

Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

Number of Food-Insecure Households in US Still Rising

WASHINGTON, DC—Since 1995, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), using dates from surveys conducted annually by the Census Bureau, has released estimates of the number of households that are food-insecure—broken into “food-insecure with hunger” and “food-insecure without hunger.”

Food-insecure households are those not able, for financial reasons, to access a sufficient diet at all times in the past 12 months. Households labeled “hungry” are those where one or more household members experienced hunger due to lack of financial resources at some time in the past 12 months.

The report for 2004, released in October, reveals that 88 percent of US households were food-secure throughout the entire year in 2004, meaning that they had access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members, and 12 percent did not.

The remaining households were food-insecure at least some time during that year. The prevalence of food

insecurity rose from 11.2 percent of households in 2003 to 11.9 percent in 2004, and the prevalence of food insecurity with hunger rose from 3.5 percent to 3.9 percent.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) recently pointed out that the new USDA report shows the fifth consecutive annual increase—and by far the worst increase since 2000—in the number of insecure Americans.

The total number of people living in food-insecure households in the US rose to 38.2 million in 2004. This number included 24.3 million adults (11.3 percent of all adults) and 13.9 million children (19 percent of all children).

FRAC also noted that this number grew by nearly two million in 2004, and has grown by seven million in five years. It compares to 36.3 million in 2003, 34.9 million in 2002, 33.6 million in 2001, 33.2 million in 2000, and 31 million in 1999. Of the 11.9 percent of food-insecure households (13.5 million households), 10.7 million of these individuals lived

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art by Curtis Cannon

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in households that experienced outright hunger. Black households (23.7 percent) and Hispanic households (21.7 percent) experienced food insecurity at approximately double the national average.

The USDA report also included food insecurity and hunger rates for every state, based on three-year averages. (The analysis uses three-year averages because the survey sample size for each state is too small to give accurate numbers for individual years.)

The ten states with the highest rates of food insecurity, in order from the highest, were Texas, New Mexico, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Utah, South Carolina, Arkansas, Idaho, North Carolina, and Arizona. All ten had rates at or above 12.7 percent of households.

FRAC, America's Second Harvest, Call to Renewal, and other groups aiming to end hunger in the US, point out that

federal nutrition programs—like food stamps, child nutrition programs, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families—have kept the food security numbers from being even worse. Nevertheless, the US Congress was working at

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press time on a budget that would seriously reduce these programs. (See the stories on page 3.)

FRAC also noted that rising unemployment, lack of health insurance, stagnant wages, and shrinking workplace benefits contribute to food insecurity.

Lynn Parker, FRAC's director of Child Nutrition, said, "Food insecurity and hunger have gone up for virtually every region of the country and every type of household.

"This increase in hunger and food insecurity will mean more children who have trouble at school, more illness among children and adults, and less ability to purchase a balanced and nutritious diet."

The USDA study showed that food-secure households typically spent 31 percent more for food than food-insecure households of the same size and composition.

—from *Food Journal* (a publication of the Texas Association of Community Action Agencies), *Food Research and Action Center*, and *America's Second Harvest*. To view the report, go to www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err11/.

Food Stamp Cuts Dropped from US Budget; Drastic Cuts of Safety-Net Programs Remain

In late December, the US Congress dropped cuts to the Food Stamp Program from the final budget resolution for 2006. However, many cuts to safety-net programs remain.

WASHINGTON, DC—Bread for the World (BFW) representatives and advocates for low-income people across the US were relieved in December when the Congress dropped cuts to the Food Stamp Program.

"We're shouting 'Alleluia!' about zero cuts to the Food Stamp Program," said David Beckmann, BFW president. "But the budget bill still contains other cuts that will hurt poor working families in order to pay for tax cuts for wealthy people."

The absence of cuts to the Food Stamp Program is a major victory for hungry people and their advocates. If the cuts that were passed by the House of Representatives had prevailed, more than

200,000 people would have been slashed from the program.

However, there are still major concerns about budget cuts to critical low-income assistance programs, like Medicaid, child support, and foster care. All these cuts were included in this almost \$40 billion spending-cut bill.

