

## Elected officials, clergy convened to discuss hunger

By JESSICA R. KEY @QueenCuriosity3 | Posted: Thursday, July 23, 2015 6:04 pm

Think back to the last meal you ate. Was it earlier in the day, a couple of hours ago...right now? For some, their last meal may have been yesterday, and in countries like Africa, people go days without nourishment.

Poverty is a primary reason why many people aren't able to access food and in some cases, quality food.

Bread for the World, a non-partisan, Christian citizens' movement in the U.S. to end hunger, recently held a forum to address issues of hunger and poverty.

"This forum was important because it is an urgent matter in our community. Hunger and poverty are the issues right in front of us and we need to deal with them. This isn't an issue that just needs to be discussed. Something needs to be done," said Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, Bread for the World's national senior associate for African-American and African church engagement and the forum's moderator.

During the forum, supporters such as the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, Community Resurrection Partnership and the Indianapolis Recorder Newspaper, came together at the Indiana State House Chamber and listened as members of the Indiana State Legislature and the faith community gave their ideas about hunger and poverty.

"People don't want to talk about things they can potentially face. Statistics show most of us are one to two paychecks away from poverty, hunger and homelessness. We must not run from these topics, but run toward them to address them," said Rev. David Greene, pastor of Purpose of Life church and a member of the Concerned Clergy of Greater Indianapolis.

Elder Anne Henning Byfield, presiding over the African Methodist Episcopal Church North District, echoed Greene's sentiments and said she believes hunger and poverty isn't a political issue, leadership issue or even a food issue – it's a compassion issue.

"It's selfishness. Because we are OK, we act as if it doesn't matter what's going on in the rest of the world," added Byfield.

Under the leadership of Rep. Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago, the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus served as the event host.

Local politics were also represented at the forum. Indianapolis mayoral candidates Chuck Brewer and Joe Hogsett gave remarks.

Hogsett shared a story on the realities of hunger in Indianapolis. He said last Christmas Day, he and his



Rev. Angelique Walker-Smith of Bread for the World served as the event's moderator

family volunteered at Kountry Kitchen restaurant's Christmas dinner give-away. He manned the phones and was disheartened by the volume of phone calls – calls from families who needed a hot meal.

“After a few hours, the food ran out, but the phone rang again, and again, and again,” said Hogsett. “We need to take action on this because the phone continues to ring.”

Brewer's message focused on how hunger ties into other societal ills.

“Think about how hard we work to provide a good educational system for students. If children are hungry or worried about their next meal, it doesn't matter. Think about public safety. Think about families who have difficulties making ends meet. Oftentimes, they make bad decisions that cause them to end up in the criminal justice system all because they were trying to support their families,” said Brewer.

During the forum, speakers shared statistics such as 14 percent of Hoosiers live below the poverty line and 12 percent struggle to put food on the table; 1 out of every 6 children are at risk for hunger; 150 billion pounds of food is wasted annually in the U.S.; and that 70 percent of kids qualify for free or reduced lunch.

They also wanted to point out that behind the numbers are real people and that there is no “poster child” for poverty and hunger – it could be anyone.

Although the realities of hunger are startling, speakers gave messages of hope.

“The bigger federal programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Women, Infant and Children program, free school lunch and summer feeding are remarkable. We're making progress in providing for all of the hungry people. We know from other countries that this is a fixable problem. We can make changes if we lean as a nation in the right direction,” said Rev. David Beckman, president of Bread for the World, which is headquartered in Washington D.C.

U.S. Rep. Susan Brooks, R-Indiana, said statistics prove strides have been made and assured attendees that Congress is currently working on this issue. She recently voted for the Fighting Hunger Incentives Act that gives tax incentives to restaurants, supermarkets and farms who contribute excess inventory to food pantries. She's also encouraged organizations to appropriately fund The Emergency Food Assistance Program, a federal program that provides food and administrative funds to states to supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people.

Also, Brooks and U.S. Rep. Andre Carson, D-Indiana, are co-sponsors of the Global Food Security Act, which requires the president to coordinate the development and implementation of a strategy to accomplish the objectives of promoting global food security, resilience, and nutrition consistent with national food security investment plans.