

Opening Comments

Welcome to The Forum on Hunger hosted by the Organization for Faith Education and community, an interfaith organization whose goal it is to bring people of faith together to address important public issues and to promote research about the intersection of faith and well-being. It is our sincere conviction that disagreements between different faith traditions become insignificant when we focus on our shared concern about important things like the needs of the poor, of children, immigrants, and those abused by power in its various forms. This is not to deny that on the level of religious practice differences exist between us, rather for the sake of making a better world we refuse to let those differences matter.

Over the years, the Organization for Faith, Education, and Community has sponsored research conferences and other activities aimed at our shared goals. We also publish The Journal of Faith Education and Community and recently a book titled *Faith and Loss: Light in Darkness*. If these activities and the organization's goals sound appealing to, we encourage you to join our efforts. Please consider leaving your contact information on our signup sheet.

Before introducing our guests and beginning our program, I would like to say a few words about poverty and hunger. As a sociologist I would like to start by making a few general observations:

- In respect to poverty, the United States has the highest rate of poverty in the developed world (of the world's wealthiest countries, the G7). Of the 35 OECD countries we have the second highest poverty rate at a near tie with Turkey and only exceeded by Israel. (<https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>)
- The Department of Labor estimated in 2016 that one out of four jobs in the United States pay enough to keep a family of four out of poverty
- Texas has the #14th highest poverty of states in the United States (17.2%), the national average is 14.8%.
- Of the (254) Texas counties, Nacogdoches County ranks as the 23rd poorest in the state (25.7%)Poverty rate in Nacogdoches = 38.4% (City-data.com). If we just look at statistics, the need for a community discussion about hunger seems obvious us.
- The final observation I would like to make is less directly related to these statistics about poverty and hunger. The United States has a unique attitude about poverty. In general, we believe that the poor are solely responsible for their poverty as if hunger exists for intrinsic reasons. Surveys consistently show that many American's (about 1/3) believe that poor people are poor due to some fault of their own. This belief corresponds to an age-old cultural theme in the United States that some poor people are worthy of assistance (people who are poor due to no fault of their own), and some are unworthy (those who are poor

due to some fault of their own). It is upon this belief that our welfare system is grounded.

While this way of thinking is widespread in American society, it seems much more common in the Bible belt. Here, many believe that poverty is a moral issue as if not having enough to eat is a sign of moral failure, a moral failure on the part of the hungry person.

Perhaps it is true that in relation to poverty we do have a moral problem. However, it seems to me that the moral failure is not on the part of the poor but rather on the part of the rest of us.

I believe that it is unarguably true, if people examine the spiritual principles of their respective traditions without resorting to a tortured logic that twists experience into justifications for personal privilege, it becomes obvious that all major faith traditions are unequivocal - - all major faith traditions regard the poor and hungry as our responsibility regardless of whatever judgments we have about their worthiness.

The Panel

Panel members were asked to share information about their organizations such as history, funding, number of persons serviced, etc. Following their presentations they were asked to identify the strengths, needs, and how community members can best support them in their efforts. The information that follows is a summary of the panel presentation.

Azleway Children's Services, Jenni Chumley, 1100 South Street, 936-205-5641.

Azleway is a faith-based foster care and adoption agency. The agency offers a weekly food pantry open to the public. Foster parents are encouraged to utilize the service also. The agency serves approximately 100 families from the general public each month. Clients call on Monday for an appointment to pick up food on Thursday.

Strengths: Foster children are taken care of. Serving a wider populations by making appointments with families in the community.

Needs: More donations of meat. Monetary donations.

What we can do: Refer potential clients to the agency. Volunteer on Thursdays.

Harvest House, North Street Church of Christ, David Fears, 3914 North Street, 936-564-4806

Harvest House depends on individual donors and grants. They serve approximately 3,000 adults and 800 seniors per month. There is a government sponsored program consisting of senior boxes and a back pack program for elementary students in the community. Approximately 400 students receive food each Friday for the weekend.

Strengths: Serving children and senior citizens. They work with Feeding America and have access to food from Walmart (that would be thrown away).

Needs: monetary donations to buy food from foodbanks. Food drives. Volunteers to help on second and fourth Thursdays.

What we can do: Refer potential clients. Money or food donations. Volunteer once per month.

Helping Other People Eat (HOPE), Denise Lee, 2100 East Main, 936-559-1801, email nacogdocheshope@yahoo.com.

