This Christian Study Guide of the 2018 Hunger Report: *The Jobs Challenge: Working to End Hunger* offers a biblically based tool to explore God’s call to protect the vulnerable in the 21st century. The guide summarizes the report’s overall theme of the dignity of work and provides discussion questions and group activities on select topics covered in the report. It is focused on galvanizing our faith into action. The guide also includes steps to help discussion leaders prepare for the study.

**Study Session Outline:**

- Scripture: a biblical reflection related to topics covered in the report, followed by some questions to consider.
- Issue: a summary of the report.
- Application: Activities to engage group members by using content from the Hunger Report (hungerreport.org) applied to one’s own life and the wider community, including communities of faith.

**Planning your Study**

As discussion leader, your role is to guide the process of group reading and discussion related to the report, but also to be open to learning with others. While you are not expected to be an expert on the issues covered in the report, it is recommended that you read the full report prior to the session. Here are some key steps for serving as a discussion leader:

- Review the study session and refer to the 2018 Hunger Report for more details.
- Consider your own goals for the class and feel free to adapt the guide to enhance the experience for your group. The guide is designed for Christians of many theological and political viewpoints.
- Confirm the date, time, and location of your meeting and invite participants.
- Bring a Bible to the session. Encourage participants to bring additional translations to enrich the biblical reflection. You will almost certainly discover your own powerful connection to the biblical text.
- Bring session materials for each participant and have a flip-chart or whiteboard available for activities and discussions. Consider giving participants the session outline below, or your revision, to help them follow along. Some sessions include an activity that requires access to the Internet. If your group does not have Internet access but you choose to do that activity, have someone print out relevant pages or data ahead of time.
- Plan to include prayer time, especially time for remembering those most affected by the topics that you discuss. The session as outlined in this guide may take more than 90 minutes, but may be modified to meet your scheduling needs. After familiarizing yourself with the outline of the session, adapt the activities to best serve the needs of your group.

**Group Expectations**

If you haven’t led an adult learning group before or it has been a while, here are some suggestions:

- Adults want to know what they’re going to discuss. Be clear and focused about your goals and your schedule.
- As you begin, help participants make connections with each other—through introductions and a short response to a question like “What do you hope for from our time together?” Including time for prayer at each session also helps build community.
- Encourage all participants both to speak and to listen. Allow each person who wants to speak to have the time to do so.
- Encourage “I” statements (I feel..., I wonder..., etc.) instead of “you” or “they” statements (you don’t know..., they always... etc.).
- Adults bring lots of experience to the conversation. Find ways to appreciate their need to integrate new material with what they already know, but also keep the conversation focused.
- At the start of the session, invite participants to write down one question they would like to have answered. Before the closing prayer, invite participants to return to the question and write a response—new information or perhaps new questions.
Facilitating discussion

The study guide includes a few questions for discussion. To stimulate full participation, consider using one or more of these techniques:

• Divide the group into smaller groups and ask each group to discuss and report on one assigned question. Give them a set time and then have them report to the larger group. Ask the individuals in the larger group to comment on (add to or question) what they’re hearing.

• Divide the group into teams of two. Ask each person to consider the question at hand and write down a word, phrase, or other response. Then pair up the two-person teams to create groups of four to broaden the discussion. After another 3 or 4 minutes, invite participants to say what they heard. What key words were used? Is there shared interest in one particular issue?

• Divide the group into teams of three or four. Place poster paper on the walls, one sheet for each question. Give the teams 8 to 10 minutes to discuss the assigned questions and post their “answers” on the poster paper. Give a 2-minute warning. At the end of the allotted time, review the responses, noting similarities, themes, concerns, or ideas.

Additional Resources

Your denomination or national group may have additional social policy resources relevant to this Hunger Report. You can reference some of these online at www.hungerreport.org, or check its web site. Throughout the year, www.hungerreport.org is updated with new stories and statistics you can use. Bread for the World’s website, www.bread.org, has additional resources, including current advocacy campaign materials in the activist corner at www.bread.org/activist. The Alliance to End Hunger, an organization affiliated with Bread for the World and the Institute, has created an Advocacy Playbook that enables organizations and volunteers involved in hunger-related service activities to be effective advocates with political leaders to end hunger. See www.alliancetoendhunger.org/advocacy-playbook. Another Bread publication you may find helpful is the Biblical Basis for Advocacy to End Hunger, which can be downloaded or ordered at www.bread.org/library/biblical-basis-advocacy-end-hunger.
Scripture

Ask for volunteers to read Matthew 20:1-16 aloud.

From the beginning, work has been part of God’s plan for humanity. Work is not intended to be a punishment. On the contrary, work gives humankind an opportunity to be in fellowship with God, and share responsibility for creation through good stewardship. Work gives women and men a sense of purpose, self-worth, and communion with God.

