

Hunger News & Hope

A Seeds of Hope Publication

Welfare Scandal Rocks Mississippi

by Michael Williamson

Editor's note: Most of the time, when we hear about welfare fraud, we think of wild (and inaccurate) stories about so-called welfare queens and low-income people abusing assistance programs. Meanwhile, Michael Williamson, who lives in Mississippi, has found a real case of welfare fraud, this one perpetrated by upper-income folks.

In Mississippi, a welfare scandal has exposed how millions of dollars were diverted to the rich and powerful—including professional athletes—instead of helping some of the neediest people in the nation.

The state has ranked among the poorest in the US for decades, but only a fraction of its federal welfare money has been going toward direct aid to families. Instead, the Mississippi Department of Human Services allowed well-connected people to fritter away tens of millions of welfare dollars from 2016 to 2019, according to the state auditor and state and federal prosecutors.¹

Former Human Services Director John Davis has pleaded guilty to charges tied to welfare misspending in one of the state's largest public corruption cases.

The scandal has ensnared

Please see "Welfare Scandal" on page 2.

What You'll Find Inside:

2

Welfare Scandal
(Continued)

4

Fighting Hunger
(for Food & Books)
in the Summer Months
An Interview with
Linda English

8

Humanizing the Homeless:
The Continuing Photographic
Work of Leah Denbok

10

Newsfront
Cindy McCain at the World Food
Programme, Homeless Seniors,
What Homeless People Want,
Vietnamese "Super Coffee"

12

Quotes, Poems & Pithy
Sayings



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer



Welfare Fraud,

continued from page 1

high-profile figures, including former wrestler Brett DiBiase and retired National Football League (NFL) quarterback Brett Favre, who is one of more than three dozen defendants in a civil lawsuit the current Human Services director filed to try to recover some of the welfare money wasted while Davis was in charge.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) money helped fund pet projects of the wealthy, including \$5 million for a volleyball arena that Favre supported at his alma mater, the University of Southern Mississippi, according to Mississippi Auditor Shad White. Favre's daughter played volleyball at the school starting in 2017.²

Another \$2.1 million of TANF money went toward an attempt to develop a concussion drug by a company in which Favre was an investor, White said. Favre has asked a judge to dismiss him from the lawsuit, with his attorney arguing that the Department of Human Services (DHS), not Favre, is responsible for "grossly improper and unlawful handling of welfare funds." Favre is not facing criminal charges.

Some of the money that was intended to help low-income families was spent on luxury travel for Davis and on people close to him, on drug rehabilitation for DiBiase, and on boot camp-style gym classes for public officials.³

Mississippi has ranked among the poorest in the US for decades, but only a fraction of its federal welfare money has been going toward direct aid to families. Instead, the Mississippi Department of Human Services allowed well-connected people to fritter away tens of millions of welfare dollars from 2016 to 2019.

The nonprofit Mississippi Community Education Center (MCEC) used TANF funds to pay a mortgage on a ranch in Flora, MI, owned by former football player Marcus Dupree, and funded a fitness program run by former footballer Paul Lacoste. Dupree was also paid by the Mississippi Community Education Center and Family Resource Center of North Mississippi for a statewide lecture tour.⁴

MCEC received \$2.5 million in federal grant funds diverted from Mississippi's TANF welfare funds, as well as tens of millions in public funds as an element of the scheme.⁵ The Mississippi state auditor has termed the scheme "the largest public embezzlement case in state history." A grand jury in Hinds County indicted MCEC founder, Nancy New, and her son Zach in the scheme.

Favre had introduced MCEC's founders to top state welfare officials. A lawsuit filed against former Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant for his alleged role in the scandal resulted in the publication of a 2017 text message between Nancy New and Favre in September 2022.⁶ The message revealed that former Mississippi governor Phil Bryant and some members of his government illegally diverted welfare funding to build a volleyball stadium at Favre's alma mater, the University of Southern Mississippi, with Favre asking New: "If you were to pay me is there anyway [sic] the media can find out where it came from and how much?"⁷

In contrast, some welfare recipients say they found little relief but plenty of bureaucratic headaches from collecting modest monthly TANF payments.

