



# Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

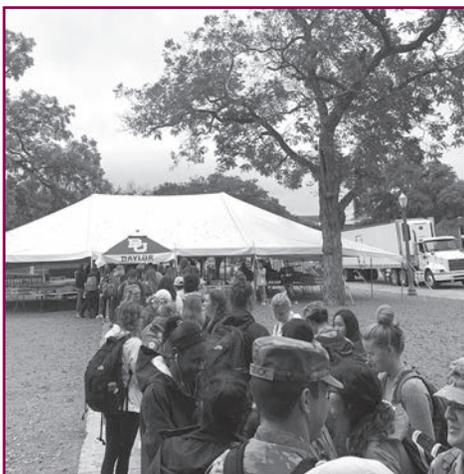
## College Students Struggle to Fill Their Stomachs

by Mira Martin & Brad Springman

*Editor's note: This issue is the result of a new partnership between Seeds of Hope and the Baylor University Department of Journalism, Public Relations & New Media, in which students take on a full issue of Hunger News & Hope as their semester project for an editing class. Brad Springman and Mira Martin worked closely with Seeds staff to inquire into an issue that was of great importance to them: students who don't know where their next meal is coming from. They looked into the student population at the local community college and at their own Alma Mater, examining how students at an affluent school like Baylor (which is literally across the street from the Seeds office) could go hungry. We hope you will learn from the stories they gathered. -lkc*

In the world of higher education, it may be hard to believe that some students struggle to make it from meal to meal. Still, the harsh reality is just that. The good news is that universities across the nation are striving to increase their resources and improve their success programs, so that they can equip students with essential dietary needs to lead them toward success.

Administrators at Baylor University and McLennan Community College (MCC), both located in Waco, TX, shared how they are taking action to fight food insecurity and support their students.



*Hungry students blend in with the crowds as they wait in line for the free farmers market.*

*Photo by Brad Springman.*

"Our job here is to make sure we have shelf-stable items and as many items as we can keep on the shelves for students who have any, ANY type of food need," Baylor's Michelle Cohenour said. "For some students, it's snacks that they don't have money for. And then other students are coming multiple times a week because we are their food source."

Cohenour is the director of student success initiatives at Baylor and oversees The Store, a food pantry on campus that is available for any student to access.

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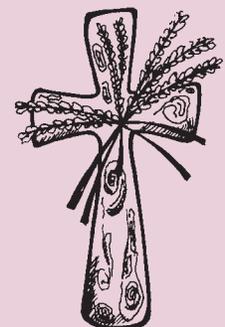
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*Cross & Wheat logo by Erin Kennedy Mayer.*

## Students, continued from page 1

While many campuses have weekly meal plans, breakfast is usually a luxury for struggling students, and getting through weekends without a secure food source is a constant battle. Even if students are able to fill their stomachs, they may not be giving their bodies the necessary vitamins and nutrients that are indispensable to living a healthy and functional life.

"I had a student tell me recently that to get involved in something else beyond class and studying 'just felt too daunting because I don't have the energy,'" Cohenour said.

Food insecurity is difficult to recognize for a number of reasons, one being that the physical symptoms usually are not easily recognizable, another being that the stigma associated with being hungry prevents people from speaking up.

"But you would be shocked. I've met with students—both young men and women—who talk about food insecurity, and I would never know it by looking at them," Cohenour said. "I mean, it is such an invisible, personal identity that we don't even know."

There are probably people in your everyday life who often take half of each meal to go just to make it through another day in the week.

The problem with incidents like this is that many people would rather skip a meal and stay quiet rather than ask for help. One of the biggest challenges colleges face is the task of lessening the shame attached to food insecurity, while

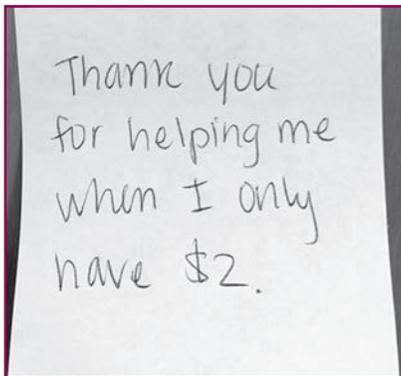


Photo by Brad Springman.