In Matthew 20:1-16, heaven is described through the parable of the workers in the vineyard. In the text, the owner of the vineyard displays certain characteristics of the relationship between God and people, but also of how we as humans should treat each other. The story demonstrates a respect for the dignity of work and attention to the basic needs of workers. Imagine going to the marketplace and seeing many day laborers standing around and waiting for an opportunity to find work that could keep them and their family from going hungry. This is a scene that many of us have witnessed ourselves. In the passage from Matthew, we know there were plenty of hands available for work, since every time the landowner went to the marketplace, he found laborers willing to take up the task. However, he did not take advantage of that to pit the laborers against each other, or to offer them a salary that was not fair and right, or to ask them to work extra hours, or to not pay them the same day as had been agreed. The landowner and each laborer entered into a verbal contract for fair wages. This is part of what dignified work is about—providing an opportunity for work where laborers are valued, treated with respect, and receive a fair wage, as agreed and in a timely manner. Work can also help build a person’s self-respect and sense of accomplishment. Workers are providing for a family, contributing to something larger than themselves. They are also contributing to a community.

Questions

1. What role does your church have in affirming the value and dignity of work? Does the story of the landowner help us consider how we view job creation and fair labor laws?

2. What does it mean to call on those with wealth to open their hand to the poor and needy neighbor, as suggested in Scripture? More than donating money, how might we build a system that treats workers and all people fairly?

3. How would you respond to the statement that hunger and poverty is the church’s work and not a government responsibility?

4. How could fair and equitable treatment of employees lead to a more productive workplace?

Issue

Economic growth is vital to achieve the goal of ending hunger in the United States. While economic growth is necessary for progress against hunger, by itself it is not enough. Economic growth must be tied to job creation strategies that produce sustainable and equitable jobs that pay workers enough to provide for themselves and their families. In recent decades, the U.S. economy has more than doubled in size, but the incomes of most workers when adjusted for inflation have scarcely grown at all.

Eighty percent of the nation’s jobs are in the private sector. Government policies are important to private sector vitality and also help to ensure that the economy leaves no one behind. The federal government needs to create long-term economic strategies to support private sector job creation. This should include bipartisan support for revenue increases, along with strategic cuts in government spending, to keep the federal deficit from growing into a crippling burden in the decades to come.

Government policies can provide a foundation for a talented and productive workforce. Investments targeted in communities disproportionately affected by hunger and poverty—including women, people of color, people who were formerly incarcerated, and youth who are out of school and not working—can level the playing field and create opportunities for people who have been marginalized in the United States.

1. Break into small groups and read the following sections of the Hunger Report about government policies that contribute to the growth of dignified work. Share your findings with the rest of the group.

b. Chapter 4, Box 4.2: Paid family Leave—Not Everyone Gets It, p. 76, and Box 4.3: Your Schedule—Take It or Leave It, p. 79.

2. Next, return to small groups to read the following sections of the Hunger Report about economic policies that lead to job creation. Then share the ideas with the rest of the group. What did you learn from this? What questions does it raise for you?

a. Chapter 2 sections, Making the Grade on Physical Infrastructure, pp. 36-38, and Banking on Human Infrastructure, pp. 38-41.

b. Chapter 3 sections, Small Business is a Big Deal, pp. 65-67, and Expatriate Communities Support Entrepreneurs, pp. 68-69.

Application

1. The amount of money that can be considered a living wage varies across different communities. Find out what the living wage is in your community. See http://livingwage.mit.edu/. How can you, as individuals and as a community, support employers in your community that pay a living wage?

2. What defines a “good job” for you? What are the benefits, protections, and other things you value in a job beyond the actual salary or wage?

3. Pope Francis said recently that “Poverty is not an accident. It has causes that must be recognized and removed for the good of so many of our brothers and sisters.” As we know, unemployment and underemployment are associated with poverty. Can you make a list of the root causes of unemployment or underemployment in your community?

4. Do you see progress against hunger and poverty in your local community? If so, where? If not, where might there be opportunities to make progress?

5. Where might there be opportunities for you to work together with church and community leaders to help end hunger and poverty? If you are already engaged in such work, how can you deepen your involvement?

6. Review the recommendations at the end of the executive summary. Are they recommendations you can work to support, both as individuals and as a community? Develop some concrete ways to become more active.

7. For further study, you may consider visiting an online resource produced by KQED radio entitled The Lowdown: connecting newsroom to classroom. Specifically, their minimum wage lesson plan for use in classrooms can also be used by your group. With a little planning, it can be a great way to tie together what you have learned about jobs and wages. https://ww2.kqed.org/lowdown/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2017/01/Minimum-Wage-lesson-plan.pdf