"What may seem like an easy handout program is not," said Brandy Nichols, a single mother of four children age 8 and younger. Mississippi requires TANF recipients to prove they are actively looking for employment, and Nichols, of Jackson, Miss., said the job search is time-consuming.

"It's work, and sometimes work takes away my ability to find a true, stable job," she said.⁸

TANF is for families that have at least one child younger than 18. To qualify in Mississippi, the household income must be at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The current upper income limit for a family of three is \$680 a month.

From 1982 through 2021, Mississippi was the poorest state for 19 of those 40 years and among the five poorest for 38 years. In 2021, the US poverty rate was 11.6 percent and Mississippi's was the highest in the nation, 17.4 percent.⁹

Federal statistics show a dramatic decrease in the number of Mississippi residents receiving individual TANF aid starting in 2012, the first year Republican Phil Bryant was governor, and continuing into the term of current Republican Gov. Tate Reeves. Bryant chose Davis to lead the DHS.

During the 2012 budget year, 24,180 Mississippians received TANF. By the 2021 budget year, that was down to 2,880 in a state with nearly 3 million residents.¹⁰

Robert G. "Bob" Anderson, the current Mississippi DHS executive director, told Democratic state law-

makers in October that about 90 percent of people who apply for TANF in Mississippi don't receive it, either because their applications are denied or because they abandon their applications.¹¹

Those who do qualify get the lowest payments in the country, according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.

The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service said that in 2020, New Hampshire had the highest TANF payment in the country, \$862 a month for a single parent and one child. Mississippi's monthly payment for a family of two was \$146.

In 2021, Mississippi increased its TANF payments by \$90 per month, per family—the state's first increase since 1999—at Anderson's recommendation. The increase cost \$2.8 million, and Republican Sen. Joey Filligane said during a Senate debate that it was all paid by federal money, not state money.

"We're not talking about a lot of money," Filligane said. "These are the poorest of the poor in our state."

"Of course, those are all our dollars," replied Sen. Melanie Sojourner, one of 18 legislators—all Republicans—who voted against the increase.

The federal government sends Mississippi about \$86.5 million a year for TANF and allows states wide leeway in spending. Records show Mississippi does not always spend its entire allotment, sometimes carrying millions of dollars from year to year.

During Mississippi's 2016 budget year, the DHS sent \$17.3 million in direct aid to recipients, about half of the state's TANF spending. During the next three years under Davis, the department decreased the amount of TANF money going to individuals.

By the 2019 budget year, Human Services was spending \$9.6 million on direct aid, 16 percent of the TANF money. About \$27.6 million, 46 percent of the money, was going to the Mississippi Community Education Center. The organization—run by Nancy and Zach New, who have pleaded guilty to state charges in the welfare mispending case—said it was fighting poverty by working on parenting skills, school drop-out prevention, job readiness and other programs.

Ultimately, at least \$77 million in welfare funds was misspent in what officials believe is the largest public fraud in state history.¹²

—Michael Williamson, an ordained minister and hospital chaplain, is a former Seeds intern and wrote, for Seeds, *A Guide to World Hunger Organizations*, Volume II (Jones Press, 1994). He has served in cross-cultural urban ministry with Latino immigrants in Los Angeles, a cross-cultural mission in the Mississippi Delta, and economic development/public health mission projects in the Balkans and

Mexico. He lives in Clinton, MS, with his wife Amy (also a former Seeds intern) and their daughter Rosemary.

End notes

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The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service said that in 2020, New Hampshire had the highest TANF payment in the country, \$862 a month for a single parent and one child. Mississippi's monthly payment for a family of two was \$146.



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3. Giacomo Bologna and Luke Ramseth, "How a drug company got welfare money," *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 19, 2020.

4. Ashton Pittman and William Pittman, "In-Depth: How Brett Favre Secured \$6 Million In Welfare Funds For A Volleyball Stadium," *Mississippi Free Press*, September 16, 2022.

