were there responses that you think were inappropriate or inadequate to the need? Were there needs that were not mentioned?
3. Do you know of any specific examples of any of these responses in your congregation, or community? Have you been personally involved in any? (Ask class members not to disclose any sensitive personal information about others without their permission.)
4. What role can churches play in some of these responses to hunger?

Conclude by bringing up (or reinforcing, if they have been brought up in discussion) the points made in the introduction to this exercise.

Conclusion

5 minutes

As “Homework,” Hand out information on food insecurity in your county for participants to study before the next session (see the website section for Session 3 for instructions on how to get this information).

Also encourage each member of the class to do one of the following:

» Complete the case study (if you did not use it in class).

» Find out more about state and federal assistance programs and community-based food assistance from the websites listed for this session on Handout #5.

» Try out the ACCESS website (www.access.wisconsin.gov), an internet tool that provides a quick and easy way for people in Wisconsin to get answers to questions about health and nutrition programs.

Post the closing litany (from p. 4) and have the class read it responsively (with a different leader from the previous session).

Thank the participants for coming, and invite them to return for the next session. Tell them about the guest speaker who will speak about hunger issues and initiatives in your community.
Session 4 » Hunger in Our Community

Goal

For this session, you will invite a local expert, or experts, on hunger in your community to help your group to find out what is needed to more adequately address hunger and food insecurity problems in your community. This assessment of community needs provides an essential knowledge base for the action plan you will develop in the next session.

Materials Needed

Opening prayer and closing litany (p. 4), written on large sheets of paper (Re-use from the first session; before class, post them where everyone can read them)

Something large to write notes on that can be posted in front of the class next session - a large newsprint pad or sheets of butcher paper - and a marker

Handout #10, “Public Policy Advocacy” (download from the website)

Whom to Invite

You may already know someone in your area to invite, but for help in identifying appropriate local resource people, you can contact:

» Your County Extension Office. Ask for the Family Living or Nutrition Educator. This person may be able to come speak with your group, or may refer you to a representative from a local hunger council.

» Community Action Agencies (CAAs). CAAs provide food and technical support to food pantries in their regions.

» The coordinator of your local food pantry.

» Wisconsin Council of Churches.

Visit the “Hunger Resources” section of the Wisconsin Council of Churches website (www.wichurches.org) for further assistance in finding a speaker in your area.

Different people will bring different kinds of expertise. In addition to the above, you may wish to consider county health and human services workers, directors of local food pantries or regional Second Harvest or independent food banks, WIC (Women, Infants and Children assistance program) Offices, or other community service organizations, or sociology or economics faculty from a local college or university.

Visit the website section for this session for contact information for the above, or for further assistance in finding a speaker in your area.

Session Structure

Organize the conversation as best fits the guests and the group. Refer to the list of “Questions to Consider” on p. 23 to help you in discussing with the presenter and the class the topics to be covered. The opening prayer and the closing litany (p. 4) help set a context. Allow enough time for your group to ask all of their questions. The session concludes with an exercise to brainstorm a list of priority community needs. Have someone take notes on large sheets of newsprint for reference in the next session to help carry insights forward.
Questions to Consider

There is nothing necessarily technical about a needs assessment, though it can include as much data about your region as you want and can find. You might ask your guest or guests to help you explore the following questions:

1. How large an area do we want to look at? Does it make sense to look at food security needs in our county, city, or town, or just one neighborhood?

2. How many people in our area are hungry or food insecure? Who are they? What factors seem to be the most responsible for hunger and food insecurity in our community?

3. Are nutrition assistance programs, such as food stamps, school breakfast and WIC, available and accessible in our community? Are there eligible families in our community who do not participate in these programs, or do not receive other assistance such as Medicaid, energy assistance, or earned income tax credits? Do low-income people in our community face barriers to using these programs? Are there obstacles to applying (such as limited hours or inconvenient locations), or do some households need more information or assistance in applying? Are there enough computer workstations in community locations where families can apply online? Are there local or county resource guides listing available programs?

4. What retail sources of food (supermarkets, convenience stores, farmers’ markets, food coops) are available in our area? How accessible and affordable are they for low-income people? What variety and quality of food do they offer? Is there a need for a supermarket to offer lower prices and greater variety?

5. What sources of emergency or supplemental food are there in our community? How extensively are they used? Are they adequate to the community’s needs? Do they need more funding or food, or greater community support?

