

Just Harvest



Creative Resources for Your Church's Hunger Emphasis

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Sacred Seasons:

Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

These unique worship resource packets are available for the liturgical year, four packets a year for \$150 (\$165 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$60 (\$75 outside of the US).

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Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

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Material in this packet is for the use of the purchasing faith community to enhance worship and increase awareness in economic justice issues.

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Just Harvest

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A Word About This Packet

Our Hunger Emphasis theme this year comes from issues of sustainable development and environmental justice that affect hungry people profoundly at home and around the world. The cover art, as well as several other pieces of art, is by Sylvia Stockton (see page 3). See page 3 also for more about food and spiritual issues.

These issues are expressed in the liturgy "Just Harvest," in the children's drama "Exodus 16: bread from Heaven" by Katherine Ramirez, and in the sermon "Holy Manna" by Doug Donley. We have tried to incorporate these themes with the usual hunger-awareness themes in a fresh way for congregations who are familiar with hunger issues. If your congregation is new to the experience of hunger emphasis, we recommend "Developing a Heart for the Hungry: A Hunger Emphasis for Churches," available for \$30 at www.seedspublishers.org.

As always, the material in this packet is for your congregation to use freely. We have tried to pull together creative and inspiring resources that you can use to raise awareness of issues surrounding economic justice and food security (especially from a biblical perspective) in your congregation. We endeavored to choose a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams. May it be so.

Gratefully,
The Staff and Council of Stewards

Corn and a Just Harvest

We have chosen to use corn images in several places in this packet, for several reasons. Corn is the grain that serves as the main staple for people in Latin American and South American countries, as well as many others. It was the source of bread for North American indigenous groups for centuries. Pioneers and rural families relied on cornbreads during the settling of this continent by Europeans.

More recently, the use of corn to feed beef cattle, to make fuel, and to make the syrup that sweetens a myriad of food products is at the center of political debate in the US and elsewhere.

But there is also a spiritual side to our choice. Many, if not most, tribal cultures over the millennia have designated the source of their food as sacred. One sees the depiction of corn plants (and corn women) among US tribal communities in the Southeast and Southwest—as well as others.

The Cherokee (or Ani-Yunwiya, as they called themselves) have long deemed corn to be sacred. Their legend about the coming of corn to the earth involves a heavenly being who lived among the people as a grandmother.

At her death, her grandson cleared a field and buried her there, according to her instructions, and corn plants grew where her body had been. Though she no longer lived among them as she once had, she would now be with them forever as the corn plant, to provide food for them. (For one version of this legend, go to www.thebearbyte.com/Stories/ComCorn.htm.)

Sylvia Stockton, an artist who celebrates her Oklahoma heritage and her Cherokee ancestry, is enchanted with art that depicts the corn plant. She has given us a number of sketches that were inspired by sculptures, tiles, and other corn art she has collected over the years. Our cover art is one of those sketches.

We felt that the use of corn was compatible with our theme, “Just Harvest.” We chose this theme to celebrate the time of harvest and plenty—which is when many congregations observe their hunger emphases—and to point out that the God of Hebrew and Christian scriptures calls us to share

out of our abundance. We also chose it to highlight the necessity for legislation in our lands that ensures that the harvest will be just. The Bread for the World Offering of Letters this year centers around the US Farm Bill, and how it affects hungry people in this country and all over the world. As this packet is mailed, the Senate will be deliberating on their version of this bill—which, once passed, will be US law for five years. For more information about this, see the flyer at the back of this packet.

—Katie Cook

The Food God

God decided to visit the earth, so he sent an angel to survey the situation prior to his visit.

The angel returned with his report. “Most of them lack food,” he said, “and most of them lack employment.”

God said, “Then I shall become incarnate in the form of food for the hungry and work for the unemployed.”

—Anthony de Mello,
SJ, *The Song of the Bird*



art by Sylvia Stockton

bulletin art

**God spoke: "Let us
make human beings in
our image,**

make them reflect our nature
So they can be responsible for
the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air,
the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself...



Then God said, "I've given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant
on Earth
And every kind of
fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the
ground for food."
And there it was.

God looked on everything God had
made; it was so good, so very good!

Genesis 1: 26,29-31a
The Message

Just Harvest

a liturgy

by Katie Cook

Note: We suggest that you arrange corn, squash, pumpkins, and other harvest-time foods on the altar table, and use corn tortillas or corn bread for communion bread. Another idea would be to include those things in a processional. If you regularly have a processional in your weekly service, assign people of all ages to follow the choir and ministers, carrying different fruits of your local harvest. You might also incorporate the bringing of groceries for the food pantries or soup kitchens you support. Immediately after the Call to Worship, begin your processional. It is possible that all of the congregation would be able to participate in bringing staple foods and produce to the front of the worship area.

Call to Worship

FIRST READER: This is what the Lord says, Bring the full tithe in the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house.

SECOND READER: Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour down for you blessings beyond your wildest dreams.

FIRST READER: I will protect the produce of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not be barren.

SECOND READER: Then you will experience what it means to be a people of grace.

—adapted from Malachi 3:10-12

Procession

Congregation processes with fruits of the harvest and groceries for local agencies.

Processional Hymn

“Praise God for the Harvest”

The Worshiping Church #373

Lyrics: Brian Wren

Music: Traditional Welsh Melody

Tune: ST. DENIO

Invocation

This should be given with members of the procession standing around the altar and front area with their gifts.

God of provision, come into our midst and open our hearts to your gifts. Speak to us through all of these leaders and



art by Sylvia Stockton

listeners, and open our ears to your word. Open our hands, that we may share out of our abundance. Take these fruits of our harvest and multiply them, so that all of your children will be fed.

Participants go to their seats.

Meditation of Contemplation

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthier child, a vegetable garden, or an improved social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Reading from the Hebrew Scripture

Exodus 16:1-31

Reading from the Epistles

Galatians 6:7-10

Hymn

“Join Hearts and Voices”

A Singing Faith

Lyrics: Jane Parker Huber

Music: John Hatton

Tune: DUKE STREET

Readings from the Gospel

John 6:51-58

John 21:1-19

Suggested theatre reading for youth:

“What Jesus Didn’t Say”

see page 7

Sermon

“Holy Manna” by Doug Donley

see page 8

Communion Meditation

Just as God is worshiped when the hungry are fed and the thirsty given something to drink, so is God praised and

glorified in this meal for which we gather as the Body of Christ. For it is in this meal that we proclaim, through the simplicity of bread and wine, that Christ is among us, filling us not only with food, but with hope and peace and joy. Therefore, let us draw near to the table of our Lord and to one another.

—Ashlee Wiest-Laird

The Bread

CELEBRANT: On the night before his death, Jesus was with his followers at supper. He took the bread that was on the table and gave thanks for it. When he had done this, he broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take and eat.”

After his death, and after he appeared to various of his followers, Jesus appeared to them one last time in Galilee. He caused them to catch many fish in the sea of Tiberius, and when he had made breakfast for them on the beach, he said, “Come and eat.”

The bread is distributed.

The Cup

CELEBRANT: After his last supper with his disciples, Jesus took a cup of wine from the table; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, “Drink this, all of you.” He took what was on the table, and gave it to them to drink. In drinking from this cup, we bind ourselves together in a common hope that we will be healed in our deepest hearts, and that we will be the instruments of healing in the world.

The cup is distributed.

CELEBRANT: In this Eucharist, we celebrate the generosity of our God, who opens the windows of heaven, and rains down bread upon us. O God, we give thanks to you, for the goodness and love we know in the provision you have made. Bless this bread to be the manna that sustains us. Bless this cup to be the drink of new life. Bless these elements to be a sacred covenant that nothing can sever. Help us to faithfully receive this food and drink. May it strengthen us to follow Christ and to become your manna for a hungry world.

Hymn

Dear Lord, Give Bread (Señor, dé Pan)

Banquet of Praise #136

Lyrics: Spanish Table Grace

Music: Nancy J. Schweers, Gary P. Davison, 1960

Tune: SEÑOR, DÉ PAN

Benediction

O God of mercy and love, we pray that having eaten this meal of spiritual food, we would affirm our kinship with those who are hungry. We pray that we would be empowered to rise from this table, walk out into the world, transforming our worship here into worshipful deeds of mercy and compassion today and everyday. Grant us grace that it might be so. Amen.

And now, go from this place, continuing to worship God in spirit and in truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—Ashlee Wiest-Laird

What Jesus Didn't Say a reading for youth and others

by Katie Cook

FIRST READER: Jesus didn't say to Peter, “Do you love me? Then go out and build magnificent structures with arches and columns and gold-leaf frescoes.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

SECOND READER: He didn't say, “Go and organize institutions in which the leaders will have more power and wealth than anyone else on earth.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

THIRD READER: He didn't say, “Take the things I've said and done and put them in a book that you will raise up as an object of worship.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

FIRST READER: He didn't say, “Put my words in red ink and then do everything you can to forget them or discount them.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

SECOND READER: He didn't say, “Work out a system of belief whereby to exclude and punish anyone who disagrees with you.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

THIRD READER: He didn't say, “Become as prosperous as you can, dress as sumptuously as you can, and show how you are blessed by your possessions.”

ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

And then he said, “Follow me.”

—based on John 21

Holy Manna

a sermon by Douglas M. Donley

John 6:51-58

Holy Manna is the stuff of revelation.

Holy Manna is the grace we notice when the world throws a wrench at everything we know and hold dear.

Holy Manna is the life-force, the sustenance for the journey ahead.

Holy Manna is all around us if we just pay attention.

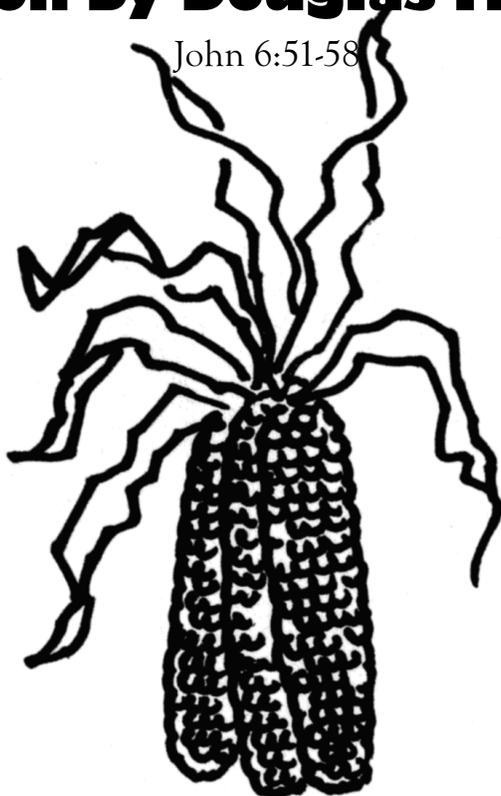
Even when we are in the wilderness of our discontent, even when we are perplexed by wars and rumors of wars, even when we are faced with unemployment, even when we are mired with depression or some other debilitating condition, the good news is that Holy Manna is around, if we just look closely enough.

Okay, so what's manna, anyway? You will remember that when the Hebrew people fled from slavery in Egypt that they fled into the desert. They had some food with them, we would suppose, but not 40 years worth. The people started longing for the fleshpots of Egypt. They grumbled to Moses and Aaron and Miriam: "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die?"

But God provided for them a bread-like substance called *manna*. It was there like dew upon the ground every morning and had to be used quickly before it went sour. The people were skeptical at first. The word *manna* actually means, "What is this stuff?" But they ate it and were sustained for their journey.

Whenever people have forgotten God's power or presence, they were reminded of the manna in the wilderness.

I used to go backpacking with our church youth group. When I was about 13, I went



art by Sylvia Stockton

on my first backpacking trip. There were six youth and one adult leader. We went to West Virginia and hiked up to Spruce Knob, the highest point in West Virginia, all 4,200 feet of it. It doesn't sound like so much right now, but back then, we were doing something out of our comfort zone.

We even got a bit crabby. No pleas from the leader for us to enjoy the views and stay in the moment could cheer us up. That was until we came to a clearing and found the manna. This was in the form of tiny wild blueberries.

We feasted on this little gift from God. We got enough energy from the manna to make it to the top of the mountain. We were sure to take our share on the way back

down so we could have blueberry oatmeal, blueberry pancakes and even blueberry no-bake cheesecake. Yum.

A few years later we got a bit more adventurous. When I was 17, we went to Utah and hiked from the source of the Virgin River through a canyon known as "The Narrows," a chasm where the shallow river cut a 500-foot-deep canyon. Our plan was to spend two-and-a-half days hiking the 27 miles into the beautiful canyon and end up at Zion National Park.

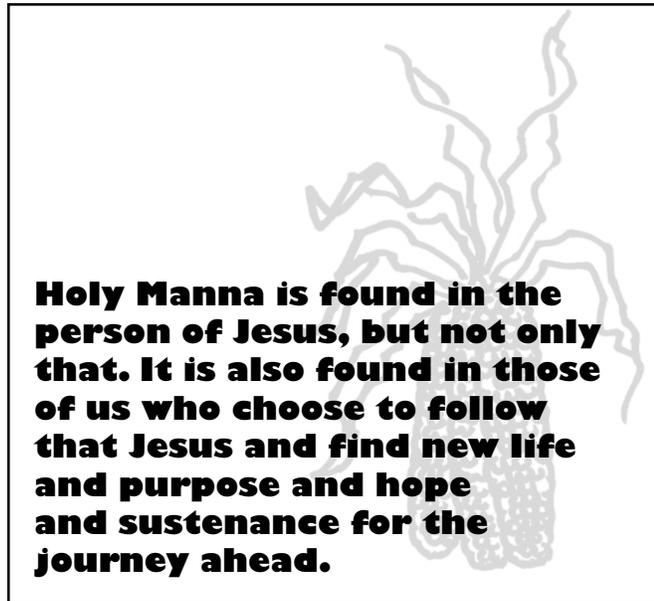
We began our trip and followed the trails. The problem was the trails were animal trails. You know as well as I do that animal trails often peter out. When they did, we would find ourselves bushwhacking through oak shrubs as we looked for the next trail that we prayed would last a bit longer. After the first day, we had had traveled about three miles. We started conserving food, realizing that we would be out a bit longer than we had planned. Luckily, a couple of fisher-folk took pity

But if we think good religion is only about taking communion, then we have lost its central core. We cannot stop with the eating and drinking of the communion elements.

on us and gave us a few trout that first night—which we happily cooked up, in pancake batter.

On the fourth day, we finally arrived in the narrows, slowed by hunger and making grumpy allegations of blame for the delay. We stowed our boots in our backpacks and put on sneakers so we could wade back and forth across the Virgin River. Our dinner that night was a couple of squirts of jelly from a tube.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, we saw people for the first time. Our pace tripled. We knew we were close to



the end. We surrounded them, told them of our plight and asked them how much farther we had to go until we reached civilization. They gave the sixteen of us the rest of their bag of Oreo cookies. It was like manna from heaven. We each had a crumb or two and it was the best food we had ever tasted.

We were hungry, but we were not starving—not really. But in our own dramatic eyes, we had gone through the worst of times and had been surprised by grace in that bag of Oreo cookies.

We need manna to get us through the really rough times. Think of the manna that gets you through your desert experiences. The manna for me in the wilderness ends up being music, or good friends, or good food. It can even be a revelation from a book that helps me see the world in a new way.

In today's scripture, the writer of John has Jesus reinterpret the Exodus story by personalizing it—saying that Jesus is the Holy Manna, the bread of life. Much of our communion hymns and liturgies reflect this image. But if we think good religion is only about taking communion, then we have lost its central core. We cannot stop with the eating and drinking of the communion elements. While this might well be a helpful starting point, it cannot be the

be-all and end-all. It can be seen as a cop-out for the real work of the community of faith.

It's not about the meal. It's about the journey. The point is not whether or not we take communion. The point is that we are to be the people of God doing good work.

We are to be the Holy Manna. We are to be the ones offering hope to the world. We are to be the ones offering alternatives to the war-making, easy-answered syrupy spirituality that makes none of us healthier. We are to be the Holy Manna.

How can we be so audacious to be Holy Manna? Each of us is a child of God. Each of us is a reflection of God. Therefore, each of our lives is holy.

You don't feel all that holy, you may say? I can understand that. There are plenty of days I feel less than holy. My family can attest to the times when I am certainly less than godly. But the reality is that we are all children of God and whether we like it or not each one of our lives is holy.

So we have the "holy" part down.

What about the "manna" part?

Well, manna is the part where we bring hope to people.

It's the part where we show people how to live.

It's where we befriend the friendless.

It's where we speak the truth in love.

It's when we hold each other close.

It's when we help resettle a family.

It's when we receive from that family some hope and some deeper sense of faith.

It's when we utilize our worldly goods in such a way that we can help people have a place to live, a school to attend, a place to call holy.

