



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Who's Hungry? Who Cares?
(*Food and Hunger*, pp. 26-32)
- 📖 Sharing Our Bread
(*Food and Hunger*, pp. 54-57)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:
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Christian Reflection

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Who's Hungry and Who Cares?

Efforts to reduce chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity have shown some success recently. But who is still hungry? We can influence governments and organizations to respond to the one in seven people who are hungry in the world.

Prayer†

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger.
Give them, through our hands, this day their daily bread; and by our understanding love, give peace and joy. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146

Reflection

Most of the world's 842 million hungry people "live in developing countries, where efforts to reduce hunger have shown some success over the last decade," writes Jack Marcum. Yet food insecurity, defined as "a condition of uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way," persists in even the most highly industrialized nations.

The trends of world hunger during the 1990's include:

- ▶ *an overall decrease in number and percentage of people who are hungry.* The number of hungry people in the developing world declined from 817 to 798 million and from 20% to 17% of the population. Major declines occurred in China (193 to 135 million, 17 to 11%), South America (42 to 33 million, 14 to 10%), Southeast Asia (76 to 66 million, 17 to 13%), and West Africa (36 to 33 million; 21 to 15%).
- ▶ *no change in the number of hungry people, but a decline in percentage due to population growth in India* (214 million, 25 to 21%). The pattern is similar in the rest of South Asia (77 to 79 million, 29 to 25%), East Africa (73 to 81 million, 44 to 39%), Southern Africa (34 to 37 million, 48 to 41%), the Caribbean (8 million, 28 to 25%), and North Africa (6 million, 5 to 4%).
- ▶ *a dramatic increase in hunger in Central Africa* (22 to 48 million, 35 to 58%). The hungry population also grew in Central America (5 to 8 million, 17 to 21%) and the Near East (20 to 35 million, 10 to 14%).
- ▶ *continuing high levels of food insecurity in the United States.* Of all U.S. households, 11% (containing 35 million people) were food insecure at some time during 2002. The rates are higher in black (22%), Hispanic (22%), and female-headed, single-parent households (32%). More children (16%) are food insecure than the elderly (6%). These rates have been relatively constant since 1995, when statistics were first reported.

What do American Christians think about the current hunger situation? Based on a 2003 survey of Presbyterians, we are more confident of ending hunger in the U.S. than in the rest of the world (77% to 44%). The pessimism about the world may be based on a misperception that the hunger problem has gotten worse or remained the same (63% and 13%) over the last decade.



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Very few respondents blame the hungry for their circumstances, but most expect them to take responsibility for themselves after food assistance helps them get back on their feet. Most believe the best way to fight hunger is to help poor people obtain better paying jobs (87%) rather than to simply provide them food (10%). Respondents want “major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support” to end hunger, but believe these efforts should be more efficient, accomplishing more while spending less. Interestingly, while support for major new efforts to end hunger varies little across different views of the Bible or theology, those who attend church weekly are significantly more likely to support such efforts (81%, versus 69% of members who attend once a month or less).

In church we learn how to care for one another as the body of Christ, and to join together in caring for people beyond the congregation. The “offering of letters” described by David Beckmann is an innovative way to integrate worship, study, and ministry to the hungry. Church members write notes to members of Congress about legislation that will impact hungry people in the U.S. and around the world. “Because the United States is the world’s most powerful nation,” Beckmann notes, “American citizens can help shape decisions that influence hungry people throughout the world. A single decision by Congress or the President can either offset our individual contributions to charitable organizations, or multiply them many times over.” Over the last thirty years, hundreds of thousands of letters written and collected in worship services “have moved members of Congress to win increases in nutrition programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to relieve the debt of poor countries, to appropriate money for battling the spread the AIDS, and to make international assistance programs more effective.”

Study Questions

1. Reading *Who’s Hungry? Who Cares?* (pp. 26-32), are you surprised to learn how many people are hungry in the world and where they live? What do you find most interesting about the trends in world hunger during the 1990’s?
2. Do you agree that “major new efforts [to combat hunger and food insecurity in the United States], led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support” are needed? If so, what form should these efforts take? Are there model efforts within your community that should be encouraged?
3. Compare Psalm 146 with Jesus’ warning that the nations (or peoples) will be judged to be either sheep or goats (Matthew 25:31-46). What similarities and differences do you notice?
4. Study the Bread for the World website (www.bread.org). What resources on world hunger can this Christian organization provide for your study group and congregation?

Departing Hymn: “Where Is Bread?”

[†]Mother Teresa, in *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words*, compiled by José Luis Gonzalez-Balado (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1997), 9.

Who's Hungry and Who Cares?

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, and 2 or 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the trends of world hunger during the last decade and the problem of food insecurity within industrialized societies like the U.S.
2. To consider how a local congregation can respond to food insecurity among members and in the surrounding community.
3. To explore resources provided by Bread for the World for individuals and congregations to respond to world hunger.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Central Africa, with economic disruption caused by the AIDS epidemic and warfare, is one region of the world where both the number and percentage of hungry population increased in the 1990's. David Beckmann puts a face on the problem with this story: "During a recent trip to Uganda I met a young AIDS orphan named Deborah, who helped guide me through a Kampala slum," he writes. "Her parents had fled to the city from a spell of violence in Rwanda. They died from AIDS when she was little, and she has no relatives in Kampala. Deborah is lucky if she gets one meal a day and has usually depended on the kindness of neighbors to give her a place to sleep on the floor. At fifteen years old, she now has several men friends who give her food, clothes, and a halfway decent place to sleep. Given the prevalence of AIDS, these relationships pose a great risk to her life.

"Deborah is one of more than fourteen million children who have lost their mother or both parents to AIDS. Yet many more Africans still die from causes related to chronic undernutrition, a continual deficiency of calories or of one or more essential nutrients, than die from the dramatic plague of AIDS" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 54).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 146 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The Psalmist celebrates the Lord God who, as creator of heaven and earth, "keeps faith forever" by executing justice for the oppressed and the hungry, prisoners and the physically suffering, and dispossessed widows, orphans, and strangers. The counsel against putting our trust in princes (146:3-4) does not imply that government should stay out of matters of justice; rather it calls us to abandon our selfish ways of treating the oppressed and to adopt a God-centered perspective. This call to emulate the Creator's concern for the oppressed is found in Jesus' warning of the judgment of the nations (or peoples) as either sheep or goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

The lesson interprets data from several studies of world hunger and a survey of Presbyterians concerning hunger issues. Members may want to look more closely at the data by visiting the websites for the original studies, which are listed in “Suggestions for Further Study,” *Food and Hunger*, p. 32. For instance, *Hunger Issues: The Report of the February 2003 Presbyterian Panel Survey* [Louisville, KY: Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004] finds interesting differences between men and women respondents (e.g., women are more likely to believe that hunger has gotten worse and that we should do more to fight hunger), and between lay and clergy respondents (clergy are much more likely to believe hunger can be solved and that Congress should give equal priority to relieving world hunger as to ending U.S. food insecurity). It also compares the Presbyterians’ responses to a national survey of likely voters.

Study Questions

1. The Presbyterian survey, *Hunger Issues*, found that many Christians are mistaken about trends in hunger. Review the absolute numbers and percentage of hungry people in different areas of the world, the three major trends in developing countries (decrease in absolute and relative numbers; no change in absolute, but decrease in relative numbers; and increase in absolute and relative numbers), and the lack of improvement in food security in the U.S. Which of these are surprising? Can members suggest explanations for these patterns?
2. Encourage members to discuss the programs of charitable and religious groups within their community. These might include programs that directly feed the hungry, such as food pantries, holiday or regular meal programs, and food assistance. Other programs address the causes of persistent hunger and food insecurity, such as job training programs, housing assistance, and education in nutrition. Are these programs successful? What resources do they need in order to be more effective? Do members know of other programs that should be started or encouraged in the community?
Encourage members to discuss the role of government in supporting these programs. Should we be concerned about interference of government in religious or charitable institutions, or of faith requirements being put on recipients of hunger assistance?
3. The description of the oppressed is very similar—they are hungry, poor, or imprisoned. Yet these passages have very different literary forms: Psalm 146 is a poem or hymn, while Matthew 25:31-46 is an instruction with parabolic elements. The psalmist indirectly invites us to embrace God’s attitude toward the hungry and others; Jesus’ instruction assumes that collectively we (i.e., “the nations” or “the people”) know that we should do this.
Though Jesus does not expressly identify himself with the “Son of Man” and “King” in the instruction, this identification is clear from the context. This introduces a new motivation for justice and compassion in the nations—they are not merely emulating God’s attitude, they are responding to the presence of Jesus in the hungry and oppressed.
4. Bread for the World’s website offers much free information (statistics on hunger around the world and in the U.S.; a world map with links to hunger statistics by country; overviews of current legislation before Congress; addresses and links to write letters to elected officials, candidates, and news media in each area of the country; and news articles on hunger issues). The online store sells lessons for children’s Sunday school, worship materials, books, and cards. Other pages describe the Offering of Letters and the Covenant Church programs.

Departing Hymn

“Where Is Bread?” is on pp. 44-45 of *Food and Hunger*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.