

ELCA Food Stamp Challenge

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

What is the ELCA Food Stamp Challenge?

- Can \$1 curb your hunger? The ELCA Food Stamp Challenge is an opportunity for you and your congregation, campus ministry or outdoor ministry site to live for one week on the national average Food Stamp benefit of \$1 per-person, per-meal. What will you eat? How will you feel? Is it healthy? **Are you hungry?**

What can my congregation and I accomplish by participating in the Food Stamp Challenge?

- By participating in the ELCA Food Stamp Challenge you have a terrific opportunity to learn through experience what it is like to live on Food Stamps. By being a part of this journey you stand in solidarity with nearly 25 million Americans who weekly count on Food Stamps to feed their families and themselves.

The ELCA Food Stamp Challenge is not only just an experiment to see if you can 'do it', but it is also a call to action. During your week living on Food Stamps you are encouraged to let your voice be heard by contacting your member of Congress. Share with them your experience and what Farm Bill reforms you believe are necessary to ensure that access to healthy foods is possible for those to rely on Food Stamps.

By inviting a group from your congregation or community to participate in the Food Stamp Challenge, you have a wonderful opportunity to host an educational event about the Farm Bill and how it directly affects agriculture and nutritional programs around the world. Educational resources are available at:

www.elca.org/hunger and www.elca.org/advocacy

How do I participate in the Food Stamp Challenge?

- Visit www.elca.org/advocacy and click on ELCA Food Stamp Challenge. Here you will find the Leaders Guide and Food Stamp Challenge guidelines which outline how to participate.

Do I need to register myself or my congregation for the Food Stamp Challenge?

- As a church, we'll have a bigger impact in the media and with our members of Congress if we can tell them how many congregations and individuals are participating in the ELCA Food Stamp Challenge.

Please let us know if you or your congregation participates by e-mailing hunger@elca.org.

You are also invited to read about others' experiences and share yours on the official ELCA Food Stamp Challenge blog: www.curbyourhunger.blogspot.com

What is a blog?

- A **blog** is a website that provides commentary or news on a particular subject such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal [online diaries](#). A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.

Be sure to visit the ELCA Food Stamp Challenge blog at www.curbyourhunger.blogspot.com. Here you can share about your Food Stamp Challenge experience and read about others. Visit often because updates are posted frequently.

Are there resources to help me prepare and plan for the Food Stamp Challenge?

- Yes! ELCA Food Stamp Challenge guidelines, leader guides, congregational activities, congressional contacts, and Farm Bill/Hunger resources are available at www.elca.org/advocacy.

- We also are offering a series of online orientation sessions. Currently we have four offerings:
 - + Saturday, July 28th @ 1PM EST/10AM PST
 - + Thursday, August 1st @1PM EST/10AM PST
 - + Wednesday, August 15th @ 7PM EST/4PM PST
 - + Monday, August 20th @ 12PM EST/9AM PST

To sign up or request additional offerings, e-mail christopher.carpenter@elca.org or call 1-800-638-3522 X-2815

Are there resources available on advocacy and the Farm Bill?

- Please visit www.elca.org/advocacy. Here you'll find information on the ELCA's mission as a public church speaking for the common good in government and resources to learn more about the Farm Bill.

Are there ways to engage my congregation, neighbors, and/or co-workers in the Food Stamp Challenge?

- Yes! Visit www.elca.org/advocacy to download The Fellowship Hour Food Stamp Challenge guide. Here you will find all the information you will need to host a community/congregational meal activity which perfectly compliments the ELCA Food Stamp Challenge.

What does the Farm Bill have to do with Food Stamps?

- During the Great Depression, President Roosevelt introduced several bills to support struggling farmers at the heart of rural America. That was the beginning of the Farm Bill. But today the Farm Bill isn't just about farmers or farms. There are nine titles in the 2002 Farm Bill which cover issues ranging from energy to conservation to nutrition. The Food Stamps program is included in the nutrition section of the Farm Bill and

accounts for more than sixty percent of the spending in the bill. Decisions about who can participate in the program, how much those persons receive, and the type of assistance offered through the program are all decided in this important piece of legislation. And the opportunity to influence these decisions happens rarely; Congress only considers the Farm Bill every 5 or 6 years.

Why is there a September 15th deadline to participate in the Food Stamp Challenge?

- Congress has taken up the task of writing a Farm Bill to replace the 2002 version. Already, the House of Representatives has voted and passed a Bill that will now go to the Senate. If we want to influence our Senators to pass a Farm Bill that strengthens the Food Stamp program and our nation's commitment to people who are food insecure, then we must do it while the Senate is still debating the issues. It is expected that the Farm Bill will be a priority for the Senate after their August recess and come to a vote before the middle of September.