6. Is locally produced food available through farmer’s markets, community-supported agriculture, or community gardens? Are these sources accessible to low-income people? How many families grow home gardens and preserve produce? Do families lack supplies or education to begin home gardening and canning?

7. What is the level of awareness about hunger in our community? Who else is concerned about the issue? What sorts of resistance might local anti-hunger initiatives encounter?

8. How informed are elected officials (local, state, federal) regarding hunger in our community and key policy issues that affect it?

Brainstorming Community Needs

After the guest presentation, label a fresh sheet of newspaper “Community Needs.” Ask participants to spend five minutes naming what they see as the three or four most important food security needs of their community. Think about both the needs of hungry and food insecure people in your area, and about the needs or shortcomings of existing programs and service providers. Save this sheet for reference for the next session.
Session 4 » Hunger in Our Community

Homework

As “homework,” distribute copies of Handout #10, “Public Policy Advocacy” to read before the next session.

Also encourage class members to do one of the following:

» Bring a donation (nonperishable food or money) to your local food pantry. Visit with the staff or volunteers about what they do and how they perceive the community’s need for their services.

» Visit your local library for books to help you learn more about hunger issues.

» Visit the “Public Policy” links on the “Hunger Resources” page of the Wisconsin Council of Churches’ website (The web address, www.wichurches.org, is given on the “Public Policy Advocacy” handout).

Resources

See the website section for this session to find resources with hunger, poverty, employment and other information about your county.
In advance of this session, you should have some idea of how the awareness and motivation resulting from the preceding sessions can be harnessed for the ideas generated during this session. Is there an existing committee that can use additional volunteers to implement these ideas? Does a new task force need to be formed?

Following this session, the next steps may involve convening a new committee or putting items on the agenda of an existing committee, making contacts with others in the congregation or community, and gathering more information. Your group might be ready to organize specific actions, such as conducting a food drive, recruiting food pantry volunteers, or setting up a table on Sunday morning with materials for writing letters to legislators. Other ideas may involve more information gathering and planning – but this session should lead to a definite plan to begin that process now.

Goal

To move beyond studying the problem of hunger in the local community to doing something about it.

Materials Needed

The opening prayer (p. 4), copied onto a large sheet of paper (Re-use from first session; before class begins, post it where everyone can read it)

Sign-up sheets — with columns marked “name,” “phone number,” “e-mail,” and “project”

Notes from previous session (before class begins, post them where everyone can read them), including the “Community Needs” sheet

A large newsprint pad (with easel or other stand) — use the kind with sheets that can be torn off and stuck to a wall after they are filled out (or post the sheets with masking tape) — and different colored markers. Write headings on five of the sheets:

» “Our Gifts”
» “Challenges”
» “Potential Partners”
» “Next Steps”

Be sure to have additional sheets available in case you need them.

Copies of the following (downloaded from website):

» Handout #11, “Twenty Ways to Get Started” (for everyone)
» Handout #12, “Closing Litany” (for everyone- this Litany is different from previous sessions)
» Case Study #4
Introduction: Direct Service and Advocacy

5 minutes

Begin with the opening prayer, as in previous sessions.

Tell the group that the purpose of this session is to do some brainstorming about where to go from here, based on what has been learned in the preceding four sessions. Start the sign-up sheet circulating through the class. Depending on how you expect to follow up this series with action, tell the class to write down their names and contact information if they might be interested in being part of a group that will follow through on the action ideas generated in this session, or if they would be willing to help in any way. They should leave the “Project” column blank for now.

Read the following, or put it in your own words:

It is important to keep in mind two broad types of actions that congregations and other community groups can take in response to hunger: direct service, and public policy advocacy.

Direct Service activities are helping activities that can be undertaken by groups, essentially on their own initiative. These can include operating food pantries or meal sites, providing job training or literacy education, rehabbing and weatherproofing buildings, setting up free health clinics, etc.

Public Policy Advocacy means persuading community leaders and the general public to support laws and regulations that will serve the common good of the whole society, especially the most vulnerable. Advocacy can take many forms. For example, advocates can ask their members of Congress or the State Legislature to increase funding for nutrition programs. They can ask government officials to change regulations to make assistance programs more effective. They can urge employers to offer living wages and adequate health benefits for their employees. They can write letters and op-eds to local papers. Congregations or other organizations can hold community forums to raise awareness about community food security issues.

