

Hunger News & Hope

... a Seeds of Hope publication

The 2011 US Budget and the Poor

As soon as the 112th Congress of the United States opened for business in January, legislators from both sides of the political aisle, along with the Obama administration, have been locked in combat over the 2011 national budget.

By February, virtually every organization in the US that serves the poor, or tries to advocate for them, was expressing profound concern over proposed budget cuts that seemed to disregard, if not target, the world's most vulnerable populations.

The leaders of dozens of the nation's foremost faith-based and charitable agencies came together to write a letter to the House of Representatives, warning against abrupt, deep reductions in domestic and foreign assistance. The letter said that such cuts "would imperil the longstanding US commitment to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance for those threatened by disaster and conflict."

The letter cautioned that "in the next major global humanitarian crisis—the next Haiti, Tsunami, or Darfur—the United States might simply fail to show up."

Nevertheless, that same month, the House passed a budget for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year (which ends on September 30) that would have disastrous consequences for impoverished people in the US and around the world. The Senate voted against the bill. The hostile debate continued, threatening to end in stalemate.

In late March, a group of anti-hunger activists launched a fast to protest what they called "Draconian cuts" from programs that help hungry people. The fast was endorsed by as many as 30 organizations and joined by some 4,000 people—including a prominent food critic and cookbook author.

"We need to gather and insist that our collective resources be used for our collective welfare," *New York Times* food columnist Mark Bittman wrote in a blog that he kept throughout the fast. "Not for the wealthiest thousand or even million Americans but for a vast majority of us in the United States and, indeed, for citizens of the world who have difficulty making ends meet. Or feeding their kids."

On April 8, the government would have literally shut down if no agreement were reached by the end of the day. With time running out, the two sides worked out a compromise.

President Barack Obama addressed the nation on April 13, discussing the compromise, about which neither side seemed content. Democrats and White House officials had given in to deep cuts in programs for the poor, law enforcement in poorer communities, environmental programs, community health centers, foreign

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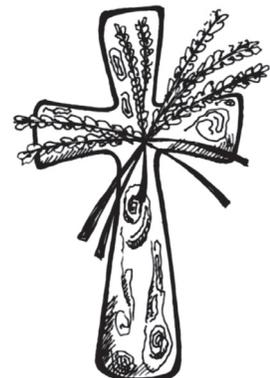
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Japan Still Stunned by Tsunami

by Derek Sommer

On April 11, the tsunami-warning siren is once again heard across Japan. But this time, there is no rush of response, but a hushed silence, as rescue workers and citizens alike stop to remember the earthquake and tsunami a month prior.

The disaster still sits heavy on the hearts of many Japanese as they struggle to resume day-to-day life. Even as shops begin to reopen, and the long queues for petrol that marked the week following the disaster have subsided, many evacuation areas are without proper food, water or fuel.

The rolling blackouts resulting from the Fukushima nuclear-plant disaster—which Japan's economics minister, Kaoru Yosano, said could go on for three to five years—continue to interfere with relief efforts.

According to the National Police Agency, the death toll has risen to 13,591 while the total persons missing has begun to drop, tallied today at 14,497. Meanwhile, there are some 434,000 people who have been rendered homeless by the disaster, living in shelters, many of which still have trouble

meeting basic needs. There are some who still struggle to find housing at all, a deepening crisis as temperatures continue to drop with the onset of winter.

But the Japanese people are not without help: the Japanese Foreign Ministry announced shortly after the disaster that 116 countries were offering aid, including the poor Afghan province of Kandahar, which sent the nation \$50,000. Red Cross Red Crescent continues to fund the Japanese Red Cross Society, which after two weeks of conducting search and rescue operations, has begun to work to give survivors shelter.

According to the international organization, a project is currently in motion, thanks to overseas donations, by which the Japanese Red Cross is constructing 70,000 prefabricated homes in some of the hardest-hit areas of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, each house fitted with a package of six appliances. The project is expected to benefit more than 280,000 people. Red Cross also has teams of psychosocial workers at shelters with the task of helping victims deal with the psychological trauma of watching as everything familiar to them washed away.

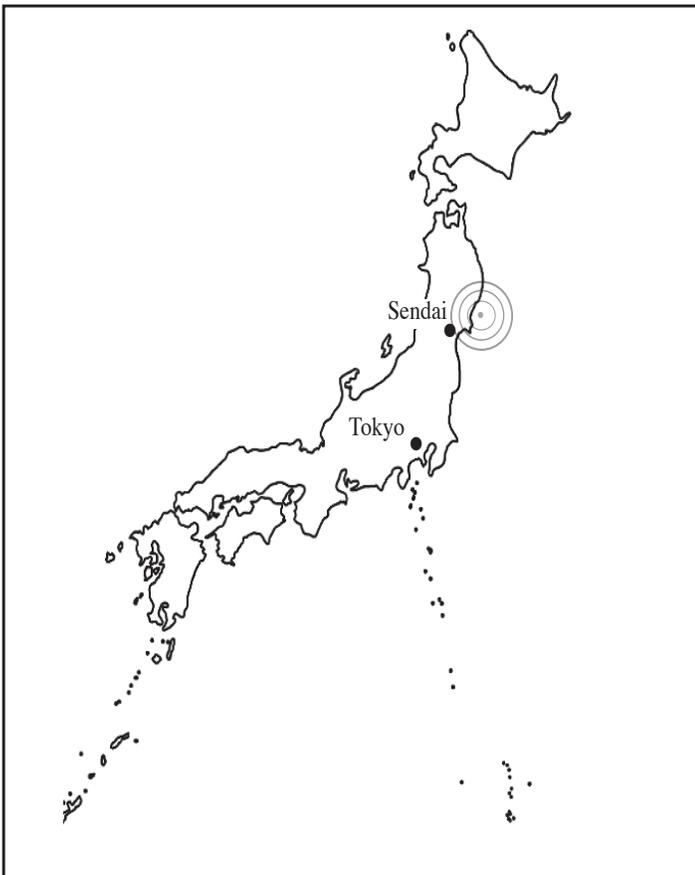
Numerous Christian groups are also directly involved in Japan's reconstruction. Baptist World Aid announced that a relief team was sent over from their US, Hungary and Singapore bases to assist Baptist groups in Japan. Church World Service is currently engaged with the help of over 25,000 individuals in 100 evacuation sites, where it is still a struggle to meet basic needs such as food and water.

United Methodist Women has opened the doors of its Wesley Center in Tokyo to refugees in need, and Lutheran World Relief is struggling to meet rising demands for shipments of their Quilts and Kits aid packages, which provide essential items for the weeks following a disaster.

Honoring Japan's request that no outside organizations interfere in the relief work, the United Methodist Committee on Relief has sent an emergency grant to the Church of Christ in Japan, which is helping local churches fulfill their role as distributors of basic necessities to earthquake and tsunami victims.

So, what is the best way for the everyday Christian to lend immediate aid to Japan? According to the Church World Service, a cash donation is the best way to go. Clothing, household items and food all require packaging, transport, storage in warehouses and distribution—all of which can become a drain on one of the most valuable resources in such a crisis: the volunteers and aid workers who are in charge of helping their people.

—Derek Sommer, a native of Dallas, TX, is a Professional Writing student at Baylor University.



The above map shows the epicenter of the March 11 earthquake. The Japanese government has named the earthquake and subsequent tsunami the "Great Eastern Japan Earthquake."

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aid and United Nations peacekeeping missions. Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that the final deal “made a bad situation less bad.”

Republican leaders, however, were pointedly criticized, especially by so-called Tea Party spokespeople, for not cutting enough. GOP leaders in Congress had promised to cut \$100 billion from the budget, while protecting Bush-era tax cuts for the extremely wealthy.

The popular Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was cut by \$500 million. (The original House bill, HR1, called for \$747 million to be cut from the program.) Economists have supported this program for decades, explaining that every dollar spent in the WIC program saves \$5 in the long run.

Community health centers will lose \$600 million. Advocates say this will take away access to basic health services for 5 million low-income Americans, prompting them to use more costly emergency rooms.

\$194 million was cut from foreign-food assistance and related programs, including food aid donations and a global school meals program. Hundreds of millions were cut from rural economic development programs, food research agencies and crop assistance programs.

President Obama, however, told the nation that the agreement had evaded even more massive cuts to domestic hunger programs, as well as assistance to poor and hungry people around the world. Among the programs the White House was able to save were Pell grants for college students, health research, the Head Start early learning program, some food aid to the poor and some housing subsidies.