How do I contact my member of Congress about the Farm Bill and Food Stamps?

- If you don't know who your Representative is, visit http://ga6.org/elca_advocacy/leg-lookup/search.html
- You can visit your Representative's Web site by going to www.house.gov and typing their name in the search box. On their Web site you'll find contact information to the Representative's Washington D.C. and state offices, including phone numbers and addresses.
- You can call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Representative's Washington office directly.
- Letters are an effective way to reach Congress, but take a long time to arrive at the desk of your Representative. If you want to send a letter, we suggest you also fax a copy to the office so they receive your message immediately. Fax numbers and office addresses are again found on your Member's Web site.

When I contact my Member of Congress, what should I say?

- **Introduce yourself:** tell them your name, that you're a constituent from [your city], and that you're a person of faith who belongs to [your congregation/faith].
- **Explain why you're calling/writing:** Describe the Food Stamp Challenge briefly. Provide background on why the Food Stamp program is an important issue for you and the country. End with a simple reflection on your experience to personalize the call.
- **The Ask:** Tell them that you would like to see your Representative support:
 - Increasing food stamp access and benefits so that more low-income families can participate and can afford to purchase healthier foods.
 - Eliminating restrictions in the Food Stamp program that disadvantage savings accounts.
 - Removing the five-year waiting period for eligible legal immigrants to qualify for food stamps.
 - Funding community food security grants that support local initiatives to combat hunger.
- **Conclusion:** End by thanking the person for their time and assuring them you'll be attentive to the Representative's action on the issue.

I think I can eat on \$3 a day. Isn't the current food stamp allowance enough?

- The food stamp program's original purpose was to supplement Americans' income when they lacked the resources to buy adequate food. However, with the rise of housing and cost of living in the last 20 years, and degrading wages, more families and individuals are relying on the food stamp program to put food on the table.
- The truth is that \$3 a day can buy a healthy meal. But that's not the real question. This exercise isn't about being creative with beans, rice, lentils, pasta, and other cheap food goods. It's about what \$3 represents.

Here's the real question: is \$3 a sufficient response to our sisters and brothers who need food assistance? Does \$3 embody our commitment to providing a just food system, even for those who are poor? What things, including dignity and respect, are we denying our neighbors in need by providing \$3 for daily sustenance?

- And the significance of this allowance isn't only the "\$" sign. The experience of people who participate on the program is unique to their circumstances. Often, it takes longer to shop for cheaper goods; low-income communities have fewer grocery stores and sometimes only over-priced convenience stores; healthy options for eating on a low budget rarely include produce; there are rare opportunities to purchase local or organic products on a limited budget; and additional stresses of living in poverty may be compounded if shopping for food is so limited and restricted.
- Maybe you can do it, but should the people who are participating in the food stamp program have to survive this extreme challenge every day? What does \$3 say about the value we place on the vulnerable of our community?

I cannot participate in the Food Stamp Challenge for health reasons. Is there anything else I can do?

- Absolutely! Host a Food Stamp Challenge meal activity, write/call your member of Congress and encourage them to ensure that comprehensive reform to the Farm Bill occurs and/or make a contribution to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Even if you do not participate in the Food Stamp Challenge you have an opportunity to make a difference!

My congregation has decided to participate in the Food Stamp Challenge. How can I get some local media attention?

- It is definitely possible to get local media attention for your Food Stamp Challenge! For an example of a great article written about an Episcopal Church participating in the challenge, visit <http://www.newsobserver.com/105/story/651145.html>

- Here are some tips for working with your local media to raise awareness of this issue:
 - Before you contact the media, plan your Food Stamp Challenge event to be media-friendly. Make sure you have good visual appeal. Have colorful banners, or maybe have the Sunday School class draw pictures related to hunger and put them around the room where you'll be hosting the Food Stamp Challenge meal.

 - Prepare a one-page press announcement that includes the event name, specific location (including address and location within the building), time (start and end), and purpose. (Refer to www.elca.org/advocacy for the purpose.) Be sure to include one person's contact information (including a cell phone number if possible) in case the reporter has questions. Be sure to include details of the visually appealing aspects of the program - i.e. children's pictures, family involvement, etc.

 - About a week before the event, e-mail or mail the press announcement to the editors of your local newspaper, radio station, and television station. If somebody does a community blog, send it to that person, too.

 - Call to follow up a few days after you send the announcement to make sure the announcement was received, and to answer any questions about the event.

 - At the event, have some printed materials from www.elca.org/advocacy set aside and give them to the press who attend, and point the press people towards folks who are comfortable

speaking on the issue (including the pastor). Offer to answer any questions or help them if they need assistance.