

Where Is the Balm?



Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Hunger Emphasis 2025

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seedseditor1@gmail.com • www.seedspublishers.org.*

art by Rachel Farris

Sacred Seasons



Worship Tools for the Creative Church

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A 40-Day Hunger Emphasis calendar

Daniel G. Bagby
Joseph Haag
Andy Loving
Kathryn Mueller
Jo Pendleton
Jacqueline L. Saxon
Ken Sehested
Jon Singletary
David Wilkinson
Leslie Withers

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for poor and hungry people of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. Since 1991, the group has sought out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of hunger and poverty.

Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. Contact information: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; 254/498-4997; seedseditor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2025
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A Word about This Packet

When the Seeds liturgical team met last summer to plan this packet, we were all under a cloud of anxiety and sadness over the state of vulnerable people in our world. We all expressed feelings of helplessness in facing the devastating cuts in funding for global humanitarian aid, particularly food and medical assistance. We asked ourselves, "What can we say that will tell people the truth without paralyzing them?" We struggled with this, all the way up to press time.

For the liturgy, we chose some hard-hitting scripture readings: Amos 8:4-7, Luke 16:1-13, James 5:1-6 and Psalm 113. We wanted to highlight passages that state blatantly what many refer to as God's preferential option for the poor. For the communion service, we highlighted the five countries that are in famine or on the brink of famine, and then we choose five more countries or populations that are suffering almost as badly.

We always include a few pages of statistics in the Hunger Emphasis packet, and we discovered that this year's statistic pages were particularly difficult to write. We have endeavored to explain why in this section. (See pages 23-27.)

Because this information is so heavy, we tried to include pieces that will inspire you. We also included some practical ideas—especially in the "12 Things You Can Do for Hungry People" on pages 20-21 and the Hunger Emphasis calendar.

You will see many offerings from our liturgical team, which includes Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida from the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts; Erin Conaway, pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX; Ken Sehested, a founding Seeds editor and writer who lives in Ashville, NC; Sharlande Sledge, retired associate pastor and now resident writer at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco; Scott Turner, youth minister at Seventh & James; and Alec Ylitalo, pastor at Richfield Christian Church in Waco. You will sometimes see their names, but their work is everywhere in this packet, particularly in the liturgy.

In these pages you will find Sharlande's pastoral prayer, infused with singing. We have also included a pastoral prayer by Scott and another by Janice Sykora of Corpus Christi, TX, a prayer she wrote for her husband's funeral. The art on page 22

was created by Janice's husband, Wayne Sykora.

The children's sermon is by John Ballenger, a long-time contributor and pastor in the Baltimore, MD, area. Brett Younger, a pastor in Brooklyn, contributed the sermon, "People on the Edges." The communion service is adapted from one that was written by Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili of Tbilisi, Georgia, and printed in a previous packet.

There is a meditation from Claire McKeever-Burgett inspired by a question from one of her children. Claire is a former Seeds intern and a frequent contributor. We also included a new nested meditation by Sharon Rollins, whose art you see in almost every *Sacred Seasons* packet, and whose nested meditations our readers have seen for years.

The original version of the "12 Things You Can Do" piece was written by Emily Benton Ryan when she was a Seeds intern. It has been so popular that we have updated and adapted it twice. The benediction is from *Take This Bread* by Sara Miles, who started a food pantry literally on the altar table at her church in San Francisco.

The cover art is by Rachel Farris, a graphic artist in Waco, TX. (See page 4 for her description.) Another new piece, on page 23, was created by Eh K Paw, a teenaged immigrant from Burma. Other art in these pages was done over the years by our beloved Seeds artists.

All of this is painstakingly proofread by Ellen Kuniyuki Brown, who tries to make sure that we make sense. We hope this packet will be inspiring as you guide your congregation through a meaningful hunger emphasis season. As always, we are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We are counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs, resources and inclinations. We would love to hear about how you used them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and we want you to share them with others. May we all find what is ours to do and work together to bring healing to God's wounded and hungry people.

Gratefully,
Katie Cook, on behalf of the Seeds staff
and Council of Stewards

Where Is the Balm?

A Theme Interpretation

by Katie Cook

Most of our readers are already concerned about food insecurity and all the issues that are connected to it. If you weren't, you wouldn't be reading this page. We don't feel that we need to persuade you that God has called us all to serve the vulnerable people in our world. What we want to do is to provide resources that will help you do that.

Before we act, we must assess the situation. This has been extremely difficult to do in recent months because of the sweeping cuts in humanitarian aid since January of this year. The number of hungry people, and where they are, is high, but we don't really have all the information. The information in these pages is hard to confront, but this is where we are in the world.

Also, before we act, the Seeds Liturgical Team also feels that we must first express our deep lament. Everything is NOT okay. People seem to be suffering more than ever, and our hearts are broken for them. We must first acknowledge that.

During our planning session, we came across Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, in which the prophet writes (possibly speaking for the city of Jerusalem)

*Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my
poor people not been restored?
O that my head were a spring of
water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I may weep day and night
for the slain of my people! (8:22-
9:1)*

We know we are called to give food to the hungry, give water to the thirsty, comfort the sick,

care for the prisoner and welcome the stranger. But none of us can do any of this alone. We tend to forget that.

Everyone has a different part to play. We all have a wide variety of gifts, whether we acknowledge this or not. Sometimes we need to call out each other's gifts. Frederick Buechner said, in essence, that our calling is where the world's deepest need and our greatest delight intersect.

So, we must each find that which is ours to do. Then we must find the courage to do it, perhaps at some sacrifice to ourselves. Only then we can answer the question, "Where is the balm?" It is in us.

A Word from Rachel Farris, Our Cover Artist

Based the image from the theme passage, Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, a passage heavy with sorrow, yet laced with a longing for healing. At its center is a severed branch of the Balm of Gilead—one of a couple of plants traditionally associated with the biblical balm. Cut off from its food and source of life, the branch is withering, its pods and leaves falling away.

Intertwined around the stem is a serpent, referencing the Greek and Roman caduceus—the modern symbol of medicine. The leaves and structure of the branch echo the form of the winged staff, creating a visual parallel between ancient healing and contemporary symbols of care.

Though the image may first appear desolate, it carries a quiet hope. From this broken branch, both pods and sap can still be harvested—the very elements once used to produce the healing balm of Gilead. Amidst death and hopelessness, the potential for restoration and healing remains. It is a picture of grief, brokenness and the enduring possibility of healing.

—Rachel Farris is a graphic designer with many talents and interests.



Where Is the Balm?

A Hunger Emphasis Liturgy

by the Sacred Seasons Liturgical Team

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?
Jeremiah 8:22*

Call to Worship

One: We seek the one who heals, for our neighbors cry out in pain.

All: *We need your hands, O God, to mend our self-inflicted scarcity.*

One: We seek the one who invites, for our walls define us more than our welcome.

All: *We need your hospitality, O God, to gather us from our self-made divisions.*

One: We seek the one who sets a table, for our world lets hunger-pangs grow louder.

All: *We need your bread and cup, O God, to free us from our selfishness and to let our tables overflow.*

One: We seek the balm to all of our brokenness,

All: *Where is that balm, O God? For we long to feel whole again....*

—Alec Ylitalo

Hymn

“God of Justice, God of Mercy”

Words: Jane Parker Huber, 1983

Music: Rowland Hugh Pritchard, 1855

Tune: HYFERDOL

A Singing Faith #63

Meditation of Preparation

We build walls around our hearts, around our homes, around our land, around our borders to keep out strangers, the different, the other; to protect ourselves from getting hurt or from having to share our space with others. We guard our hearts, our land, and our country with great vigilance until the very guarding obsesses us and we become so outwardly focused and defensive that we lose

touch with ourselves and our humanity. In our efforts to protect and defend we become disconnected and fragmented.

—Edwina Gately, *A Mystical Heart*

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Jeremiah 8:18-22

Amos 8:4-7

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 113



art by Rachel Farris

Epistle Reading

James 5:1-6

Litany of Confession

One: Holy God, hear the confession of our sin in your grace and mercy, for we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Many: Lord, increase our kindness as you carve away our avarice.

One: Our neighbors are hungry and thirsty, not for metaphorical food, but for actual bread and water. With selective and often feigned fiscal concern, we're cutting crucial feeding programs and looking away from the consequences of these choices.

Many: Lord, burn the fire of your justice in our bones until we can no longer remain silent or complacent.

One: As individuals, our love of neighbor is important, but not enough. Drive us together with partners previously unseen that we might advocate with unity for our hungry senior adults, our parents trying to hold it all together, and our starving children falling irreparably behind.

Many: Continue to agitate our minds and souls until we've done all you are calling us to do to feed Christ in the children of our city; to satiate Christ in the thirsty adults of our country; to advocate for Christ in our war-torn siblings around the world; to love deeply in deeds and not just words.

—Erin Conaway

Hymn

"You Satisfy the Hungry Heart"

Words: Omer Westendorf, 1976

Music: Robert E. Kreutz, 1976

Tune: FINEST WHEAT

Chalice Hymnal #429

Gospel Reading

Luke 16:1-13

Pastoral Prayer

See "There Is a Balm in Gilead" by Sharland Sledge on page 7.

Sermon

See "People on the Edges" by Brett Younger on page 12.

Communion Service

See page 9.

Meditation of Commitment

Whatever else the true preaching of the word would need to include, it at least would have to be a word that speaks from the perspective of those who have been crushed and marginalized in our society. It would need to be a word of solidarity, healing and love in situations of brokenness and despair and a disturbing and troubling word of justice to those who wish to protect their privilege by exclusion.

—Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round*

Hymn of Commitment

"God Has Work for Us to Do"

Text: Carl P. Daw

Music: Mark A. Miller

SATB with Piano/CGA1288—Choristers Guild

Benediction

As we go out from worship to world, may we be guided by God's hands and hospitality, the abundance at the table, and the balm that we find in a God who tends to those who are forsaken by the world around them. With that guidance, may we not leave the power and sting of God's call on us to address scarcity and hunger, to mend inequality and division, and to actually take action on behalf of those whose voices have been destroyed. May our words today be transformed into work, as each of us attempts to live out the Gospel of abundance. Amen.

—Alec Ylitalo

O God, lead us from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead us from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts,
our world,
our universe.
Amen.

—From the Community of St. Francis
Prayer Book

There is a Balm in Gilead

A Pastoral Prayer

by Sharlande Sledge

Text: Jeremiah 8:22

Author's note: Begin with a soloist or the congregation singing the refrain to the African-American spiritual "There Is a Balm in Gilead" as part of the prayer:

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

Merciful God, In Jeremiah's time, as in our own, sometimes our most honest way to worship when we are brokenhearted is through prayers that sound a steady cry of lament. Like the prophet, we feel the depths of pain, suffering, agony and defeat, not only for the world we see around us, but in our own lives.

We confess that sometimes we, too, do not complete the tasks you call us to do for the people you love. At times, our losses are characterized by intense grief, uncontrollable tears and brokenhearted displays of both empathy and sympathy.

Whether we read, sing, or pray our lament, our prayers, like Jeremiah's, are loud and strong. We hear Jeremiah's distress because Zion is overthrown and Israel is in exile. Through the words of scripture, we can almost taste the salt in his tears when he cries to God,

"Is there no balm in Gilead?" "Are there no healing ointments in Gilead? Isn't there a doctor in the house? So why can't something be done to save my dear, dear people?" (Eugene Peterson, The Message)

(Here the soloist or congregation repeats the song's refrain):

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

God, you know the wounds on the body of your people, the wounds that have come to us by our not tending to your call to live by your ways and toward your reign. We have wrestled with your teachings and struggled to turn toward your shining face when, all the while, you have lifted your countenance upon us and upon our sisters and brothers in this world.

With what we think may be a casual, off-hand word, we may gash the spirit of friend or stranger. What we think may be a minor tear in a project we are working on with our sibling in Christ may have the power to tear and tear and tear until the project is broken.

Forgive us, Lord, for the part we play in the woundedness of the world. Heal us, hands of Jesus, and take away our sin. We need the spiritual ointment of your balm that heals the gashes, the bruises, the brokenness we have inflicted on our kin. We bring our sins to you for the healing only you can give.



art by Lara Luksis Davis

(The soloist repeats the refrain):

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

Sometimes we ourselves feel like our very souls are overthrown, and our lives seem to have been cast into exile. We lean on you, our Healer, to comfort our spirits. Restore our brokenness into wholeness. Guide us in the larger context of our communities, for we are a part of them, and they are a part of us.

What kind of spiritual ointment do we need to bring a balm to our weary souls? We need the calmness that is ours through you alone. We need your purpose to be etched into each of our spirits. We long for you to be our Light that we may realize your invitation to Love.

May we hear your call to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,” as Christ forgives us. Listen to our prayers; forgive

the wounds that by carelessness or by ill intent we place on others. Show us what steps are ours to take as we work with you to make this wounded world whole. Tend the wounds that linger on our souls because we do not receive your abundant love and mercy that are freely poured out as balm for our spirits.

Merciful and Loving God, our Great Physician, put a new and right Spirit within us and heal our sin-sick souls.

For we truly believe (*repeat refrain*):

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

Amen.

—Sharlande Sledge recently retired after serving for many years as associate pastor for Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX. She is now serving as Lake Shore’s writer in residence.

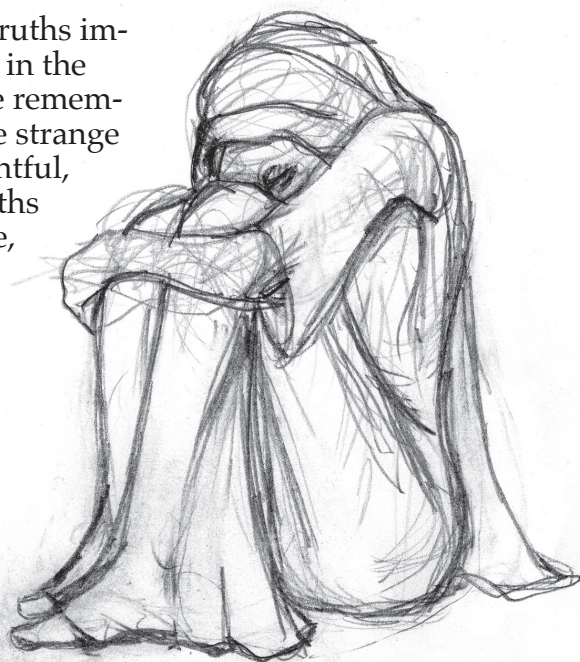
When I behold the problems of the world,

O Lord, I pray not to be tempted to quick answers. When every tongue declares a different truth, when every people praises its own righteousness, let me pass before I speak or praise or hope.

Let me look inward seeking to discover eternal truths implanted by Thee, truths greater than those heard in the outer multitude of voices and words. And let me remember always that to be loud is not to be right, to be strange is not to be forbidden, to be new is not to be frightful, to be black is not to be ugly. Thus let me find truths true to Thee, that I may live with them, and Thee, and myself in peace.

—Gelasian Sacramentary

—The *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* is an ancient book of Christian liturgy. It contains the priest’s part in celebrating the Eucharist. The oldest extant manuscript dates to the 8th century. This prayer is thought to have been written in the 7th century BCE.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Where Is the Balm?

A Communion Service

by Katie Cook

Preparing for the Service

In previous Hunger Emphasis packets, we have created calls to the table using monologues representing people from vastly different areas of the world who were experiencing acute food insecurity.

This year we decided to change the way we call out these areas for remembrance and prayer. We incorporated them in the raising of five loaves of bread and five cups, starting with the five countries that are on the brink of, or in a real state, of famine. For the raising of the cups we added other places that are in severe crisis. This year there is acute hunger in much of the world, and it was difficult to select the 10 we chose for this service.

The service is adapted from a beautiful one written by Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, pastor of the Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, Georgia. That service was printed in the 2015 *Sacred Seasons* Hunger Emphasis packet.

We have written the service for two celebrants and an “assistant” who rings the bell when the elements are raised. This can be adapted to fit your congregation’s needs.

To prepare for this service, you will need five loaves of bread and five cups for the wine, and a communion table large enough for them. (Bishop Songulashvili adds two cooked fish, such as tilapia, to remind the congregants of the small boy’s lunch that was used to feed the multitude in John 6. After the service, the congregants go to the table and eat the fish and bread, sharing bits with each other.) You might decide to procure different kinds of bread, such as pita, Haitian or Cuban bread, or some of the wide variety of African breads.

If you can find a cloth map or a fabric that displays a map of the world, that can be your altar cloth. Or you could drape the table with cloths that have African, Middle Eastern, Haitian or Cuban patterns.

This liturgy includes a “Kyrie” response to each element that is raised. It could be sung by a soloist, a choir or ensemble, or the congregation. If you involve the congregation, you might consider taking a few minutes before the service to teach them the Kyrie that you want to use. We recommend these two choices:

(1) “Kyrie,” Music: Russian Orthodox
Arranged by John L. Bell;

Copyright 1990 Iona Community,
GIA Publications, Inc.