Medicaid cuts included in the budget bill are expected to increase the health care costs and reduce the number of covered health services for low-income families.

The bill increases state flexibility in setting the price of co-pays and premiums for health care services, and allows states to avoid paying for certain health care services.

There are also cuts in funding for child-support enforcement. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that \$5 billion in child-support payments will go uncollected over the next 10 years if these cuts stay in place.

Additional cuts of \$343 million for foster care funding are also planned. This amount includes two cuts that will make it harder for states to provide federally funded foster care benefits to certain grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

—from *Bread for the World Institute*, 50 F Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001; Phone 800-82-BREAD; Fax 202-639-9401; Web: www.bread.org.

Religious Leaders Arrested in Capitol for Protesting Budget Cuts

WASHINGTON, DC—115 religious leaders were arrested in front of the Cannon House Office Building while kneeling in prayer to protest what they termed “the immoral budget and tax agenda which slashes spending on the poor to finance tax breaks for the rich.”

Mobilized by Call to Renewal—a coalition of largely evangelical Christians pledged to advocate for the poor—national faith leaders, clergy, and faith-based providers of services held a press conference on January 18.

“These are political choices being made that are hurting low-income people,” said Jim Wallis, the event’s organizer and founder of the Christian ministry group Sojourners. “Don’t make them the brunt of your deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility.”

Speakers at the event accused conservative religious leaders of agreeing “to support cutting food stamps for poor

people if Republicans support them on judicial nominees.”

“They are trading the lives of poor people for their agenda,” added Jim Wallis of Sojourners, one of the organizers of the event. “They’re being—and this is the worst insult—unbiblical.”

The speakers pointed out that some US leaders seem to want to “save” Christmas by making sure that people at shopping malls say “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays.” The real Christmas scandal, the protestors said, is the budget in Congress.

“There is a Christmas scandal in this nation,” Wallis said, “and it is the budget that is an assault on poor people and low-income families. This budget and these cuts fill the rich with good things and send the poor away hungry.”

Following the press conference, participants knelt in prayer, blocking the entrance to the Cannon House Office

Building on the corner of Independence and New Jersey Avenues.

Police began arresting the protesters after warning them three times to move from the entrance. Participants were then escorted, one at a time, into one of two Metro buses and transported to a Capitol Police warehouse facility, where they were processed and released after paying a fine.

Other actions took place on the same day across the country—such as a vigil in front of the offices of Senator Wayne Allard and Representative Marilyn Musgrave in Loveland, Colorado.

—*from Associated Press, Reuters, Catholic News Service, Washington Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, The Coloradoan. For more information about Call to Renewal, contact Sojourners/Call to Renewal, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200; Washington, DC 20010; Phone: 202-328-8842; Web: www.calltorenewal.org.*

Facts About Poverty in the US

From Interfaith Peacemakers of Edina (Edina, MN):

- The US is the only industrialized country in the world without Universal Health Insurance. 44 million American citizens currently have no health insurance at all.
- According to the World Health Organization, the US health care system ranks 37th in the world in “level and disparity of quality health care.”
- Of all the industrialized countries, the US ranks 20th in infant mortality, 21st in child mortality, and 17th in life expectancy.
- In 2003, the US government cut off medical benefits to 164,000 of its own war veterans and voted to decrease funding of the Veteran Affairs department by \$1.3 billion.
- In the past 30 years, the average US citizen’s annual salary has increased by ten percent. Over the same period, the average annual pay package of the top 100 CEOs increased from 39 times the average worker’s salary to more than 1,000 times the average worker’s salary.
- US Members of Congress do not pay into Social Security and have a “special” plan. They retire at their regular sal-

ary until they die (an average of \$12,000 per month.) The average US citizen, having paid into Social Security from every paycheck of his or her life, can expect, upon retirement, an average \$1,000 a month.

From the Center for Arms Control (CACNP), Stockholm International Peace Institute:

- The US has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world. In the US, one of every six children lives in poverty. One of three is a child of color. In Sweden, one of every 36 children lives in poverty; in Germany it is one of 20, and in Britain it is one of 15.
- The US and Italy are tied at 13th in the number of young adults enrolled in Bachelor Degree college programs. Finland ranks first.
- The US spent three times more money on the initial cost of the current war in Iraq than it spends yearly on kindergarten through twelfth-grade education.
- Twenty-six cents of every US tax dollar goes to military spending. Four cents goes to education.

We Were Going to Change the World

by Kristi Rowe Miller

Editor's Note: Kristi Rowe Miller, a Certified Nurse Midwife, worked with her husband, Neil, with a Mennonite Central Committee project in Haiti for four and a half years. She and Neil recently returned to the village where they worked after a sixteen-year absence.

Steam wafted off the enamel mug of dark, sweet, hot coffee clutched in my hands. Menor pulled up a woven Haitian-style chair and sat down. "Madam Neil! I remember you! One night, twenty years ago, I came to your house after a long trip. I had gotten wet in the rain and I was very cold. You heated up water for me to bathe and Neil gave me some of his dry clothes."

Two decades later—it wasn't about the vaccinations or the micro-credit, it was about a kind deed on a cold, rainy night. Indeed, Menor wasn't the only one who remembered such things. Throughout my week of visiting my old hometown, I was plied with gifts, coffee, rice and beans, and lots of memories.

Twenty-two years ago, Neil and I drove over the ridge and into the beautiful village of Bwadlorins, Haiti—chock full of dreams and ideals.

We were going to make it sustainable, identify with the people, teach them to fish instead of handing them fish, avoid being "the great white nurse," walk hand-in-hand, work side-by-side...we were going to change the world—or, at least, Bwadlorins. Did we? (Should we have?)

Walking through the area, I noticed several things. There are fewer malnourished kids, more latrines, soil-erosion-prevention techniques in use, nicer houses, more people wearing shoes, clean water sources, bigger schools, better clinics, and a much bigger market.

On the other hand, the beautiful pines on the mountaintops are practically gone, HIV has taken hold, the "road" is still a

mountain path with a lot of wishful thinking, very scary items, such as Penicillin and Pine Sol as remedy, are still being sold in the market, and the midwives still deliver babies with dirty hands. Have the

***What's our job, then?
Here's a modest proposal
for development work:
keep on keeping on.***

development workers succeeded or failed?

I don't think success or failure can be measured by the number of latrines in town or the number of trees left on the mountain. It's tempting for US Americans to use such standards. We like numbers and charts. I wish we had a nice tool for measuring the hearts of people. How does one truly measure attitude change,

progressive thought, love? We can't. Only God can.

What's our job, then? Here's a modest proposal for development work: keep on keeping on.

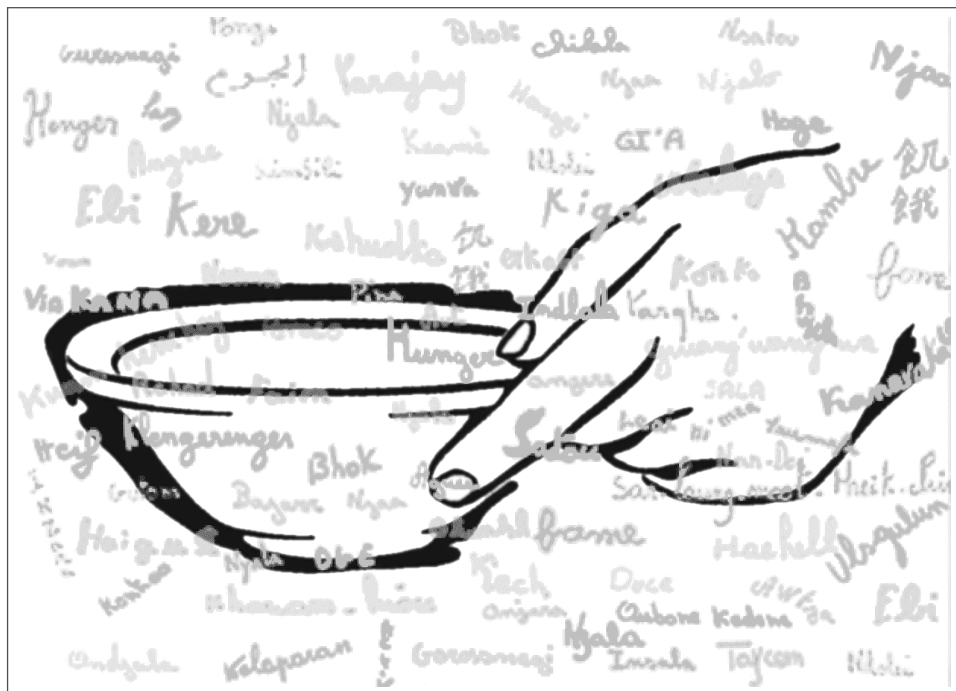
Keep on heating up that warm water on a rainy night, keep on sweating in the gardens, keep on clothing the town crazy man and crying with the barren woman. I'm convinced more than ever that this is God's development program.

When a kind deed swells a heart just a little bit wider, more of God's love seeps in and that person changes. It may take 20 years, and those in the thick of it don't see the change, but it's there.

I remember being asked in 1984 to see a 12-year-old kid with a very high fever. I went with the local nurse to his house and we examined him. We decided it must be pneumonia and malaria,

continued

Note: The words for hunger in many languages below is used courtesy of the US Committee for World Food Day. A colorful version of the words can be found at www.worldfoodday.org, or contact the Seeds office at seedshope@aol.com.



so we put him on Penicillin and Chloroquin.

There were no cars in town, so we couldn't take him to the hospital. The young Haitian nurse was afraid to go to his house at night because we had to pass the cemetery, so I ended up waking at 3:00 AM, walking in the pitch dark past the cemetery, and stumbling my way to his home to give the night-penicillin shot.

This went on for three nights and he just wasn't improving. He almost died. Finally, we got a car and took him to the nearest hospital. There I was informed that he had typhoid.

I had misdiagnosed him and almost cost him his life. God and Chloramphenicol saved him and he returned to

Bwadlorins a couple weeks later. I always felt like such an incompetent fool about that case.

But do you know what they remember? Not that I misdiagnosed him. Not even that I took him to the hospital. They remember the scary 3:00 AM walks past the cemetery, and 21 years later they're still thanking me for that.

I think that if the MCC team had gone to Bwadlorins with numbers and charts, with US American goals for "success," we would have failed miserably. Now, 22 years later, I would be encountering numbers all right: "Ma Neil, give me \$20 to roof my house," "Please fund this orphanage program to the tune of \$50,000 a year," etc. Instead I'm met with gifts and gracious hospitality.

And the numbers still happened. The quality of life in Bwadlorins has vastly improved. I was there at the beginning of MCC's involvement, and I've now witnessed a small piece of it at the end. We kept on keeping on. I don't presume to know God's mind, but I like to think that he's smiling on the little mountain village of Bwadlorins, Haiti.

—*While in Bwadlorins, Kristi trained 31 traditional midwives, handed out 31 midwife kits, spent 3 days training the local nurse, attended one birth, and (hopefully, she says) encouraged two MCC workers. She lives in Waco, Texas, where she works in a hospital while her husband directs the work of the World Hunger Relief, Inc. training facility nearby.*

Campaign Asks for One Percent of Budget to Fight Poverty



It seems as though every cause across the spectrum has adopted a colorful plastic bracelet. Champion biker Lance Armstrong inspired people to wear yellow ones to encourage cancer patients.

The green ones, believe it or not, represent Harry Potter. Perhaps you've seen someone wearing a white bracelet bearing the word "one," and wondered what that was about.

It's for the ONE Campaign—an effort to rally US citizens to fight the global AIDS and extreme poverty. The campaign engages participants through a diverse coalition of faith-based and anti-poverty organizers to show the steps people can take to respond to these emergencies.

The US government is finalizing decisions at press time about how much money to spend on humanitarian assistance in the fiscal year 2006. Joining the ONE Campaign shows our leaders that we want to do more to respond to the needs of impoverished people around the globe.

The aim of the effort is to give Americans a voice in churches, schools and other organizations to lobby for a historic pact to respond to these needs.

The campaign contends that allocating an additional one percent of the US budget, which comes to \$25 billion, toward providing basic needs—like health, education, clean water and food—would transform the futures and hopes of an entire generation in the poorest countries.

The literature states,

One percent more of the US federal budget would help

save millions of lives and be a major commitment towards achieving the internationally agreed-upon United Nations Millennium Development Goals. If it is delivered, we would achieve 0.35 percent of national wealth going to Official Development Assistance.

Longer term, so long as we can prove the money is working, the goal is for the US to continue to increase effective assistance until it meets the international commitment to give 0.7 percent of the national wealth. This is an appropriate goal for ten years' time, or 2015, the deadline for achieving the Millennium Goals.

To avoid corruption in recipient countries, the ONE Campaign is working on approaches like America's Millennium Challenge, which direct assistance to honest governments and channel support through private and faith-based relief and development agencies.

The ONE Campaign was founded by Bread for the World, CARE, DATA, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam America, Plan USA, Save the Children US, World Concern, and World Vision.

The group works closely with the National Basketball Association, Rock the Vote, and the Millennium Campaign. The ONE Campaign is supported by Bill and Melinda Gates and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

—*from Dallas Peace Times. For more information, or to sign the ONE Declaration, go to www.one.org.*

West Africa Enters New Year with Millions at Risk

from the UN World Food Programme

DAKAR, SENEGAL—The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) recently called on the international community to rally behind its efforts to tackle hunger and poverty in West Africa, the poorest region of the world.

The WFP says its goal is to feed at least ten million people in West Africa with over 300,000 metric tons of food—at a cost of approximately US\$237 million. By mid-January, only US\$18.4 million had been confirmed—about eight percent.

“Only last year we saw in Niger what happens when poverty is allowed to take root and fester...livelihoods collapse, and people, especially young children, suffer terribly and even die,” said WFP Senior Deputy Executive Director, Jean-Jacques Graisse, on mission to Dakar.

“Conflict has also destroyed lives and many still need assistance to deal with the immediate consequences of violence and displacement or to pick up the pieces as peace returns. WFP has a huge job to do in 2006,” he said.

The organization says that despite a good harvest at the end of 2005, the Sahel region (the area south of the Sahara, extending from Senegal across the African continent to Sudan, and—according to some geographers—to Somalia; *see the sidebar on page 7*) will face another difficult year.

Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, and particularly Niger all suffered great hardship during the 2005 “hunger season,” and the poorest are likely to find themselves in a precarious situation again.

In Niger in particular, crushing poverty and crippling debt continue to

plague rural families. WFP’s emergency operation is currently focused on maintaining assistance to malnourished children. It also includes food-for-work projects and the replenishment of cereal banks in poor villages.

However, the WFP says its current operation in Niger still requires nearly US\$22 million to avoid a break in food supply by February.

“The Sahel region has for too long been allowed to slip deeper and deeper into poverty, despite relative stability and democratic government. Access to food is at the very heart of human existence and yet poverty means that millions of people right here in West Africa wake up each day uncertain how they are going to feed themselves,” said Graisse.

The future of Liberia took a positive turn with the successful conclusion of elections at the end of 2005, ending a 14-year civil war. However, the infrastructure is still dysfunctional, so the WFP is feeding about 700,000 people in the country. This includes around 50,000 people, who fled their homes during the conflict to camps within Liberia, and who have not been resettled yet. Another 75,000 refugees still remain in neighboring countries, hoping to return home.

Ivory Coast, meanwhile, teeters between peace and a renewed conflict that has the potential to destabilize much of the region. WFP’s current operation targeting nearly one million food-insecure people is reinforced by a contingency plan to feed an additional 350,000, if the need should arise.

The recent deterioration in security in eastern Chad is yet to have an impact on food deliveries to 12 camps that are home to over 200,000 refugees from Sudan’s Darfur conflict, but an escalation of hostilities could have a dramatic impact on operations.

Insecurity in the northern reaches of the Central African Republic also increased the number of refugees crossing into southern Chad to over 40,000.

Even stable countries making good economic progress, such as Senegal, have significant food and nutrition needs. Over the next five years, WFP is planning to double the number of school children receiving free meals to a quarter of a million, as part of efforts to improve nutrition and access to primary education in Senegal.

The WFP also has operations in Benin, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome, Principe, and The Gambia – a total of 18 offices.

All countries in which WFP has offices are classified as low-income, food-deficit. Fourteen are among the bottom 20 percent of the UN Development Project’s Human Development Index, the lowest seven of which are all West African countries.

An estimated 3.2 million children under five years of age in the region suffer from acute malnutrition, and nine million from chronic malnutrition.

—*from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and ReliefWeb. For more information, go to the interactive hunger map on the WFP web site: www.wfp.org.*



The Sahel Region

Sahel, pronounced sah HEHL, is a dry grassland in Africa. The Sahel lies south of the Sahara and extends through large parts of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan. Some geographers also consider certain desert-like regions in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia to be part of the Sahel.

A number of serious droughts (dry periods) have struck the Sahel. The area has been especially dry since 1968. Millions of people in the Sahel have died as a result of crop failures caused by the droughts.

Farmers in the Sahel face many problems. During some seasons, the area either receives no rain, or the rains come too late for the growing season. Occasionally, the Sahel receives heavy rainfalls that wash away the farmers' seeds.

Other problems include livestock epidemics, attacks by locusts that destroy crops, and erosion, the wearing away of soil by wind and rain. Much of this erosion results from the overgrazing of the grassland.

Agricultural experts have developed methods to improve farming in drought-stricken areas such as the Sahel. But more economic assistance and cooperation by the area's governments are needed before these methods can be widely applied.

—Mark W. DeLancey, Ph.D., Professor of Government and International Studies, University of South Carolina, World Book 2004

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table

Participants Book and Leader Guide

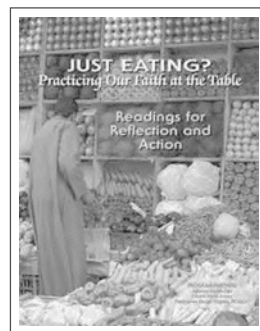
by Jennifer Halteman Schrock

(in collaboration with Advocate Health Care, Church World Service and Presbyterian Hunger Program)

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table is a new seven-week curriculum designed for high schoolers and adults. It aims to bring into dialogue daily eating habits, the Christian faith and the needs of the broader world.

Scripture, prayer and stories from the local and global community are used to explore four key aspects of our relationship with food: the health of our bodies, the health of the earth that provides our food, the ways we use food to extend hospitality and enrich relationships, and the challenge of hunger. The colorful study guide is peppered with action steps and healthy eating tips.

For more information, go to www.pcusa.org/hunger/features/justeating.htm.



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Sacred Seasons is a quarterly series of creative worship tools to help raise awareness of hunger and justice issues. A year's subscription includes Advent, Lent, Ordinary Time, and a fall hunger emphasis resource. To order, call 254/755-7745; fax 254/753-1909; write to Seeds Publishers at 602 James, Waco, TX 76706; or e-mail seedshope@aol.com. US subscriptions are \$120. Single packets are US\$50. (Non-US subscriptions are \$135; individual packets are \$60.) For more information, see www.seedspublishers.org.



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Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek 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 poverty.

Editorial Address

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quotes, poems, & pithy sayings

In the Global Village, distance no longer decides who is your neighbor, and "Love thy neighbor" is not advice, it's a command.

—*Bono*

The [US] is in deep trouble. We've forgotten that a rich life consists fundamentally of serving others, trying to leave the world a little better than you found it. We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, the courage to fight for social justice. In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land on something. But that's the struggle. To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never to allow despair to have the last word.

—*Cornel West*



True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it shelters the destitute; it serves those that harm it; it binds up that which is wounded. It has become all things to all.

—*Menno Simons, 16th-Century Anabaptist leader*

Joan: (to God) I thought you were supposed to "let there be light."

God: That's everybody's job. Everybody's.

—*Joan of Arcadia*

Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase; just take the first step.

—*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

art by Sally Lynn Askins

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Seeds of Hope Publishers also produce quarterly packets of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an economic justice attitude.

These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art, and drama.

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