5. Wolfe, "Absurd Expenditures."

6. Pittman and Pittman.

7. Dianne Gallagher, Erin Levenson and Devon M. Sayers, "Brett Favre's texts included in lawsuit over mis-spent Mississippi welfare funds," CNN, September 14, 2022.

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Please see "Welfare Fraud" on page 7.

Fighting Hunger (for Food & Books) in the Summer Months:

An Interview with Linda English

by Katie Cook

Most of the articles in this *Hunger News & Hope* issue focus on concerns surrounding hunger and food insecurity among individuals experiencing poverty. One such connection between poverty and hunger is the increased likelihood of poor families to reside in a community with limited access to affordable, healthy foods (i.e., a “food desert”).

Living in areas of concentrated poverty, however, means that families with children are not only situated in such “food deserts,” but they are often living in “book deserts,” as well. Compared to their wealthier counterparts, these families have relatively little access to print or online reading materials. Specifically, many families in low-income communities do not possess many (or any) books at home and, even when public libraries or bookstores are only a short car ride away, inadequate transportation can render these resources frustratingly out of reach for these families.

Although libraries in neighborhood-based public schools fill some of the resource gaps, providing vital access to children’s books during the school year, these school libraries are closed during the summer when children have an arguably greater need for read-

ing materials. Similarly, although school breakfast and lunch programs can help provide desperately needed food for children during the school year, hunger and food insecurity do not stop during the summer months when school is out of session. So, while children in higher income families look forward to summer as a time filled with joyful play, family road trips taking in spectacular scenic vistas, summer camps swimming with friends or learning to canoe and freedom to lounge around reading, summer can represent a time of intensified hunger (for food and for books) for children living in high poverty communities.

While free United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) summer meal sites, non-congregate meal programs and meal delivery social services (such as Meals-To-You or Kids Meals Inc.), summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) scale-up provisions, and community-based food pantries help to provide summer nutrition to school-age children who receive free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch during the school year, most communities lack comprehensive strategies to address “book hunger” during the summer. Literacy Connexus is working to change that.

Since 2004, Literacy Connexus has been equipping churches to address the literacy needs of marginalized persons in Texas and beyond. Literacy Connexus has recently recruited Dr. Linda English to spearhead its efforts to scale up and expand its *What’s For Lunch?* initiative, which aims to foster literacy and mitigate



Left: The Book Nook @ Brook at Brook Avenue Elementary School in Waco, TX, all set for children to come and browse through the books. The program continued through 2019. Photo by Linda English.

the summer learning losses experienced by children in low-income communities who have limited access to books and other print materials. Although program details vary from site to site, pilot programs for the initiative have established lending libraries and reading activities to operate concurrently with USDA and church-operated free summer meal programs—feeding bodies and minds during the summer months.

Dr. English is uniquely positioned to take on this challenge. She took an unconventional path through education: leaving school in the summer following eighth grade, then later—as a single mother—resuming her educational journey, earning her GED certificate, enrolling in a community college, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in economics from Oklahoma State University, and, ultimately, earning her PhD in economics from Vanderbilt University. She has been teaching economics courses (including a course on the economics of poverty and discrimination) at Baylor University for the past 14 years. She recently resigned her full-time position at Baylor to follow her passion of expanding book access for children in under-resourced communities.

She attributes her ability to succeed, despite taking a non-traditional route through higher education, to her strong reading skills and a love of learning developed through reading throughout her early childhood years. Along with the team at Literacy Connexus, Dr. English will draw on her economics training and experience operating a lending library at a USDA summer meal site, to pursue the goal of making books available to all Texas children residing in food insecure households.

We recently caught up with Dr. English and asked her a few questions about this new passion.

HNH: You seem to have an unusual passion for education for children in under-resourced communities. Where do you think that passion comes from?

ENGLISH: Although I currently have sufficient household income to avoid food insecurity and poverty, that has not always been the case. As a single parent, with only an eighth-grade education, I found myself working three jobs (waitressing, housecleaning and working in retail) and still needing help to make ends meet.

This is not an unusual story for families in under-resourced communities. What is unusual, though, is that a strong educational foundation formed during my pre-kindergarten through elementary years enabled me to resume my educational journey, to essentially escape long-term food insecurity and poverty, by attending school while I worked multiple jobs.