The challenge is for us to find ways that we can be manna for a world and people in need. If we can find ways to do that, we will be doing holy work.

Holy Manna these days represents true community. It represents the hope of the world. It is found in the person of Jesus, but not only that. It is also found in those of us who choose to follow that Jesus and find new life and purpose and hope and sustenance for the journey ahead.

I think of the many people who have traveled to New Orleans to offer some support and help in the years after the hurricane. They are an example of Holy Manna.

I think of the people who take to the streets to protest warfare. They are Holy Manna.

I think of the plethora of volunteers that we have at our church who help out with Loaves and Fishes, serving meals to the hungry people of Minneapolis; the people who deliver food in the Meals on Wheels program; the good people of our church who have helped refugee families to resettle here in the Twin Cities. You are examples of Holy Manna.

I think of those of us who demonstrate and advocate for rights for all people. You are examples of Holy Manna.

Sisters and brothers, this world doesn't need so much people declaring that they are Christians as much as we need people who are willing to be Holy Manna.

So recognize your holiness. Recognize that we have the opportunity to spread that holiness like manna in the wilderness.

We need people who will show God's love to a world in need.

We need people who will be beacons of light in a world where light is a rare commodity.

We need people who will offer friendship in the face of loneliness. We need people who will offer grace to a people in deep need.

We need some Holy Manna.

This past weekend, I gathered with eight other people to help one of our members move into a new apartment. She was so thankful for all of the help. It was like each person was a portion of Holy Manna.

One of our other members moved a week or so ago, but the move was scheduled when her mother was in the hospital in another state. Her friends took care of the move so she could be with her mother. They were certainly Holy Manna for her and her mother.

When we have that Holy Manna all around us, then we are on the way to being much more healthy, hopeful—and even holy.

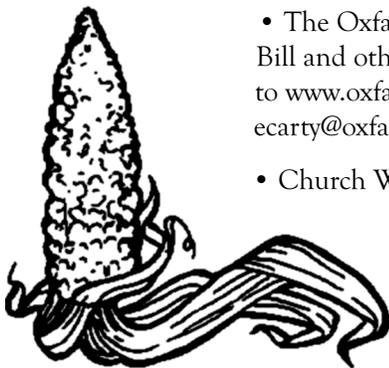
So recognize your holiness. Recognize that we have the opportunity to spread that holiness like manna in the wilderness. Being Holy Manna will not only please God, it will shock people and it will bring rays of hope to a world and a people in need.

I can think of nothing more Christian than that.

—Doug Donley is a pastor in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Sources on Food and Faith

- Melinda Hemmelgarn describes herself as an an investigative advocate with a mission to help people “think beyond their plates.” She is a former Food and Society Fellow and a registered dietitian. She has written an article, “Sustainability Links Food, Faith” that speaks to the issues of food and faith. To read the article, go to www.columbiatribune.com/2007/May/20070523Life014.asp.
- Kathleen Wood [kathleen@cg-strategies.com] is working—in partnership with the five mainline Protestant denominations, particularly the Lutheran Church—to create resources on faith and sustainability. The most recent campaign, *A Fair Harvest*, includes a bulletin insert, postcard campaign materials for members of the Senate and prayers written by farmers.
- Chris Bedford [chrisbedford@charter.net; www.chrisbedfordfilms.com] has produced a film that has been used in a number of churches. *What Will We Eat?* is about the struggle for local, healthy food. He has made more than 100 films and won 36 awards. One of his films, *The Next Industrial Revolution*, sold in 70 countries, is at the heart of a global effort to build an ecologically sustainable economy.
- The Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth division has produced worship resources, including an Earth Sunday service. Go to uuministryforearth.org for more information.



• The Oxfam America web site includes resources about the US Farm Bill and other agricultural sustainability issues. For more information, go to www.oxfamamerica.org or email Liz Carty at ecarty@oxfamamerica.org.

• Church World Service, Advocate Health Care, and the Presbyterian Hunger Program have produced a curriculum called *Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table*, produced by Church World Service. For more information, go to www.pcusa.org/hunger.



Who Is My Neighbor?

by Rydell Harrison

Three days after I moved into my office last summer, I brought my sons to the office to show them where Daddy worked. My office was “messy,” the children’s rooms were “awesome,” the organ was “too loud,” and the playground was “...whoa!”

I was so busy melting in the heat and watching them ramble up and down the sliding board that I didn’t notice the stranger walking across the empty parking lot. He excused himself and asked if the church was Baptist. I was slow to answer, not ready for a fundamental or theological discussion, but I answered, “Yes.”



I was so busy melting in the heat and watching the kids ramble up and down the sliding board, that I didn’t notice the stranger walking across the empty parking lot.

He told me that he wanted to be baptized. My eyes immediately darted to the hose on the side of the building. Then I remembered that this was a Baptist church. I apparently had a perplexed look on my face because this was nothing like my baptism at Somerset Baptist Church in New Jersey. There was no soft music playing. There was no class that told me what baptism was. There were no friends who had already been baptized, and me waiting for my turn. This guy was for real.

He told me that he was homeless. He had been in Greensboro for three weeks. During that time, he was staying at the shelter and enjoying the hospitality of the Greensboro Urban Ministry. While reading his Bible earlier that day, he’d decided that baptism was for him.

He moved from Wisconsin to Greensboro to help his mother, and that turned out to be a “bad situation.” He didn’t seem very comfortable talking about that, so I didn’t push.

I paused for a minute, taking everything in, and thinking about how I had just wanted to “show off” my cool church and my messy office to the kids. “So...how about that baptism?” he asked.

Not knowing what to do, I called Michael [the pastor] who was on vacation. Daniel and Marnie [other ministers at the church] were also out of town so I invited the stranger to church on Sunday. We worked out the logistics, and he was excited about church. He turned to leave, and I thought about how I was NOT living out the Gospel in this situation.

I called to him and said, “Me and the boys were just about to go and get pizza. Would you like to come?” He smiled and told me how he didn’t have any money. I told him not to worry since CiCi’s Pizza is pretty cheap.

Then I thought, “Why am I about to let this guy get into my car? There was no question that I could defend myself if I needed to, so I felt safe (the gospel makes you loving, not dumb), but a moving vehicle, with my kids in it, is a different story.

“Change of plans!” I said. “Let’s walk to Yum Yums!” So pizza became hot dogs.

As we ate together, we talked about life—my life and his. We realized that we weren’t that different. We both had goals and dreams. He had been a student at the University of Wisconsin before coming to North Carolina to study education. We talked for two hours.

He came to church for the next two Sundays. The second time he came was on Father’s Day. I took him to have dinner with my children and my parents. He helped my mom make the salad. He sat at the table with us and passed the bread and the potatoes. We held hands as we offered thanks for the food.

We talked about politics, education, gas prices, and of course why MTV and BET are ruining today’s youth (my father’s favorite topic). We talked about life in Wisconsin and how we all wanted to visit him there when he returned.

He was my brother. That evening after dinner, he hugged the family and I drove him back to the shelter for the last time. He disappeared.

In Luke's Gospel, there are two travelers on the road to Emmaus, minding their own business. (Luke 24:13) Like me, they had heard a sermon somewhere in their past about the importance of treating your neighbor well. (Luke 10:25-37) A stranger appeared and they dined together. After the meal, the stranger opened the scriptures to the travelers and their hearts burned within them, and suddenly the stranger disappeared.

On Father's Day, as I drove home with my children, Xavier pointed to the shelter and asked, "Daddy, does he live there?" I told him that he did and I tried to explain the plight of homelessness and poverty to an eight-year-old boy. He asked if we could help, and the scriptures became clear to me, and my heart burned within me. "We MUST help!" I told him.

To be like Christ is to be on the side of the afflicted.

To be like Christ is to do justice and to show love.
To be like Christ is to dine with and show hospitality to our neighbors!

This is the Gospel. This is the lesson our stranger taught us.

—Rydell Harrison is the Minister of Music and Worship at College Park Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. This article is reprinted from Collage, the church's newsletter.

Then I thought...why am I about to let this guy get into my car? There was no question that I could defend myself if I needed to, so I felt safe, but a moving vehicle with my kids in it is a different story.



It is tragic how few people ever "possess their souls" before they die. "Nothing is more rare in any man," says Emerson, "than an act of his own." It is quite true.

Most people are other people.

Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation. Christ was not merely the supreme individualist, but he was the first in History.

People have tried to make him out an ordinary Philanthropist...or rank him as an Altruist... but he was really neither one nor the other...

When [Christ says] "Forgive your enemies," it is not for the sake of the enemy, but for one's own sake that he says so, and because Love is more beautiful than Hate.

