

# Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

## *If I Do Not Have Love...* by Peter Yuichi Clark

*Editor's note: Just before press time, we learned of the death of longtime Seeds friend and artist Peter Yuichi Clark. You will find more about Peter on page 5, but we also wanted to share some of his writing with you. Below is a meditation he wrote for Seeds in 1991.*

The hospital had paged me at midnight to answer a Code 300 call—a cardiac arrest. Dulled from lack of sleep, I dressed and drove through the whitened streets of Louisville to reach the emergency room. I arrived in time to hear the doctor pronounce the man dead. His wife sobbed in agony and collapsed in my arms. I embraced her and held the hands of sons and daughters; we grieved in common silence as a veil of snow fell quietly outside.

When I got home, I lay down on the cold mattress and struggled with my memories of that family. Their tear-stained faces and grief-swollen eyes haunted me. It would not be easy for any of us to sleep that night. Try as I might, I could not forget them.

Like physicians, nurses and others who care for people who are suffering, the temptation that faces me as a chaplain is to distance myself from this family's tragedy and avoid becoming too emotionally involved. One must become detached if one is to survive in the helping professions.

The apostle Paul contends quite the opposite in 1 Cor. 13:3. Similarly, Jesus taught in Matt. 22:37-40 that there are two great commandments: you must love God with your whole being, and you must love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40).

These two are intimately connected. As you love God, you realize the depth of God's love for all of humanity. You perceive that God sees all people as worthy of love and care. As you love God, you begin to treat people with the same regard that God has given you. You cannot remain aloof. You identify with them. You have respect for them. Such is the beginning of love for your neighbor.

Paul illustrates here is what happens when someone ignores Jesus' command. Though Paul's hypothetical martyr does charitable deeds, he does not "have love." He is distant, detached. The martyr is not identifying with poor people and treating them as beings of equal worth. As a result, the verdict on him is simple and damning: "I gain nothing." Being unable to truly love others, he ultimately is unable to love even himself.

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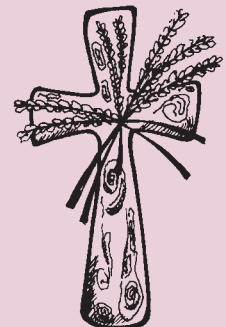
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Cross & Wheat logo by Erin Kennedy Mayer.

# Hell's Kitchen Farm Project: A Lot More than Food

by Katie Cook

Smack in the middle of the borough of Manhattan in New York City (NYC), the most unlikely of places, is a 4,000-square-foot roof garden. Called the Hell's Kitchen Farm Project (HKFP), this garden consists of 52 kiddie-pool planters perched on the top of the five-story Metro Baptist Church (Metro) building in sight of the New York Times building.

According to a sign on the roof, 400 pounds of fresh food was produced last year by 600 volunteers and visitors in 935 volunteer hours. This also included the climbing of more than 52,200 very steep stairsteps. (There is no elevator.)

That neighborhood, the west side of Midtown Manhattan, has been called Hell's Kitchen for more than a hundred years, referring to the grinding poverty of its residents, originally Irish immigrants who tried to make a home there in the late 19th century. Pervasive poverty continued there until the 1990s, when the area began to be gentrified.

Metro's pastor, Tiffany Triplett Henkel, was there when the project was initiated. HKFP volunteers planted the first seedlings in the spring of 2011, after a year of dreaming, Henkel said. She said that members of the congregation and staff had been talking for years about the fact that they had this large, under-utilized roof space—in a city where space is a crucial issue. Alan Sherouse [then the Metro pastor] told a reporter in 2012 that he remembered hearing a

church member say, "I've always thought about whether we could grow vegetables on the roof."<sup>1</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, Sherouse and Henkel, then director of Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries (Metro's nonprofit

*Members of the congregation and staff had been talking for years about the fact that they had this large, under-utilized roof space—in a city where space is a crucial issue.*

social ministry outlet, which includes services to low-income people, including a food pantry), became a part of a neighborhood network of churches and nonprofits that were addressing food security issues and food justice work. Out of that network, a more specific conversation began about the lack of fresh food available for the people who came to the various pantries for help.

At the same time, the gentrification in the neighborhood was causing many of the longtime residents difficulty in buying nutritious food. There was still some affordable housing, but the supermarkets and food suppliers were "going upscale," making fresh food more expensive. "Also at that time," Henkel added, "farmers' markets didn't take SNAP benefits, which made it even harder."

As the network was considering what to do about this, nearby Metropolitan Community Church of New York (MCCNY) Charities had an Americorps Vista intern who had experience in farming and was interested in writing a grant to start an urban agriculture project. The MCC church didn't have space to grow anything, and Metro had a large roof space but no way to get funding for such a project, so a collaboration was born.

*Left: In the spring of 2011, volunteers carried seven metric tons of soil to the Metro Baptist Church roof in Midtown Manhattan to begin the Hell's Kitchen Farm Project. Photo courtesy of Metro Baptist Church.*



Those two churches joined forces with RMM and the Clint Housing Development Company, which is an affordable housing organization in the area. “Clint Housing Development Company has a strong horticulture presence in the community, and is also interested in food security for their clients,” Henkel said.

Those four organizations wrote the grant, came up with some of the details of how to implement the project, developed a core group of advisory people and received \$15,000 from the United Way of New York City to begin.

Henkel said that much of the early money was used to secure the rooftop so that it could bear the extra weight and to ensure that the space was safe for volunteers to work there. “But it also afforded us a chance to then raise enough funds to get enough equipment like the soil, the containers and all of that,” she said.

In the spring of 2011, the group put out a random call on social media for volunteers to help carry the soil up five steep flights of stairs. “Sixty people just showed up out of nowhere,” Henkel said. Seven metric tons of soil was dropped off in front of the church. Using 200 buckets, a bucket brigade formed and those 60 volunteers moved all of the soil to the roof in one day.

*Seven metric tons of soil was dropped off in front of the church. Using 200 buckets, a bucket brigade formed and those 60 volunteers moved all of the soil to the roof in one day.*

Also that spring, volunteers planted seedlings in kiddie pools, each placed one inside another to help conserve water. And they’ve been growing food consistently ever since, always learning and changing, always working to expand the growing season. The project is still community-based and run by volunteers. Thousands of volunteers of all ages have assisted with the project, including corporate, educational and church teams from all over the country. Young people also participate in a six-week intern program for high schoolers in the summer.

The only person who is paid (other than the high-school interns, who receive a small stipend) is Mark Prehn, a part-

time staff member who serves as Food Justice Coordinator—which also involves work with the RMM food pantry in the basement of the Metro building. Prehn said, “The farm project is like a child adored by many, many loving parents.” Long-term volunteers come on Thursdays and Saturdays to do the main work, joined by teams from the neighborhood. A smaller group takes care of daily watering and care of the plants.

The food pantry, a client-choice pantry in which clients choose their food like they would in a grocery store, is open on Saturday mornings. Anywhere from 50 to 100 people—sometimes more—come for food. Prehn says that, because they harvest the produce on Thursday and Saturday to take downstairs to the pantry, clients are able to get truly fresh food.

But the HKFP organizers knew they needed to supplement this supply. “We knew at the beginning that the amount of food we could produce on the rooftop would only barely dent the need for fresh food items,” Henkel said. With 700 to 800 clients coming to the pantry every month, each representing households of three to five people, and each receiving food supplies for three days, the organizers realized that 4,000 square feet was not going to provide enough fresh food.

So, about a year into the project, they began to search for other sources of fresh produce. “We began to explore Community Supported Agriculture [CSA] aquaculture programs to better support our food pantry,” she said. They connected with an organization called JustFood and another called GrowNYC, which is agriculture focused with the promotion of justice in the city. They connected with farmers in the NYC area, mostly immigrant farmers, who were being trained to become official CSA farmers.

