



'Robyn's story'
 Northampton, Mass.

This discussion guide is for the ELCA World Hunger video "Robyn's story." Find the video at ELCA.org/hunger/resources.

"We walk with people who are homeless when they are empowered to defend their own rights."
 – ELCA social message, "Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment" (1990)

INTRODUCTION TO SHARE

On a single night in January, 554,000 people experience homelessness in the United States.¹ While homelessness decreased significantly between 2010 and 2017—dropping by 14 percent—there has been a slow but steady increase since then, with about a 1 percent increase between 2016 and 2017. While losing access to safe, stable housing can happen to anyone, some groups in the United States are at higher risk of homelessness for a variety of reasons.

Military veterans, in particular, are at a slightly higher risk of homelessness. Recent estimates suggest that while less than 10 percent of the U.S. population are veterans, more than 12 percent of homeless adults are veterans.² In addition to the same challenges in finding affordable housing and sustainable jobs as other Americans, many veterans also face dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, adapting to civilian life and finding support networks to help them. These factors can make it difficult for veterans to find safe, stable housing.³

Robyn is one of many veterans whose life has been changed by homelessness. Without support for his mental health care and other needs, Robyn faced a lot of obstacles to finding employment and housing. However, through Cathedral in the Night, a ministry in Northampton, Mass., Robyn has been able to find a supportive community that has helped him regain self-confidence and faith.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

"Think-pair-share" is a model that emphasizes collaborative learning. Participants begin by (1) **thinking** independently about the topic or question, then they (2) **pair** with another person to discuss and finally they (3) **share** out loud with the entire group. Use this technique throughout the discussion guide to help generate multiple perspectives and deeper analysis.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

THINK: Independently think to yourself.

PAIR: Share with someone next to you.

SHARE: Share your ideas and thoughts out loud with the group.

¹ The U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, <http://www.hudexchange.info/>.

² See Tsai, Jack, and Robert A. Rosenheck. "Risk Factors for Homelessness Among US Veterans." *Epidemiologic reviews* 37 (2015): 177–195.

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/veteran-homelessness/>.



WATCH VIDEO: Length is 2 minutes, 6 seconds

VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the think-pair-share model to answer the questions below.

1. What are some of the causes of homelessness? What obstacles did Robyn recall facing when he returned home? How does Robyn's experience connect with other causes of homelessness?
2. Robyn states at the end of the video "I was in the darkness and found my way to the light, and I didn't do it alone." What effects could homelessness have on someone, both physically and psychologically?
3. What does this tell us about the impact that hospitality and support through the church can have on someone's physical, mental and emotional state?

THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

Read the following selection from the ELCA social message on homelessness ([ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness](https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness)).

Christians walk with the homeless when they join with others to voice deep concern about homelessness, ask hard questions, and advocate policies that seek to provide job training, employment opportunities, housing, education, health care, and support for the homeless. While as Christians we may differ in our views on what policies will be most effective, we ought not overlook the need for new and sustained initiatives by government, businesses, and non-profit organizations, including church groups. Church leaders are challenged to help create the public will to eliminate homelessness. What do you and your congregation do to advocate for those without shelter?

Equally important are the will and wisdom to keep even more children, women, and men from becoming homeless. Walking with people who are homeless includes the responsibility to prevent homelessness. We are called to be aware of and concerned for people in our midst who are vulnerable to losing their housing. Neighborhood and community initiatives are needed. Effective political and economic policies to assure housing, employment, literacy, and health services for low-income families can help people who are potentially homeless.

Let the church pray for a renewal of commitment to walk more closely with and among people who are homeless and who are at risk of becoming homeless in their daily struggles, sufferings, and hopes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the think-pair-share model to answer the questions below.

1. The passage opens with the statement "Christians walk with the homeless." What might this look like? How is Cathedral in the Night using its resources to walk with people facing homelessness?
2. What resources exist in your community that could allow you to "walk with" those experiencing homelessness? In what ways does your congregation or synod already accompany neighbors who are experiencing homelessness?
3. This text also states that we are "called to be aware of and concerned for people in our midst." What does this quote mean to you and your role in the church? What difference can awareness and concern make in our communities and congregations?



CONCLUSION

The passage above concludes, “Let the church pray for a renewal of commitment to walk more closely with and among people who are homeless and who are at risk of becoming homeless in their daily struggles, sufferings, and hopes.” While “ending hunger” or “preventing homelessness” may seem like daunting tasks, there are small things we can do everyday as siblings in Christ to accompany those who are in need around us. Below is an activity to help enliven this commitment

Directions:

1. Think to yourself about one thing you could do in your community, at your job, in your family etc. to accompany those experiencing homelessness around you.
2. Once you have a thought, write it on a piece of paper (do not include your name), crumple the paper and put it in the center of your group.
3. Next, go retrieve one that was not yours. You will then read these aloud as a group.
4. Once complete, take time to reflect on what those around you have written as ways that they can renew their commitment to walk more closely with and among those experiencing homelessness.
5. Discuss: What stood out to you about what those around you have written? Why is it our responsibility as Christians to walk with those experiencing homelessness in our communities?

See the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, hudexchange.info, for detailed statistics about homelessness in your community.

WHAT'S NEXT?

ELCA World Hunger is the ELCA's ministry for accompanying congregations and their partners in drawing on their strengths to address concerns in communities. Cathedral in the Night is one of many ministries supported in part by ELCA World Hunger, because of its goal of strengthening its community through an integrative project inviting anyone to enjoy a meal and celebrate together.

Ministries like Cathedral in the Night are supported through ELCA World Hunger's Domestic Hunger Grants. The grants support congregations and partners addressing local issues including, but not limited to, food security, housing, clean water and human rights. To learn more about ELCA World Hunger and the Domestic Hunger Grants, visit ELCA.org/domestichungergrants.