



Hunger Sunday

Bread for the World's Newsletter for Church Action Against Hunger

An Article for Your Church's Newsletter

An Act of Prayerful Solidarity

Can you identify with hungry people if you have never experienced hunger yourself? Perhaps. For many who recently lived on a food stamp budget for a week, though, it became easier with personal experience.

In April, 85 members of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, OR, spent no more than \$21 each—the average food stamp benefit in Oregon—for seven days' worth of food. Using food already on hand at home had to be factored in as well.

As Rev. Kurt Levensaler, Director of Outreach Ministries, put it, the experience was "an act of prayerful solidarity with our neighbors who are hungry."

Church members who participated in the food stamp budget week said that they were unable to eat a nutritious diet. Many mentioned the monotony of rice and pasta. "I discovered there are no cheap cheeses—even artificial cheese is expensive," said participant Mary Sicilia. "Fresh fruits and vegetables were too expensive... everything but lettuce for making salads adds up quickly. I suspect the resulting diet would start taking a toll on our health fairly soon."

"I wanted to savor each bite of my meal—almost like sacred time!" said

Cheryl Richardson of her experience. "I took time in between bites... and I really thought about how people have to do this week after week." She added, "We had to really plan out how we were going to spend that \$21 per person. We realized how much we snack—you can't buy snacks on that budget. Children would not be able to have friends over and offer them a snack. If you were living where you had only one store at your disposal or you did not have transportation, this would make living on the meager amount a greater challenge."

Bread for the World's 2007 Offering of Letters, *Seeds of Change: Help Farmers. End Hunger.*, looks at the U.S. farm bill through the lens of hunger and poverty. Our efforts are focused on reforms that will help feed hungry people today and improve their opportunities to support their families in the future. The farm bill's most direct impact on hunger comes through the Food Stamp Program, which served more than 25 million low-income people in an average month in 2006. It is our country's first line of defense against hunger.

Although food stamps make a big difference in the lives of participants, providing meals that families otherwise could not afford, research corroborates

the impressions of members of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral: the national average benefit of \$1 per meal is generally enough to purchase sufficient calories, but not enough to buy nutritious foods like fresh fruits and vegetables or lean meat.

As a result, the diet of too many food stamp recipients lacks essential nutrients and is too high in fat and sodium. Dr. John Cook of the Boston University School of Medicine found that it would cost 30 percent more than the typical Food Stamp benefit to purchase food that meets the American Heart Association's recommendations for a healthy diet.

As the farm bill is reauthorized, Bread for the World members are urging Congress to raise food stamp benefits to enable participants to afford an adequate and nutritious diet.

It is also encouraging that members of Congress have taken action to

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Facts: Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition

- ❖ Children in the United States are more likely to be poor than they were 40 years ago, even though the value of our country's wealth per person more than doubled during this time.
- ❖ Hunger and poverty rates are higher in rural America than in urban areas. The latest available figures show that 12 percent of rural households are food insecure, compared to 11 percent of all households—nearly 14 percent of rural people live below the poverty line, compared to 12.5 percent of all households.
- ❖ The Commodity Supplemental Food Program, a federal nutrition program included in the farm bill, provides low-income, mostly senior participants with monthly food packages. The program is especially critical to seniors who are homebound. For the past two years, the administration has proposed to eliminate the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, but Congress has prevented this.
- ❖ A full-time, year-round minimum wage worker earns only \$10,712 annually—falling more than \$4,000 below the poverty line for a family of three.
- ❖ A majority of the U.S. population will spend at least one year of their adult lives below the poverty line.

An Act of Prayerful Solidarity

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educate themselves and their colleagues. In May, Representatives James McGovern (D-MA) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) invited their colleagues in the House of Representatives to join them in living on a food stamp budget for seven days. Their invitation read in part:

“As members of Congress, we don’t have to rely on food stamps... but that means it is difficult for many of us to imagine what it is like to

experience true hunger or to rely on the Food Stamp Program.”

Their goal, wrote McGovern and Emerson, was to “raise awareness of the difficulties facing food stamp recipients and demonstrate support for the Food Stamp Program’s vital role in providing nutrition assistance to low-income families.”

Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) agreed to participate along with McGovern and Emerson. While shopping at Safeway, Ryan quickly saw the limits of his budget. “It’s unbelievable,” he said as he selected peanut butter, jelly, bread and a big bag of cornmeal. He also got canned tomato sauce and pasta on sale. There was no money for meat, milk, juice, fresh fruit or vegetables, except 32 cents’ worth of garlic to flavor the tomato sauce. “By the end of the week, I’m going to be eating cornmeal and strawberry preserves.”

Through “seeing it for ourselves,” people of faith and our political leaders can recognize the importance of farm

bill reforms like raising the food stamp benefit. There’s a lot at stake in the farm bill for hungry and poor people. Thank you for your acts of solidarity.

Would you like to try the Food Stamp Budget yourself or with members of your church? You can view and print a copy of the Food Stamp Budget journal that members of Trinity Episcopal used on Bread for the World’s website at <http://www.bread.org/church>.

Action of the Month

Ask Congress to develop and pass a farm bill that raises the food stamp benefit and enables more eligible people to participate in the Food Stamp Program and other federal nutrition programs.



The 90-Second Letter

Your letters make a difference!

Urge your senators and representative to improve the U.S. farm bill in ways that will reduce hunger in this country and around the world.

Writing to Congress: An effective letter has three essential ingredients:

1. Be Specific

In the United States, 35 million people live in families that struggle to put food on the table.

2. Name the Action

The Food Stamp Program, the country's first line of defense against hunger, should be strengthened so that it enables participants to afford a healthy diet and reaches more eligible people. Currently, just 60 percent of those who are eligible are participating in the program.

3. Give a Reason

The United States has made a commitment: by 2010, we will cut the U.S. food insecurity rate in half. Improving the Food Stamp Program is a key strategy for honoring this commitment.

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Senator _____ or Representative _____,

As a constituent, I'm writing to ask you to make improvements in the U.S. farm bill, which is due for reauthorization this year.

Congress should use this opportunity to strengthen the Food Stamp Program—our country's first line of defense against hunger. A strong Food Stamp Program is essential since 35 million Americans live in families that struggle to put food on the table.

Research has shown that the current average food stamp benefit is not enough to afford a nutritious diet. Moreover, only 60 percent of the people who are eligible for food stamps are actually receiving them.

Please work with your colleagues to help the United States meet its commitment to cut food insecurity in half by 2010. Strengthening the Food Stamp Program will help accomplish this.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address

Send your letter to:

Senator _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

or

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515



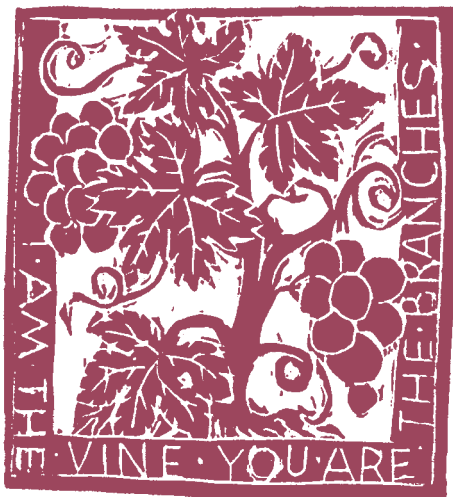
Resources and Opportunities**Save the Date:
October 21**

Bread for the World Sunday

Bread for the World Sunday is a time for churches to renew their commitment to ending hunger in God's world. Celebrated on October 21 or a Sunday of your choice between World Food Day on October 16 and Thanksgiving, Bread for the World Sunday is a chance to reflect on God's gifts, pray for people in need and take steps to help reduce hunger.

Each year, Bread for the World offers a resource kit to help your church celebrate. This year's reflection piece will be written by Fr. Ray Kemp, a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington and a senior fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown. For the first time, a children's reflection—suitable for a Sunday school class or children's sermon/moment—will be included. Ann Davis, Director of Children's Ministries & Discipleship for the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church will author this children's resource. The resource kit will also include prayers, litanies and music selections.

Worship bulletin inserts will also be available free of charge, and congregations are encouraged to place their orders early. Online orders can be placed at www.bread.org/sunday.



Last year's Bread for the World Sunday was celebrated by more than 900 churches from nearly every denomination and in towns and cities across the country. Here are a few of the many activities they enjoyed:

- Some churches organized an Offering of Letters to coincide with their BFW Sunday celebration, emphasizing advocacy as a way for churches to get involved in overcoming hunger.
- Other churches combined service with their BFW Sunday celebration by helping those in their communities who are hungry. Many churches collected canned goods and presented them as part of the offering that week. Others organized service trips to their local soup kitchen.
- Churches also coordinated the timing of Bread for the World Sunday to complement other activities and celebrations going on in their church, such as World Communion Sunday. A Lutheran church timed its BFW Sunday celebration to follow a weeklong ELCA Hunger Appeal emphasis and the Thanksgiving meal they serve for poor people. As the pastor wrote, "Our hope is that some hearts stirred by the first two events found a new opportunity for education and action through Bread for the World."
- Many churches included children in their BFW Sunday celebrations. Some Sunday school classes focused lessons on hunger in God's world, while other churches invited children to speak to the congregation about hunger. The children at one church led the worship service around hunger and Bread for the World with the theme "What must I do?"
- Some churches held a special offering and donated the gifts to Bread for the World as well as to local agencies working to end hunger.

Stay tuned for more information on Bread for the World Sunday 2007!

BFW Staff Can Help

Bread for the World's staff can offer tips on letter writing, brief you on legislation, assist your church's hunger ministry, and put you in touch with others who are working on these issues.

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Bread for the World

Seeking Justice. Ending Hunger.

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