On the global front, although the 2011 agreement cut \$8 billion from international affairs funding, analysts said it did preserve most of foreign aid assistance at 2010 levels.

At press time, the compromise package was headed back to Congress for approval. Legislators were expected to approve it, grudgingly, to prevent a renewed threat of a government shutdown.

Anti-hunger activists are now looking toward what a Church World Service spokesperson called “the looming battle” over the 2012 budget, raising “grave concerns over the possibility that a 30-percent cut in humanitarian and poverty-focused foreign aid is proposed for the next fiscal year.” Analysts estimate that about two-thirds of the cuts in House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan’s (R-WI) multi-year proposal would come from assistance for low-income Americans.

In urging legislators to avoid massive cuts to programs that help hungry people, policy analysts point out that—contrary to the perceptions of most Americans—only one percent of the US budget goes to foreign humanitarian aid and 14 percent goes to domestic social programs. Cuts to these programs, they say, will not solve the deficit problems of the

US government. They will, however, cause severe hardship for a population already on the edge of calamity.

“Many US humanitarian and nutrition programs literally save lives,” one Bread for the World background paper said. “Cuts to their funding risk lives.”

The same paper pointed out that low-income people cannot afford to sacrifice any further. Well-known economists from both sides of the aisle add that cuts in the budget will have to be coupled with increased revenue. President Obama punctuated this opinion, saying, “Warren Buffet [known as one of the wealthiest people in the world] does not need any more tax cuts.”

As a *Washington Post* headline from April 12 states, “It’s the economic debate, not the US, that’s bankrupt.”

—Compiled by Katie Cook. Sources: Bread for the World, Church World Service, New York times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Capitol Times, Oakland Tribune, Associated Press, Reuters. For up-to-date information about the budget process, go to www.bread.org/hunger/budget. See also the Bread for the World background paper, “The US Budget: Myths and Realities” by Michele Learner.

Worship Resources with an Attitude



**towards peace, justice
and food security
for all of God’s children.**

Sacred Seasons is a series of worship tools designed to help raise awareness of hunger and justice issues. A year’s subscription of \$100 includes Advent and Lent packets, plus the fall Hunger Emphasis packet. To order, call 254-755-7745, email seedseditor@clearwire.net, or write to Seeds Publishers at 602 James Ave., Waco, TX 76706. Single packets are US\$30. (Non-US subscriptions are \$115; individual packets are \$40.) To see back issues of Sacred Seasons, go to www.seedspublishers.org.

What I Keep:

Photographs of the New Face of Homelessness and Poverty

An Introduction to the Book and the Author

by Derek Sommer

“This is a very important book: everyone wants to be in it.” Said Susan Mullally, a professor of photography at Baylor University.

We were looking at the catalogue for the members of the Church Under the Bridge, which meets under the Interstate 35 bridge between 4th and 5th Streets in Waco, TX. Over a hundred faces, of every age and race, stared up at me.

“You know when you were in high school and you got your first yearbook? That’s like the first yearbook, in a way.”

Keeping track of the congregation was all Mullally had meant to do for Church Under the Bridge when she joined the church as the official photographer, but it was her work here that led her to use these members as part of a gallery recently exhibited in a downtown gallery, and published in the volume, *What I Keep*.

“It was a way for me to get to know people and for them to get to know me,” said Mullally, who feels the project emerged very organically from her work.

“I started to ask people what they kept: what really mattered to them. A lot of times, they had no idea what I was talking about. ‘What do you keep? Why would I keep something?’” Mullally said.

“Not everybody has something that they value. I’m sort of selecting people in a way; I select people that I feel I get to know a little better. I’m very careful about who I ask and how I treat their images.”