In his entreaty to the young man whom, when he looked on, he loved, "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor," it is not of the state of the poor that he is thinking, but of the soul of the young man, the lovely soul that wealth was marring.

—Oscar Wilde,
"De Profundis"

Quotes, Poems, & Pithy Sayings

There must be a thousand and one ways to remove poverty from the earth. We may or may not know some of those ways already. Obviously there are many more ways yet to be designed. When we shall find them, how many of them we shall find, how quickly we find them, will depend on how eager we are to find them.

—Muhammad Yunus, founder the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Nobel Peace laureate

Hunger is as much a lack of power as a lack of food. When the poor have a voice in the decisions that affect them, hunger can be eliminated.

—Ken Regal

Truths about society can be discovered only if one takes sides. You must stand somewhere in order to see social reality, and where you stand will determine what you see and how you see it. The poor, I suggest, see a different social world than the rich—and so do those who think, whether consciously or not, from the vantage point of the poor or the rich.

—Michael Harrington

Avarice, greed, concupiscence and so forth are all based on the mathematical truism that the more you get, the more you have. The remark of Jesus that it is more blessed to give than to receive is based on the human truth that the more you give away in love, the more you are. It is not just for the sake of other people that Jesus tells us to give rather than get, but for our own sakes too.

—Frederick Buechner

I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one's eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips, and hearts.

—Dom Helder Camara

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.

Beaten yet today—O Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,

The poorest worker bartered through the years.

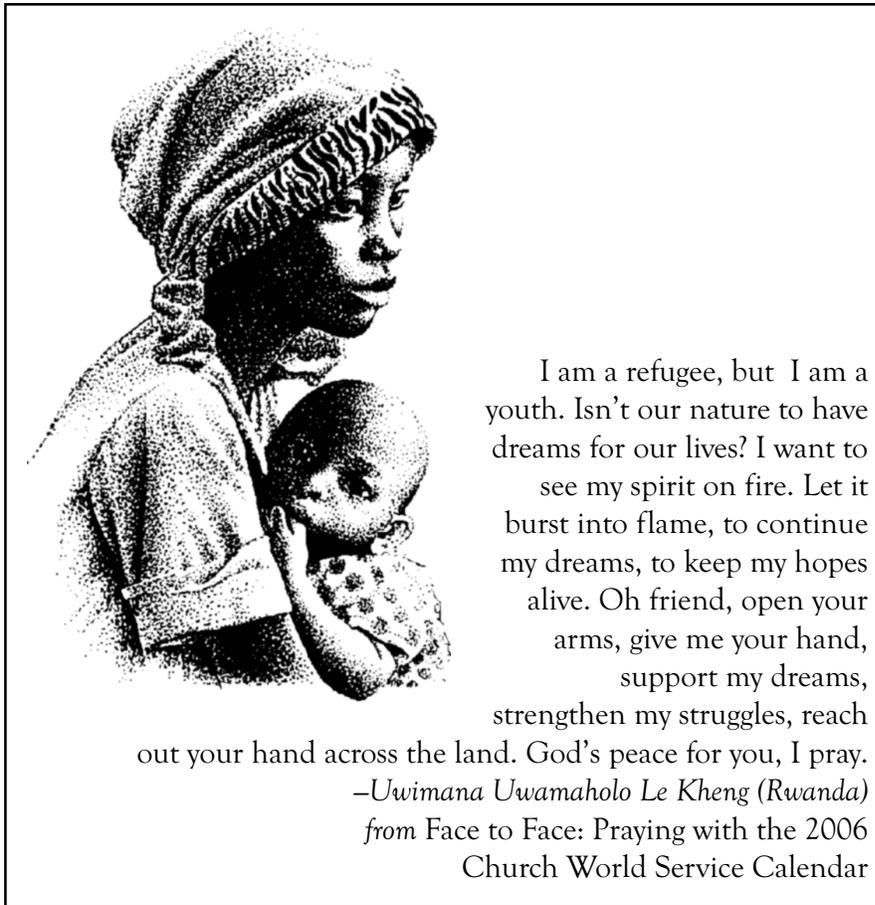
—Langston Hughes

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them better.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Compassion is not a sloppy sentimental feeling for people. It is an absolutely practical belief that regardless of a person's background, ability, or ability to pay, he should be provided with the best that society has to offer.

—Neil Kinnock



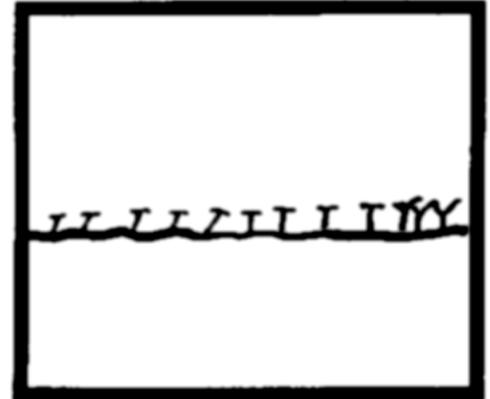
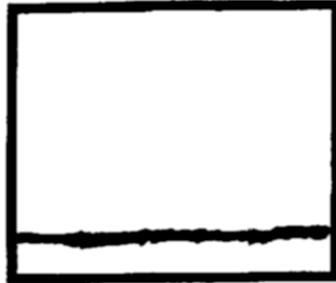
I am a refugee, but I am a youth. Isn't our nature to have dreams for our lives? I want to see my spirit on fire. Let it burst into flame, to continue my dreams, to keep my hopes alive. Oh friend, open your arms, give me your hand, support my dreams, strengthen my struggles, reach out your hand across the land. God's peace for you, I pray.

—Uwimana Uwamaholo Le Kheng (Rwanda)
from Face to Face: Praying with the 2006
Church World Service Calendar

The Sabbath of the Land

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your un-pruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food....

Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.
—Leviticus 25:1-7, 24



The art on this page is from a book of drawings done by Adam Matheson of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (then of Oshawa, Ontario), in 1999. The book is entitled "My Jubilee Book." Adam was nine years old and in the fourth grade. These drawings were featured in Sacred Seasons, Pentecost/Ordinary Time 1999 ("Proclaim Jubilee.")

Exodus 16: Bread from Heaven

a drama project for children

by Katherine Ramirez

Cast:

Narrator

The Lord

Moses

Aaron

Israelites



Note: Encourage the children to improvise as they go through the play. The Israelites, who include everyone except the four speakers, should dramatize what the narrator is saying and react to Moses' words. Use your imagination and that of the children in getting the props and costumes ready. You may want to continue this project over several weeks if you do it during Sunday school or another weekly program—or you could conduct the activity during a day camp.

Possible Props: Sugar Frosted Flakes (representing manna) to scatter around (and some to eat), shepherd's staffs, tunics and loose strips of cloth for costumes, sandals, costume paint for beards, cotton and posterboard to make the cloud, baskets for gathering the manna.

Narrator: Fifteen days after leaving Egypt, the entire congregation of Israelites came to the wilderness of Sin, which lies between Elim and Sinai. They began to complain to Moses and Aaron about leading them away from their comfort zone in Egypt and into this new land of hunger.

(The Israelites throw their hands up, shake their fists in the air, make remarks under their breath and give glares to Moses and Aaron)

The Lord: Moses, I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day, the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.

Narrator: This was the Lord's way of testing the people to see if they would follow his instruction. Moses and Aaron told the Israelites of the good news.

Moses: *(to the congregation)* Your complaining is not against us, but against the Lord.

Aaron: *(to the congregation)* Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.

Narrator: As Aaron said this, the whole congregation looked toward the wilderness and the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud.

(The Israelites look off in the distance, towards the sky)

Narrator: In the morning, a layer of dew surrounded the camp. As soon as the dew dissolved, a flaky, frost-like substance covered the ground. The Israelites did not know what the substance was.

(The Israelites talking amongst themselves in confusion. Some point to the ground.)

Narrator: The house of Israel called the bread, manna. It was like a white seed that tasted like wafers with honey.

Moses: *(to the congregation)* It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs."

Narrator: The Lord also instructed that no one was to take any more or any less than needed. When all were done gathering, they measured it and not one was over or short.

Moses: I told you not to harbor it overnight, but you did not listen! That's why it was filled with worms and became rotten the next morning! Can you not follow directions?

Narrator: Morning after morning, they gathered as much as they needed, but when the day became warm, it melted.

Moses: On the sixth day, you can gather double the amount of bread. What you have left over from the sixth day can be stored overnight; you'll need it for the seventh day.

