



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Human Footprint, 2008 (90 minutes)

Human Footprint explores the consumption patterns of an average person in the U.S. from birth to 77 years 9 months in a variety of interesting visual ways. The filmmakers follow two typical people in the U.S. through each stage of life, focus on a sample of consumer products relevant to that life stage, deconstruct some of the products into their raw material components, and build models that represent the average per-person lifetime footprint. The quantities of goods that are consumed by the average U.S. citizen in a lifetime are shocking. A pile of 3,796 diapers on the front lawn (made from 1,898 pints of crude oil and the pulp of 4.5 trees), 19,826 eggs dumped from a truck, 5,054 newspapers (made from 43 trees), and 28,433 rubber ducks lined up to represent the average number of showers taken (using 700,000 gallons of water over a lifetime).

Questions for Reflection

These questions are intended to be open-ended with no right answer. Allow for thoughtful silences and encourage friendly dialogue. The questions are in no particular order; select those that seem most relevant to the group (feel free to add your own, too!).

- 1) What component of our “footprint” surprised you the most? Remembering that these numbers are statistical averages (likely representing a broad range), were there some components that you felt were over- or under-stated given your personal experience?
- 2) The film states that the carbon footprint of the average U.S. citizen exceeds 20 tons—5 times more than the average French citizen and 20 times more than the average Indian citizen. Also, the average person in the U.S. will be responsible for more carbon emissions during their *first year* than the average person in Tanzania in a *lifetime*. What are your reactions to those statistics?
- 3) The film states that we are each responsible for 64 tons of landfill waste over our lifetime. What lifestyle choices are responsible for some of this amount? What might we do to make different choices?
- 4) *Human Footprint* calls the people it is examining “Americans” while this study guide refers to “U.S. citizens” or “people in the U.S.” Are these terms synonymous? What statement does the use/misuse of these terms make about how we feel about our position in the world? Do you think this plays a role in the inequities of our resource consumption?
- 5) The film shows how much we consume, but it doesn’t mention how much we waste. Are waste and consumption the same? What does our faith say about waste? How might your faith influence your patterns of consumption?
- 6) The film offers few solutions to reduce your footprint. What actions can you think of? What challenges do we face in trying to do this?

- 7) How could your church work together to reduce the consumption patterns of its members? How else could this film challenge your church to take action?
- 8) The film discusses Christmas spending from a consumption viewpoint. How might we, as Lutherans, change our Christmas spending and traditions to more responsibly celebrate Christ's birth?

Other Resources

If this film and the issues of consumption and consumerism grabbed your interest, you may want to check out the following resources:

ELCA, *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice* (ELCA Social Statement, adopted August 28, 1993). www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Environment.aspx.

ELCA World Hunger, "Living Simply with God: A 40-Day Hunger Calendar." Available online at www.elca.org/hunger/simplicitycalendar.

Anne Basye, *Sustaining Simplicity: A Journal* (Chicago: ELCA, 2007). Available from Augsburg Fortress.

William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).

National Geographic Education and Children's Programs, *Human Footprint Educational Resource* (National Geographic Society, 2008). Available online at www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/14/g68/HumanFootprint.pdf.

Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff* (Free Range Studio, 2007). Available online at www.storyofstuff.com.

Freecycle. The Freecycle Network™ is a grassroots group of volunteers who give and receive items to other local community members for free, promoting reuse by keeping usable items out of landfills. Membership is free. www.freecycle.org.

The DVD *Trashed* (Bill Kirkos, 2007). Learn more at www.trashedmovie.com.

Peter Menzel, Charles C. Mann, and Paul Kennedy (intro.); *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* (Sierra Club Books, 1995).

Plan a trip to your local landfill! Appointments can generally be made to visit your local landfill or recycling center. Contact your local municipal government to find contact information for your waste management company.