(2) “Penitential Act,”

Music: David Hass, *Mass for a New World*
Copyright 2000, GIA Publications, Inc.

As always, we want you to adapt these ideas to your own situation and imagination.

Communion Service begins on page 10.



art by Jesse Manning

Blessing of the Bread

FIRST CELEBRANT: Jesus said, "This is my body." This bread is who he is, and we are all sharing it. May it be the bread of life for us and neighbors across the street and around the world.

(The first loaf is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We break this bread for the millions of literally starving people in Gaza, where famine—a direct result of armed conflict and food aid blockades at its borders—was recently confirmed.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Gaza, that food aid would be allowed into the country and the people will have access to enough food and resources to thrive.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

The assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The second loaf is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We break this bread for the people of Sudan, where years of warfare have destroyed livelihoods, infrastructure, trade routes and supply chains—and continue to do so. A protracted famine is taking hold in northern Sudan.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray especially for the people of the Zamzam refugee camp in Northern Sudan, that they will receive the food and necessities that they need.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The third loaf is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We break this bread for the people of South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, where armed conflict, climate shocks and economic instability are combining to bring the people to the brink of outright famine.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for these people, for peace and stability in their region, and for enough to eat.

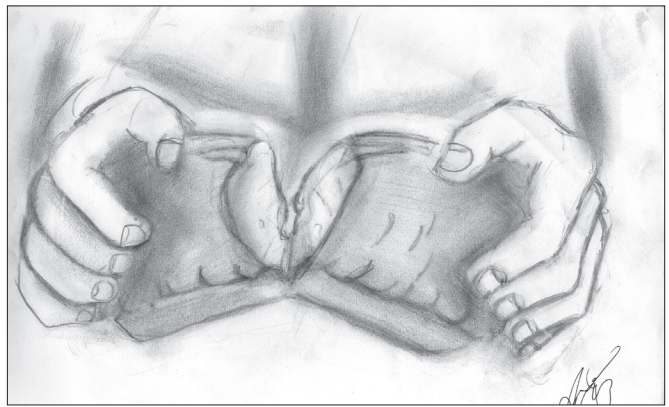
CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The fourth loaf is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We break this bread for the people of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Devastating earthquakes, climate-related shocks and political violence have put Haiti on the brink of famine.



art by Jesse Manning

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for peace, stability, and abundance of resources for the Haitian people.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The fifth loaf is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We break this bread for the people of Mali, a large country in the heart of Africa's Sahel region. Climate change (and the attending decline in agricultural production), conflict and ever-increasing global food and fuel prices are driving Mali to the brink of famine.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Mali, that they will receive an increase in resources and a new life of food security and peace.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

Blessing of the Cup

FIRST CELEBRANT: Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood. When you drink this, you are sharing in my life." As we do this, we are creating a new covenant among ourselves and with God. May it become for all of us the cup of salvation.

(The first cup is raised.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We raise this cup for the people of Yemen, who are suffering from one of the world's most urgent humanitarian crises. Nearly 20 million people, mostly women and children, continue to suffer from ten years of warfare, climate shocks, rampant disease and economic collapse.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Yemen, that they may know peace and security and hope for rebuilding their country.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The second cup is raised.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We raise this cup for the people of Afghanistan, who suffer from one of the world's worst hunger crises. Forty years of conflict has caused economic chaos and entrenched poverty. Two earthquakes last summer joined other climate disasters in worsening the problems.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Afghanistan, that they will find the resources to rebuild from disasters, especially in Kuz Kunar District, Nangarhar Province. We ask for peace, stability and food security in their country.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The third cup is raised.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We raise this cup for the people of Syria, for whom 13 years of conflict have caused economic collapse and the world's second-highest number of internally displaced people. Food security has deteriorated even further since the overthrow of the Assad regime and the current escalation of conflict in Lebanon.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Syria, that they will be empowered to pick up the pieces of their war-torn country and that they will know true peace and food security.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The fourth cup is raised.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We raise this cup for the people of Cuba, who are suffering from an extreme hunger crisis. Climate change, hurricanes, US sanctions and government mismanagement have caused widespread shortages in food, medical supplies and treatments, electricity, transportation and agricultural tools.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray for the people of Cuba, that their burden will be lifted. May they find ways to rebuild their infrastructure and return to prosperity.

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

(The fifth cup is raised and broken.)

FIRST CELEBRANT: We raise this cup for the people

in North America who find that they can't make ends meet, even working at least one job.

SECOND CELEBRANT: We pray that these hard-working people will find rest and abundance. We also pray for those who are trying to serve them as they come for help in alarmingly increasing numbers. We pray for hope.

CONGREGATION: Amen. We pray that hope may come to all God's people.

Assistant rings a bell.

Choir, soloist or congregation sings "Kyrie Eleison."

FIRST CELEBRANT: We thank you, O Lord, for counting us worthy to call upon you, the God of Heaven and Earth, and say:

CONGREGATION: Eternal Spirit,
Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and all that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God who
is in heaven:

The hallowing of
your name echo
through the uni-
verse!

The way of your
justice be followed
by people of the
world!

Your heavenly
will be done by all
created beings!

Your common-
wealth of peace

and freedom sus-
tain our hope and come on earth.

With bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another,
forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.



art by Jesse Manning

Call to the Table

FIRST CELEBRANT: As we come to the table, let us hold the people of the world in our hearts and pray that the One who multiplied the loaves and fishes will empower us to feed multitudes.

SECOND CELEBRANT: As we come to the table, remember that we are all now part of God's new

Please see "Communion Service" on page 15.

People on the Edges

A Hunger Emphasis Sermon

by Brett Younger

Text: Deuteronomy 24:14-15, 17-21

Editor's note: The statistics stated below are from 2023 and 2024, the most recent numbers that were available at press time. With the wholesale demolition of US humanitarian aid that occurred earlier this year, we only know that many of the numbers will be worse—in some cases much worse.

Every year before World Hunger Day, I look up the updated statistics. Every year, I have trouble getting my head around the numbers. They are overwhelming, devastating and too horrible to believe.

Around 24,000 people die of hunger-related diseases every day. Six million children under the age of five die every year as a result of food insecurity. 730 million people woke up this morning with little hope of enough to eat. The World Food Programme says that 309 million are dealing with chronic hunger. 880 million live on less than a dollar a day.

Farmers and their families live from harvest to harvest, relying on the surplus from one harvest to get them to the next. According to Bread for the World, the time period between when the food begins to run out and the next harvest is called the “hunger season.” The hunger season can last for months.

Starvation is caused by conflict, climate change, government corruption, corporate corruption and income inequality. Conflict disrupts harvests and the delivery of humanitarian aid. People driven from their homes and jobs do not know where to turn for food. The conflict in Gaza, even a year ago, had led to half of the Palestinian population facing starvation. Action Against Hunger estimates that 85 percent of the world’s poorest people will soon live in areas affected by conflict.

Climate change leads to displacement. According to Bread for the World, the total number of climate-related displaced people could be over a bil-

lion by 2050. Climate change will continue to cause hurricanes and floods, forcing people to leave their homes and livelihoods.

Whatever the reasons for food shortages, one thing is sure: the children who suffer are not to blame. Hunger affects their intellectual development, physical growth, and ability to fight off illness. Without proper nutrition, a child’s heart shrinks. The liver, kidneys, and intestines begin breaking down.

Wars on poverty do not get as much attention as other wars. Children are starving in horrifying



numbers and neither Sean Hannity nor Rachel Maddow talks about it much. Families do whatever they can to survive. They sell needed assets like livestock and run up debts. They are reduced to scavenging for food to feed their children.

The problems are so overwhelming that we do not want to think about hungry people. The pictures are more overwhelming than the statistics:

Poverty exists not because
we cannot feed the poor,
but because we cannot
satisfy the rich.

crying babies, the bloated stomachs of children and the faces of mothers who starve themselves to death in the hope that the food they need will keep their children alive. Right now, the news is understandably focused on the situations in the Middle East, particularly Gaza, where a full-blown famine is erupting. But there are plenty of other places where the specter of famine looms.

More than anything else, what keeps us from thinking about hungry people is that WE are not hungry. For most of us, “hungry” means we do not have the exact food in our refrigerators that we have a taste for. For some of us, the only time we feel hunger pangs is when we fast before a medical test that most of the world cannot afford.

The amount of money that the richest one percent of the world’s population makes equals what the poorest 57 percent makes. Poverty exists not because we cannot feed the poor, but because we cannot satisfy the rich. We may want to reassure ourselves that the hoarding of resources by the richest society in history has nothing to do with the resentment others feel toward us. We may want to tell ourselves that the suffering of others has nothing at all to do with us, but we are connected. We cannot keep pretending the world is fair.

Charles Dickens writes, “‘God for everyman and everyman for himself,’ said the elephant as he danced among the chickens.”

If someone asked, “How much do you need?” we might answer, “Just a little more.” And yet, in our closets, there are clothes we do not wear. In our refrigerator, there is food that we will waste. In our bank accounts, there is money we do not need.

We struggle not to lead self-centered lives. US Americans make up 5 percent of the world’s population and consume 20 percent of the resources. We have learned to make excuses: “I work hard for what I have.” “I have too much to worry about without thinking about starving children.” “It’s not my responsibility.” “The government should do more.”

We would like to think that we as a nation give more help than we do to hungry people. According to one poll, US Americans believe that about fifteen percent of the federal budget is given to foreign aid. The actual amount—even before the devastating January 2025 cuts—was less than 1 percent. Americans spend more on lawn care than the US government spends on poverty-reducing foreign assistance.

By percentage of Gross National Product (GNP), the US was already the lowest of any industrialized nation in funding development programs. And, according to Oxfam, only half of what we call foreign aid goes toward economic development. The rest goes to militaries.

Of the top ten recipient countries of US aid, none are among the twenty poorest countries in the world. The average Norwegian gives seventeen times as much for development aid through his or her taxes as the average US American.

Our lack of concern is embarrassing. Most Americans who call themselves Christians give less than a dollar a year to feed hungry people. We lose sleep over problems at work, difficulties at school and troubles at home, but few of us lose sleep over children starving.

We tell ourselves there is nothing we can do about it, but that is not true. Though it is true that it is hard to care. You and I are stuck inside a system of consumption that we are reluctant to critique honestly. Our mortgages, luxuries, and privileged lifestyles control what we think. Whoever is paying our bills tells us what we are supposed to believe.

Bob Marley said, “Some people are so poor. All they have is money.”

God’s people have always struggled with the line between necessities and luxuries. The rich have been very rich and the poor have been very poor for centuries. The writers of the Bible point out the precariousness of life for poor and marginalized people. Famines and droughts are part of the stories. Immigration is not a modern inconvenience. It is what the Book of Deuteronomy is about.

When asked, “What’s your favorite book of the Bible?” not many answer, “Deuteronomy.”

At first glance, the book is filled with archaic, strange, and irrelevant laws, designed for an ancient world that is not much like ours. But the laws of social justice are grounded in God’s character. God tells the Israelites to lend to the poor without interest, distribute goods to the needy and defend the fatherless, because God defends those who are usually left out. Deuteronomy is clear on how we should treat people on the edges. We should feed every hungry person.

This is Deuteronomy 24: “Don’t abuse laborers who are needy, whether they’re fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your city. Pay them at the end of each workday. They’re living from hand to mouth and need it now. If you hold back their pay, they’ll tell God and you’ll be guilty of a horrible sin.

“Make sure foreigners and orphans get their rights. When you harvest your grain and forget a bundle, don’t go back and get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow so that God will bless you in who you are.

“When you shake the olives off your trees, don’t go back over the branches and strip them bare—what’s left is for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow.

“And when you cut the grapes in your vineyard, don’t take every last grape—leave a few for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow.”

At first these verses seem to encourage inefficient agriculture. The landowners are to leave food behind. They are not to go back over olive trees and vines to make sure they have not missed anything. A portion of the harvest is left for people on the edges.

These laws are amazing. During times of famine and hunger, God’s people will take care of God’s children. They believe there is no such thing as “my” bread. All bread is ours and is given to us, to others through us, and to us through others. The Hebrews believe that what we have is on loan. Overcoming hunger is not charity. It is justice.

These progressive laws have serious implications for two groups. The “haves” who own the fields, olive groves and vineyards, who have more than enough. And the “have nots” who are referred to three times in this short passage as “the immigrants, the fatherless, and the widow.” The orphans and widows are not just those who are grieving. In the ancient world those without fathers and hus-

band are the most likely to be poor. They are the ones who are most vulnerable to hunger.

The painting “The Gleaners” by Jean-François Millet pictures this text in Deuteronomy. Three peasant women are gleaning a field of stray grains of wheat after the harvest. When it was painted in

Of the top ten recipient countries of US aid, none are among the 20 poorest countries in the world. The average Norwegian gives 17 times as much for development aid through his or her taxes as the average US American.

1857, the French middle and upper classes hated it. They did not want to be reminded of their responsibility to the poor.

At least they were honest.

Most of us did not become Christians because we want to give our money away, but if we are honest, we see there is a lot more in the Bible about sharing with the poor than about any of the other issues we tend to give our attention. Jim Wallis tells a story from his time in seminary. He and a fellow student decided to find all of the verses in the Bible that deal with hunger and economic justice, and literally cut them out—with scissors. When they were done, the Bible was in shreds.

Wallis held it up in the pulpit as a dramatic reminder of what happens to our faith when we do not care about the poor.

With God’s help, we can do better. We can be better. We can learn the wonderful truth about ourselves, that we were born for more than self-entertainment. We do not have to be spectators while others starve. God will help us see our own face in those who are hungry, and in doing so, see God’s face. If we give to hungry people, God will turn our minds and hearts to gratitude.

We want to think that what is good for us is good for the world, but the Christian message is that what is good for the world is good for us. We can become who God will help us be. We can know the joy of following Christ. We can do more than

agree that it is a good idea to feed starving children. We can feed starving children.

We can join groups like Bread for the World, advocating for hungry people. We can step into a voting booth, and think not of our own self-interest, but of hungry people. We can cook meals for

We can know the joy of following Christ. We can do more than agree that it is a good idea to feed starving children. We can feed starving children.

our local shelters and soup kitchens. We can give one percent of our income to feed hungry people. We can take up an offering for starving families. Not many do that, but we can.

Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."

What we are doing may feel like a drop in the ocean, but if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something important. The pebble, the crumb and the morsel make a difference—not just for one, but it can continue to ripple out and affect the gulf of hunger. Imagine the effect if all of us gave generously at the same time. The waters would change, the waves of compassion would build, and our pebbles would make the difference between life and death for God's children.

—Brett Younger is a generous and frequent contributor to *Sacred Seasons*. He has pastored a number of churches in Indiana and Texas, and now serves as pastor of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY. Before moving to Brooklyn, he taught homiletics at McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, GA. He has written numerous books and is much sought after for his thoughtful editorial writings.

Communion Service, continued from page 11

covenant. As we partake of the cup of salvation, may it infuse us with life and enable us to live into this liturgy.

Distribution of the Elements

SECOND CELEBRANT: O God of mercy and love, we pray that having eaten this meal of spiritual food, we would affirm our kinship with those who are hungry. We pray that we would be empowered to rise from this table, walk out into the world, transforming our worship here into worshipful deeds of mercy and compassion today and everyday.

CONGREGATION: Grant us grace that it might be so. Amen.



Note: The words of institution are adapted from a monologue by William F. Cooper, who has acted the part of the Witness in the Upper Room for the Seeds Easter Walk¹ at Seventh & James Baptist Church for more than 20 years. The prayer before the distribution of the elements is from the New Zealand Prayerbook. The final prayer is by Rev. Ashlee Weist-Laird. The information about the countries being uplifted is from the World Food Programme. The information about Cuba is from Hunger News & Hope, Vol. 25 No. 1, Spring/Summer 2025.

Endnote

1. *Easter Walk* is a drama for children depicting the last week of Jesus' life through Easter Sunday morning. The pilot program for this group of monologues was created at Seventh & James. An electronic copy is available at no charge from Seeds of Hope. Go to www.seedspublishers.org and look under *Sacred Seasons* and Lent/Eastertide under that, or email seededitor1@gmail.com.

art by Jesse Manning

Friends Who Need Us

A Children's Sermon

by John Stewart Ballenger

Before the service, engage the help of three people in the congregation. (Try to vary the gender, age and ethnicity as much as possible.)

When the children's time begins, give the children a few adhesive bandages, some animal crackers and a container of water. (Let them eat some of the animal crackers, if necessary. Then give them more.)

Tell them that you think these things might be useful before too long. Then take them for a walk around the sanctuary. Lead the children to the first person you've previously enlisted, who is sitting somewhere in the midst of the congregation.