Narrator: Still, some went out to gather the following morning and they found no bread.

The Lord: *(to Moses)* How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.

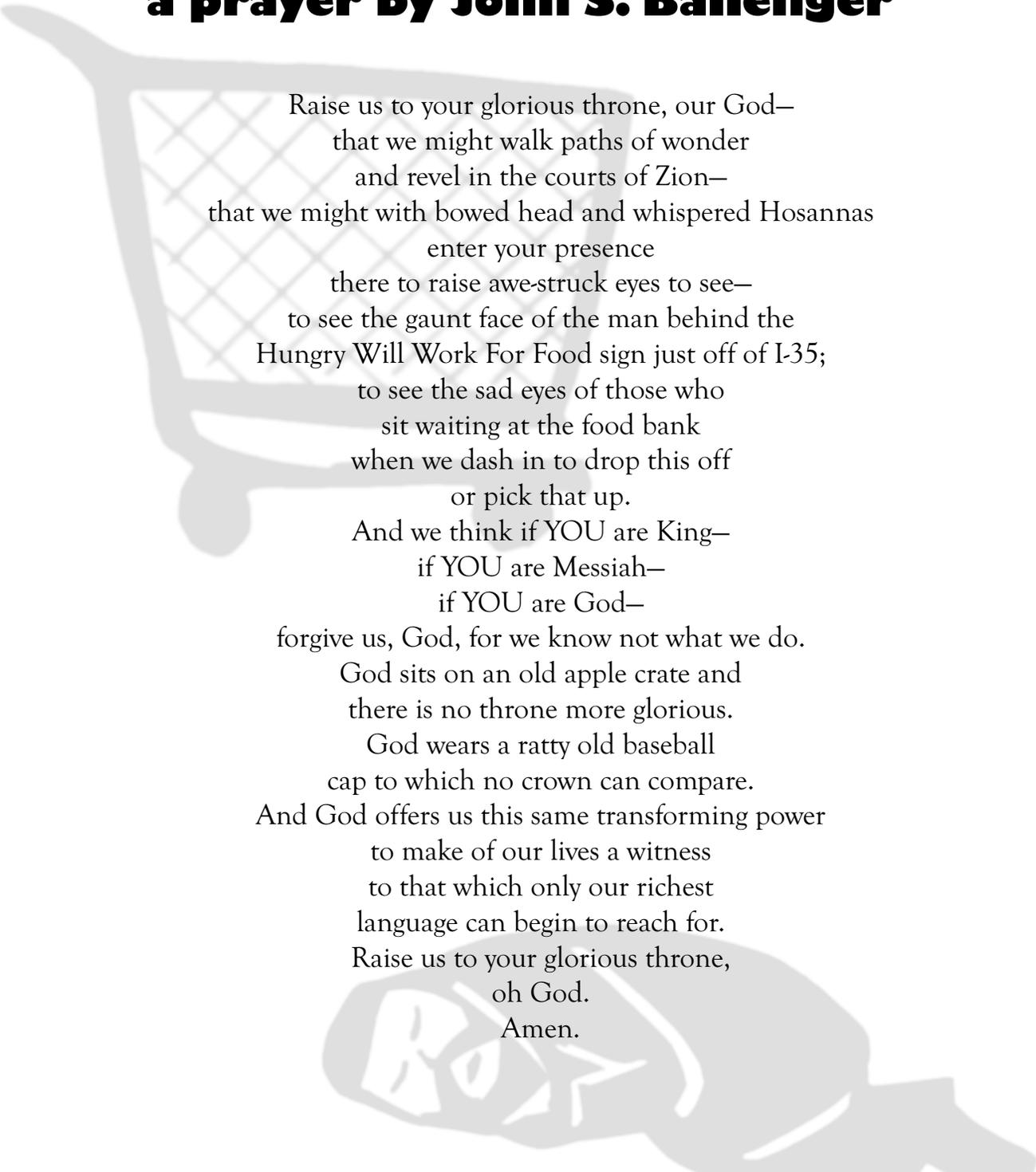
Narrator: So everyone rested on the seventh day. For the next 40 years the Israelites were supplied with manna.

(The Israelites give thanks as they break bread together.)

—Katherine Ramirez, a native of Floresville, Texas, is a professional writing student at Baylor University and a Seeds of Hope intern.

Raise Us to Your Glorious Throne

a prayer by **John S. Ballenger**



Raise us to your glorious throne, our God—
that we might walk paths of wonder
and revel in the courts of Zion—
that we might with bowed head and whispered Hosannas
enter your presence
there to raise awe-struck eyes to see—
to see the gaunt face of the man behind the
Hungry Will Work For Food sign just off of I-35;
to see the sad eyes of those who
sit waiting at the food bank
when we dash in to drop this off
or pick that up.
And we think if YOU are King—
if YOU are Messiah—
if YOU are God—
forgive us, God, for we know not what we do.
God sits on an old apple crate and
there is no throne more glorious.
God wears a ratty old baseball
cap to which no crown can compare.
And God offers us this same transforming power
to make of our lives a witness
to that which only our richest
language can begin to reach for.
Raise us to your glorious throne,
oh God.
Amen.

*John Ballenger is a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland.
art by Curtis Cannon*

The American Way

a sermon by Raymond Bailey

Luke 12: 13-21

I have good news and bad news. The *Los Angeles Times* reported this week that there has been a tremendous increase in the number of millionaires in the United States. The number of millionaires is increasing rapidly, doubling every few years. The bad news, however, is that even though you may have become a millionaire you may not be considered “rich” in America.

The truth of the matter is there are so many millionaires in America that we have now created levels. There are the lower millionaires who just have one-to-ten million dollars. So if you have one-to-ten million, you’re still low on the social scale in American life. Ten to fifty million puts you in the middle class of the wealthy. To qualify as “filthy rich” you must be worth more than 50 million.

What a country, huh? Millionaires on every corner, in every city, everywhere you turn and look. What more could people want? Perhaps the creed of this great nation of ours was expressed some years ago in the popular movie *Wall Street*. Some of you are old enough to remember that movie; others of you may have seen it on late night television. One of the most striking things in the movie is when Michael Douglas stands and delivers these words (perhaps they are the American Creed):

Greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed in all its forms, greed for life, greed for money, greed for love, greed for knowledge, have marked the upward spiral of mankind.

Jesus just didn’t understand it, did he? He was a part of another culture and another time. How dare he suggest that greed might not be a positive force, a driving force to make men and women happy, to fulfill all of life’s needs.

Greed is not limited to rich people, however. It comes at different levels, does it not? Scholars suggest that most likely the person who came to Jesus in our story was probably a poor person. This person came to Jesus and

asked him to judge between himself and his brother with regard to their inheritance.

“Make my brother share the inheritance with me,” he said. A wealthier person would have sought other means, would have worked through the legal system, or would have a successful, wise rabbi. Most likely this was a poor person. The inheritance may not have been great at all, but he wanted Jesus to rule in his favor.

Greed can mark the life of a poor person as easily as it can that of a wealthy one. The average middle class person would think of his or herself as above greedy tendencies. But are there any of us who have escaped all of those tendencies to want to acquire positions and wealth?

Maybe it’s from the best motivations, to provide comfortably for our family, to provide for our children, to leave more to our children than was left to us. Indeed, if we can make more money, we can give more money. And certainly that’s a worthy motive.

What does the drive for “more and more” do to us?

How does it impact our humanity? There was a time when politicians could run for office on the slogan “A chicken in every pot.” Today we want to have sirloin steak.

Today we want to have not just one car, but we want every member of the family to have a car. Mama’s gotta have a car; Daddy’s gotta have a car; and as soon as he is old enough to get a driver’s license, Baby’s gotta have a car. We’re not satisfied anymore just to own one home. We need a home in which to live and we need a place of escape, a lodge in the mountains or on the beach, so that we can relax and rejoice.

We have trouble knowing when enough is enough. Time and again, there is pain and heartache because we’ve found our lives consumed with seeking things, with wanting more and more.

Luke has a lot of things to say about money. Most of the time he is urging compassion for the poor. He

What does the drive for “more and more” do to us? How does it impact our humanity?



leaves no doubt that Christians have an obligation to care for the less fortunate, but in this particular passage the focus is on the pursuit of more, on the merry-go-round of more, more, more. Obsession with money and what it can buy demeans the simple joys of life.

How many Mamas and Daddies had a great moment of rejoicing when the first child was born, or even the second one, or the third one? Standing in the hospital room, looking at that beautiful baby, holding the child in one's arms for the first time, all else seemed insignificant.

