Grand Canyon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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No One Should Have to Fight This Hard for Daily Bread

By Bishop Deborah K. Hutterer, Bishop of the Grand Canyon Synod of the ELCA

When nearly half a million people lose access to food assistance, something has gone wrong.

In Arizona, participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has dropped by roughly 47% in the past year, the steepest decline in the nation. More than 400,000 of our neighbors, including many children, are no longer receiving help putting food on the table.

These numbers are not abstract. They represent parents skipping meals so their children can eat, older adults navigating unfamiliar systems, and working families doing their best to make ends meet while finding that the systems meant to support them are increasingly difficult to access.

As people of faith, we are called to pay attention when something so essential as daily bread becomes harder to obtain, not only because of individual need, but because of how our shared systems are functioning. Martin Luther taught that "daily bread" includes not only food itself, but also the good government and faithful institutions through which God provides for human well-being.

Recent changes to federal law have introduced stricter requirements for SNAP, including expanded work rules and increased pressure on states to reduce administrative error rates. At the same time, Arizona has faced staffing shortages and administrative burdens that have made it harder for people to apply for and maintain benefits in a timely way.

The result is a system under strain, and, for too many Arizonans, a system that is no longer working as intended.

We recognize the importance of accountability in public programs. But accountability must not come at the cost of access. A system that is so difficult to navigate that eligible people cannot receive help is not functioning well, no matter how efficient it may appear on paper.

Faith communities across Arizona see the impact of this every day. Food banks and local ministries are serving more people even as SNAP participation declines. These ministries are vital, but they were never designed to replace a program of this scale. They cannot bear alone what public systems were built to share.

In the Lutheran tradition, we understand God's care for the neighbor as something lived out not only in personal acts of compassion, but also in the structures of our common life. As the ELCA social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* reminds us, "Government is intended to serve God's purposes by … promoting the common good." Public programs like SNAP are one way we, together, seek to ensure that our neighbors do not go hungry.

That same teaching affirms that all people should have access to adequate food and just structures that support human flourishing. When access to food assistance collapses on this scale, it raises a moral question as well as a policy one.

Martin Luther put it starkly: "If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve." Hunger is not only a private burden. It is a public responsibility.

As Arizona leaders negotiate the state's FY2027 budget, we pray they will consider those who struggle to put food on the table. We urge them to allocate the resources necessary both to meet urgent need and to ensure that the Arizona Department of Economic Security can serve qualified recipients in a timely and effective way.

The question before us is not simply whether rules are being followed. It is whether our systems are serving the people they were created to serve.

The measure of any society is how it cares for those most in need. In Arizona, we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that our public life reflects that care.

No one should have to fight this hard for daily bread.

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