Introduce the children to this person. You might say something like, "This is Charles. Charles, how are you today?" Charles's answer should be something like, "I'm not doing too well. I cut my finger. See?"

Then ask the group if anyone has anything that could help Charles. The children with the bandages will, hopefully, respond to their cue and give him a bandage. After he thanks them, continue your walk.

The second person should tell the children he or she is hungry, and you would prompt the children who carry the animal crackers.

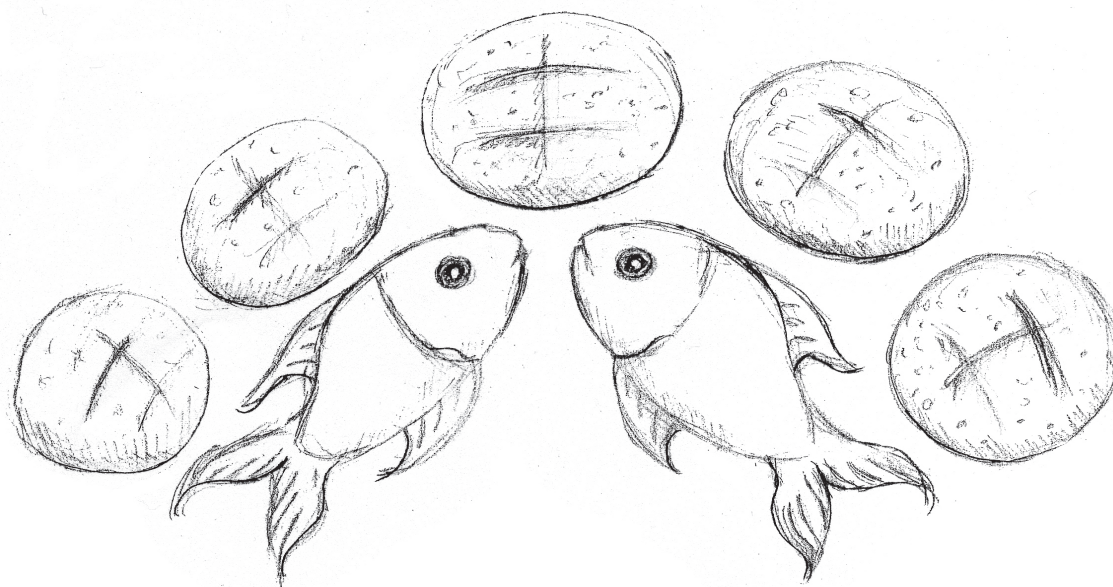
The third person will tell the children they are thirsty, and the children should give them water to drink.

When you have returned to the place normally reserved for children's sermons, explain that this is exactly what Jesus asked us to do—to help people like our friends in the congregation, any time we can.

—John Ballenger, a pastor in Baltimore, MD, is a nationally recognized leader in the field of creative worship. This children's sermon is from "Developing a Heart for the Hungry: A Hunger Emphasis Primer for Beginning Churches," Seeds of Hope Publishers, 1998 (available for no charge at www.seedspublishers.org). You can also write to seedseditor1@gmail.com and ask for a pdf.



art by Rebecca S. Ward



art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

by Scott Turner

God of Abundance,
We come before you today in awe of your miracles.
Whether it be a miracle of bread created from thin air,
or simply the miracle of human kindness and cooperation,
we are immensely thankful either way.

We live in a world beholden to the myth of scarcity.
We are always fighting for more resources, more power,
and more influence,
but you have created much and it is in our hearts,
where fear and self interest fester,
that we have allied ourselves with the lie.

Lord, help us to see the world for what it truly is.
Help us to see you in the trees, the sky, and the waters.
Help us to see the enormity of your creation
and all it has to offer our hard hearts.
Help us to learn to share and cooperate,
keeping an eye on our neighbors for their sake
and not for our own foolhardy self interest.
Help us to forsake competition for love.
Help us to sow friendship on the fields once soaked in malice.
Help us to live with hearts full of gratitude.
In the name of the God of Abundance, we pray.
Amen.

—Scott Turner is an MDiv student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary and minister to youth at Seventh & James Baptist Church. He also serves as a member of the Seeds Liturgical Team.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Breaking down the barriers between the givers and the receivers of aid, between those who have and those who have not, is an essential expression of the solidarity that liberates the privileged from their blindness and the marginalized from their invisibility.

—Theodore W. Jennings,
Good News to the Poor

So how do we feed and nourish our spirit, and the spirit of others? First find a path, and a little light to see by. Then push up your sleeves and start helping. Every single spiritual tradition says that you must take care of the poor, or you are so doomed that not even Jesus or the Buddha can help you.

—Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*

We become more human as we discover we are able to love people. And when I say “love people,” I mean to see their value and their beauty, to love people who have been pushed aside, humiliated, seen as having no value. Then we see that they are gradually being changed. At the same time, sharing our lives in community with the weak and the poor, we come in touch with our own limits, pain, and brokenness. We realize that we, too, have our handicaps which are often around our need for power and the feeling that our value lies in being powerful—a power that frequently involves crushing other people. So we’re confronted by two visions of society: a vision of a pyramid, where you have to have more and more power in order to get to the top, or a vision of a *body* where every person has a place.”

—Jean Vanier

Jesus Christ hung out with known sinners, worked on the Sabbath, threw a fit in church and generally offended the honchos of status quo religion. One day, while talking about the down-and-outers of his day, the hungry, the thirsty, the illegal immigrants, the naked, the sick and the prisoners, he told his followers, “To the extent

that you served one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.”

—Marv Knox

What more can we say, God, that you don’t already know? You long for justice for all people, but it is washed away by the flood of violence in our world. You hope that righteousness will walk with us, but you hear the clear cries of those we mistreat. You ask us to speak up for those in need, but we shut our mouths and turn away. Forgive us, God. Have mercy on us.

—from a worship bulletin at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.

—Henri Nouwen

art by Lara Luksis Davis



In times of even temporary cessation from struggle, or in times of greatest conflict, the dream of peace continues to nourish the hope of the race. The dream persists, even though we do not know what peace on earth would be like because it has never been experienced....

Hope is fed by a conviction,
deeper than the processes of thought,
that the destiny of humanity is good.

It is this spirit that is captured by this spiritual. Yes,
“There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.” The
day that this conviction leaves
the spirit of humanity, our moment on earth is over,
and the last fond hope of the race
perishes from the earth forever,
and a lonely God languishes while...

God’s dreams go silently to dust.

—adapted from a quote by Howard Thurman

You Feed Them

by Claire McKeever-Burgett

Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, "This is an isolated place, and it's already evening. Send these people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves."

Jesus replied, "You feed them."

—Mark 6:35-37

Why are people so cruel, Mommy?
I don't know, Sweetheart. I don't know.

All I know is that the sun rises in the east,
sets in the west, and
we come from God, and
we will return to Her,
and the in-between can get really, really ugly
and really, really beautiful,
and that when I scream, I also sing,
and the women scream-sing with me.

I know that starving people
is the cruelest form of cruelty, and
feeding them is the most sacred of sacraments,
and that whatever we do to the least—
that is, whatever we do to the most maligned,
hated, starved, ignored, marginalized, oppressed,
abused, berated, we do to the Divine.

I know that love is what saves us, and
hate is what kills us,
and to stay soft,
we must walk through green,
wet grass at least once a day.

I know that we must roll our eyes
and sigh and laugh and dance.
I know that we must call our friends,
even when talking on the phone is the
last thing we want to do.

I know that love can hurt like hell
and that hell isn't anything other than
what cruel people create right here on

earth, and that the way to salvation,
the way to God, and
the way to ourselves
is the exact same way.

I know I love you, my beautiful, inquisitive child.
I know I will always love you.
I know that my love for you is limitless, and
that real love is not sparse or contained
but, instead, spreads like a blanket across the earth,
healing, comforting, liberating
in ways we may never know.

I know that being a person isn't easy, and
I know we can make it easier for ourselves and
others when we do our emotional, spiritual work,
which leads us to tangible acts,
like feeding and freeing the hungry and the held.

I know the world is wild, and I know
you will make it less so in the ways it needs taming
and more so in the ways
it needs releasing.

I know that when the disciples came
to Jesus and said, "Let's send these people away
to buy food for themselves," Jesus replied,
"You feed them." And I know Jesus
says the same to us today.

I know that God is with us. God lives in us,
and I know this God with and within us
is the way to shalom, salaam.
I know this God with and within us
is shalom, salaam.
May it ever be so. Amen.