How difficult it is for us to hear the words of Jesus when we live in a culture that is so opposed to his teachings.

For many, however, re-entry into the world of things blurs these moments. Suddenly, fourteen or fifteen years later, you get that call from the police station. Your child has been arrested. Your child has a drug problem. Your child this. Your child that. And you wake up, you sit up in bed, you stare at one another, and you say, "Whose kid is this?"

Crowding a graduation ceremony into your busy schedule, you think, "Who is that young woman walking across the stage? Who is that young man walking across the stage? He or she is a stranger to me." Then the children are gone off to college or perhaps a job, and they get their own apartments. You find yourself alone.

All of a sudden you have time for yourselves, and you look across the table and you say, "Who is this man? Who is this woman? I don't know her anymore. I don't know him anymore. We took those vows. We were so happy and joyous in those early days, courtship, engagement, marriage. How we meant those vows we took. But somehow, somehow we've both gotten caught up in the American way."

We've become greedy—greedy for individual accomplishment and achievement, greedy for more prominence and prestige, greedy for power. We compete in a dog-eat-dog society. This competition doesn't just exist between those with whom we work or those who are challenging us in the academic world, or whatever world in which we find ourselves, but sometimes we find ourselves competing with our spouse, keeping score as it were, as to whose achievements are the greatest. Who's making the most money? Who can contribute the most?

The Christian struggle is sometimes between the good and the better things. The hard choices for us are between the good and the better, between the good and the best, as we decide about how we're going to spend our days.

Perhaps it doesn't just happen in that empty nest time. Perhaps at that time both are still moving along. And the truth of the matter is that with the children gone, there's more time to work. "I can put more effort in my profession. With the children gone, I can accomplish more than I could when I had to fool with those kids." Sometimes it doesn't come until retirement, and then you have two lonely people, sharing the same house, sharing the same bed. But somewhere in that quest: quest for money, quest for a better house, quest for a better car, quest for more prestige, quest for more knowledge—somewhere in that race, we lost the meaning of it all.

Greed is not always measured in stocks, bonds, houses, and cash. Sometimes it's greed for love; sometimes it's greed for life; sometimes it's greed for power. There are a lot of things for which we may be greedy. The *Wall Street* speech was based on a commencement address actually delivered at a California university by Ivan Bosky. You may remember that name, because he was a key figure in an insider trading scandal that landed him in prison.

The movie was made in the 1980s. Have our values improved in the last quarter century? We don't have to compete for millions. We don't have to be the chairman of the board. We don't have to compete for a dean's position. Measuring life in terms of material acquisitions often leads to the loss of fundamental humanity.

How difficult it is for us to hear the words of Jesus when we live in a culture that is so opposed to his teachings. Jesus told the story of a man who said, "I'm going to build barns. I'm going to accumulate, and accumulate, and accumulate. And then at some point in life, I'll be able to just relax and live life easy." And he died before he could carry any of that out.

Last Sunday, someone leaving the sanctuary told me the story of a woman who had been playing the lottery for years and finally had a winning ticket. On her way to the awards ceremony, she had a heart attack from the excitement—and died.

People come too late to understand what is important in life. They get to the end of the rainbow and find that the gold in the pot is fool's gold. They discover, like Midas, that their gold can't be eaten, can't extend their lives, can't produce love, can't satisfy the heart.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God," Jesus told us. The desire for money is the root of all evil, Paul wrote. Some of us need to re-examine our lives, the way we spend our time, and ask ourselves what's really important in life. What is it that can really bring us joy?

It's good to be rich towards God—and to find the fulfillment that comes to us from valuing those things that are valued by our God.

—Raymond Bailey, a longtime homilectics professor, is a pastor in Waco, Texas.

Hunger and Poverty Around the World

compiled by Bessie Hilliard

- 854 million people across the world are hungry, up from 852 million a year ago.

—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2006*

- Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds.

—*Robert Black, Saul Morris, & Jennifer Bryce: “Where and Why Are 10 Million Children Dying Every Year?” The Lancet, 2003*

- In essence, hunger is the most extreme form of poverty, where individuals or families cannot

afford to meet their most basic need for food. Hunger manifests itself in many ways other than starvation and famine. Most poor people who battle hunger deal with chronic undernourishment and vitamin or mineral deficiencies, which result in stunted growth, weakness and heightened susceptibility to illness.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- Countries in which a large portion of the population battles hunger daily are usually poor and often lack the social safety nets we enjoy, such as soup kitchens, food stamps, and job training programs. When a family that lives in a poor country cannot grow enough food or earn enough money to buy food, there is nowhere to turn for help.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- In 2004, almost 1 billion people lived below the international poverty line, earning less than US\$1 per day.

—*The World Bank, 2007*

- People who live on less than US\$1 per day have problems obtaining adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. As a result, 820 million people in the developing world are undernourished. They consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth.



art by Sharon R. Rollins

—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2006*

- Undernourishment negatively affects people’s health, productivity, sense of hope and overall well-being. A lack of food can stunt growth, slow thinking, sap energy, hinder fetal development and contribute to mental retardation.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- Economically, the constant securing of food consumes valuable time and energy of poor people, allowing less time for work and earning income.

Socially, the lack of food erodes relationships and feeds shame so that those most in need of support are often least able to call on it.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- Poor nutrition and calorie deficiencies cause nearly one in three people to die prematurely or have disabilities.

—*World Health Organization*

- Malnutrition contributes to 53 percent of the 10.6 million deaths of children under five each year in developing countries. This amounts to one child dying every five seconds. Malnutrition has many other adverse effects:

1. Malnutrition inhibits the ability to learn. A condition of malnutrition called “wasting” affects up to 52 million pre-schoolers in developing countries. Stunting affects 160 million pre-schoolers in developing countries. In addition to this, up to 60 percent of all pre-school children in the developing world are anemic.
2. Inherited hunger, which causes malnourished mothers to give birth to malnourished children, is a major impediment to development. Maternal malnutrition endangers mothers and children alike in these ways.

3. Every year more than 60,000 mothers worldwide die in pregnancy and childbirth as a result of iron deficiency.
4. More than 20 million children are born annually with low birthweight, the result of their mothers having inadequate nutrition before and during pregnancy. Low birthweight babies are four times more likely to die in the first week of life from infections such as diarrhea.
5. Low birthweight babies who survive are more likely to remain malnourished throughout childhood, and to face health and learning difficulties throughout their lives.

–*World Food Programme*

- Vitamin and mineral deficiencies are among the leading causes of death and disability in developing countries, particularly among children. Iron deficiency is the most prevalent form of malnutrition worldwide, affecting an estimated 2 billion people. For each US\$1 spent on iron fortification of food, there is a US\$84 return in increased productivity and decreased disability. These deficiencies affect people in various ways:

1. Iron deficiency is of particular concern among women of reproductive age and children because of the severe consequences on health, productivity and learning.
2. Vitamin A deficiency affects approximately 40 percent of the developing world’s preschoolers. Vitamin A deficiency is associated with blindness, susceptibility to disease and higher mortality rates. It leads to the death of approximately one million children each year.
3. Iodine deficiency is the greatest single cause of mental retardation and brain damage. Worldwide, 1.7 billion people are at risk of iodine deficiency, which can easily be prevented by adding iodine to salt.

–*World Food Programme*

- In the developing world, 27 percent of children under five are moderately to severely underweight. 10 percent are severely underweight. 10 percent of children under five are moderately to severely wasted, or seriously below weight for one’s height, and an overwhelming 31 percent are moderately to severely stunted, or seriously below normal height for one’s age.

–*UNICEF, 2006*

- Between 2005 and 2006, the number of hungry people in 70 lower income countries rose from 804

million to 849 million. Many of these live in Sub-Saharan Africa:

1. By 2016, the number of hungry people is projected to decline in all regions, except Sub-Saharan Africa.
2. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 85 percent of the average nutrition gap, the indicator of food availability which is 13.5 million tons, while low-income countries of Asia account for only 14 percent, and the low-income countries of Latin America and the Caribbean account for the remaining 1 percent.

–*Food Security Assessment, 2006*

Water is one of the major concerns of development programs around the world. One of every six people lacks access to safe drinking water. Two million people—most of them children – die each year from waterborne disease.

–*Church World Service*

About 12 percent of the world’s population uses 85 percent of its water.

–Maude Barlow: “Water as Commodity—The Wrong Prescription,” *Institute for Food and Development Policy Backgrounder*, Summer 2001

In all corners of the world,

the poor face structural challenges that keep them from getting even their first foot on the ladder of development. Most societies with the right ingredients—good harbors, close contacts with the rich world, favorable climates, adequate energy sources, and freedom from epidemic disease—have escaped extreme poverty. The world’s remaining challenge is not mainly to overcome laziness and corruption, but rather to take on the solvable problems of geographic isolation, disease, and natural hazards, and to do so with new arrangements of responsibility that can get the job done.

—Jeffrey Sachs, global economist

Hunger and Poverty in the United States

compiled by Bessie Hilliard

- In 2003, 11.2 percent of US households were considered food insecure, which is defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” 16.6 percent of households with children were food insecure. 18.2 percent of children were considered to be food insecure.

—USDA 2003, *Measuring Food Insecurity and Hunger*

- About 35.1 million Americans—including nearly one in four American children—do not have access to sufficient food. Of these, 22.7 million are adults (10.4 percent of all adults) and 12.4 million are children (16.9 percent of all children).

—US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2006: “Household Food Security in the United States”

- In the US, 3.3 percent of children under the age of five are stunted for their age and 1.1 percent of children under five are underweight, while 7 percent of children under the age of five are overweight for their age.

—World Health Organization, 2002

- The prevalence of males who are 15 years and older who are obese is 31.1 percent. The prevalence of females who are 15 years and older who are obese is 33.2 percent.

—World Health Organization, 2004

- 25 million Americans—including 9 million children and 3 million seniors—are provided with emergency food assistance by food banks:

1. Seventy percent of client households served are food insecure, meaning they do not know where they will find their next meal. Of these households, 33 percent are experiencing hunger, meaning they are completely without a source of food.
2. Of the 25 million Americans, 66 percent are living below the federal poverty line and 12 percent are homeless. More than 40 percent have to choose between paying for utilities or heating fuel and food. Some 35 percent have to choose between paying for rent or a mortgage and food. Nearly 32 percent report having to

choose between paying for medical bills and food.

3. Thirty-five percent of US food bank clients are receiving Food Stamp Program benefits. Among the households with school-age children, 62 percent participate in the federal school lunch program and 51 percent participate in the school breakfast program.

4. Nearly 74 percent of pantries, 65 percent of soup kitchens, and 43 percent of emergency shelters are run by faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues and other religious organizations. More than 66 percent of food pantries and 40 percent of soup kitchens rely entirely on volunteers and have no paid staff.

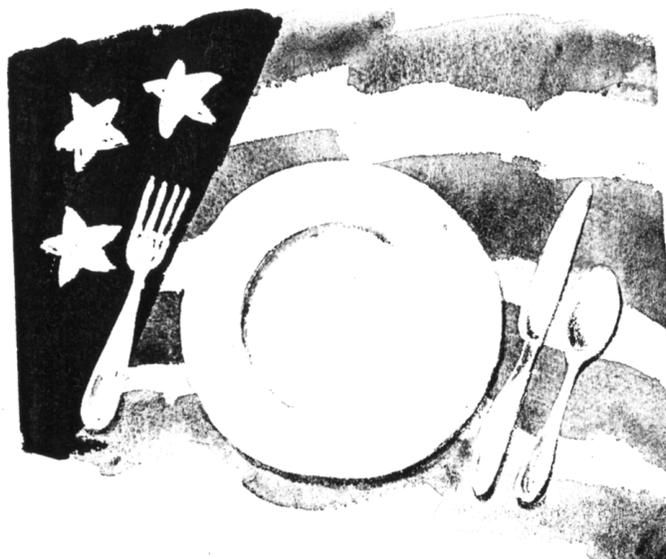
—America’s Second Harvest

- The US Food Stamp Program has an average monthly participation of 25,641,656.

—Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), 2005

- In 2005, the Census Bureau showed that the number of uninsured Americans was at a record high of 46.6 million, with 15.9 percent of Americans lacking health coverage. The number of uninsured children rose from 7.9 million in 2004 to 8.3 million in 2005.

—Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2006



Hunger and Farmers

compiled by Bread for the World

- In 2003, 14 percent of the population, or 7.5 million people, living in rural areas were poor while the poverty rate in metropolitan areas was 12 percent. The 2003 child poverty rate in rural areas was 20 percent, higher than the 17 percent in metro areas. Poverty rates for African Americans and Native Americans are more than 10 percentage points higher in rural areas than in metro areas. The poverty rate is highest in counties that are completely rural counties, with 17 percent of the population poor, compared with 12 percent of the population poor in urban counties. Ninety percent of the counties where 20 percent or more of the populations have lived in poverty over the last 30 years are rural (360 counties of 400).

—United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2002

- More than 2 million farms operated by white farmers while African-American farmers are the principal operators of 29,090 farms; Latino farmers operate 50,592 farms;

Women farmers operate nearly 238,000 farms.

—United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2002

Nearly three-quarters of the world's poor people live in rural areas. Most of these people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. In 2000, more than half (55 percent) of workers in developing countries labored in agriculture. More than two-thirds of sub-Saharan Africans were farmers or employed by farmers.

—United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization 2006 (FAO), 2001; UN Economic Commission for Africa 2005

- Eighty percent of the world's hungry people live in rural areas. Smallholder farmers comprise 50 percent; landless people account for roughly 20 percent; and livestock herders, fishers and forest-dependent people make up 10 percent.

—United Nations Millennium Project Hunger Task Force 2005



Be gentle when you touch bread.

Let it not lie uncared for,
taken for granted or unwanted.

There is such beauty in bread,
beauty of sun and soil,
beauty of patient toil.

Wind and rains
caressed it.

Christ often blessed it.

Be gentle when you
touch bread.

—David Adam

How the 2007 US Farm Bill Can Help Reduce Hunger

by Michele Learner
Bread for the World

Bread for the World's 2007 Offering of Letters, Seeds of Change: Help Farmers End Hunger..., looks at the US Farm Bill through the lens of hunger and poverty. BFW's efforts are focused on reforms that will help feed hungry people today and improve their opportunities to support their families in the future. At press time, a version of the farm bill had been passed by the House of Representatives and was in deliberation in the Senate.

A Fair Rural Policy

The farm bill is the United States' primary legislation on rural policy, so it is especially important to allocate farm bill resources fairly among all those affected by the law. These include a wide variety of farmers and other rural families, some prosperous and others of modest means. Currently only 6 percent of all rural residents own or work on farms, and only one-third of all farmers receive government payments for growing certain crops. So commodity payments cannot be considered a substitute for wider rural development efforts. In addition, some commodity payments distort international trade, which in turn makes it harder for low-income farmers in developing countries to sell their crops at a fair price.

For these reasons, Bread for the World urges our nation's decision-makers to identify viable alternatives to commodity payments based on production and type of crop. The solution could include, for example, improved crop insurance, "green" payments for ecologically sound farming practices, and/or risk management accounts. Rural development assistance covers programs that help rural communities design their development strategies, provide local entrepreneurs with credit and technical assistance, and enable communities to build the communications infrastructure that will attract new employers. Allocating resources to initiatives that help a wider section of the rural population and do not distort trade are critical ways to reduce hunger through the farm bill. Hunger could be eased among both low-income U.S. rural families and farm families overseas.

A Stronger Food Stamp Program: Affording a Healthy Diet

This year, Bread for the World is seeking improvements in the U.S. farm bill—legislation which encompasses not only farm policy, but rural development, conservation, the Food Stamp Program, and other initiatives. The legislation is complex, but so far-reaching that one of our partner organizations points out, "No one who eats can afford to yawn" when the farm bill is discussed.

Our 2007 Offering of Letters, *Seeds of Change*, calls on Congress to strengthen rural U.S. communities and better support hungry people in the United States, farmers and other rural families of modest means, and farmers in poor countries struggling to sell their crops.

The farm bill has brought many potential partners to our advocacy efforts. "We've started talking and sharing information on a regular basis with groups like the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska, as well as with our traditional denominational partners and organizations," said Bread for the World Senior Regional Organizer Tammy Walhof. She added that this networking often broadens the impact of advocacy on the farm bill. For example, Bread for the World activists learned with little time to spare that Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) had scheduled a district hearing on rural development. A specialist who had worked with the Center for Rural Affairs offered the senator briefing materials before the hearing.

This year's farm bill debate has also attracted people active in the sustainable farming movement and other farmers, often new to anti-hunger work. In Minnesota, for example, they have been attending workshops organized by Bread for the World, Church World Service, The Minnesota Council of Churches and the Catholic archdiocese's rural life and social justice offices. Many have said they are pleased that churches are working on the farm bill. Even those who were initially skeptical about whether

non-rural residents could understand the realities of farming have left Bread for the World events saying that they agree with many of the reform proposals we are supporting – and that, even in areas where they don’t agree, they respect the serious thought that has been given to developing our positions.