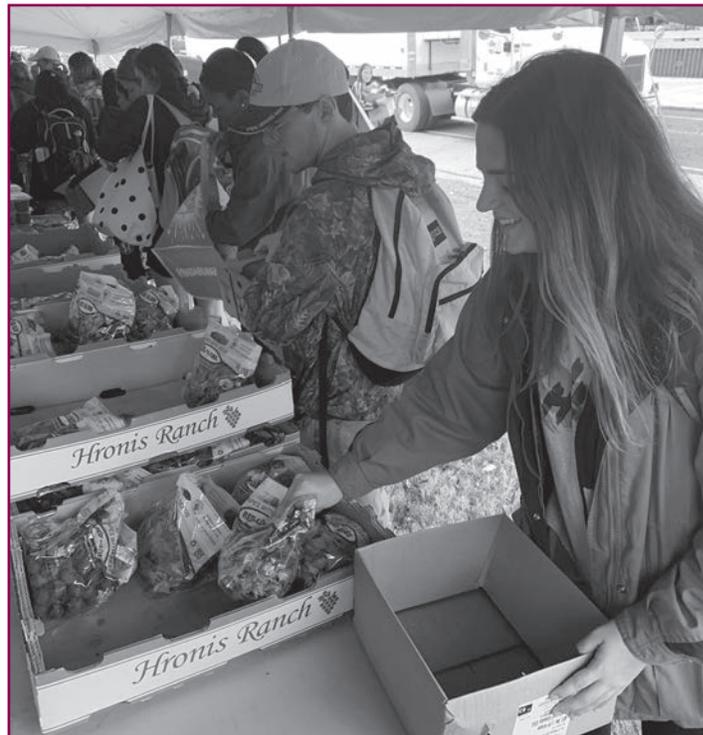
many students struggle to identify with their needs.

"We will tell [students] about the pantry and then talk about how we can save them \$100 a month if they would just come use us," MCC College Success Coach Spike Burt said. "That has actually helped normalize the food pantry for a lot of students."

Burt is in charge of running Paulanne's Pantry, the food pantry at MCC. He said that if visiting a food pantry has a way of benefiting all students enrolled, it will seem like less of a big deal to students really in need. Both MCC and Baylor have also provided free farmers markets on campus, and anyone enrolled can take advantage of these without the fear of judgment.

Baylor's free farmers market is held once a semester on campus and provides nearly 2,000 students with over 30,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables while raising awareness for issues surrounding food insecurity.

Baylor has taken many steps toward diminishing the stigma around seeking help to receive food—something that



Above: Students Macy McCarney and Greyson Landrum stocking up after waiting in line with others.  
Photo by Brad Springman.

other food pantries may not consider. Combating hunger issues on college campuses is especially difficult because students live in such tight-knit communities.

"Several [food pantries] in the state of Texas have you come in, you meet with a staff member, you fill out an intake form.... We heard barrier, barrier, barrier, barrier. Because if you come to the front desk and you know our student who works there you might not want to say, 'Hey I wanna talk to Michelle about accessing the store,'" Cohenour said.

To prevent obstacles like this from deterring students, Baylor's food pantry has a card swipe system on the pantry door. All undergraduate and graduate students have anonymous access to the pantry and can enter and exit whenever they need to. This system also helps Baylor record quantitative data that helps measure how frequently students visit the pantry.

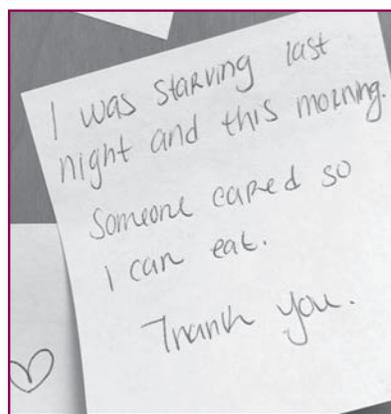


Photo by Brad Springman.

Cohenour shared that in September The Store received 781 visits by 305 different students. In October she said visits were at an all-time high level as they were receiving 200 visits per week.

Baylor also added a casual stop by The Store as part of its new student tour route to help spread the word.

Perhaps one of the most successful attempts at making students feel safe is the Sticky Note Project.

"Students are starting to leave notes for each other on the back of the door... a lot are encouragement for each other... like 'thanks so much, this has prevented me from passing out.' Two students wrote that. It lets you know the level of need," Cohenour said.

The Sticky Note Project is a powerful way to let students know that they are not alone. Not only is it an act of gratitude from students to the success center, the sticky notes encourage and motivate other students going through food insecurity.

"The community here is literally the best! I don't feel alone, and neither should you!" one student wrote.

Students should not have to focus their energy on finding a meal when they are at college to learn and grow.

"To be food insecure at Baylor University, as you can imagine, is a very difficult thing," Cohenour said. "To be food insecure at any university is difficult, but here at Baylor, especially when there is such a dichotomy between students who have and those who don't. It can be even more isolating."

Cohenour shared that on the 2019 New2BU survey, a survey for all first-year students, 15 percent of students said they were not able to afford money to eat three meals a day, an increase up from 9 percent in 2017. A survey given every three years to all enrolled students showed that 25 percent of students said they sometimes do not eat enough food to try and save food for the next day.

Food insecurity is a growing problem at universities. Programs like Paulanne's Pantry and The Store strive to combat food insecurity and to normalize the issue to ensure that all students have easy access to food and are placed in a position to strive for success.

— See bios about Mira Martin and Brad Springman on page 8.



*Note: At press time, Central Texas Food Bank—a Feeding America and Feeding Texas food bank serving 21 counties in the area—announced that it had just launched a new partnership with Baylor to provide food for more than 460 students each month. The goal is to enhance student access to nutritious foods and expand the availability of produce. Last March, the pantry at MCC received a substantial and much-needed bequest from local attorney Paulanne Hoover and renamed itself Paulanne's Pantry. (See above: Victoria Rodriguez checks the shelves for canned goods. Photo by Katie Cook.)*

## Bon Jovi's Soul Kitchen

by Mira Martin

In November 2019, CBS *Sunday Morning* dug deeper into how celebrities are participating in the fight to end hunger. Reporter Tracy Smith sat down with Jon Bon Jovi and his wife Dorothea Hurley to talk about their involvement. About eight years ago, Bon Jovi co-founded the JBJ Soul Kitchen in New Jersey.



Art by Jesse Mannings

According to the website, the Soul Kitchen's mission is to "provide healthy, organic and locally-grown food to [their] neighbors in need." At this unique restaurant, patrons can either give a \$20 donation to cover their meal and likely someone else's, or they can pay for their meal through service, such as washing the dishes. The restaurant sees an even amount of people coming in to donate and people coming in because they simply do not know where their next meal will come from. Hurley briefly talked about the challenge of recognizing someone struggling with hunger.

"Hunger doesn't look like what your mind's eye might imagine. It's the people at your church, it's the kids that go to school with your kids," she said.

When the couple realized this, they felt it was their duty to help others as much as they could. Opening this year is a JBJ Soul Kitchen located at Rutgers University in New Jersey. When asked about his choice to expand the restaurant to college campuses, Bon Jovi reminded viewers that things aren't always as they seem.

"When you send your kids off to school, you don't even think about after tuition, books, living, what's left for food...we all think it's the right of passage to study hard and eat the ramen noodles, but how 'bout if it's the only thing you can afford?" Bon Jovi said.

The couple hopes to continue spreading awareness about this issue, as it affects a good percentage of the nation's population. In the meantime, see how you can help students at your local college, and if in New Jersey, stop by the JBJ Soul Kitchen to enjoy a meal while supporting the community.

— Mira Martin's bio is on page 8.

# Q & A with Chelsea Strawn

by Brad Springman

*Editor's note: Our guest editors for this issue wanted to talk with a student who had experienced food insecurity while studying at Baylor University. Brad Springman spoke with Chelsea Strawn, who now works for the Texas Hunger Initiative and volunteers at Baylor's The Store, a ministry that includes providing food and clothing to students. Here's what she said.*

## What was your experience with hunger like at Baylor?

My number one priority was always getting financially settled enough to stay enrolled in classes. And every single semester that was hard because I got a ton of scholarships, but that was the only support that I had because I couldn't get private loans or anything like that because no one in my family had credit to co-sign for it. So I worked two jobs my freshman year, and then I still wasn't really able to make ends meet.