Both types of action are necessary. Direct service engages citizens in actively meeting the needs of their neighbors. Public policy advocacy can mobilize resources that are beyond what any business or voluntary group can muster on its own. Direct service can provide immediate relief, while public policy can aim at long-term solutions that attack root causes of hunger.

Case Study #4
(Optional - 15 minutes)

If you have time to do the case study during the session, hand out copies now. Give participants time to read, reflect and write on their own or in pairs or small groups. Then discuss the questions as a group.

If you don’t have time during the session, hand out the case study at the end of the session as “homework.”
Brainstorming
50 minutes total

If you have more than an hour, you can expand the time taken for this exercise accordingly.

Our Gifts
10 minutes

Put up or turn to the sheet labeled “Our Gifts.” Ask what assets and resources your congregation (or congregations) and its members have that might be used to help meet the “Community Needs” on the list from last session. These gifts can include not only financial assets, physical resources, and “time and talents,” but also relationships and motivation. For example:

» Money from the church budget, special offerings, or fund raisers
» Building space for a pantry or meal site
» Land for a community garden
» Volunteers to help at pantries or meal sites, organize food drives, etc.
» Persons involved in agriculture, retail, restaurant or other food-related businesses
» Persons with expertise in nutrition, personal finances, energy conservation, etc.
» Volunteers who can write to legislators, meet with local officials and community leaders, submit letters or Op-Ed pieces to newspapers, etc.
» Persons who belong to, or work with, populations in the community who are most vulnerable to hunger

When finished, post the sheet(s) on the wall.

Potential Partners
5 minutes

Put up, or turn the flip chart to, the sheet labeled “Potential Partners.” Ask for names of other congregations, organizations, or businesses who might collaborate with you on anti-hunger efforts. List them (and the persons to be contacted, if known) on the newsprint. When finished, post the sheet(s) on the wall.

Next Steps
15 minutes

Talk about the difference between two types of responses to hunger by reading the following, or restating it in your own words:

We’re now ready to start planning our own response to the problem of hunger in our community.

» We can address the symptoms by providing food or other resources directly to hungry people;
» We can also address root causes of hunger through advocacy.

Both are necessary: Hungry people need food now, but if the root causes are not addressed, people will continue to be food insecure and there will be a continuing need for emergency and supplemental food.

Put up, or turn the flip chart to, the sheet labeled “Next Steps.”

Ask participants to come up with some ideas for next steps. Encourage a mix of ideas that:

» Address root causes as well as symptoms.
» Involve both direct service and advocacy.
Includes both short-term and long-range activities. Short-term activities engage people in concrete actions that provide a more immediate feeling of accomplishment. Long-range activities can make lasting contributions to the community and bring participants to deeper levels of awareness and involvement.

You can distribute Handout #11, “Twenty Ways to Get Started,” but encourage participants to come up with their own ideas as well.

After the sheet has been filled, prioritize the top three or four ideas. (If you have used more than one sheet for this list, be sure all are posted where the class can see them.) Go through the list and ask for a show of hands for each idea, and tally the responses next to each. (Use a bright-colored marker different from the one used to write the list). Ask each person to vote for no more than 3 ideas. Or, you can give everyone colored adhesive dots that they can stick next to their 3 favorite ideas.

After the priorities have been set, ask those who signed the volunteer sheet which of the priority “next steps” they would like to work on, and note that in the “project” column. Ask if anyone who hasn’t signed the volunteer sheet would like to add his or her name now.

Conclusion
5 minutes

How you wrap up depends on the structure for moving these ideas forward. If there is an existing committee to take on these tasks, then you can tell the group that you will forward the ideas and the list of volunteers to the committee. If a new committee or task force needs to be formed, then you will need to contact the volunteers to set up a first meeting to develop an action plan.

Whatever the case, let everyone know that the conclusion of this study/action series is the beginning, not the end. Encourage everyone to act on what they’ve learned. Thank them for coming to the class: their interest and participation has set the stage for the initiatives that will follow.

Closing Litany
5 minutes

Distribute copies of Handout #12, “Closing Litany”. Assign the parts of “Leader 1” and “Leader 2” (if you did not do so earlier). Divide the rest of the class in half (right side/left side) to read the parts of “Group 1” and “Group 2.”