Please see “Farm Project” on page 4



*Right: Volunteers plant the first seedlings in one of 52 kiddie-pool planters as part of the Hell’s Kitchen Farm Project. Photo courtesy of Metro Baptist Church.*

## Farm Project, *continued from page 3*

“We got connected with a farmer, Sergio, who provides food to us for 22 weeks. He brings in fresh vegetables and some fruits from his farm in New Jersey,” Henkel said. CSAs support local farmers by providing the funds they need to plant and grow their crops. People buy full or half shares in the CSA for an entire season, and they do it upfront. On designated days, the farmer brings in the harvest, whatever it is, and the members take their share home.

“This ensures that the farmers can have all of the supplies for the season, but it also ensures they don’t have to take on the full risk,” Henkel said. “We are putting money upfront and when, say, a hurricane hits—which has happened twice since the project started—and wipes out a portion or all of the season, we are agreeing to take on that risk with the farmer. But when it isn’t a risky year, we receive the benefit of all of the growth for that season.”

Henkel said that the farm project looks for funding to purchase extra shares from Sergio. “So that’s another way we are getting fresh food into our food pantry.”

Prehn added, “Also, if someone in the CSA can’t pick up his or her share of the harvest, or if there is anything left over, that all gets donated to us.” The pantry buys most of its shelf-stable food through the United Way or the Food Bank of NYC. “Eight years into the project, those programs are recognizing more and more the need for local, fresh, nutritional food,” Prehn said.

“We also receive donations from City Harvest, which is a food rescue organization,” Prehn said. “We get a lot of

bread and produce weekly from them. We have another partnership with the farmers market, the Green Market up on 57th street. We go there every week. There’s one farmer there who, if there’s anything he wasn’t able to sell throughout the week, he will just donate it to us. I think that, in all of those programs, being able to focus on the issue of food waste, too, and redistributing what would have gone to waste, that is a very important component of Hell’s Kitchen Farm Project.”

Prehn says that people have come to expect a bigger diversity of fresh produce from the RMM pantry, compared

*“The farm project is like a child adored by many, many loving parents.”  
—Mark Prehn, Food Justice Coordinator  
Hell’s Kitchen Farm Project*

to other food pantries in the city. Depending on the time of the year, they are not always sure how much the rooftop farm is going to provide for the food pantry, so securing that diversity throughout the year has been a challenge. Having all of these other resources is helpful. “We will take pretty much whatever produce we can get,” he said.

Henkel said perhaps the most important aspect of the project is described on the back of their T-shirts: “Hell’s Kitchen Farm Project: Growing More Than Food.” She added,

*So the idea is that, yes, food is growing and that’s important, and it’s getting distributed to those who need it, but really what’s happening on the roof with us is the sense of a community coming together. It’s really fascinating to watch corporate groups and school groups and local residents in our community who are really taken by what is happening on the roof and the food we produce. Being able to see food start from the seed and go to the mouths of those who could really benefit. Or just to be up there and take a breath on the top of a building in the middle of Manhattan that has chosen to take 4,000 square feet and do something different. To listen to the buses from the Port Authority depot go around us as we’re up there, with our hands dirty, watering the plants.*



*Left: Mark Prehn, Food Justice Coordinator for the Hell’s Kitchen Farm Project, checks out some of the vegetables on the Metro Baptist Church roof with Manhattan skyscrapers in the background.  
Photo by Katie Cook.*

And this doesn't describe all of the magic. High school students from the city, who may never otherwise have the opportunity to engage in any kind of agriculture, become engaged in a very intentional way.

"They are not coming because they had such a great experience somewhere else, and they want to do more. They are really new to this concept. All of the concepts of food justice we cover with them—food deserts or food insecurity or food waste, or any of these topics—are quite new to them."

As an example, Henkel described a trip to the CSA farm in New Jersey where high-school interns harvested the food for that day and brought it back to town. "They got to see what really happens on a harvest day," Henkel said. They had never realized where a bulb of garlic came from. The idea of food waste had a whole different experience when they saw how hard it was to harvest that food.... And it's not just the kids learning; the adults also get a lot out of the experience on the roof. We are growing a lot more than food."

