



# Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

## Freedom from Hunger: *National Hunger Commission Releases Report*

In June of 2014, the US Congress created a bipartisan National Commission on Hunger to identify solutions to hunger and to provide policy recommendations to the Congress and the US Secretary of Agriculture about how to use existing programs and funds of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) more effectively in combatting domestic hunger and food insecurity.

The nine-member commission held regular meetings for a year and a half, traveling to eight cities around the country: Oakland, CA; Indianapolis, IN; Albany, NY; Portland, ME; Albuquerque, NM; Washington, DC; El Paso, TX; and Little Rock, AR.

They held public hearings and visited government, nonprofit, community and faith-based programs that are working to alleviate hunger. They heard testimony from 83 experts and 102 members of the public.

The commission was chaired by Robert Doar, Morgridge fellow in Poverty Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and Mariana Chilton, associate professor at Drexel University School of Public Health and director of the Center for Hunger-Free Communities. The group was charged with developing innovative reforms in both public and private food assistance programs to reduce and eliminate hunger.

In January of this year, the group released a 96-page report, *Freedom from Hunger: An Achievable Goal for the United States of America, Recommendations of the National Commission on Hunger to Congress and the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture*. It has been hailed as one of the strongest bipartisan affirmations around the solvability of hunger in the United States in decades.

The report contains a deep look at potential root causes of hunger, as well as clear, actionable recommendations. "It recognizes hunger as a

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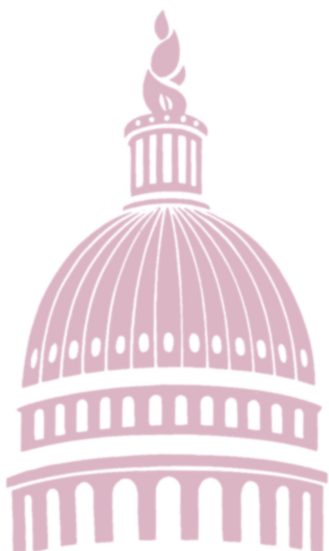
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# Hunger Commission

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significant problem in the US, with consequences on health, education and the strength of our workforce,” Chilton said.

“It’s a solvable problem, however, and the federal nutrition assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] and child nutrition programs, provide a strong foundation on which to build,” she said.

The report also states that hunger cannot be solved by food or government efforts alone. “The solutions to hunger require a stronger economy, robust community engagement, corporate partnerships, stronger families and greater personal responsibility,” Doar said. “Synergies between government, nonprofits, industry and individuals will have a greater impact on hunger together than any one of these could alone.”

The commission chose a measure of hunger called *very low food security*, which occurs when eating patterns are disrupted or food intake is reduced for at least one household member because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

For purposes of the report, the commissioners stipulated that *hunger* refers to “the lack of access to food when families do not have enough money, causing them to cut the size, quality or frequency of their meals throughout the year.”

With this definition in mind, the report found that 5.6 percent of households in the US, or 6.9 million households, experienced hunger within the past year. The percent of households facing hunger rose from 4.1 percent in 2007 to 5.4 percent in 2010, and has remained around 5.6 percent since, even as the economic recovery enters its sixth year.

The report says that many factors lead to hunger in America. These include household income or the availability of government assistance, but they also include major contributing factors such as low or underemployment, unstable families, insufficient education, exposure to violence, a history of racial or ethnic discrimination, personal choices or a combination of these.

The commission believes that these factors play a large role in hunger and cannot be addressed solely through public nutrition assistance programs or charitable giving.

Root causes of hunger, according to the commission, include labor market forces and job availability, family structure, education, exposure to violence, historical context and personal responsibility. The report mentions the effects of the Great Recession of 2007-2009 as a major cause in economic hardship.

It goes on to say:

*By focusing on the most vulnerable members of our society, such as seniors, single parent families with young children, people with disabilities, and our veterans, the United States can surely put an end to hunger.*

The commission concluded that the problem of hunger in America is fundamentally a problem of values. “In a nation

as rich as ours, no one should go hungry,” the report says. It continues:

*In addition to sound public policy, the solution to hunger in America requires an economy with broad opportunity for working-age adults, robust community and corporate partnerships, personal responsibility to make good, positive choices for our families and communities, and our sincere commitment to helping others in ways that strengthen the fabric of our society.*

The report focused on seven specific groups that the group learned are especially vulnerable to hunger: seniors, single-parent families with young children, veterans and active-duty military, people with disabilities, American Indians, people affected by high incarceration rates and immigrants.

*Freedom from Hunger* contains 20 recommendations from six categories [see page 3] to Congress, the USDA, the President and other Executive Branch agencies for the immediate future.

The commissioners emphasized that these solutions depend on bipartisan actions in Congress, and commitment from the current and future Executive Branch, “and they depend on each of us to make the personal choice to get involved and act on our commitment to help nourish our families and communities.”

The recommendations focus on helping those who are not working to find work, supporting those who are working but at low wages or part-time hours, and helping populations that are most at-risk. Each recommendation includes a rationale and an action item for Congress, the USDA or the Executive Branch.

In a separate statement, two of the commissioners, Jeremy Everett of the Texas Hunger Initiative, and Billy Shore of Share Our Strength, spoke to several concerns about the report among passionate anti-hunger advocates. The first is the fear that the report includes words that are “code” for supporting block grants for SNAP. The two emphatically state that the report does not support the establishment of block grants, changing the entitlement structure of SNAP or undermining national standards that protect program beneficiaries.

Another concern is whether the report recommends increased work requirements for SNAP benefits. As Everett and Shore state, the commissioners understand that most working-age, non-disabled SNAP recipients are either already working or recently lost jobs and “very much want work that provides family-supporting wages.”

Everett and Shore went on to say that they are confident that this report is “more than just the best that could be expected politically.” It is to be hoped that, as they say, the Hunger Commission’s report can serve as a catalyst for “a larger conversation about what bipartisan approaches to ending hunger can achieve.”

—Sources: *National Commission on Hunger website; Freedom from Hunger: An Achievable Goal for the United States of America, Recommendations of the National Commission on Hunger to Congress and the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture; joint statement from Jeremy Everett and Billy Shore.*

# Recommendations of the US Hunger Commission Report

## • *Improvements to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):*

1. Encourage a greater focus on job placement, job training and career development among SNAP recipients, and ensure necessary supports and infrastructure to facilitate finding work.
2. Ensure SNAP eligibility incentivizes work by improving responsiveness to earned-income fluctuations.
3. Encourage the use of financial incentives to SNAP recipients to facilitate the purchase of fruits, vegetables, high-quality proteins, whole grains and other healthy foods.
4. Exclude a carefully defined class of sugar-sweetened beverages from the list of allowable purchases with SNAP benefits.
5. Use evidence-based product placement strategies that encourage purchase of healthy products with SNAP benefits and tie it to SNAP eligibility for stores.
6. Reform SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) to ensure that efforts are likely to lead to measurable improvements in the health of SNAP recipients.
7. Continue to promote and facilitate greater coordination of means-tested programs across federal and state agencies and provide state incentives for establishing a “no wrong door” approach between SNAP and non-nutrition family support programs.
8. The USDA should use its current flexibility to the greatest extent possible to support state innovations that would help clients to become more food secure and more self-sufficient, and should approve or disapprove these requests within 90 days of submission.
9. Create mechanisms for improved training for front-line SNAP caseworkers to maintain a customer service perspective that facilitates best practices of case management.
10. Support the well being of families that have members who serve or have served in the U.S. Military.

## • *Improvements to child nutrition programs:*

11. Improve access to summer feeding programs and congregate meals by reconsidering requirements for rural areas.
12. Change area eligibility for reimbursement of summer feeding from 50 percent of children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals to 40 percent to help reach children in rural and suburban areas.
13. Make the summer electronic benefit-transfer option available by creating a mechanism that allows communities to apply for it if they can clearly demonstrate a barrier to congregate feeding related to remoteness, climate or safety.

14. Streamline and simplify administrative processes among the child nutrition programs.

## • *Improvements to nutrition assistance options for people who are disabled or medically at risk:*

15. Expand Medicare managed care plans to include coverage for meal delivery for seniors with physician recommendation.
16. Expand Medicaid managed care plans to include coverage, with a physician recommendation, for meal delivery for individuals who are too young for Medicare, but who are at serious medical risk or have a disability.