—Claire McKeever-Burgett, a former Seeds intern, is a writer whose books Blessed Are the Women: Naming and Reclaiming Women's Stories from the Gospels and In the Beginning Were the Women: Matriarchs, Mystics, Wise Women, and Warriors in the Hebrew Bible invite people to pay attention to women's stories and heal from religious and theological trauma.

12 things You Can Do for Hungry People

(for kids, their parents & their ministers)

by Emily Benton Ryan

12 things kids can do

1. Whenever your stomach growls, pray for the 319 million people in the world who have to go to bed hungry.
2. Give one of your favorite garments to a clothing closet for low-income people.
3. At each meal, offer thanks for the food that you have (even if it's not your favorite) and pray that God will help you do things for people who don't have enough.
4. Try not to eat junk food.
5. Find out if there is a weekend backpack program in your community for kids who don't have food at home. If there is, ask if you can help fill the backpacks. If there isn't, talk to your teachers or write a letter to your local newspaper and ask why there isn't one.
6. Ask your parents, teacher, or Sunday school leaders where the food you eat comes from. Why do so many people go hungry in countries that export food products to countries like ours?
7. Make a list of things you have and a list of things you would like to have. Talk to your parents about which of these are necessities and which are luxuries.
8. Don't eat between meals for a week.
9. Ask your parents or pastor about hunger organizations and donate some of your allowance to your favorite one.
10. Ask your children's minister what the Bible says about hungry people. Encourage them to spend some time teaching you and the other children about this.
11. Ask your Sunday school teacher about the re-

gion of Gaza in the Bible. Find it on a map of Bible lands. Then pray for the people in Gaza who are facing starvation.

12. Read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Why do you think the first two people didn't help the man who was in trouble? What do you think you would do? Talk to your parents or leaders about this.



art by Sharon R. Rollins

12 things parents can do

1. Take your children grocery shopping with you. Buy extra canned foods, peanut butter, or other staples for your local food pantry. Have your children pick out their favorites, so that a hungry person can enjoy the foods that they enjoy.
2. Take your children to a farmer's market and talk to them about eating healthy food grown by local famers.
3. Ask your kids to help plan a meal that is just soup and bread or beans and tortillas. Drink only water.
4. Take your children with you to volunteer at a soup kitchen or deliver Meals on Wheels.
5. Work with your children to organize a canned food drive at your church. Kids can motivate a congregation better than anyone.
6. Find a copy of the *Simply in Season* Children's Cookbook by Mark Beach and Julie Kauffman. Help your children learn where their food comes from.
7. Teach your children about the importance of recycling.
8. Get your children to help you put toiletries or fruit and granola bars in bags and give them to people who stand on street corners with signs.
9. Encourage your children to collect some of their blankets and warm clothing. Then take them to deliver the items at a local shelter.
10. Help your kids write a letter of concern to Congress or the President about hungry people. Let them write or draw on a small paper plate, and then fold it and put it in an envelope to mail. (Go to www.bread.org for help in wording the letter. A salad-size paper plate will go, folded once, in a small standard envelope.)
11. Talk with your children about the people who stand on busy street corners holding signs.
12. Talk with your children about all the luxuries you have compared to the necessities that some lack.
3. Encourage your children to be involved with a UNICEF collection for Halloween.
4. Talk with the children about what it must be like not to have a home. Ask someone to dress up like an unhoused person and come in and talk to the kids.
5. Get a list of isolated church members and ask the kids to write and decorate cards to them. Or ask them to write and decorate cards for Meals on Wheels recipients.
6. Conduct a Bible drill with the children using verses about taking care of poor people. Tell them that these verses have a theme, and get them to guess what it is. (You can use the 40-day calendar that comes with this packet to get the references; each day includes a scripture about what God thinks of poor and marginalized people and what believers are commanded to do.)
7. During a time when your children usually have a meal together, pass out one piece of bread and a cup of water to each of them and talk with them about how hunger feels.
8. Help your children assemble relief kits for people in war zones or disaster areas. Either the Mennonite Central Committee (www.mcc.org/respond/kits) or Church World Service (www.churchworldservice.org) will tell you how.
9. Set up a church-wide recycling center and get the children to promote it with announcements and skits.
10. See if there is a CROP Hunger Walk in your community. If there is, get your children involved in walking. For more information, go to www.churchworldservice.org and click the "CROP" button. If there isn't one in your community, organize your own walk. (It could involve just a few people.)
11. Give each child one-fourth cup (two ounces) of rice in a baggie and tell them to take it home and think about the fact that many people only have this much to eat for one day.
12. Before it gets cold this winter, encourage the children to donate blankets, coats, gloves and scarves to a shelter for unhoused people.

12 things a children's minister can do

1. Find out what materials your denomination produces for children about hunger. If you need help, contact Seeds (254-498-4997 or seed-seditor1@gmail.com) and we'll help you find materials that are appropriate for your church.
2. Ask your church to collect canned food for a

local food pantry, and ask the children to promote it.

—Emily Ryan was a Seeds intern in 2008, when she wrote the first version of this list. Because it has been so well received, we have updated and reprinted it several times over the years.

Prayers of the People

by Janice Sykora

Oh! Gracious God, we thank you for sending us your only son, Jesus, who boldly stood up against others to glorify you. You give us joy with the weekly remembrance of the resurrection of your Son, our Lord and Savior.

For us mortals, it takes determination to stand up for our beliefs by demonstrating patience in our social and political opposition. Give us courage to make the hard decisions, even though those choices may offend someone else. We pray that barriers which divide us may crumble and hatreds cease so that your spirit of wisdom and charity can be observed in our elected and appointed leaders. This is our prayer to you.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We trust in you, O Lord, to guide us through our earthly challenges so that we can live in justice and peace. We thank you for your comfort and guidance as we face our daily responsibilities. May your church be seen as good stewards of your creation. We offer prayers for believers everywhere, our nation, and for all in authority.

Help us to be peacekeepers and to understand the dire need for peace around the world. As we attempt to recognize and appreciate the diversity we may find in others, always keep us focused on the goal that it is *your* work we are called to do. We pray for those who preach the word and administer the sacraments.

We ask for comfort and healing for those who suffer from any illness, worry, trouble or anxiety. Ease their pain, Lord. We pray for those who have entered into newness of life in your kingdom. May they share in your eternal joy with all the saints. This is our prayer to you.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We ask your blessings on veterans who have served our country. We pray for those serving our country currently in the armed forces and those deployed overseas. For ourselves, we thank you for our many blessings. Give us strength and perseverance to meet the challenges of our daily lives and to build a sustainable society as we work

with others. Help us to live with gratitude, love and kindness. This is our prayer to you.

Lord, hear our prayer.

As we worship in communal celebration, we offer prayers for our worship as we respect the dignity of every human being. Let us make a joyful noise to the Lord. We pray for those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries. May they grow in wisdom and grace all their days. And we pray to you for all those whom we love but see no longer. Grant to them eternal rest. Let light perpetual shine upon them. May the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. This is our prayer to you.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Please see "Prayers of the People" on page 28.



Hunger in the World Today

by Katie Cook

A History of Ups and Downs

For years, three United Nations agencies—the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)—have reported hunger and malnutrition as the biggest health risks in the world.

The number of deaths from hunger-related causes is greater than those from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. The main causes of hunger in the past few decades have been poverty, natural disasters, armed conflict, global climate change and the displacement of people.

In the final quarter of the 20th century, humanity was gaining ground against hunger, its oldest enemy. From 1970-1997, the number of hungry people dropped from 959 million to 791 million. This was mainly the result of dramatic progress in reducing the number of undernourished people in China and India.

In the second half of the 1990s, however, the number of chronically hungry people in developing countries started to increase at a rate of almost 4 million per year.

By 2001-2003, the total number of undernourished people worldwide had risen to 854 million. This included 820 million in developing countries, 25 million in countries in transition, and 9 million in industrialized countries.

In 2007-2008, one in seven people did not get enough food to be healthy and lead

an active life. But the worst was yet to come. The petroleum crisis of 2008, brought on largely by the war in Iraq, caused food prices to spike and set the anti-hunger movement back a decade or more.

That situation was worsened by floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and extended droughts across the globe. That year saw a number of riots in countries where the scarcity of food grew as the prices of food skyrocketed.

Although fewer people have died from hunger-related causes in the past few years, more and more people are at risk for food insecurity and undernourishment.

Member nations of the United Nations resolved in 2015 that they would work to end world hunger by 2030. That is not going to happen. In 2016,

art by Eh k Paw



for the first time since the year 2000, the number of food-insecure people started to rise. It has been rising ever since.

The world has faced major global hunger crises for several years. The usual causes—armed conflict and climate change (and the displacement both of those realities cause), along with drastically increasing economic inequality—were already causing relief and development agencies to struggle to make inroads.

Then, in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the problem and, the next year, the Russian invasion of Ukraine threw the world's supply chain into further chaos. Then, earlier this year, the US administration made huge, sweeping cuts in funding for all humanitarian aid.

An Unprecedented Global Crisis

The US is not the only donor nation that is turning inward. The United Nations recently endeavored to organize fundraising to avert famine in Yemen and fell drastically short of its goal. In fact, the US, while rethinking some of the earlier cuts in aid last spring, refused to reinstate any funding for Yemen, stating that the aid would only fall into the hands of terrorists.

At this writing, the people in five countries—Gaza, Sudan, South Sudan, Haiti and Mali—not only face intense food insecurity, but are, according to the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP), in the throes of “catastrophic hunger.” They are on the brink of famine.¹ This includes 1.9 million people. WFP reported earlier this year that famine has been confirmed in Zamzam camp in northern Sudan, and, just before press time, famine was confirmed in Gaza.

At the annual World Health Assembly early this summer, Mike Ryan of the UN's World Health Organisation (WHO) described the situation in Gaza, responding to claims of Israeli representatives that the Palestinian organization Hamas was “misappropriating” food aid in Gaza. Stating flatly that that truckloads of WHO supplies were even not being allowed into Gaza, Ryan said that, according to the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Gaza had been classified as IPC5. This classification indicates that famine is imminent.

The IPC defines famine as a situation in which at least one in five households in an area faces an extreme lack of food, leading to starvation and destitution, which in turn leads to extremely crit-

ical levels of acute malnutrition and death.² The WHO's Mike Ryan described famine this way: “Do you know what IPC5 means? It means they will die immediately unless they receive food and assistance.”

The situation in Gaza has only worsened for hundreds of thousands of people over the summer.

And this is only one story.

The WFP had aimed to provide food and nutrition assistance to 123 million people in 2025, which was already expected to be a year of unrelenting humanitarian needs, driven by escalating conflicts and climate and economic shocks. Now it is working through a 40 percent reduction in funds from the US as part of the Trump administration's “America First” agenda.

Up to 16.7 million people have already been affected by these cuts in 2025. As mentioned above, funding for Yemen and Afghanistan face the deepest cuts, with US officials claiming that terrorist groups are benefiting from humanitarian food aid.

What's Being Done to Help & What Needs to Happen

Global efforts have been known to alleviate the worst of these tragedies. The World Food Programme describes a coordinated effort from governments, financial institutions, the private sector and international partners that pulled the people of Somalia back from famine in 2022. We know it can be done.

The first challenge involves peacebuilding efforts to ensure safe and unrestricted access across borders and conflict lines. In Gaza, Israeli troops are severely restricting the delivery of life-saving food and medical supplies, citing that Hamas is appropriating it. Sadly, in many countries, terrorist groups like Al Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Houthis in and around Yemen prevent the populations from accessing food aid.

Skilled diplomacy is necessary to save lives and prevent the hunger catastrophe from spreading even further. However, this only happens when the international community comes together.

The next step is to work to avert the underlying causes of hunger. WFP has made a new priority of working to build resilience, adapt to climate change, promote good nutrition and improve food systems. This has yielded good results in 18 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Ca-

ribbean as of 2023.³ WFP is also working with governments in 83 countries, through a rural initiative, to boost or build national safety nets and nutrition-sensitive social protection.⁴

Don't People Want to Help?

Thirty years ago, David Beckmann, then president of Bread for the World, said, "We have the resources to end hunger. We just lack the political will." Dominic MacSorley, the former CEO of Concern Worldwide, agrees:

Despite all that humanitarian assistance is achieving, and its extraordinary impact, it is falling short. The combination of new and unprecedented levels of need and the inadequate levels of humanitarian funding has put us on course for great tragic and avoidable loss of life. This is inexcusable. No one should die because of a lack of money or will.... The knowledge, resources and capacity exist to end global hunger by 2030, the goal set by the United Nations. However, that will not come close to happening without renewed urgency and resolve.

—Sources: UN World Food Programme, UN World Health Organisation, British Broadcasting Corporation, Devex, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Concern Worldwide.

Endnotes

1. See page 9 of this packet for a communion service that highlights these countries.
2. The IPC plays a critical role in identifying famine conditions and informing the response needed to save millions of lives. The IPC is now the primary mechanism the international community uses to analyze data and arrive at a conclusion whether famine is happening or projected to occur in a country. Analyses are based on evidence gathered by a wide range of partners and technical consensus among multiple stakeholders.

Please see "Hunger in the World" on page 28.

A Few Global Statistics

Note: Since January of 2025, global humanitarian aid has been thrown into chaos, and that includes statistics. The story above describes some of the crises faced by agencies and individuals who are trying to see that all God's people have food security. There are many numbers floating around, but many of them are no longer accurate. It usually takes a year or so for analyses to be completed and the numbers tabulated.

This year, the numbers will be even further off, because agencies are fighting to hold back the tide of emergencies caused by US cuts and those of other former donor countries. Here are a few statistics from United Nations programs that we think are somewhat current. Some of the numbers are almost certainly much higher than the reality.

- In sixty-seven countries, 319 million people are facing acute hunger.

—World Food Programme

- Although the numbers have gone down in some countries in the last year, other countries face profound food insecurity. Five countries—Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Gaza and Haiti—face outright famine.

—World Food Programme

- Approximately 673 million people faced some level of food insecurity in 2024.

—Food and Agriculture Organisation

- Some 673 million people were undernourished in 2024, a slight improvement from 2023 (695 million), but still far above pre-pandemic levels.

—Action Against Hunger, UN report

- Some 2.3 billion people were moderately or severely food insecure, including 545 million in low-income countries—a 17 percent increase since 2019.

—Action Against Hunger, UN report

- More than 1 billion people in Africa cannot afford a healthy diet, a sharp rise from 864 million in 2019.

—Action Against Hunger, UN report

- Food prices have surged, driving the average cost of a healthy diet to \$4.46 per person per day—up from \$4.01 in 2022.

—Action Against Hunger, UN report

- The number of people unable to afford a healthy diet globally stands at 2.6 billion, or nearly one in three people worldwide.

—Action Against Hunger, UN report

Hunger in the US

compiled by the Seeds staff

Note: It is easy to forget the precise definition of food security and food-insecure households, so we have provided definitions from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the sidebar on this page. For a more extensive hunger glossary, see page 27.

Statistics about hunger and poverty in the US take at least a year to collect and compile, so that most of the statistics you see at any given time are not current. Most of the statistics we have now—from agencies like the USDA, Feeding America, and Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)—are from 2023. US food insecurity numbers have been on the rise since 2021.

In January of this year, the US White House implemented deep cuts in domestic food assistance. That, combined with increasing costs of food and other necessities, is profoundly affecting people across the country. We have few ways of tracking the newer numbers in time for this worship packet.

However, we do know—from anecdotal reports coming in from food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and other assistance agencies—that the number of food-insecure households is spiking. The director of one assistance program said that they are seeing an increasing number of what they call “the working poor,” people who work at least one full-time job but still can’t make ends meet.

Food secure households had access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

Food-insecure households are uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, at some time during the year, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food. Food-insecure households include those with low food security and very low food security.

Households with **very low food security** are food insecure to the extent that normal eating patterns of some household members are disrupted at times during the year, with self-reported food intake below levels considered adequate.

—USDA Economic Research Service

Below are some statistics about hunger in the US. As you read them, please bear in mind that the situation is probably worse in most cases.

- Some 86.5 percent, or 114.6 million, of US households were food secure throughout 2023. The prevalence of food security that year was statistically significantly lower than the 87.2 percent (115.8 million) in 2022.

—USDA Economic Research Service

- Some 8.4 percent, or 11.2 million, of US households had low food security in 2023.

—USDA Economic Research Service

- Some 5.1 percent (6.8 million or one in 20) of US households had *very* low food security at some time during 2023. This means the households reported regularly skipping meals or reducing intake because they could not afford more food.

—USDA Economic Research Service, FRAC

- There are hungry people in *every* county in the US. Food insecurity exists in all 3,144 counties and county equivalents as well as all 435 congressional districts in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

—Feeding America

- One in five, or 13 million, children are food insecure. This is the highest number of at-risk children in years.

—Feeding America

- In the last two years, almost 50 million people turned to food banks for help. This represents one in seven households.