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. Most of this information came from an October 2018 interview with Tiffany Triplett Henkel and Mark Prehn. See also "Rooftop Farm an Oasis in NYC" by Alice Horner, *Associated Baptist Press*, 2012.

## Endnote

1. See "Making Peace between a Planet and Its People" by Chrystal Bartlett, *Baptist Peacemaker*, Vol 32 No 2, Fall 2012, page 14.

## Love, continued from page 1

To me as a minister, and to all of us as affluent Christians in a hungry world, this verse speaks a powerful word. Do we value the poor and suffering as our sisters and brothers? If we give to assuage our consciences, to make ourselves better, or to impress others with our philanthropy, then we receive our reward—a very hollow one. But if we act because we hear God's call to act in love for all people, the reward is love—and we gain everything.

*Gracious, compassionate God, we have seen your selfless love in the life of your Son, Jesus. He has called us to love you with our full being, and to love our neighbors as people of worth and value in your sight. Grant us the strength to help those who suffer without distancing ourselves from them. Teach us not to be afraid. O God, may we risk bravely in your love. Amen. ■*

## Remembering Peter Clark

The Rev. Dr. Peter Yuichi Clark, a longtime and beloved *Seeds* artist, died at his home in Alameda, CA, on December 6, after a long and courageous battle with biliary tract cancer. He was 54. Peter began sharing art with *Seeds* publications as soon as the ministry moved to Texas in 1991. Our readers will recognize his name, but will perhaps not know anything more about him except that he was an accomplished and generous artist.

Peter wrote his own obituary. (His wife, Tilly, wrote, "Writing your own obituary may sound unusual to some of you, but it was an exercise that he sometimes gave to his students, and one he decided to practice himself through the lens of his diagnosis.")

Peter wrote that he felt called from an early age to serve people as a Christian minister, and passionately and cheerfully followed that vocation throughout his life. At the time of his death, Peter held the positions of Director of Spiritual Care Services for UCSF Health at the University of California, San Francisco, and Professor of Pastoral Care at the American Baptist Seminary of the West, a member school of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.

A graduate of Plano, TX, Senior High School, Peter received his BA from Baylor University, his MDiv from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and his doctorate

from Emory University. He was ordained to the ministry at Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, and endorsed as a healthcare chaplain by the American Baptist Home Mission Societies. He held a number of certifications and awards in the fields of chaplaincy and Clinical Pastoral Education, but he wrote that he was proudest of being the husband of Tilly Roche Clark and the father of Adam Kiyoshi Clark.

Peter was well known for his hearty laughter and constantly positive and welcoming presence. Even as he was beginning to succumb to cancer, he sent a donation and encouraging note (in his amazingly beautiful handwriting) to the *Seeds* office. He is already sorely missed by the people involved in this ministry—even the ones who never met him. —lkc



# New SNAP Measure Will Rule Out 668,000 People

by Katie Cook

On April 1, hundreds of thousands of Americans who rely on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits will no longer receive them. On that day, a new rule from the Trump administration designed to tighten work requirements for recipients will go into ef-

*"SNAP needs to be preserved—and even expanded—as an American treasure. Making sure all Americans have enough food to eat has long enjoyed bipartisan support. Let us hope that continues."  
—Craig Gunderson*

fect. The rule will affect able-bodied adults, 18 to 49 years old, who do not have dependents. Anyone who does not work at least 20 hours a week will be dropped from the list.

To almost all of us, this seems to make sense on paper. Let those who can work do so, right?

Except that it's not in any way that simple.

About 36 million people (some sources say almost 38 million) receive SNAP benefits. After April 1, according to the USDA, that number will decrease by 668,000.