## • *Pilot programs to test the effectiveness of strategic interventions to reduce and eliminate hunger:*

17. Congress should allot funds to the USDA to implement, evaluate and disseminate results of multiple pilot programs to assess their effectiveness on reducing hunger.

## • *Incentives to expand roles for corporate, nonprofit and public partnerships in addressing hunger in civil society:*

18. Incentivize and expand civic engagement efforts on reducing and eliminating hunger.

## • *Creation of a White House Leadership Council to End Hunger*

19. Establish a mechanism for cross-agency collaboration to facilitate improved public assistance programming and evaluation through enhanced technology, data sharing and coordinated funding streams that protect effective programs and encourage coordinated efforts to address larger issues of poverty.
20. The White House Leadership Council to End Hunger and its members should monitor hunger at the federal and state level, with a specific emphasis on the following at-risk populations: seniors, single-parent households with young children, people with disabilities, veterans and active-duty military, American Indians, those reentering society from prison, survivors of violence, abuse and neglect; and immigrants (including documented and undocumented, asylum seekers and refugees).

—*Freedom from Hunger: An Achievable Goal for the United States of America, Recommendations of the National Commission on Hunger to Congress and the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.*

# Liberia, Guinea & Sierra Leone: Food Security & the West African Ebola Crisis

*Editor's note: The stories on pages 4 and 5, written by Grayson Wolf, are the latest in a series called "Where Are People Hungry?" found on the Seeds website. To read about Syria, Greece, North Korea, the Horn of Africa, South Sudan, Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Mali, Guatemala and Yemen, go to [www.seedspublishers.org/where-are-people-hungry](http://www.seedspublishers.org/where-are-people-hungry).*

The Ebola crisis in West Africa garnered headlines starting in December 2013 and continuing through 2015, and not without undue cause. That outbreak was the worst ever recorded for the Ebola virus. In fact, it killed more people than all previous Ebola outbreaks combined.

Displacing countless people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, this epidemic seized the world's attention. Often lost, however, in the hysteria surrounding a possible pandemic, were the frightening implications of Ebola and food insecurity.

The data about the Ebola crisis is absolutely stunning. A late 2015 World Health Organisation (WHO) situation report said that there have been 27,049 documented cases of Ebola, resulting in 11,149 confirmed deaths.

That number continues to climb as more cases have been discovered in 2016, and the real total is widely suspected to be higher than the recorded one.

The epidemic was at its height from August 2014 to October 2014. Liberia was declared Ebola-free in May

2015, after 42 days with no new cases, but cases have cropped up since then, and they are still appearing in Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Disaster relief poured into West Africa in 2014, and the crisis raged on, sometimes claiming the lives of relief workers who contracted the disease. Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières) alone treated nearly 10,000 people, losing 14 of its own staff to Ebola. Many other organizations provided healthcare and vital resources to the disease-ridden countries. These relief efforts were well publicized.

Unfortunately, news outlets frequently overlooked the importance of food assistance when reporting the Ebola disaster relief. The World Food Programme has fed 2.8 million people affected by Ebola between April 2014 and August 2015.

In doing so, they coordinated the distribution of over 66,000 metric tons of food. Despite this tremendous effort, 1.7 million people still lack reliable access to food in the region, of which at least 200,000 are food-insecure directly because of Ebola.

The virus attacks food security in multiple ways, but none more apparent than Ebola's propensity to devastate family units. Ebola is transmitted by contact with the body fluids of an infected person. Accordingly, Ebola spread most easily within families, jumping from one family member to the next. In this manner, the main providers and caregivers of the family are stricken, leaving behind widows, orphans and otherwise vulnerable family members.

Ebola also disrupted the national economies—another factor in amplifying food insecurity in West Africa. Because of the crisis, many countries closed their borders to Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The decrease in imports caused the price of many basic food sources to increase dramatically.

Furthermore, the epidemic upset trade and food markets within the respective countries, which also contributed to food scarcity and higher prices. Consequently, the already destitute, Ebola-ridden populations have experienced severe food shortages.



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# Nepal's Economic Conditions Paired with Earthquake Make Recovery Difficult

Nepal's worst natural disaster in 80 years has left millions in need of aid. On April 25, 2014, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal's Western and Central Regions. A second earthquake occurred on May 12, 2015, this time registering a magnitude of 7.3.

