

Global Farm Challenge – “More than Food” Podcast Episode 3 with guest Franklin Ishida

Ryan: Hello and welcome to ELCA World Hunger’s “More than Food” podcast. This is a chance for us to dive into the stories and people that are part of the Global Farm Challenge and to hear how God is calling us to be active workers for justice in the world accompanying our neighbors and building a just world where all are fed. I’m Ryan

Brooke: and I’m Brooke...

Ryan: and together we are the Hunger Education team with ELCA World Hunger and the hosts of “More than Food.” In the Global Farm Challenge to go card game, players get the chance to experience the challenges and opportunities smallholder farmers face around the world. One of the stories featured in the game comes from a partner of ELCA World Hunger in Cambodia. In this episode, we will hear from Franklin Ishida about the real project and community behind this story. Welcome to the “More than Food” podcast, Franklin.

Franklin: Thank you, it’s a pleasure to be with you here.

Ryan: Before we get into the story for this episode, can you tell us a bit more about yourself?

Franklin: Yes I am the director for Asia and the Pacific for the ELCA and as such my job is to have a relationship on behalf of the ELCA with partners and companions around Asia.

Ryan: Your work gives you a really close perspective on the community featured in the story from Cambodia and ELCA World Hunger’s partner there, Life with Dignity. Can you tell us a bit more about Life with Dignity? What’s the relationship between them and ELCA World Hunger?

Franklin: Life with Dignity first started in Cambodia as the Cambodia project of The Lutheran World Federation. This came immediately after the devastating Khmer Rouge regime in which millions of people were killed and went hungry and the country was devastated. When The Lutheran World Federation decided to pull out of the country, they didn’t just pull out but they left behind a national organization which became Life with Dignity, to continue th work. The ELCA has been a partner with The Lutheran World Federation Cambodia from the beginning and continued on in supporting and working with Life with Dignity

Ryan: I’m learning a little bit here, too, so thank you. In the Global Farm Challenge To Go card game, the story from Life with Dignity focuses on a smallholder farmer raising pumpkins. This is part of the agricultural work of Life with Dignity’s larger work. Can you tell us more about this story and the project and who was involved in and what did they do?



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Franklin: Cambodia is a country where poverty still continues on in so many ways. It has been modernized, and we can go to big cities and see great wealth, if you go to the rural areas there are still farmers working the fields in traditional ways and the challenges are severalfold. One of which is the lack of good irrigation, in some cases, because there are some parts of the country where water is just not abundant. Many farmers have had their land taken away from them, and as the government has returned their land to these farmers, it often has been land that is not the best land for growing things. So, Life with Dignity has been working with communities to develop the land with these farmers as well as develop irrigation projects to help with better planting techniques and so forth. So this story is about how Life with Dignity is working with farming communities to grow better crops for themselves.

Because of the poverty and the lack of resources for developing themselves, many people leave the country to work elsewhere, and this has other problems associated with people going to other countries. They may be able to make some money, but it's not always sufficient to send home. Or, they get caught up in nefarious activities by traffickers who traffic them for labor and end up working in terrible conditions. So Life with Dignity, among other things, is working to keep people on the land and to build up their lives with their own skills and technology to support themselves. So, this growing of pumpkins is part of helping one family at a time to build up themselves in ways they can do best. It's a way to help even with the self-identity of people that they can do something. And starting with pumpkins is one way to do that.

Ryan: It sounds like this can have a pretty big impact on hunger and poverty in the community, by providing opportunities that prevent people from having to migrate. In what ways do you see it addressing hunger and poverty in the long-term?

Franklin: Well, growing pumpkins alone is not a solution to poverty or hunger. It's just one means, one start, at least. But it does bring extra income so these people

Where they can not only grow things for themselves, but they can sell their produce and develop a market for their food items, so they can have self-sustenance. As this grows, it helps one family at a time, and not just one family, but if other families see this happening for one, they will say, "I can do that, too," and so it helps the whole community.

Ryan: Work that happens in other communities can seem so far removed from us. Why do you think it's important for the church in the US, in the Caribbean, for the ELCA to be part of this work?

Franklin: That's a good question. Sometimes things that are far away are so far removed that we don't know about them or don't care about them, or we say we have problems ourselves too. And that's true. Poverty and hunger is an issue with in the United States and the North American continent at the same time. But by working with others, we can learn from them their own development of themselves and the dignity that it brings to them as they develop their own means, as well as supporting people, human beings, brothers and sisters in another part of the



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world. And maybe the feel-good thing, and it's certainly more than that, it really is just developing people, human beings. And they are part of the human family, which we are too. And it is a small way in which we can do a lot of work.

Ryan: Definitely, that work is so important right now, with rates of hunger and poverty on the rise worldwide for a lot of reasons. In thinking about the larger trend of hunger and poverty, thinking about the work that you are able to bear witness to and to accompany through your job, is there anything else you would like to share with our listeners?

Supporting one family, one community, many communities in another country, is not just about providing support. It is a way of learning about other people's lives, learning about the cultures, and histories of other places. Cambodia is one of those in which they have had a tragic history. But even the bigger history of Cambodia is amazing, when we look back at some of the ancient times there. They had agricultural resources hundreds of years ago that somehow, with various changes in the context, have been neglected and have not carried on in today's history. But we can learn about those, and it shows the wonders of God's world, both in terms of our histories, our cultures, and the peoples together. So, doing small things like working with Cambodia or working with another country or working with those in our own country is about getting to know people's lives. And a game like this can certainly make us aware of other's people's lives and how we intersect with them and become part of that same past.

Ryan: I love the way you framed that. When we are responding to hunger, when we are learning together through things like the Global Farm Challenge, it's not just learning about challenges and opportunities so that we can solve problems or take advantage of solutions. It's really about building community, being part of what God is doing to restore the world, learning from one another and really appreciating the diversity with which God creates and sustains. And that is a wonderful way of phrasing it. And having those relationships and working together is so critical now. It's why the focus for ELCA World Hunger this summer is on the Global Farm Challenge. If you haven't had a chance to play the Global Farm Challenge To-Go Card Game, you can order your own game set and find a lot more information to be part of this whole-church effort at elca.org/globalfarm.

Franklin, thank you for your time with us and for the work that you are doing.

Franklin: It has been a pleasure, thank you, Ryan, and an honor to do this. And we wish ourselves good luck in all this work.

Ryan: Thanks for joining us today. And remember to check out Elca.org/globalfarm for more episodes and info about the Global Farm Challenge.



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