“I think many of the ideas we present resonate with people new to Bread for the World who live in rural areas,” said Walhof. “We will continue to be engaged with them and encourage them to be active on farm bill issues.”

New Opportunities: International Partnerships

The farm bill’s most direct impact on hunger comes through the Food Stamp Program and smaller federal nutrition programs.

Food stamps have an impressive record as the country’s first line of defense against hunger. In the 1960s, malnutrition similar to that in developing countries could still be found in the United States. By the 1970s, researchers credited food stamps for the fact that acute malnutrition had virtually disappeared. After Hurricane Katrina and other major hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, the Food Stamp Program did a widely praised job of enabling disaster victims to buy food for their families. Food stamp spending automatically increases to respond to needs, so the program was able to expand during the period of devastation that followed the hurricanes.

Because the United States still has a significant level of food insecurity and hunger, it is vital to maintain a strong Food Stamp Program. In an average month, the program serves more than 25 million people, nearly all living below the poverty line. Today approximately half of all food stamp recipients are children.

As the farm bill is reauthorized, Bread for the World urges Congress to raise food stamp benefits to enable participants to afford an adequate and nutritious diet. Although food stamps make a big difference in the lives of participants, providing meals that families otherwise could not afford, the dollar amount of the benefits is quite modest – the nationwide average monthly benefit amounts to roughly \$1 per meal per person.

The Food Stamp Program benefit size is not enough to provide an adequate diet, and participants struggle to make their benefits last through the month. The Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture published a study in 2006 which showed that nearly two-thirds of participating

households used more than half of their benefits in the first week of the month, and 56 percent of the households used more than 90 percent of their benefits in the first two weeks.

Moreover, researchers argue that the food stamp benefit is not enough to purchase healthy foods. The benefit is based on the cost of the “Thrifty Food Plan,” which was first developed for emergency use during the Great Depression. The Thrifty Food Plan is based on the assumption that families can spend one-third of their income on food, no longer true in an age of rising childcare, housing and transportation costs.

Researcher John Cook of the Boston University School of Medicine found that it would cost 30 percent more than the typical benefit to purchase a diet that meets the American Heart Association’s recommendations. Dr. Cook explained, “The government has dramatically underestimated the amount of food stamp benefits participants need, not to mention the extent of poverty in the United States, by using the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan... as the basis for determining maximum food stamp allotments and poverty thresholds.”

The average \$1 per meal benefit is generally enough to purchase sufficient calories, but not enough to buy nutritious foods like fresh fruits and vegetables or lean meat, which are more expensive. It often results in a diet that lacks essential nutrients and is too high in fat and sodium. In April, the governor of Oregon and hundreds of Oregon churchgoers participated in a “food stamp challenge” –living on a food stamp budget for a week.

Governor Ted Kulongoski found his supermarket trip a challenge. Despite efforts to select the least expensive foods, his items totaled more than his allotted \$21 for the week. He returned two bananas and one Cup O’Noodles to stay within budget. Kulongoski received shopping help from

“One in 10 US households... do not always have enough food to feed themselves or their families. In many cases, low-income Americans are forced to make choices that most Americans find difficult to even imagine.

As members of Congress, we don’t have to rely on food stamps... but that means it is difficult for many of us to imagine what it is like to experience true hunger or to rely on the Food Stamp Program.”

–Reps. James McGovern (D-MA) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) in a letter to colleagues in the House of Representatives, May 2007

Christina Sigman-Davenport, a mother of three who works for the Oregon Department of Human Services and began getting food stamps last fall after her husband lost his job. Her tips included: scan the highest and lowest shelves for lower-priced items, look for off-brand products, and rely on filling, low-cost staples like macaroni and cheese. In the longer term, she advised, he would need to clip coupons religiously and buy in bulk whenever possible.

Mary Sicilia, who participated in the “food stamp challenge” with other members of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, found her choices limited. “How do you choose between bread and milk? Between lunch and dinner?” she asked. “With the Food Stamp Program, it would be hard to get ahead in terms of stocking up and easier to end up truly hungry at the end of the month. I now understand why the Trinity Pantry is so besieged when food stamps run out.”

Participant Cheryl Richardson added, “We had to really plan out how we were going to spend that \$21 per person. We realized how much we snack – you can’t buy snacks on that budget. Children would not be able to have friends over and offer them a snack. If you were living where you had only one store at your disposal or you did not have transportation, this would make living on the meager amount a greater challenge.”

In May, Reps. McGovern and Emerson invited their colleagues in the House of Representatives to join them in living on a food stamp budget for seven days. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) agreed to participate. While shopping at Safeway, Ryan quickly saw the limits of his budget. “It’s unbelievable,” he said as he selected peanut butter, jelly, bread, and a big bag of cornmeal. He also got canned tomato sauce and pasta on sale. There was no money for meat, milk, juice, fresh fruit or vegetables, except 32 cents’ worth of garlic to flavor.

Stronger Nutrition Programs: Participation and Eligibility

Along with raising the food stamp benefit, the farm bill could reduce hunger by increasing the participation of eligible people in the Food Stamp Program. Currently, only about 60 percent of those who are eligible are actually receiving benefits.

There are a variety of reasons that eligible people do not participate—lack of knowledge of the program and difficult application processes are just two of these. Participation also varies widely by state—from well under half to more than 80 percent. The Food Stamp Program can take advantage of “success stories” to find additional

ways of reaching low-income families and simplifying the process of proving one’s eligibility.

Already, for example, outreach materials are available in 37 languages – from Albanian to Yoruba – and some states offer Internet applications to cut down on trips to the food stamp office. Massachusetts recently enrolled 60,000 eligible seniors through a simplified application that one recipient called “a blessing in the mail.”

Bread for the World also supports expanding eligibility for the Food Stamp Program to some low-income people who do not qualify under current rules. For example, adults who are legal immigrants but arrived in the United States less than five years ago are not eligible to apply for food stamps even though many would qualify based on income from their jobs. Many people who have modest retirement savings also do not qualify and are forced to spend down their savings before they can receive food stamp benefits, even though they may need only temporary help.

Going Forward

Bread for the World activists continue to contact decision-makers and educate their communities about hunger and the farm bill, their work grounded in the belief that Christians have a responsibility to help end hunger in God’s world.

And members of Congress have begun working to persuade their colleagues that farm bill reforms are important. When Reps. McGovern and Emerson began their “food stamp challenge,” they spoke of the value of direct experience. The goal, they said, is to “raise awareness of the difficulties facing food stamp recipients and demonstrate support for the Food Stamp Program’s vital role in providing nutrition assistance to low-income families.”

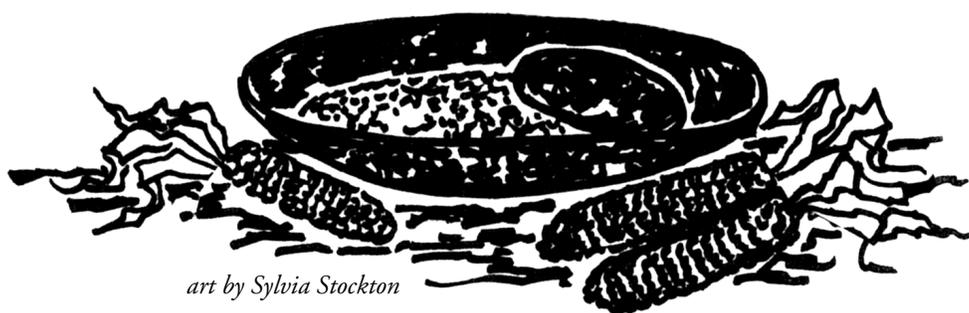
There’s a lot at stake in the farm bill. Thank you for calling for the improvements that will help hungry and poor people, both today and tomorrow.

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Children Make Great Advocates!

Children write wonderful letters to their senators and representatives, if given age-appropriate sample letters and directions. Help younger children write letters to their members of Congress. They can decorate a paper plate with a drawing of their favorite food or a picture of a farmer. On the back, help them write a simple message about hunger in our nation and world and the need to support farmers everywhere.

benediction



art by Sylvia Stockton

Make us worthy, Lord,

*to serve those throughout the world
who live and die in poverty or hunger.*

*Give them, through our hands,
this day their daily bread;
and by our understanding love,
give peace and joy.*

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta