

Responding to Hunger in God's World

Seven Steps for Churches

1 Study the Bible. The essential first step for any congregation in responding to hunger issues is to establish within the worship and study life of the congregation the connections between hunger and biblical imperatives. This means exploring together how the Bible and other teachings of our faith relate to the world we live in today. Get out your concordances. Look up the verses together. Use the words “poor” and “hungry.”

2 Find out what your denomination is doing. Most major denominations have channels for donations as well as excellent materials for hunger education.

3 Study your own community. What are the needs in your city or county? What are local churches and groups already doing? Where can your congregation's energy best add to the work being done?

(For resources on this, contact the Food Research and Action Center, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 540; Washington, DC 20009; 202/986-2200. They have updated information about hunger and poverty in your area.)

4 Involve the whole congregation. Devise a plan to work hunger concerns into the structural life of the church. What is the role for the official board or body of elders? What about women's organizations, youth groups, church school leaders, education committees, or missions committees? How can concern

Dear God,

Help us to learn more about love.
It's easy for us to love people who love us,
but sometimes we forget how to love the people
who need love most.

You sent Jesus to show us
how to love those people,
just like he loved the tax collector, Zaccheus,
and the woman at the well.

Please help us to understand this love
and become more like you want us to be.

Amen.

—Sara Hills, who wrote this prayer, is a first-year student at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. “Seven Steps for Churches” is taken from a manuscript by H. Joseph Haag of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The quote by Corley Sims, a high school senior in Woodway, Texas, is from “Preaching the Gospel without Words” in the 2004 Hunger Emphasis Packet.

Art on this page is by Susan Smith.

for the hungry find an appropriate place in worship? We all need to move from seeing the hunger issue as “belonging” to only a small group within our churches to seeing it as involving everything we do.

5 Enlist disciples. All of the above steps should lead toward locating those people who will respond with faith and enthusiasm to hunger work. Avoid thinking of the same people year after year. Don't be afraid to issue a call. It is good news that God calls each of us to the exciting work of building a better, more just world.

6 Form a planning group. Having done this groundwork, gather your group together to plan goals and strategies. This group can include as few as three people or as many as a dozen. Continue to involve other committees and groups as your work touches their areas of emphasis, but keep the planning group together as a steering committee.

7 Act! Finally, you're ready to begin the direct work on the project. Don't wait until you're sure you have the “perfect” action. Probably no such thing exists. We learn by doing, and then we study, pray, reflect, and figure out what to do next. Don't worry about the scope of your first actions. Just begin.

One night our youth minister shared with us a new perspective on what might have happened in the story of the feeding of the multitude. It is possible, she said, that some of the people watching the boy that day were so moved that they shared their own fish and bread that they had brought. To me, that is no less of a miracle than if the five thousand had been physically fed by the few loaves and fish.

Maybe instead of sitting around waiting for the miracle, we should begin the miracle.

—Corley Sims

art by Rebecca Ward



There is enough food in the world to feed all of the people in the world. And yet...

- More than 840 million people in the world are malnourished—799 million of them are from the developing world. More than 153 million of them are under the age of five.
- 6 million children under the age of five die every year as a result of hunger.
- Virtually every country in the world has the potential of growing sufficient food on a sustainable basis. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has set the minimum requirement for caloric intake per person per day at 2,350. Worldwide, there are 2,805 calories available per person per day.
- Fifty-four countries fall below the minimum

requirement for calories; they do not produce enough food to feed their populations, nor can they afford to import the necessary commodities to make up the gap. Most of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.

- More than 2 million children each year have severe visual problems due to lack of vitamin A.

—from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

- Of the 6.2 billion people in today's world, 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 per day.
 - The amount of money that the richest one percent of the world's people make each year equals what the poorest 57 percent make. The richest five percent of the world's people have incomes 114 times that of the poorest five percent.
 - Each day in the developing world, more than 30,000 children die from mostly preventable and treatable causes such as diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, measles or malaria. These diseases are far more deadly to children who are stunted or underweight.
 - By the end of 2000, some 22 million people had died from AIDS, which has caused 13 million children to lose either their mother or both parents.
 - 40 million people are living with AIDS—90 percent of them in developing countries and 75 percent of them in sub-Saharan Africa: 2.9 million are under the age of 14.
- from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- Malnutrition can severely affect a child's intellectual development. Children who have stunted growth due to malnutrition score significantly lower on math and language achievement tests than do well-nourished children.
- In developing countries, 91 children out of 1,000 die before their fifth birthday. By comparison, in the

United States eight children in 1,000 will die before turning five years old.

—UNICEF

- 12 million people die each year from lack of water, including 3 million children from waterborne disease: 1.1 billion lack access to clean water; 2.4 billion live without decent sanitation; and 4 billion without wastewater disposal.
- The World Bank
- One of the leading causes of food security crises is displacement. Three out of every four refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide are women and children.
- Church World Service

Meanwhile, in the wealthiest nation on earth...

Poverty persists in the US.

- 33.6 million people—including almost 13 million children—live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. This represents approximately one in ten households in the United States (10.7 percent).
- 3.3 percent of US households experience hunger. Some people in these households frequently skip meals or eat too little, sometimes going without food for a whole day. This affects 9 million people, including 3 million children.
- 7.4 percent of US households are at risk of hunger. Members of these households have lower quality diets or must resort to seeking emergency food because

they cannot always afford the food they need. 24.6 million people, including 9.7 million children, live in these homes.

—United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

- Preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger, according to a recent study.
- Pediatrics, Vol. 110 No. 4, October 2002

Poverty is increasing in the US

- Between 2000 and 2001, poverty rose to 11.7 percent of the population, or 32.9 million people, up from 11.3 percent and 31.6 million.
 - The 2001 median household income in the US was \$42,228, representing a 2.2 percent decline in real income from its 2000 level of \$43,162.
- US Census Bureau

Food insecurity is rising in the US

- In 2001, the number of Americans who were food insecure, or hungry or at risk of hunger, was 33.6 million, a rise over 2000, when 33.2 million Americans were food insecure. The number of individuals who are suffering from hunger rose from 8.5 million in 2000 to 9 million in 2001.
 - The number of food insecure households with children has also risen since 2000 by 10,000 to 6.18 million.
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Household Food Security in the United States

Unemployment is increasing in the US

- Average unemployment rates in the past year have risen: in 2001, the rate was 4.8 percent, but jumped to 5.7 percent in 2002.
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics