

Books and Resources

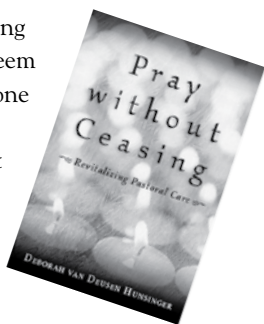
***Pray Without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care* by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger**

Wm. B. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, 2006). ISBN: 0-8028-4759-5. 250 pp.

The most interesting and significant books seem to grow out of at least one problem that their authors identify and want to remedy. Hunsinger identifies a problem with contemporary pastoral care, namely, that it often lacks a basis in theological reflection on prayer. Various “spiritualities” abound in the North American church. Simultaneously, mainline Christians draw sparingly from the Bible and the rich traditions that provide wisdom concerning this ancient spiritual practice, one that offers a “lifeline” for relationship with God and others in Christ.

Hunsinger attributes this problem with pastoral care to two factors. First, she asserts that large numbers of Christians are uncomfortable with prayer, especially praying with others. Mainline Christians, like the broader culture, increasingly view the spiritual life as a private matter and shun the level of intimacy that praying with another requires. A second factor, and perhaps the more basic one, Hunsinger says, involves inadequate education. Too few ministers are taught in seminary how to think theologically about prayer and its practice. Consequently, prayer does not find a central place in ministries of care. Because of these two factors, not only ministers, but those who rely on ministers for guidance, lack facility with this most vital of faith practices. The result is less frequent and fervent praying, which hinders relationships with God and one another.

Hunsinger responds to this deficit with



wisdom, discretion and conviction. She identifies three requirements for faithful pastoral care: community, listening and praying. She then helps readers appreciate how each requirement underpins the life of faith. She begins with a concern for *koinonia*, a community united in Christ. Any “working theology of prayer” must grow out of *koinonia* and feed back into it, she says. She then moves to a thorough treatment of how one may learn to listen more faithfully to God, others and oneself. She then considers various types of prayer (petition, intercession, lament, confession, and praise, thanksgiving, and blessing) and demonstrates how these nurture individuals and congregations in their relationship to God, one another and the world. To “pray without ceasing” remains the heart of the Christian vocation. Hunsinger challenges caregivers to pray for and with God’s people as Jesus did and to equip others to do the same.

Hunsinger has given us one of the most significant books on prayer of the last several decades. Her beautifully crafted book has the rare ability to engage multiple audiences, including seminarians, ministers and laypersons. Readers will grow from an encounter with Hunsinger’s discerning mind and pleasant spirit, both of which shine in this book. She challenges all of us to deepen the care and nurture that we offer on God’s behalf, not only to one another but to a world in need.

Allan Hugh Cole Jr. is the Nancy Taylor Williamson Associate Professor of Pastoral Care at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX. He is author of *Losers, Loners, and Rebels: The Spiritual Struggles of Boys* (with Robert C. Dykstra and Donald Capps) (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), and three



forthcoming books: *Be Not Anxious: Pastoral Care of Disquieted Souls* (Eerdmans); *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings* (Eerdmans); and *Mourning Well: Strategies for Getting through Your Grief* (Westminster John Knox Press).

Sharing Food: Christian Practices for Enjoyment

by **L. Shannon Jung**

Fortress Press (Minneapolis, 2006). ISBN: 13: 978-080063792-2. 197 pp.

Eating is not just a way to sustain life, but an occasion to be mindful of one of God's greatest gifts to us – the joy of sharing food and hospitality. In this book, Jung helps us explore the spiritual and emotional dimensions of sharing food.

Jung admits to a strong interest in food, including the preparation of and the enjoyment derived from eating good meals. Jung encourages a greater awareness and consciousness about eating. He knows that in the pace of today's typical life people often eat on the run. He sees such behavior as a great loss, for the individual and the community, because

much more happens around the table than simply the consumption of food. Relationships are enhanced and life takes on greater meaning. Sharing food with others opens us to the possibility of sensing God's grace, abundant and effective, when

we are conscious of God's presence.