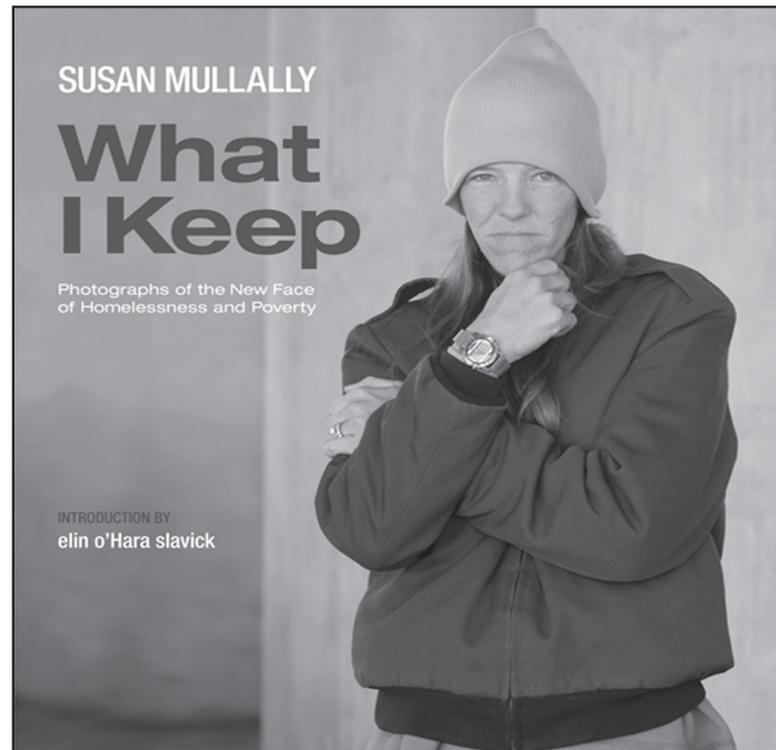
The book, which portrays a series of members of Church Under the Bridge—each with whatever they hold most dear or have kept longest—encompasses a portion of the 60 portraits that make up the two traveling galleries that are the results of Mullally’s project.

The galleries travel around the United States, and one of them was recently displayed at an exhibition in China. Mullally sees it as a work of social activism.

“I’ve always been interested in looking at populations that are visible but overlooked, and talking about their strengths and their accomplishments,” said Mullally. “We are a consumer nation, and I think a lot of us have way too much stuff. I don’t suffer like the people I photograph do—they have what they need and anything they keep is very important to them.”

When asked where her work will next take her, it took Mullally time to reflect. “This project emerged very organically. I’ve been working for a long time on a project that deals with borders and walls, and things that separate people.”

—Derek Sommer, a native of Dallas, TX, is a Professional Writing student at Baylor University. *What I Keep* was published by Baylor University Press. To see the images, go to www.susanmullally.com. To arrange for an exhibit, email susan@susanmullally.com.



Left: Book cover courtesy of Baylor University Press

Food Deserts:

The Scarcity of Nutritious Food in Poor Neighborhoods

by Crystal Goolsby

An obesity epidemic has been on the rise in the United States for the last couple of decades, and obesity-related diseases—such as diabetes and heart disease—are becoming more widespread as well.

Even more alarming is the fact that childhood obesity is growing at a steady rate. Children are dealing with diseases that people in the past did not have to worry about until mid-life, if not later.

The fast-food joints in some food deserts don't even offer the healthier options that those same fast-food chains offer in other areas—because those options will not sell to the locals.

As these crises become more apparent to the general public, people are looking everywhere for causes, as well as for possible solutions.

These issues are the most prevalent in lower-income families and neighborhoods. People with less money try to conserve their finances to pay bills, and they often sacrifice a healthy diet in the process. They buy carbohydrate-filled and fat-filled foods that make them feel full and keep their wallets less empty.

As people in low-income areas continue to look for more ways to save money on food, businesses target their budgetary needs. Grocery stores stock filling foods with empty calories like rice and bread, and fast-food restaurants are in no short supply in the same areas. Fruits, vegetables and even restaurants with healthier options are scarce, if not nonexistent, in low-income locations.

This kind of targeted marketing has led to a new, strange phenomenon known as the “food desert.” According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website, “Food deserts are areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.”

These phenomena are most common in urban areas. They impose severe risks to peoples’ health. People who want to change their diets cannot do so easily, because they will have to drive further (if they have transportation) to find better foods that will help them improve their health.

Likewise, food deserts encourage the consumption of high-fat, high-sugar and high-sodium foods, because advertisements for snacks and restaurants offering those varieties of fare are front-and-center in these communities. The fast food joints in some food deserts don’t even offer the healthier options that those same fast food chains offer in other areas—because those options will not sell to the locals.