—Feeding America, FRAC

- Estimated food insecurity levels vary across regions, influenced by factors like unemployment and poverty as well as systems and policies that prevent certain households and communities from accessing the food they need.

—Feeding America

- Child food insecurity rates reach almost 50 percent in some counties.

—Feeding America

Please see “Hunger in the US” on page 28.

A Hunger Glossary

compiled by the Hunger News & Hope Editorial Team

Famine: According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a famine is "the absolute inaccessibility of food to an entire population or sub-group of a population, potentially causing death in the short term."

Feeding Program: a federal, school or private program or agency that serves prepared food to hungry people.

Food Desert: a district, usually a low-income area, where healthy, nutritious food is difficult to obtain. The Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert as a low-income census tract where a substantial number of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store. The residents are often much closer to fast-food restaurants and convenience stores.

Food Rescue: the practice of obtaining prepared food from restaurants, packaging it according to health codes, and making it available to feeding programs.

Food Security: having enough food to be healthy and productive. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing "when *all people at all times* have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life." According to the UN World Health Organisation, food security is built on three pillars: food availability, food access and appropriate food use. Census workers in the US use the terms "high food security," "marginal food security," "low food security" and "very low food security." According to the USDA, a household has very low food security if the food intake of one or more household members is reduced or disrupted at times during the year because the household lacks the money or other resources for food.

Food Sovereignty: a movement that seeks to establish the rights of those who grow food to determine what foods to grow, how food is grown, and how

and by whom foods are produced, processed and distributed. It also seeks to provide fair compensation for those involved in bringing food to our tables. For those who eat (which is everybody), it is the right to know where your food comes from, how the food was produced, how safe and healthy it is, and who benefits from the food's production and distribution. (*See pages 3-9 of the summer 2012 issue of Hunger News & Hope for more about Food Sovereignty.*)

Hunger: the body's way of signaling that it is running short of food and needs to eat something. According to the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), the average person needs 1,200 calories a day to lead a healthy life.

Malnutrition/Undernutrition: a state in which the physical function of an individual is impaired by lack of nutrition, to the point where they can no longer maintain natural bodily capacities such as growth, pregnancy, lactation, learning abilities, physical work and resisting and recovering from disease. The term covers a range of problems: being dangerously thin (*see "Underweight"*), too short for one's age (*see "Stunting"*), being deficient in specific vitamins or minerals, or being obese. A person can be obese and still be malnourished.

Protein energy malnutrition: a form of malnutrition measured not by how much food is eaten but by physical measurements of the body, such as weight, height, or age (*see "Stunting," "Wasting," "Underweight"*).

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program), a federal program in the US administered by the USDA.

Stunting: a condition that reflects shortness-for-age. This is an indicator of chronic malnutrition and is calculated by comparing the height-for-age of a child with a reference population of well-nourished and healthy children.

Undernourishment: the status of people whose food intake does not include enough calories to

Prayers of the People

continued from page 22

–Janice Sykora, a retired educator who resides in Corpus Christi, TX, wrote this prayer for her husband’s memorial service held in December 2024 at St. Barthomew’s Episcopal Church in Corpus Christi. Janice’s husband, Wayne Edward Sykora, painted the picture on page 22. The grayscale version is striking, but we wish we could share the original, which is full of vibrant colors.

Hunger around the World

continued from page 25

3. Most of the figures that are available now are from 2023 and 2024, which means we won’t know the full impact of 2025 cuts for some time to come.

4. Visit www.wfp.org for more information about WFP’s R4 Rural Resilience initiative. See also “Turning the Tide of Climate Change in Oromia, Ethiopia: Building Livelihoods for Resilience” by Sara Alexander, *Hunger News & Hope*, Vol 23 No 1, Spring 2023, page 5 (www.seedspublishers.org/news).

Hunger in the US,

continued from page 26

- Rural counties make up 62 percent of all US counties, but nine out of 10 counties with high food insecurity are rural.

–*Feeding America*

- The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably by state, ranging from 7.4 percent in New Hampshire to 18.9 percent in Arkansas (for the three-year period of 2021–2023). Eight out of 10 high food insecurity counties are in the US South.

–*Feeding America, FRAC*

- Nearly 50 percent of individuals experiencing food insecurity may not qualify for SNAP benefits due to program eligibility restrictions based on household income. (This will be higher now, and the people receiving SNAP will have had their benefits slashed.)

–*Feeding America*

- Meal costs vary significantly by county, ranging from \$2.91 to \$6.67, showcasing the diverse economic challenges faced by communities.

–*Feeding America*

- While nearly 40 percent of the food insecure population in the US is white, food insecurity rates among Black individuals and Latino individuals exceed those of white individuals in most counties. Overall, the percentage for Black and Latino rates were more than double the rates of white people. Native Americans and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders also experience food insecurity at disproportionately high rates.

–*Feeding America, FRAC*

Hunger Glossary,

continued from page 27

meet minimum physiological needs. The term is a measure of a country’s ability to gain access to food and is normally derived from Food Balance Sheets prepared by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Underweight: a state measured by comparing the weight-for-age of a child with a reference population of well-nourished and healthy children. It is estimated that the deaths of almost 4 million children aged less than 5 are associated with the underweight status of the children themselves or their mothers.

Wasting: a state reflecting a recent and severe process that has led to substantial weight loss, usually associated with starvation and/or disease. Wasting is calculated by comparing weight-for-height of a child with a reference population of well-nourished and healthy children. This measurement is often used to assess the severity of emergencies because it is strongly related to mortality.

WIC: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, a federal program in the US administered by the USDA. The WIC program has been shown to save \$5 in future social services for every \$1 it spends.

–*The Hunger News & Hope editorial team includes Sara Alexander, Jessica Foumena Kempton, Dawn Michelle Michals and Michael Williamson.*

We Were Each the Stranger

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins

art by Sally Lynn Askins

We were each the stranger once.

We were each the stranger.
Once you welcomed us into your fold.

We were each the stranger once.
You welcomed us into your fold;
We warmed up in your light and love.

We were each the stranger.
Once you welcomed us into your fold, we warmed up in your light and love.
Now you challenge us.

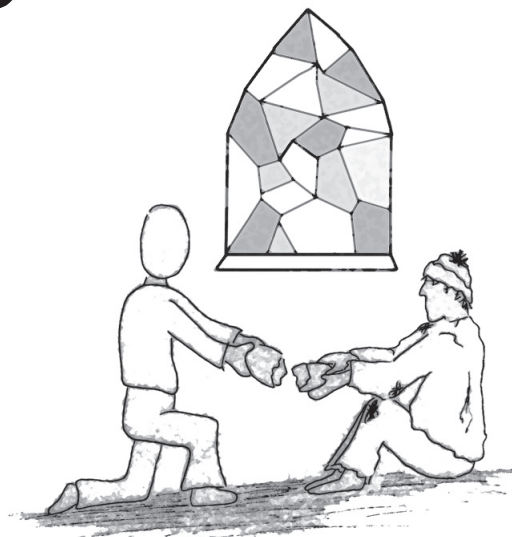
We were each the stranger once. You welcomed us.
Into your fold, we warmed up in your light and love
Now you challenge US, you stretch OUR arms and hearts in unexpected ways.

We were each the stranger once.
You welcomed us into your fold, we warmed up.
In your light and love now you challenge us, you stretch our arms and hearts.
In unexpected ways, we find ourselves grateful.

We were each the stranger.
Once you welcomed us into your fold.
We warmed up in your light and love. Now you challenge us.
You stretch our arms and hearts in unexpected ways. We find ourselves grateful.
Thank you, God, for moving us beyond ourselves and into community with others.

—Sharon Rollins is director of Waco Family Counseling and Children's Services. In addition to writing a number of nested meditations and other writings, she has produced many drawings for Seeds publications over the years, including the Sacred Seasons logo (see page 2).

Benediction



art by Sharon Rollins & Katie Cook

But this is my belief:

that at the heart of Christianity
is a power that continues to speak to
and transform us.

As I found to my surprise and alarm,
it could speak even to me:
not in the sappy, Jesus-and-cookies tone
of mild-mannered liberal Christianity,
or the blustering, blaming hellfire
of the religious right.

What I heard, and continue to hear,
is a voice that can crack
religious and political convictions open,
that advocates for the least qualified,
least official, least likely;
that upsets the established order
and makes a joke of certainty.

It proclaims against reason
that the hungry will be fed,
that those cast down will be raised up,
and that all things,
including my own failures,
are being made new.

It offers food without exception
to the worthy and unworthy,
the screwed-up and pious,
and then commands everyone to do the same.

-Sara Miles,
Take This Bread