

The power of advocacy: One person with passion can make a difference

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Hunger is defeated one person at a time, according to Christians working on the issue.

An individual can have a profound impact in the fight against hunger, said Pamela Barnett, minister of Outreach Texas for Angel Food Ministries. One person's energy to care for the hungry can be infectious, raising awareness about the issue, which encourages other people to invest themselves in the cause.

Chandra Hawthorne,
director of Minnie's
Food Pantry in Plano, is
committed to hands-on
ministry and advocacy
on behalf of the hungry
and poor.

"To deal with hunger, we must acknowledge it exists," said Susan Edwards, director of the Baptist CRISIS Center in Midland. "To deny it denies the humanity and need of your neighbor."

Awareness becomes the first step in joining the fight to make a person, a community, a state, a nation and the whole world food secure.

"We can go about our normal lives not knowing people are going without," said Chandra Hawthorne, director of Minnie's Food Pantry in Plano. "But

when you realize where hunger is at and you become part of fighting it, you discover it's easy to help a brother or sister in need."

Caring for the needy is one of the church's duties, said Suzii Paynter, BGCT Advocacy/Care Center director. Helping local people with their physical needs opens the door to sharing Christ and making an impact on the entire community.

"Jesus met people where they were," said Paynter. "If we want people to understand who Jesus is, we should be emulating his ministry. If this was Jesus' stepping stone to bringing people to God, then we should be doing the same thing."

Throughout Scripture, Jesus fed the crowds because of his overflowing compassion for them. If Christians really love others as Christ loves the church, they will not stand idle when it comes to ministry, organizers say.

The Bible encourages Christians to minister out of obedience and love. Throughout the gospels, authors describe physical ministries as both a privilege and a duty of the church.

"It changes a person from being a spectator in his or her faith to someone who is spiritually active so the Holy Spirit can enter their lives and into the lives of the people they are loving," Paynter said.

Christians should desire to give hope to the helpless out of obedience to God's commands, hunger advocates said.

"Ministry becomes an act of worship because you are returning to the Lord what has been given to you," Edwards said. "The hungry are just a recipient of this type of worship."



Suzi Paynter,
director of the Texas
Baptist Christian Life
Commission, insists
caring for needy
people is crucial part
of each church's
calling.

The Bible calls Christians to defend the helpless, like children. Advocates note the affects of planting spiritual seeds of hope in an upcoming generation are unknown, but God promises blessings to those who protect the vulnerable.

“When you focus on childhood hunger in Texas, you’re looking at where the opportunities to share God’s love with people are,” Paynter said. “Hungry kids are a great place to start. You have to know the child to know their hunger, and that’s our calling— to know people one by one so you know their need.”

Benevolence ministries guided by the Spirit have a proven track record in biblical and modern times, said several leaders of hunger ministries. They enable the church to go around the globe defending a message of faith in action.

Christians wonder how they can further God’s kingdom in hard economic and devastating social times, but the answer is clear and unchanged since the beginning of the Christian church, advocates say.

In the book of Acts, Luke describes the growth of the Christian church. He says the people met together, breaking bread with sincere hearts and selling their possessions and goods and giving to anyone with a need. He wrote, “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being

saved.”

If the church is ready to see lives changed and people saved, it must be eager to emulate Jesus’ walk and believe his message of provision out of faith, Paynter said. Feeding ministries are an example of sacrificing resources to see God’s kingdom grow.

There are many ways an individual can become an advocate of hunger alleviation, Edwards said. Whether donating food to an organization, volunteering time at a ministry or recycling plastic bags to be re-used at a pantry, every person can make a difference. When a community realizes the impact ending hunger can have, hunger advocacy goes from a one-person effort to a cooperative one.

“Not everyone is called to physically feed children, but there are some people who are,” Paynter said. “By donating to a hunger offering we, as a community of faith, are enabling those who are called into the ministry to do their job. We are giving them strength by supporting them.”

Since 1996, the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger has contributed more than \$10 million through various Baptist ministries to promote and provide food sustainability around the world. Through Texas Hope 2010—the BGCT initiative to share Christ with every Texan by Easter 2010—the world hunger offering is seeking to raise \$1 million for the hungry in 2009 and another \$1 million in 2010.

“By giving to the offering, you can be a part of 300 different ministries,” said Joyce Gilbreath of the BGCT Christian Life Commission. “We need to talk about what we can all do together.”

Having developed a three-part strategy to assist the government, various organizations and individuals across the state, Texas Hunger Initiative Director Jeremy Everett believes in order to make Texas a food secure state, people must believe hunger can be ended, work together as a whole

and set standards that align with the scope of the situation. The initiative is a partnership of the Baylor University Center for Family and Community Ministries and a partner of the Texas Baptist CLC.

“We will be working with all state agencies dealing with food or hunger in any form to make their already existing programs more efficient,” Everett said. “We are going to work at the grassroots level by working with communities so they know what resources are available by finding sites that are doing something, patting them on the back for doing it, and then developing strategic plans to develop more resources. Lastly, we are going to go around to different university campuses creating awareness and engaging students in the hunger issue.”

But organizations, initiatives and offerings cannot complete the task alone.

“Every person is an important part of ending hunger,” said Cheryl Jackson, founder of The Giving Movement, a nonprofit organization in Plano. “If you end hunger in your world and I end hunger in my world, together we can change the entire world.”