Moreover, most of these neighborhoods don’t even have supermarkets. This is especially the case in low-income, rural areas. The markets in these areas that do offer a small amount of fruits and vegetables, offer them at sky-high prices that most of their consumers cannot afford to pay.

This causes a chain reaction, reducing the number of healthy foods that are offered at supermarkets because the supermarkets will not provide food from which they cannot profit, therefore increasing the residents’ difficulty to attain healthy sustenance.

Many people are trying to alleviate this issue throughout the United States. First Lady Michelle Obama wants to eliminate food deserts within seven years as part of her “Let’s

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Below: People in low-income neighborhoods are often forced to buy their food at convenience stores like this one in East Waco, TX.



Edge Outreach: *Giving the Gift of Clean Water* by Derek Sommer

Now the people of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful." He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw the salt into it, and said, "Thus says the Lord, I have made this water wholesome; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke. (2 Kings 2:19-21)

Much has been made about hunger around the world, with good intentions, good reason and fine results. Clean water, however, is another issue about which the global philanthropic community is rapidly learning.

One cannot have nutritious food without clean water. The body cannot absorb the nutrients of even the healthiest food without healthy water to help process and distribute those nutrients and avoid dangerous diseases.

According to the World Health Organization, 25,000 people die every day from water-borne illnesses, and most of those are children under the age of 5. But bottled water is expensive to transport and heavy to carry, and even the most stout of efforts to maintain a supply eventually fizzles.

From their small base in Louisville, KY, Edge Outreach has found a new way to produce chlorine with a car battery, water and—like Elisha—a handful of salt.

Maintenance of the facilities is cheap and easy, with operational training taking little more than a day, allowing needy communities in developing countries to become self-sufficient. Edge's focus on sustainability, combined with the affordability of their purification methods, is changing the game for water-based philanthropy.

"A child dies every five seconds from a water-borne disease," said Bob Browning, field director of Edge in Haiti. "That's like crashing a 747 into the ground every 30 minutes."

Edge is fighting against misconceptions on both sides of the issue, such as the idea that people in third-world countries "get used to this water"—which they do not—and the third-world misconception that chlorine is only a poison.

Some villages don't even realize what being truly healthy feels like. Mark Hogg, the executive director of Edge, explained that "some of them have always had diarrhea, and don't even know what a solid stool is about."

Clean water is not only one of the foundations of good nutrition, but also the basis of good hygiene—nothing is really clean without having sanitary water to properly clean it with. With this in mind, Edge also works to teach health and hygiene in developing countries all over the world.

As a faith-based organization, Edge is working with small churches and empowering them to provide clean water to their communities. "You're empowering that congregation to reach their neighbor with water that won't make them sick," Hogg said.

This helps them become a stable institution in the community and provides valuable opportunities for these churches to grow.

—Derek Sommer, a native of Dallas, TX, is a Professional Writing student at Baylor University. For more information about Edge Outreach, go to www.edgeoutreach.com.



Left: A water-filter training in Northeast India. Photo courtesy of Edge Outreach.

Edge Outreach and Disaster Relief

From its beginnings, Edge Outreach had mostly been working with impoverished communities in developing countries, where their technology to cheaply and easily produce chlorine for sanitizing water was providing a more sustainable alternative to bottled water. It was not until the Costa Rica earthquake in 2009 that the Edge staff realized the potential for their technology in disaster zones.

"We'd never been in a disaster situation before," said Mark Hogg, the executive director of Edge. "We literally showed up to the epicenter at the barricades, went to the Costa Rican Salvation Army and Red Cross and said, 'We've got something that would be helpful. Do you want to see it?' and they said, 'Yeah.' ... Within a couple of hours, the heads of the Salvation Army and the Red Cross were weeping openly, saying 'Whatever it takes, we need you here.'"

—From *"Edge Outreach: A Sustainable Solution for the Water Problem in Haiti"* by Derek Sommer, Baptist Peacemaker, Vol 32 No 2, April-June 2011.

Below: The Edge Haiti Relief Team with a mini-water-treatment system. Photo courtesy of Edge Outreach.



Food Deserts,

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Move" campaign. The Obama administration wants to contribute \$400 million through an initiative called the Healthy Food Financing Initiative to attracting grocery stores to areas that do not have them. (This effort, however, may be one of the programs eliminated in recent budget cuts.)