This measure is not entirely new. Since 1996, adults in this category have been limited, with benefits capped at three months in a three-year period, unless they can prove that they are working at least 20 hours a week. But many states have been allowed to waive those caps in some circumstances—such as high unemployment figures in the region, natural disasters, industry failures and other sudden economic downturns. This new rule seeks to block states from issuing those waivers.

To support this move, the Trump administration points to low national unemployment figures and what they see as a stable economy. What it perhaps does not see is that there may be more jobs because people are increasingly working two or more jobs—low-paying jobs with no benefits—to make ends meet. Also, the administration does not seem to see the swelling ranks of people still coming to food pantries and food banks across the country. If things are so much better, why do these people still need help? Even when they have at least one job?

Another, seemingly insurmountable, complication for people in these situations is in the quest for jobs—again,

part-time, low-paying jobs with no benefits—they invariably lose any other federal benefits they might have. The system is set up to punish people who work at these kinds of jobs.

Advocates for impoverished people have brought up a long string of reasons why they think the new measure will not only not achieve what it is designed to do, it will cause more problems than ever.

"Those people and their needs don't evaporate simply because the federal government backs down on some of its commitments," Ellen Vollinger, SNAP director at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), told *Time Magazine's* Jasmine Aguilar. She called the new rule "very short-sighted." James D. Weill, FRAC president, called the plan "deeply flawed and ill-conceived."

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-MI, the top Democrat on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, issued a statement saying that the plan will only serve to punish workers whose jobs are seasonal or unreliable.

Robert Greenstein, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said the rule will disproportionately affect minorities.

Yet another issue is a lack of transportation. Chad Morrison, executive director of the Mountaineer Food Bank in Gassaway, WV, told *Time* that the people who will be impacted by this rule in his region will be people who don't have access to transportation or consistent work opportunities. "There's just so many unique challenges," he said.

Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, Speaker of the House of Representatives, called the rule "draconian," adding that it will be inflicted on those Americans "who face the highest barriers to employment and economic stability."

In reading all of these statements, I am reminded of what economist, professor and former US Secretary of Labor Robert Reich told us in his 2013 documentary, *Inequality for All*: that economies don't survive when the number of people with buying power is drastically reduced.

Craig Gunderson, ACES Distinguished Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois—and a nationally respected voice for food security, wrote in an NBC news story that the new SNAP measures threaten "an American success story."

The Food Stamp Program, the forerunner of SNAP, was established more than 50 years ago to address the menace of hunger in the United States. Over the years, numerous stud-

ies have shown that the program is, as Gunderson wrote, “responsible for profound reductions in food insecurity.” He said the program has enjoyed bipartisan support for all these years—until now.

“SNAP needs to be preserved—and even expanded,” Gunderson said, “as an American treasure. Making sure all Americans have enough food to eat has long enjoyed bipartisan support. Let us hope that continues.”

Aguilar described, in her *Time* article, a 2016 West Virginia pilot project in the nine counties with the lowest unemployment rates. The program required a minimum of 20 hours of work per week for people to receive SNAP benefits.

It failed.

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported that 5,400 people lost their benefits, food insecurity increased in those counties and unemployment remained stagnant.

Shouldn't this tell us something?

Food Stamps and SNAP evoke strong feelings of resentment among some Americans—most of whom are very quick to judge SNAP recipients, and are very quick to call themselves Christian. The big picture, that of a healthy populace who can then contribute to the good of society, is obscured by a mental image, an incorrect one, of lazy people living luxuriously off of their, the aforesaid Americans', hard-earned tax money.

Food security should never have become a partisan issue. People who claim to be people of faith—many faiths—are taught that the presence of hungry people in their midst is an egregious indictment. And we are not given permission to be judges of who deserves food and who doesn't.

My brother attends a

church in Wheeler, TX, that has an active food distribution program. One day a parishioner approached the pastor, saying that he wanted to give a large donation for the food program, but he didn't want it to go to certain people, whom he named. He said, “If you don't use it this way, we'll go to another church.” Pastor Mercer put his arms on the man's shoulders and said, “You and I need to pray that you find the right church.”