Education presented a path to financial stability for me, but this path is not always open to individuals who attend under-resourced elementary schools, who lack reading materials at home and other reading enrichment opportunities, and who fall behind in advancing their literacy capabilities. These youths are less likely to graduate from high school and—even when they do graduate—they face diminished opportunities for work or higher education. While the strong foundation of early learning and development of literacy is not a panacea for improving the opportunities for children in under-resourced communities, a large body of academic research suggests that this strong foundation is a crucial part of the story.

HNH: Your educational path was unconventional—starting with GED credentials, then going all the way through to a PhD. How does that affect your outlook on education?

ENGLISH: Most importantly, my path affords me a glimpse into the precious nature of education...It is a privilege that I thought I had forfeited after dropping out of school at such a young age. I attribute my ability to course-correct and ultimately pursue higher education to my love of reading and strong reading capabilities.

HNH: What caused you to become interested in economics?

ENGLISH: Starting community college as a single parent, I felt that business-related fields of study held the

Please see “Hunger for Learning” on page 6.



Above: Linda English, recruited by Literacy Connexus to expand the What’s for Lunch? initiative. Photo courtesy of Linda English.

Hunger for Learning,

continued from page 5

most potential for career advancement. After taking my first economics course, though, I recognized economics to be a lens that I could look through to better understand the world and the study of economics to include analytical tools that can be used to promote human flourishing.

HNH: How do you envision the proposed expansion of the “What’s for Lunch?” initiative?

ENGLISH: Several tools exist to address the heightened need for food assistance during summer months. Our vision is to equip partners who are devoted to improving literacy and education outcomes in their communities to utilize existing tools for addressing food insecurity to also make books available during the summer for families who need them. By serving households already receiving food assistance and by leveraging the existing resources and distribution channels (such as free meal sites, food banks, mail-based food delivery), *What’s for Lunch?* programs are designed to enhance equity in access to reading materials in a cost-effective way. We are currently building partnerships with key stakeholders (schools, libraries, food banks, USDA summer meal sponsors and literacy advocates) and are seeking funding to formalize and initiate pilot programs for each component of the program. Care-

ful design of the pilot programs will include feedback loops that allow for course correction in subsequent stages of the process as we establish best practices for sustainability and scale of these pilot programs.

HNH: If money and human resources were no obstacle, what would you dream of doing?

ENGLISH: I dream of reshaping book deserts into oases for reading, so that every child—regardless of their household’s income level—has opportunities to develop a love of reading and to enjoy reading books at home. Although realizing the dream will take more than just eliminating the barriers to book access that *What’s for Lunch?* programs target, we view these programs as moving in the direction of that dream.

HNH: What has brought you the most joy from this work?

ENGLISH: Building connections with families participating in the *What’s for Lunch?* program and witnessing how the program has impacted them. For example, a parent who consistently brought her preschool-age children to the Book Nook operating at a USDA summer feeding site in Waco told me, “My children never liked reading before, but since they’ve been coming to eat, read and check out books, they are always crawling up in my lap asking me to read to them...I even stopped at a garage sale to buy some 25-cent books for them to have at home for them to read.” Seeing sparks like this and recognizing the potential for them to ignite love and lifelong habits of reading in these families has brought me tremendous joy.

—For more information about Literacy Connexus or the *What’s For Lunch?* initiative, contact Lester Meriwether at Lester@literacyconnexus.org.



Left: Photo by Victoria Borodinova

Welfare Fraud,

continued from page 3

12. Erica Hunzinger, "Explainer: Favre, other sports figures in welfare fraud case," Associated Press, October 3, 2022.

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Humanizing the Homeless:

The Continuing Photographic Work of Leah Denbok

by Linda Freeto

If we judge people, we have no time to love them.

—Mother Teresa

In the Spring 2021 issue of *Hunger News and Hope*, I introduced our readers to a young woman with great passion and mission for homeless people. At the time, Leah DenBok was a 20-year-old student at Sheridan College in Oakville, ON, majoring in photography.