I didn't consciously think, "Oh, I'm only going to eat two meals a day," but that's what ended up happening because you have to make time. There's not time to eat. There's not time to go to the grocery store. That keeps you from focusing on the fact that there's not money to do those things either.

Friends would be like "Hey, we are gonna go get pizza; we're gonna go do this," and I'd be like "I can't make it" because I couldn't afford to and I would miss out on a lot of social opportunities because if it cost any money I couldn't go. So eventually my group of friends would stop inviting me places because I would say no I'm working, or I cannot afford it.

## What helped you the most during this time?

In my last year that's when The Store got started and that helped me the most. So the first years of being a [Community Leader] The Store wasn't really doing anything, so that was rough. But I do remember the free farmers market things

that would happen on campus like the huge tents, the lines. I remember that being the best day ever! I would get up all my girls and say, "Hey, we are going to the farmers market. What do you want me to get?" It was just really nice not to have to worry about that.

It was comforting to know I wasn't the only one struggling with food.

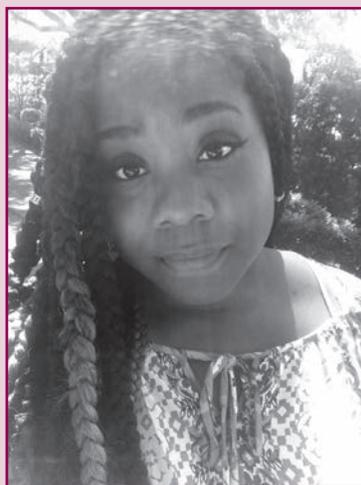
## Did you experience any stigma surrounding food insecurity?

Yeah, it was really hard because you, as a student at Baylor, you just think you're the only one that's struggling for money, like you know everyone is, because we're poor college kids, but you just assume that you're the only one really struggling because everyone has these nice cars, and fresh sets of nails and everyone's going out every weekend.

I kind of just kept it to myself, but then I would say "No, I can't come to this thing." And my friends would be like "Why?" And I'd be like "Oh, I don't have the money." And they'd be like "It's going to be really fun; you should just do it," as if I was saying I simply didn't want to spend the money. They didn't really understand I genuinely didn't have money. I'm not saying it wouldn't be a good investment or a good time that I didn't want to be there. I'm saying if I try to use my debit card it would not work.

It was stressful because I feel like there were some people who genuinely did not understand that and genuinely couldn't imagine a world where they didn't get what they wanted. Their parents would just put money in their account every month.

My mom told me when I got into Baylor, "I cannot help with any of it, so if you want to go you got to figure it out." So, in my mind, I made a big deal about wanting to go, so I just have



Chelsea Strawn, above, currently works at the Texas Hunger Initiative, where her main focus is supporting organizations that deal with poverty in the United States. She graduated from Baylor in 2018 with a political science pre-law degree. While studying at Baylor, she was a Community Leader in the Honors College for two years and worked in the Provost's Office. Photo courtesy of Chelsea Strawn.

to figure it out and not complain. But you do start to feel really sad and feel like other people are having a better experience because they can pay for their books on time, and my books would always come super late because I would have to wait to get paid.

I started to feel bad like I wasn't good enough to go to school here.

## What is the biggest thing you learned from your experience dealing with hunger?

That people are really good at pretending like everything's okay and really good at pretending like they don't need help. I didn't really do well to hide it because I remember at some point during my junior year I just didn't care anymore, and I was like "You girls think what you want."

I found out in other ways that people were struggling, and then I realized "Wow." It is like a full time job that you point on to make sure that no one thinks that you are struggling. So I learned to ask more than one time if people are okay. If I really want to know how you are, I'd be like "Have you eaten; have you slept?"

## What is your job right now?

I work as an auxiliary staff member with the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty. Basically, I work with the local hunger coalition.

I work separately with The Store and the success center to help them recruit volunteers and organize the store, and keep donations coming in because The Store has a pretty big budget, but donations are what keeps it full.

The food pantry is supposed to be supplemental to other sources of food. So if people are using a food pantry as their only source of food, that means that there is another problem that we need to fix.

From first-hand experience, I can help people walk through the [Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP] application, walk through renewing it and tell them how to use their card information. If you could use more food than what the pantry has, that is the kind of person who needs to use SNAP.