I just want you to think about that.

—Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. Sources: Associated Press; *Time Magazine*, NBC News; *Robert Reich, Inequality for All*; personal interviews.

## Open Letter from a SNAP Recipient

*Editor's note: The following is a Facebook post from a former SNAP recipient in the Texas Panhandle, where the oil- and agriculture-based economy has suffered in recent years. The Amarillo Globe News recently reported that food insecurity averages 14.6 percent across the 29 counties in the region. Zack Wilson, director of Amarillo's High Plains Food Bank, told the Globe News that job growth is not happening in the rural counties of that region. The frustration voiced here can be multiplied 668,000 times across the nation.*

**S**o now you want to restrict food stamps. We already have homeless people starving and population being decreased by less births. Maybe it's a good thing; no one can afford kids now even with jobs. The minimum wage in Texas is under \$7.50 and most jobs start there. Oil field jobs are down. Most people are living in tiny housing because they can't afford traditional houses.

We are getting close to people having no hope. I'm not saying things don't need reforms, but I feel it's more that the offices that regulate food stamps are counties away and don't do house checks. They have no idea what's going on. It has nothing to do with people who really need food. It has to do with nobody knows anybody anymore.

Not having local offices has made it too easy for fraud. But you shouldn't penalize people who do need help. You need to do something. Open food kitchens to feed people; I don't care. But it's not right to let kids go without.

I've used food stamps and I ate a lot of noodles and hamburger helper just to get through the month and, yes, I was working. Not everyone on food stamps doesn't work. But we all have bills and making \$150 to at the most \$300 a month doesn't go far when you have kids, rent, day care, bills, and, if you're lucky, car payments. YOU add it up and make it work. Trust me; it doesn't.

So you end up not working because there's no day care. Unless you can somehow get someone to watch the kids. And still you're not making it. So you get a second job and go without sleep. Trust me; I'm a grandmother now. I've done all this. I've gone to school and became a nurse. I worked myself into the ground, working 80-hour weeks and got PTSD nursing. I gave up on myself and had no self-esteem.

And I feel this will hit people that are in a place like I was at one point. And they will not have the help I did. It worries me. I've seen people who need help. I want them not to be criticized. I just want people to remember that. ■



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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 people in God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and vulnerable people; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

## Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

God takes greatest pleasure, not from burnt offerings on an altar, not from our coming in our best clothes every Sunday to church, not even from our appropriate practice of the ordinances. Those things are important. Worship is important. But the greatest worship we do is the service of the people.

—Raymond Bailey, "Do the Right Thing"

The church may preach God's love with great eloquence, yet there is no eloquence so persuasive as that expressed when God's people as Christ's body feed the hungry in this world. They are the ones with whose needs Christ fully identifies himself. Then does the loaf make itself known as the Lord of the Emmaus road.

—W. Clyde Tilley, "Knowing Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread"

We can imagine a better ending to the story of the rich fool in Jesus' parable. Imagine hungry children in Romania sitting down to a nutritious meal at the only school that will allow them to attend. Imagine the members of the Kinigi Church in the Congo sharing grain with the mothers of malnourished children. Imagine a farmer in Thailand listening to a missionary explain how these new seeds will enable the farmer to feed his family. Imagine a homeless child in Russia getting medical attention from a caring doctor. Imagine a family in Indonesia walking to church to receive the gift of a goat that will make the difference between life and death.

—Brett Younger, "Storing Grain and Starving People"

As Dorothy Day once wisely said, "What the Gospel forever takes away from Christians is the right to judge between the worthy and unworthy poor." When we sit in judgment like that, we stand aloof and apart. That's precisely the position the Gospel does not allow a Christian—as if we could critique who is worthy and who is unworthy.

—Richard Rohr,  
*What the Mystics Know*



Art by Peter Yuichi Clark

### *Editorial Address*

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Seeds also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for Advent, Lent and an annual Hunger Emphasis—with an attitude "toward justice, peace and food security for all of God's children." These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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