At the age of 13, Leah DenBok picked up a used camera from her hometown pawnshop in Toronto, ON. From that point on, Leah never looked back. Her parents, Tim and Sara DenBok, were strong supporters, advocates and travel companions. While Leah took pictures of homeless people on the streets of Toronto, her father began to ask questions of these people about the life they were living.

With pictures and stories ranging from Brisbane, Australia, to Los Angeles, CA, in hand, Leah knew

that she had to share them with the world. That is when the idea of a book was established and, in 2019, Volume One of *Nowhere to Call Home* was published.

Leah knew about and was moved by the struggle and dangers her mother, Sara, had experienced as a child on the streets of Calcutta, India. Sara was abandoned as a 3-year-old child because her family could not feed or clothe or shelter her.

She wandered the streets of Calcutta, having to find ways to survive on her own.

But of course, a young child cannot survive anywhere alone. A police officer found Sara wandering the streets and took her to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity Nirmala Shishia Bhava. The young child lived with the Sisters until she was adopted at the age of 5 by a couple from Canada.

In 2022, Leah traveled to Calcutta, taking more pictures and hearing more stories of the homeless. While there, she visited Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, where her mother had been rescued and lived until her adoption. Watching the women's dedication and tireless work, "We were profoundly impacted, and we were filled with admiration for these extraordinary women," she said.¹

In the first three volumes of *Nowhere to Call Home*, Leah helps us to see the massive problem of home-

lessness around the world through the eyes of people in extreme poverty. Every country—every city—has homeless people who sit on the

*For each volume of **Nowhere to Call Home**, Leah takes black and white photographs of homeless people. These photographs show the humanity of each person. In each volume, Leah humanizes the desperation of each person.*

sidewalks and roam the streets and alleys alone, tired and hungry.

For each volume of *Nowhere to Call Home*, Leah takes black and white photographs of homeless people. These photographs show the humanity of each person. In each volume, Leah humanizes the desperation of each person.

Each volume shows the humanity that most of us do not see as we walk or drive by every day. She has captured the eyes and expressions of children. This gifted and talented young woman has brought the stories of homeless people into focus for all of us to see.

Today, Leah continues to express her passion for others who are less fortunate than most of us. In her newest book, *Nowhere to Call Home: Photographs and Stories of People Experiencing Homelessness, Volume Four*, Leah focuses on the coronavirus pandemic's impact on people who live on the streets of the world.





The photos on pages 8 and 9 are from *Nowhere to Call Home*, Volume Four. Used with permission.

This book examines the increased hardships of homeless people during these difficult years. The struggles of the homeless were magnified during the pandemic because there was a lack of personal protective equipment, clean water and shelter.

Volume Four of *Nowhere to Call Home* has received many awards, including being named a finalist in the International Book Awards. It received 5-Star reviews from readers. Jolie Athar, the program convenor of University Women's Club of

North York, said this to Leah: "By acknowledging their worth and sharing their life stories, you [Leah] are imparting a new level of understanding and empathy toward people who need it...one can honestly say you are changing the world."

She does more than open our eyes to the realities of life for homeless people. All of the profits from each *Nowhere to Call Home* book is donated to a homeless shelter.

Today, Leah is living in Mallorca, Spain, enjoying new experiences of living in another country and learning its culture and language. She continues to take photographs of homeless people and write their stories. Leah is also a fashion, wedding and portrait photographer in Mallorca and Toronto.

If you would like to read more about Leah and her work, go to www.humanizingthehomeless.org. —Linda Freeto, a frequent contributor to *Hunger News & Hope*, has received a number of Associated Church Press (ACP) awards for her Special Section reports in the HNH theme issues. A founding member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and former volunteer Business Manager, Linda is once again serving as a Council Member.

Endnote

1. This quote is from www.leahdenboknewsletter/March-29-2023.

Teach Justice through Worship.



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Above are the covers from Leah Denbok's first three volumes of *Nowhere to Call Home*.