HOPE serves 1,750-1,900 people each month. They have been in existence for 24 years. They are funded by grants and supported by five Nacogdoches churches. They are building a new building and have plans for soup kitchen in the new location. Clients are able to show for the food they want so they do receive food that they will not use.

Strengths: Volunteers are also persons in need and understand. They provide hospitality. They are involved in a retail food program and receive donations from HEB in Lufkin and Kroger in Nacogdoches. They also are part of Foods to Encourage to offer healthier food choices.

Needs: Monetary donations for the new building. Help with painting and building a new counter. Monetary donations for food.

What we can do: Support fund raising events. Hold fund drives.

Food for Thought – SFA Food Pantry, Joy Hammond. This agency opened in January of 2015. The organization is located in the SFA Student Center and led by students. They have served approximately 190 students. Students are allowed to shop the pantry for items that they can use.

Strengths: Worked hard to develop the program to meet the needs of SFA students. Students volunteer to work in the pantry. Students are able to shop for foods.

Needs: Space, donations (list on brochures, money. Need a roller gate to secure their goods.

What we can do: Food drives.

Sacred Heart Food Pantry, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Margaret Sanford, 2508 Applebysand Rd, 936-305-3637

This pantry relies on individual donations. Twice a year the church holds food drives. No one is denied help. The pantry is open one day per month (second Tuesday) from 9:00 – 12:00. Approximately 200 families are served each month. Food is delivered to senior citizens. Clients are allowed to shop for the food they need and will eat. Coffee and donuts are served in effort to help clients feel welcome.

Strengths: Sacred Heart makes an effort to create a positive social experience. They offer coffee and donuts from 6:30-9:00 a.m. They also pick up food from Krogers. Often are able to offer baked goods – even birthday cakes.

Needs: Monetary donations. Need a source to obtain more meat (preferably in smaller packages). More rolling metal racks or grocery carts.

What we can do: Referral and communicate about the program. Money and food donations.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Veronica Whitaker, 2015 North Stallings, 936-560-2944

USDA sponsored agency that has been in existence since 1972. Nacogdoches WIC office has been open for 31 years. They served children under five and women who are pregnant, nursing, or have children under one year of age. Clients qualify with residency and income guidelines. You can qualify for WIC even if you are working. A family of four that makes less than \$3,700 qualifies for the program. Only 51% of those who qualify are receiving help from WIC. WIC also includes nutrition and health counseling. The focus is on family and health.

Strengths: The focus is on healthy nutritional choices. A registered dietician is available for guidance.

Needs: Transportation for clients to get to the WIC office on North Stallings Drive.

What we can do: Refer potential clients.

Meals on Wheels, Tammy Blank, 621 Harris Street, 936-569-6350 or online at mealsonwheelsamerica.org

Meals on Wheels serves approximately 2,300 meals per week to senior citizens. Fifty percent government funded. The rest is dependent on donations. They have seen a great gain in homebound individuals needing meals. Volunteers deliver meals. They have plenty of volunteers at this time.

Strength: Meals on Wheels helps seniors to live at longer in their own homes.

Needs: Monetary donations of any size. (There is a waiting list for volunteers).

What we can do: Be watchful for senior citizens in need – encourage them to get help.

Questions and Concerns from Audience

Undocumented persons in the community:

WIC does not need a photo ID. A utility bill will work. They do not refuse anyone that qualifies.

Sacred Heart – does not refuse anyone.

All others agreed that a person will not be refused service.

Since the meeting we received the following information from Denise Lee, HOPE:

Since we participated in the Hunger seminar on Wednesday and the issue came up about requiring ID from clients, this has been on my mind. I called ETFB for clarification and was told that we can ask for ID but they are not required to produce it. We are to serve anyone who presents themselves as hungry. This is an instance where “we have always done it this way” and no one questioned it. I honestly thought this rule came from ETFB but it does NOT. We should continue to ASK for ID in order to get them signed up and in the system and to monitor if they have already been to the pantry that month. However, we need to feed those who are not able to present ID.

Transportation issues:

Program with AAA and DETCOG will actually pay someone to drive those without transportation to appointments. Numbers: 1-800-256-6848 and 409-384-5704.

Donations:

All agencies agreed that monetary donations are better than food donations. They can buy more through the food banks that donors can buy at the store with the same money. It also allows the pantry to buy the items that are needed and in high demand.

Website:

There was a suggestion about the development of a website with information about these services. The City of Nacogdoches has a site with resources. It was recommended that groups contact the city to be added to the site.