The State of Pennsylvania passed a similar initiative called the Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which created 80 supermarkets, as well as thousands of jobs for people, in low-income areas. Other agencies are trying to help by giving convenience stores money to expand and provide more healthful offerings.

In Chicago, IL, the Walgreen Company is joining the efforts to eliminate food deserts by offering healthful foods at its drugstore locations within the city. The theory is that, since people in food deserts still tend to utilize pharmacies frequently, they will purchase some of the healthful food options while they are there. The CVS Company and other small retail locations are also trying similar tactics.

At Fernwood United Methodist Church in the community of Rosewood in Chicago, Reverend Al Sampson started a black farmers' market program, connecting local farmers of fresh foods with local consumers. Fast food is the norm in this area and in surrounding areas, and Rev. Sampson hopes that improving connections between farmers and shoppers will improve the diets of the people in his region. Also, if the initiative is successful, it could help the incomes of the farming families.

In Globeville, CO, families can attend classes where they learn to plan healthy meals. The Public Health Department in Denver, CO, started an initiative called the Healthy Eating Project. Part of its effort is to convince local convenience stores to carry fresh produce.

One school in Denver is trying to tackle the problem by growing an urban garden. Kepner Middle School lies in the midst of a food desert, where processed foods and sodas abound. At the school, there is a vegetable garden with a wide variety of colorful pickings. It started as a simple school project, but then it was endorsed by larger foundations geared toward promoting healthy eating habits. The students who help grow the garden are able to take some of the vegetables home to their families for no charge.

Though food deserts are a growing problem in the United States, it seems that more people are recognizing the dangers of living in a food desert. Hopefully, as more people get involved in the movement, more children won't have to worry about blood sugar levels and hypertension until a ripe old age.

—Crystal Goolsby, a native of Los Angeles, CA, is a freelance writer in Austin, TX. Sources: Center for Disease Control, Center for American Progress, Los Angeles Times, Time Magazine, New York Times, Public Broadcasting System, Chicago Reader, Denver Post. For more information about food deserts, visit: www.whitehouse.gov, www.cdc.gov, www.americanprogress.org. See also "Five Days in the (Food) Desert" at www.pbs.org.

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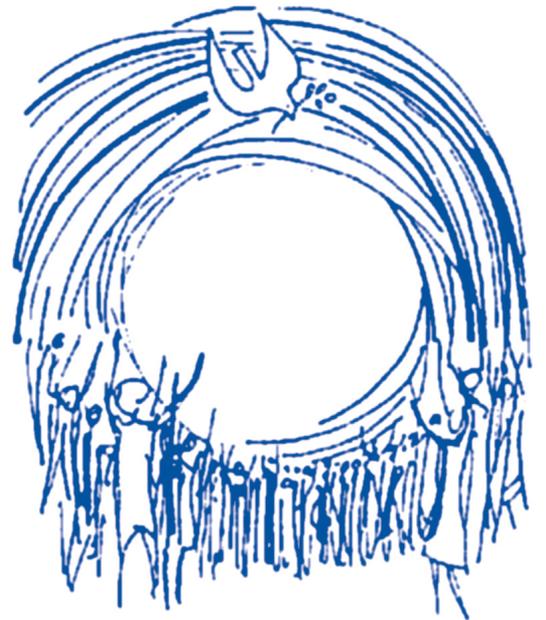
Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope 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

quotes, poems, & pithy sayings

Prayer for the Poor

Lord, forgive me for becoming accustomed to seeing children that appear to be eight, and yet are thirteen years old.
Lord, forgive me for becoming accustomed to walking in mud; I can leave it behind, the poor cannot.
Lord, forgive me for learning to tolerate filthy water; I can escape it, they must stay.
Lord, forgive me when I turn on a light and forget that they have no lights.
Lord, I can go on a hunger strike. They cannot because they are always without food.
Lord, forgive me for preaching to them "man cannot live by bread alone," and then failing to struggle with all my strength to give them bread.
Lord, help me to love them for their sakes, not to fulfill my own needs.
Lord, I dream of dying for them; but help me to live for them.
Lord, may I be with them when the hour of light arrives.
—*Father Carlos Mugica, Argentine priest and martyr (translated by Lynn Tatum)*



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

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.

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Seeds of Hope also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an economic justice attitude. These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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