Cindy McCain Now Leads the World Food Programme

ROME, ITALY—Cindy McCain was recently chosen to succeed David Beasley as the new Executive Director of the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP), which is the largest humanitarian relief organization in the world. She was selected for her many years of experience working with non-governmental organizations and humanitarian efforts. McCain has been the US ambassador to UN agencies in Rome since November 2021, for which she has been praised for work urging countries to provide more financial support to the WFP. As the widow of the late Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, Cindy McCain is also on good terms with both Democrat and Republican lawmakers, which will be vital in securing additional funding for the WFP since the US is already the organization's main donor.

McCain's new position involves many responsibilities. The WFP has 22,300 employees and operations in over 120 countries and territories. She is also entering the organization at a challenging time; food insecurity has doubled since 2019 and the world is descending into an unprecedented crisis following events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. McCain will have to match Beasley's record-breaking fundraising in order to help meet the growing need of an organization already starved for funds.

According to Catherine Bertini, a former WFP Executive Director, her biggest challenge will be "to lead change to strengthen and improve its vast management systems." McCain's leadership began on April 5, 2023, and will run for five years.

—Colum Lynch and Teresa Welsh, "Exclusive: McCain to lead World Food Programme," *Devox Newswire*.



Right: Cindy McCain, the new World Food Programme director. Photo courtesy of Mueller/MSA.

City Streets Are Overflowing with Homeless Seniors

PHOENIX, AZ—Rows upon rows of tents housing seniors has become a common sight in downtown Phoenix, AZ, and other cities. According to the newest, most reliable data, adults aged 55 years or older accounted for around 16.5 percent of 1.45 million homeless Americans in 2019. The number of homeless seniors is only rising and will double or even triple the numbers from 2017 in some areas before peaking around 2030. Margot Kushel, a professor and researcher at the University of California, says the rate of homelessness among seniors is rising faster than any other demographic, overwhelming the country's social safety net. This mass influx has a multitude of contributing factors. Many baby boomers reached adulthood during recessions in the 70s and 80s, putting them at an economic disadvantage. Coupled with income loss following a spouse or parent's death, many can no longer pay rent or mortgage and suddenly find themselves homeless. Other individuals grow old on the streets after spending years chronically homeless.

The elderly homeless population brings a host of specialized needs that current health and shelter providers struggle to accommodate. The regular nursing home and other assisted living programs often cannot take on residents with high rates of mental illness or substance abuse, which disproportionately affects homeless individuals. Staff members for Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) in Phoenix pass out adult diapers, but cannot provide nursing home quality care to individuals who need help with tasks like going to the bathroom or dressing themselves. Seniors with mobility challenges often have no choice but to sleep on flatbeds on the ground. Life on the streets elevates the risk of developing numerous diseases and other health issues, which takes a toll on an already vulnerable elderly population. Hospitals in cities work to treat people, but cannot house them. As a result, medical providers have no choice but to release patients back onto the streets in a process many sorrowfully refer to as "treat-and-street."

Although efforts are being made to build facilities with the means to care for the elderly homeless, it does not come close to addressing the dire deficit in proper housing. Medicaid, a program which provides health insurance to the poor, has a specific criteria for

disability that someone must meet before it will cover expenses for a long-term nursing home stay or assisted living. This creates another gap in the system in which numerous seniors who are not fully disabled cannot access necessary services, and as a result, they bounce between health centers and the streets, constantly reliving the cycle.

—Christopher Rowland, “Seniors are flooding homeless shelters that can’t care for them,” *Washington Post*, May 2023.

What Do Homeless Individuals Want in Housing?

DENVER, CO—Terese Howard, an organizer with Housekeys Action Network Denver (HAND), helped conduct a survey throughout 2022 asking currently and previously homeless individuals about their opinions on housing. The study was inspired by Howard’s epiphany that none of the plans or proposals to address housing or homelessness in Denver involved input from the affected people. The survey contained 24 questions “surrounding people’s experiences, priorities and desires around housing” and ultimately had 812 respondents. It was released in March of this year and its title, “Pipe Dreams and Picket Fences,” originated from two particularly insightful user responses. The full survey, which can be read on HAND’s website (housekeysactionnetwork.com), contained many eye-opening statistics.

According to “Pipe Dreams and Picket Fences,” 93 percent of people offered housing or housing vouchers did not refuse them; a few of the reasons given for the 7 percent of refusals included that the locations were inaccessible or not pet-friendly. 60 percent stated they desired “personal qualities” in housing such as autonomy and safety. Others mentioned bathrooms and climate control. Of those who were able to go through the housing process, less than 25 percent expressed confidence that the process worked effectively. Even then, most respondents reported that they could only afford rent if it was less than \$1,000 per month, and 16.7 percent needed it to be completely free. If Denver and other cities are to lower rates of homelessness, they must take into account the needs of the people affected. Howard expressed hope that this study will help inspire that change.

—Conor McCormick-Cavanagh, “New Survey Asked Homeless Individuals What They Actually Need and Want,” *Westword*, March 2023.

Vietnamese Farmers and Researchers Are Developing a Climate-Resistant “Super Coffee”

BAO LOC, VIETNAM—Researchers in the small agricultural town of Bao Loc are looking to develop a “super coffee” resistant to the effects of climate change. Although arabica beans have long been the stars of the coffee world for their complex, refined flavor, their hyper-sensitivity to weather changes makes their crops increasingly fragile in a warming world. Recent damage to arabica crops worldwide from events like erratic rainfall, hurricanes and frosts make a need for change all the more apparent. Vietnamese farmers and researchers say the robusta bean is the future of coffee.

Over half of the world’s robusta supply is provided by Vietnam. Some varieties farmed in the country’s central highlands yield twice or even thrice the amount of beans harvested from varieties in any other part of the globe. Farmers like Toi Nguyen found new methods to give the beans a pleasant, clean taste instead of the bitter, rubbery flavor that previously limited robusta to instant coffee. So far, their efforts have culminated in a variety called “Truong Son 5 (TS5),” nicknamed the “green dwarf” by locals for its resistance to parasites and other environmental threats. Farmers are grafting rootstalk from TS5 to weaker robusta plants and other understudied varieties like liberica in hopes of producing an advanced coffee that is both high-yield and drought-resistant.

—Rebecca Tan and Nhung Nguyen, “Vietnam is going all-in on a climate-change-resistant coffee bean,” *Washington Post*, May 2023.



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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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Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of [human beings] and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social condition that cripples them is a dry-as-dust religion.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Christ, instead of being the center of our lives, has become a matter for the Church...To the nineteenth and twentieth century mind religion plays the part of the so-called "Sunday-room." ...We do not understand it when we allot it merely a province of our mental life... The religion of Christ is not the tidbit that follows the bread, but it is the bread itself, or it is nothing.

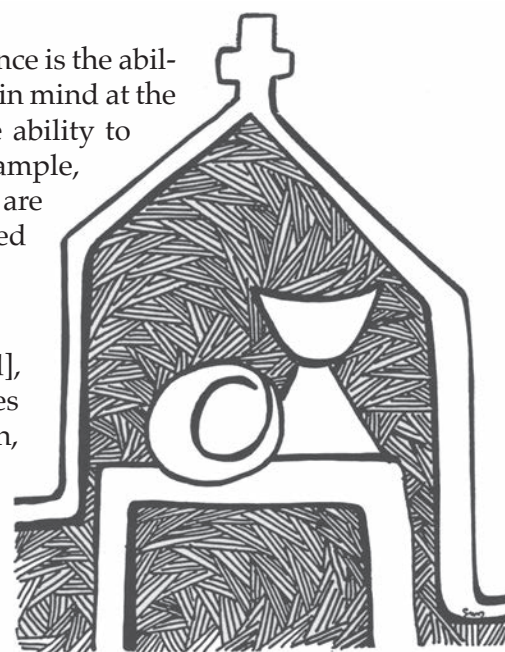
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Having seen [glimpses of God], people of varying cultures turn—for reasons unknown, and by a mechanism unimaginable—to aiding and serving the afflicted and poor.

—Annie Dillard, *For the Time Being*



art by Susan Daily, IBVM

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.

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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