
HOPE IN A TIME OF POVERTY: NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY

A Reflection from the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace & Human Development



*“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of **justice, fairness and respect** for every human being.”ⁱ*

Pope Francis

Those who are hungry, homeless and without a job are our brothers and sisters, members of God’s family. As disciples we can appreciate that their wellbeing is linked to ours, and understand God’s concern that their basic needs are met and their full participation in society is necessary.

Well over forty million Americans live in poverty. There are more than twenty million unemployed and underemployed workers searching for a decent job. These are people in our families, neighborhoods and parishes. Persons living in poverty are especially vulnerable to hunger. The *scandal of hunger*, about which Pope Francis has spoken, calls us to reach out to our hungry neighbors, those the Lord speaks of in Matthew 25.

The God of creation and mercy inspires us to pursue justice and solidarity. Families, communities, the market, and government must work together

to overcome poverty. All have a responsibility to respond generously, patiently and creatively to the needs of those in our family and community.

What can we do? Lots! We should be alert to the situation of those in need and listen to their concerns. We can actively take part in charitable works organized by our parishes and dioceses, and in the work of neighborhood projects dedicated to getting food on the tables of those who are hungry.

Beyond providing for people’s immediate needs, it’s important to step back and ask about the place of justice in our economy. Society has a basic duty to ensure a just economy. We and our political leaders have a critical role in balancing needs and resources, burdens and benefits. This includes securing protection for families in economic distress, fair policies and access to resources that can secure a decent-paying job.

The bishops of the United States have defined the moral criteria to evaluate the allocation of our nation’s resources: whether it safeguards or compromises human life and dignity; how it affects “the least of these” (Matthew 25); and how it reflects a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially workers and families.

As citizens and people of faith, we have a duty to take part in our democracy in order to address the situation of exclusion which so many experience.

We should prayerfully consider the insights that faith offers on all issues that affect the common good, especially issues of life and dignity.

On the issue of hunger, for example, we should advocate for federal nutrition programs. According to Bread for the World, all the food that churches and charities provide to hungry people is only about 6 percent of what is provided by federal government nutrition programs. Churches cannot do it alone.

So plug in to the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the projects it supports near you that work to advance both justice and food security in the community. Get involved with the advocacy work of your local diocese. Connect to the advocacy work of the bishops of the United States in their efforts to protect essential poverty and hunger-eradicating programs currently at risk in our challenging economy. Take time to learn more about how Catholic social teaching speaks to the issues of hunger and economic insecurity by visiting the resources below.

Most importantly, cultivate virtues of generosity, patience and kindness. We should work to overcome any numbness in our hearts and temptations to despair with prayer and acts of mercy and solidarity for and with those who are suffering. As

Pope Francis has said, we must have a “willingness to share everything and to decide to be Good Samaritans, instead of people who are indifferent to the needs of others.”ⁱⁱ



Nutrition, Food Security and CCHD

Traditional agriculture practice helps retiree combat diabetes

As a girl in the 1940s and '50s, Dora Pacias played in the cool waters of the irrigation ditch at her grandfather's farm near Albuquerque, New Mexico. That ditch was part of a centuries-old system of *acequias*, earthen channels that help neighbors share precious water for agriculture and livestock.

The farm is gone now, replaced by a baseball field, but the acequia still sustains growers and ranchers who maintain it with care.

In retirement, Dora and Lorenzo Candelaria farm a parcel on the same acequia and he is the *mayordomo*, the person elected to interpret the oral tradition governing the distribution of water. Because of the ongoing drought in the southwest, Dora and Lorenzo use drip irrigation to supplement the gravity-fed water supply from the acequia.

Dora credits the abundant yield of organic food with restoring her good health. "I lost 30 pounds and keep my diabetes under control without any medicine. We're eating fresh vegetables and chicken and eggs off the land like we did growing up and we're also selling produce to local restaurants and our food co-op," she says.

Dora and Lorenzo belong to the New Mexico Acequias Association (NMAA), which receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. NMAA supports community efforts to revitalize local agriculture and benefit low-income farmers.

ⁱ Francis, [Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants In The 38th Conference Of The Food And Agriculture Organization Of The United Nations \(FAO\)](#), 20 June 2013.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit www.usccb.org/jphd for the complete series of reflections.

PovertyUSA.org (PobrezaUSA.org)

An initiative of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, PovertyUSA addresses poverty from the grassroots perspective with facts and solutions.

Federal Budget (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/>)

This website contains many resources and details the USCCB position on the federal budget.

Circle of Protection (circleofprotection.us)

An unprecedented group of over 65 heads of denominations, relief and development agencies, and other Christian organizations committed to protecting hungry and poor people in the United States and around the world.

Farm Bill (www.usccb.org/farmbill)

This website contains many resources and details the USCCB position on agricultural policy and the Farm Bill.

For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers

(<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/agriculture-nutrition-rural-issues/for-i-was-hungry.cfm>)

USCCB Current Advocacy Efforts (<http://www.usccb.org/about/domestic-social-development/issues/index.cfm>)

Sign up here to join our advocacy efforts! USCCB applies Catholic social teaching by advocating on behalf of the poor and vulnerable.