Jung is especially aware that sharing food has both local and global dimensions. We all share the common need for food, but some have much more difficulty attaining its blessings than others. Enter the important gift of hospitality, which invites others to our tables and makes us more aware that food is not something all people can take for granted. This book is not simply about one's own consumption of good food – it's about everyone's need for food.

There are rich historical and cultural discussions about humanity's long struggle to find enough food to survive. The book notes that Americans are generally overfed, creating an unhealthy state that can affect the way we view ourselves, not just physically, but in a broader spiritual sense. Jung argues for a restoration of the Christian practice of fasting, and balances that with a plea to restore a greater appreciation of feasting, again tying this to

spiritual meaning.

Shared meals were central to the life of Jesus and to those early communities of disciples. Losing the value of sharing food impinges on the whole of the Gospel and of our understanding of God as the ultimate source of personal, social and spiritual nourishment. In other words, sharing food is no small matter from a religious and human perspective.

This book is an easy read, seasoned with personal stories, while challenging our thinking about the many aspects of hospitality. The demise of the family meal in many homes is widely recognized and its loss is both a symptom and a cause of faltering families.

There is much to recommend about this publication. It reminds us that eating is something we do daily, but perhaps not well. It also describes the importance of sharing food as an act of Christian discipleship and aestheticism. We are created by God to enjoy life at its deepest level. Gathering around the table to share food, and life itself, is a way to experience the joy God intends for us all.

David M. Thomas, PhD, is co-director of Bethany Family Institute, U.K. and U.S.A. and the associate director of the graduate program in family ministry, Dominican University, River Forest, IL. His interests are many and varied including pastoral theology and lifelong catechesis, astronomy, poetry and walking.



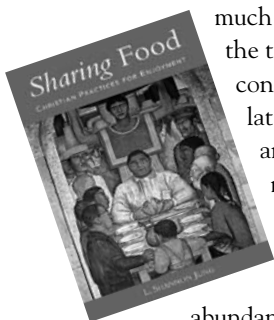
Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities edited by **Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh**

Judson Press (Valley Forge, PA, 2007). ISBN: 978-0-8170-1505-3.

168 pp.

Hope for Children in Poverty should be required reading for anyone of faith. As edited by Ronald Sider and Heidi Unruh, the book serves as a compelling and informative amalgamation of some of the finest minds and ministries working today to lift 13 million of our nation's children to a place of hope and empowerment where each day isn't simply a struggle for survival.

Marian Wright Edelman's foreword alone makes the book a worthy acquisition. She and the other authors effortlessly meld statistics and seemingly abstract situations with real human lives and faces, resulting in a clarion call



for justice and charity that echoes throughout the book. The dire situations facing poor and hungry youth in our country are “morally and practically intolerable,” she argues. Don’t worry about being overwhelmed by the absoluteness of that statement. God’s scripture and encouragement breathe through every writer in *Hope for Children in Poverty*, and the effect is a communal invitation for all to join their

cause, trusting in a better future.

After the foreword, the book breaks down into three main sections: the Lives of Children in Poverty, Special Concerns of Children in Poverty, and Biblical Reflections on Children in Poverty.



Interwoven through all of these sections is a careful balance of anecdote, issues analysis, statistics, and ministry profiles to effectively maintain reader engagement and more important, keep the subject in a holistic context. Picking just a few “important” parts out would be impossible and misses the point. However, passages detailing education, health care needs, effective advocacy, and practical methods for caring for poor children can be noted as examples of the quality found throughout. Added (and moving) bonuses are the poems, prayers, and songs strategically included, most written by children and teens growing up in poverty.

It can be argued that this book is not meant to be plowed through in a week (in fact, a free study guide exists at the publisher’s Web site). The weight and grip of the subject matter, combined with the ample amount of information and examples (not to mention inspiration), will have you putting down the book to take time to reflect, discuss, and pray about what you have just read.

Finally, the “target audience” for this resource, as mentioned at the beginning, is any person, group, or church with an open ear to Jesus’s mandate to care for the “least of these.” For those who are just starting to discern how God might put you in service to poor children and their families, you will find support and

abundant knowledge on potential avenues for investing your time, gifts, and voice.

For those already hip deep in ministry and advocacy for poor children, there is a wealth of affirmation and fresh ideas to both bolster existing ministries and ward against potential burnout. Furthermore, the ministries and organizations described are from diverse locations and environments, thereby offering views on what may prove useful in disparate settings.

For all readers it will serve as a potent challenge and call to action – personally, professionally, communally, and most of all scripturally.

To close with the words of contributing writer Jennifer Coulter Stapleton, the underlying message of *Hope for Children in Poverty* boils down to a fundamental call on the reader’s part. “Pray, advocate, serve – these three actions done in conjunction will have a powerful impact. Thirteen million children are waiting.”

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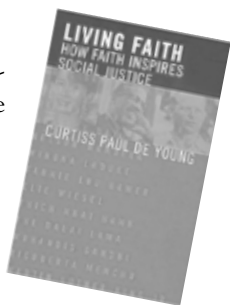


***Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice* by Curtiss Paul DeYoung**

Fortress Press (Minneapolis, 2007). ISBN-10: 0-8806-3841-7. 186 pp.

In *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice*, Curtiss Paul DeYoung examines the lives of three individuals whose faith motivated extraordinary social activism. He first relates, in a brief but compelling manner, the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who challenged the German Nazis in the 1940s. He next tells the story of Malcolm X, a Muslim who stood against racism in the United States – and, ultimately, to oppose all human injustice. The third story DeYoung recounts is that of Aung San Suu Kyi, a Buddhist and a Nobel Peace Laureate who endured many years of hardship in the struggle against tyranny in Burma.

DeYoung describes these three – along with others who have made similar journeys and contributions – as “mystic-activists.” He delves into the lives of these spiritual forebearers to find inspiration for spiritual leaders in the 21st century. His goal is to discover those elements of faith that led the social activists of the previous century to persevere in their efforts in the face of widespread spiritual devastation. “By penning this book,” he writes, “I choose hope and the faith that leads to peace and justice.”



DeYoung first discerns that the sacred writings and narratives of all the major faith groups hold an unequivocal mandate for social justice and call sharply into question any unjust social order. For him, then, religious writings and holy narratives become the foundation for social activism. He also concludes that the faith experience of activists who persevere for any length of time always includes spiritual discipline. Meditation and prayer, listening for a word from the divine or an inner voice, enable them to sustain an inner equilibrium in the midst of the external maelstrom.

DeYoung then explores how these elements of faith that inspire social action became daily practice for Bonhoeffer, Malcolm X and Suu Kyi. For Bonhoeffer, it was the discovery of “the view from below,” the ability to look at the world through the eyes of the marginalized and oppressed. For Malcolm, who was persecuted for his color, it was first a resistance to the systemic evils of white society, which then became a broader calling to ensure human rights for all people. For Suu Kyi, it was a “revolution of the spirit” that gave her the grace to reach out in love to her persecutors.

DeYoung intersperses these riveting narratives with similar stories of other faith-inspired people such as Mohandas Ghandi, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rigoberta Menchu. The book includes an appendix with brief biographical sketches of

17 such “twentieth-century mystic-activists.” He refers to them as a “supporting cast” for the three “primary actors.”

Some of these activists grew up in situations of privilege and were converted to the cause of justice through exposure to people who are marginalized. Some of them grew up in oppressed communities and learned to work for freedom. All of them learned, through their scripture and spiritual disciplines, that many of the social structures of their day were evil. They denounced the oppression in the world, but also announced the possibility of a new society – a new way of doing things that will not oppress or marginalize people nor undermine human rights. They were able to continue their work despite personal hardship, because they were convinced they were acting in the will of God.

As Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, the ethical question was changed from “How can I be good?” or “How can I do good?” to “What is the will of God?”

It is DeYoung’s hope that the 21st century will be a time “when many more choose mystic-activism and take a journey of faith in the inner regions of the soul and at the outer regions of the society.” *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice* is an excellent place to begin that journey.

Katie Cook edits the *Seeds of Hope* publications *Sacred Seasons* and *Hunger News & Hope*, as well as *Baptist Peacemaker*, the journal/newspaper of the *Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America*. She is a deacon and youth teacher at *Seventh & James Baptist Church, Waco, TX*, and a novice in the *Order of Ecumenical Franciscans*.



– Amy Castello, section editor