More than 8,000 people have been confirmed dead, and thousands more were injured. Many of those who weren't injured were displaced. The earthquakes destroyed or damaged more than 750,000 homes, thereby putting 2.8 million people in need of shelter. The Nepalese government estimated that 3.5 million of its citizens required immediate food assistance.

Many global organizations are still rallying to provide aid for Nepal. Groups such as the UN World Food Programme and the ACT Alliance<sup>1</sup> have assisted more than 250,000 Nepalese by providing food, shelter and other necessities. Unfortunately, disaster relief in Nepal was, and continues to be, an arduous affair.

Responders faced numerous difficulties in accessing those who need help. They faced external impediments such as poor infrastructure, treacherous terrain and a looming monsoon season. Furthermore, humanitarian agencies desperately needed funding.

"We've achieved a lot already but we must do much more. That's why we're bringing in more trucks and helicopters and working together with more partners to get help where it's needed—not just food, but shelter too," said World Food Programme Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. "An operation of this scope and complexity requires more financial support to see this through."

Nepal is not unfamiliar with food insecurity. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Consequently, its people are among the most malnourished. The World Bank ranks Nepal 157th out of 187 in human development and reports that 47 percent of Nepalese children under age 5 are stunted.

Moreover, the World Bank estimates malnutrition in Nepal results in a two-to-three percent loss in Gross National Product. Thus, Nepal is stuck in a downward spiral of poverty and food insecurity. The country's economic condition, combined with concerns about the earthquakes' effect on agriculture, mean that Nepal is likely facing an enduring problem in food insecurity.

As with all food security problems, relief first requires awareness. In light of Nepal's ongoing troubles, let's not forget about their hungry people

now that the disaster has faded from the public view. One excellent resource provided by Church World Service is a hymn-prayer written by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette for Nepal. If your group wishes to use this hymn as an awareness tool, go to this link: [www.cwsglobal.org/get-involved/congregations/o-god-we-hear-of-suffering-nepal.pdf](http://www.cwsglobal.org/get-involved/congregations/o-god-we-hear-of-suffering-nepal.pdf).

—Sources: ACT Alliance, Care International, Church World Service, UN World Food Programme, World Bank.

1. The ACT Alliance is a global alliance of churches and related organisations focusing on long-term development and humanitarian assistance

## Ebola

*continued from page 4*

It appears that food insecurity will be a lasting element in West Africa, notably due to the effect of Ebola on agriculture. The World Bank estimates that the three countries lost at least US\$1.6 billion in forgone economic growth in 2015 as a result of the epidemic. Since these countries rely on agriculture, production is expected to drop considerably coming years.

The fight against Ebola is still in progress, and its devastation will most assuredly outlast the outbreak. You can show support for West Africa by staying updated on Ebola news, helping fund relief efforts and keeping the stricken countries in your thoughts and prayers.

—Sources: BBC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Doctors Without Borders, Food and Agriculture Organization, International SOS, IRIN News, UN World Food Programme, World Bank, World Health Organization.



*At this writing, Grayson Wolf was a religion and English major at Baylor University and a Professional Writing intern at Seeds of Hope. He grew up in Waco, TX.*

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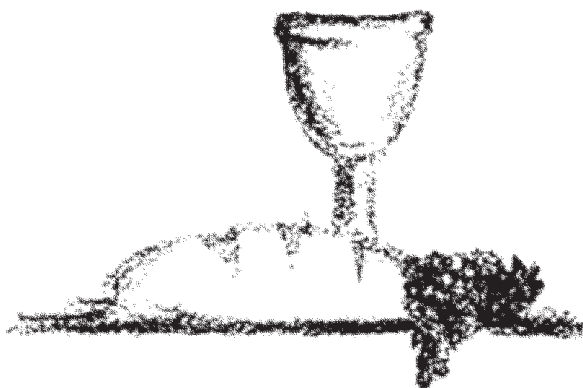
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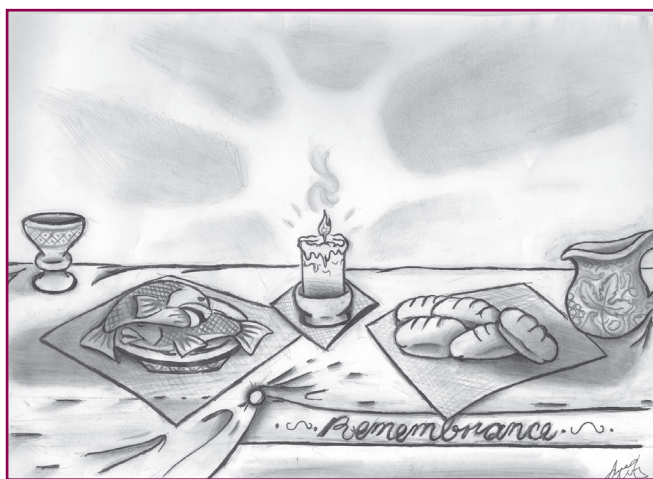
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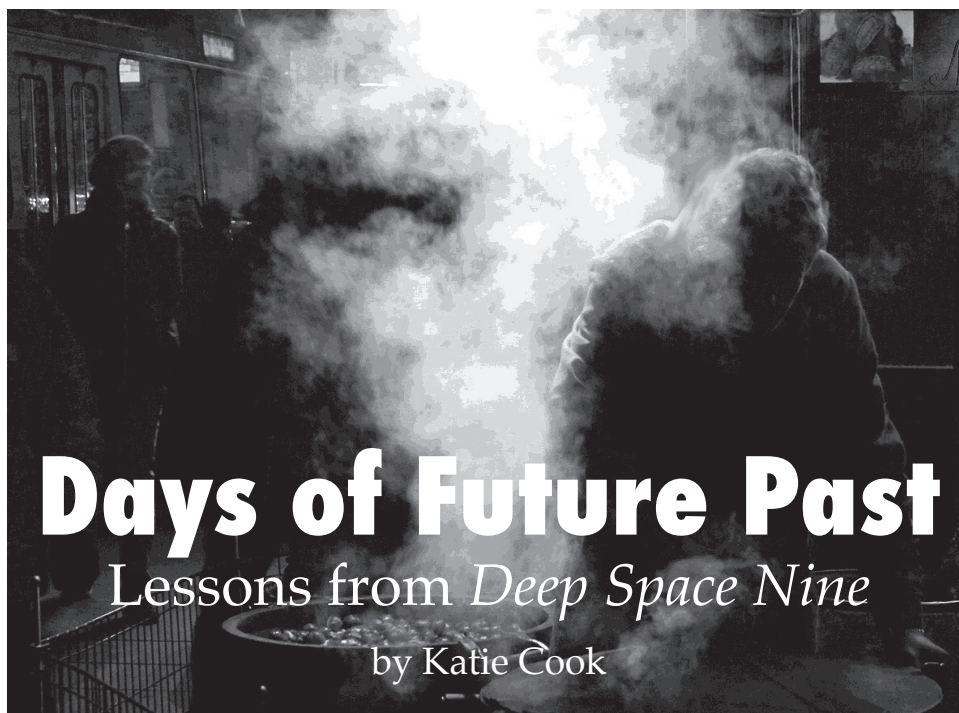
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Developing  
a Heart  
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a hunger emphasis primer  
for beginning churches

## Resources & Opportunities



# Days of Future Past

## Lessons from *Deep Space Nine*

by Katie Cook

Sometimes we are given a mirror and thereby get a good look at ourselves and our society. Sometimes that mirror comes from a most unlikely place. Strange as it may seem, I want to bring your attention to a two-part episode from the science fiction television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* that aired in 1995.

In this episode, “Past Tense,” some of the crew from the 24th-century space station Deep Space Nine return to Starfleet Headquarters on Earth for a symposium in San Francisco. A temporal distortion in the transporter throws three of them back in time to the year 2024.

Commander Benjamin Sisko, played by Avery Brooks, and Dr. Julian Bashir, played by Siddiq el Fadil, end up in a “Sanctuary District,” a 20-block walled-off “haven” where 10,000 sick, mentally disabled and jobless people are placed. Sisko and Bashir are taken to the “sanctuary” for two reasons: first, they are found unconscious (apparently sleeping) on the street, which is illegal; and second, they lack identification, which is also illegal.

Meanwhile, Lt. Jadzia Dax, played by Terry Farrell, has been separated from the others, and is taken into affluent hospitality by a young man who turns out to be a media star. While Sisko and Bashir get involved with families in the sanctuary, Dax enlists her new friend to help her find her colleagues. She finds out about the sanctuaries—and the marked ignorance and apathy of the wealthy people around her about what is happening to sanctuary residents.

All three of these Starfleet officers are shocked at this warehousing of people. Sisko and Bashir discuss with chagrin the dark days of the 21st century, when poverty was a serious problem, some people actually had no homes, and mentally

ill people were relegated to the streets with no treatment.

They were particularly shocked at the lack of awareness in the general public. After several days in the sanctuary, Bashir says, “Causing people to suffer because you hate them is terrible, but causing people to suffer because you have forgotten how to care...that’s really hard to understand.”

In Part II, Sisko and Bashir become involved (in spite of efforts not to do so) in a sanctuary rebellion in which residents take hostages in the (ineffectual) employment center and demand that the real story of the sanctuaries be told to the public.

I will leave you to discover how they all get out of there and thus restore their own timeline. But the violence and frustrations they experience and the people they encounter make up a fascinating and all-too-familiar account

of what now seem to be timeless economic and social challenges.

The episode, written by Robert Hewitt Wolfe, Ira Steven Behr and René Echavarría, provides great fodder for group discussion—for example, how easy it is to create a public program to help people and end up causing more suffering, and how social conditions for underclasses can be completely hidden from society as a whole.

Watching the exquisite contrast between the lives of the people within the sanctuary and the affluent life without, one could begin to wonder if the writers did some time traveling of their own and saw the *Hunger Games* movies that came out between 2012 and 2015, or if Suzanne Collins had seen this episode all those years ago and unconsciously picked up on its themes.

Or...or perhaps the scenes of vivid contrast in both point to a chasm between rich and poor that has been so real and pervasive—over more than the 21 years since this episode aired—that anyone who really looks will see it.

*Note: In a DVD commentary that comes with a copy of the third DS9 season, the cast and crew mention a 1994 Los Angeles Times story by Tina Daunt and Tina Nguyen that described that city’s proposed plan to shuttle homeless people from downtown streets to a fenced lot, where they would (the city proposed) have showers, sleeping quarters (or grassy areas, if they prefer to sleep there) and other services. The story describes the optimistic outlook of city officials, who were inspired by a similar project in San Diego, CA, and advocates for homeless people, who saw the plan as dehumanizing and impractical.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Homeless Camp Weighed in L.A. Industrial Area, *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1994.

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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 seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and hungry people; and to affirm, enable

## Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

**R**emember the first time God turned the world upside down? He did it with a small band of disciples and almost no resources except the power of God. We dare not underestimate what God can do with our small loaves and fishes if we give ourselves without reservation to his world-changing conspiracy...  
—Tom Sine, *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*

Christ is present today in the people who are considered unwanted, who have no job, who do not receive any attention or care, who are hungry, who have no clothing or shelter. The state and society consider them parasites. No one has time for them. You and I are worthy, as Christians, of Christ's love if our love is real. We have the duty of looking for these people and helping them. They are there so we can go to meet them.  
—Mother Theresa

Church members who may not be moved by general calls to compassion may become motivated—even compelled—into action when they see it as an outgrowth of the faith they seek to live and the relationship they nurture with Christ.  
—Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

We are rich Christians in a world of hunger. Some day we will have the inescapable requirement of explaining this to the Lord of the church.  
—Andy Loving

Our tall, imposing steeples are no longer so much a testimony of the love of God as they are to our pride, our callousness and our affluence.  
—Al Staggs

God's embracing love of the poor requires individual commitment to change.  
—Clyde Tilley

It is simply impossible to divorce the issue of hunger from the other central concerns of a living faith.  
—Glen Stassen

Bread is not merely needed to keep people alive or to survive each day, but should be available in sufficient quantity so that all can eat their bread with laughter.  
—Norma Kehrberg

art by Jesse Manning



and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

### *Editorial Address*

Seeds is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. The mailing address is 602 James Avenue, Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor1@gmail.com. Web: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2016; ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status.

Seeds of Hope also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an attitude "toward justice, peace and food security for all of God's children." These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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