There is a stigma that you are taking money from the government and living on welfare. No, there is actually a big federal push to get more people enrolled because it stimulates the economy. Let me tell you, nobody is living well off of using food stamps. It's something that you use, not even your main source of food, it is just supplemental. It is more taking strain off of you then letting you fully relax.

## Have you seen Baylor or other Colleges utilizing SNAP?

I think Baylor is in a unique position because the idea is that, if you're here, you're rich and not just comfortable. You're rich and you don't have to think about anything. I think Baylor has a long way to go in terms of using SNAP because we have to start the conversation.

It is a very rigorous institution, so most students cannot work and do school. Most students cannot succeed.

## Is there any thing else you want people to know?

If you look at research, if you look at policy, there is no downside to helping people get food. There just isn't, so we have to try and separate politics from just basic human decency and just realize that the vast majority of people want nothing more than to be able to provide for themselves.

For most people, their life goal is to provide for their children just like people who have money. So we have to stop treating poor people as if they were different.

We just have to get to know people who have experienced food insecurity, listen to them, see their humanity, think of times when you struggle.

People in the United States should just be able to have food. I don't think that's something we need to argue about.

## What would you say to someone who is in a really good position to help?

If they are a professor I would say offer extra credit to your students for donations or volunteer time.

I would research food insecurity, I would look at people and think: "Do they eat when they go to the dining hall? How often do they go to the dining hall? Do they decline invitations to go out?" Just kind of watch them. Be aware, and volunteer at The Store.

If we get this generation of students secure financially, then we can stop cyclical poverty. Then we don't have to have this conversation with our kids.

Just be kind to people.

—Bradley Springman's bio is on page 8.



Art by Susan Daily, IBVM

# To Solve the Hidden Epidemic of Teen Hunger, We Should Listen to Teens Who Experience It

by Stephanie Clintonia Boddie

## Millions of America's youth experience food insecurity.

For many young people, the toughest choice they will ever have to make about food is what to eat at home or what to choose from a menu.

But for Texas high schoolers Tamiya, Juliana, Trisha, Cara and Kristen, the choices they have to make about food are more difficult. For them, the conversation is less about food and more about how to put food on the table.

"It's kind of hard because, like, I know I'm young, and my momma don't want me to get a job, but it's really helping out," Kristin told us for a 2019 study regarding her decision to work as a waitress at a fast food chain. "Because basically, my check is paying for the food we're going to eat...the tips I made today are what we ate off of."

Such stories are part of a hidden epidemic that I—a social work scholar—and one of my students, Ana O'Quin, investigated for a recent study about food insecurity among America's teenagers. Food insecurity, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, means limited or

uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. It also means the inability to acquire foods without resorting to socially unacceptable means, such as stealing or transactional dating.

The consequences of food insecurity follow teens into the classroom and even reduce their chances of graduation.

According to the most recent federal estimates, 37 million people live in food-insecure households. This includes *nearly 7 million young people who are 10 to 17 years old.*

The problem of food insecurity is particularly pronounced among African Americans, who collectively are twice as likely as whites to experience food insecurity.

### Going Without

Teens in these households are more likely to skip meals or not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food. Some teens drink water, eat junk food or go to sleep instead of eating a meal.

"Most parents will feed you before they feed themselves," Trisha told us. "When food stamps first come, Mamma cooks a lot. But like a week later, it's nothing. Maybe cereal, or noodles, sandwiches."

Juliana added, "We used to always buy rice, because you can buy a lot of it, and it's cheap. You can buy Spam and rice and that would be the whole meal for the rest of the week."

While many teens rely on their parents and guardians well into adulthood, we found that these teens rely on themselves before they even become adults. Julianna says she started babysitting at about the age of 12 to help put food on the table.

"Whatever money I would get from that, I would give it to my mamma," Julianna said.

It's not uncommon for teens to sacrifice to make sure their mother eats.

For instance, Kristin told us that her thinking goes like this: "I know your health is worse than mine. So mamma make sure you eat. I don't care...I can scrounge up some food at school."

### Taking Risks to Eat

The teens we spoke with shared how peers engage in risky behaviors that have long-term consequences. Out of desperation, some teens – rarely but still too often – find



Photo by Katie Cook.

themselves shoplifting, stealing, transactional dating, “trading sex” for food or selling drugs to access food. “Stealing is the main thing,” said Cara.

### *Health impact*

Teens typically experience a growth spurt and need more food during adolescence. Without adequate nutrition, teens often experience the short-term effects of food insecurity, such as stomach aches, headaches and low energy. Teens in our study mentioned having a difficult time focusing in class or even staying awake during school.

Food insecurity can result in long-term effects in the following areas:

- Physical health conditions, like asthma, anemia, obesity and diabetes.
- Mental and behavioral health including anxiety, depression, difficulty getting along with peers, substance abuse and even suicidal thoughts.
- Cognitive health such as slower learning rates and lower math and reading scores.

### *What can be done?*

These teens live in households eligible to receive free and reduced breakfast and lunch and food assistance benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the U.S. government’s largest anti-hunger program, which served 40 million in 2018.

Eligible families receive an electronic benefit transfer of funds each month to purchase food, on average US\$1.39 per meal.

Teens from our study said they preferred electronic benefit transfer over the stigma of going to a food pantry or other public place to receive food. To address the hidden epidemic of teen food insecurity and its consequences, the teens first suggested increasing food stamp benefits to provide the extra food growing teens need.

The teens in our study also suggested:

- Encouraging teens to participate in school sports or afterschool programs like The Cove or the Boys and Girls Clubs where meals are served.
- Recommending that restaurants participate in food rescue programs like Cultivate that prepare weekend meals for schoolchildren.
- Cultivating gardens at schools or in the community through organizations like 4-H clubs, university extension programs and the Food Project.
- Developing job training programs like the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative to help teens gain skills to break the cycle of poverty and hunger.

### *Employment desires*

Teens like Kristin prefer to work to help put food on the table. While research shows there are benefits of teens

working to provide food for their families, it also highlights the trade-offs such as students abandoning school for work.

Young people who experience food insecurity bring a keen awareness to this challenge. It’s time for people who can do something about the problem to listen to what they have to say.

—Stephanie Clintonia Boddie is Assistant Professor of Church and Community Ministries at Baylor University. She divides her time between the Diana Garland School of Social Work and the School of Education. Having grown up in Pittsburgh, PA, she has achieved an impressive body of work on food security among young people there and continues that work in Waco. Hunger News & Hope readers have seen Dr. Boddie’s work in previous issues (see Vol 19 No 3, Fall 2019).

**Hunger News & Hope**  
received five  
Associated Church Press  
awards last year.  
Don't miss another issue!

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### **A Note to Our Readers**

As we are making the final corrections in this issue, the US and the world are being shut down in many ways by the outbreak of the Coronavirus. We are hearing daily from staffs of food pantries and soup kitchens, people whose work it is to feed hungry people, about the challenges they face and the creative ways they are finding to do their work safely. We will report on these heroic efforts in the next issue of *Hunger News & Hope*.

—From the Seeds Editorial Team & Council of Stewards

## Hunger News & Hope

is published quarterly by Seeds of Hope Publishers, in partnership with the following groups:

- Alliance of Baptists
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

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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

## Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

**W**e can't stand aside and say this doesn't matter. A stunted child anywhere in the world becomes a stunted child everywhere.  
—Roger Thurow, senior fellow, Global Food & Agriculture Program of the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs

Hungry people don't have a voice; are you going to be their voice?  
— Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America

Hunger is not a problem. It is an obscenity. How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.  
— Anne Frank

Recent research shows that many children who do not have enough to eat wind up with diminished capacity to understand and learn. Children don't have to be starving for this to happen. Even mild undernutrition—the kind most common among poor people in America—can do it.  
— Carl Sagan

When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, "Now is that political, or social?" He said, "I feed you." Because the good news to a hungry person is bread.  
— Desmond Tutu



Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

### Brad Springman



Brad is a sophomore at Baylor and is from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He currently studies journalism/public relations and is on track to receive a business administration minor. He is also a member of Phi Kappa Chi.

### Mira Martin



Mira is currently a junior at Baylor from Dallas. She is pursuing a degree in journalism/public relations with a concentration in business. She is a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma and serves as a SING chair for her chapter this year.

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.

### 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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