

A man in a grey robe is seen from the back, looking at a variety of fresh produce in a market stall. The stall is filled with colorful vegetables and fruits, including onions, peppers, carrots, and cabbages, arranged in wooden crates and baskets. The lighting is bright, highlighting the freshness of the goods.

JUST EATING?

Practicing Our Faith at the Table

Readings for Reflection and Action

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Advocate Health Care
Church World Service
Presbyterian Hunger Program, PC(USA)

Dedicated to people the world over who hunger this day for food and for justice, and to the memory of Dr. Sondra King, a participant in the creation of "Just Eating," and a tireless worker on behalf of poor and hungry people.

In memory of my mother, Perle Halteman, who taught me to cook, to garden and to feel outrage when children go hungry."

- Jennifer Halteman Schrock

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JUST EATING?

Practicing Our Faith at the Table

began as a joint venture of Advocate Health Care's Congregational Health Partnerships program and the Northern Illinois Region of Church World Service (CWS). Informal conversation about eating turned into a regular meeting to explore how we might be able to sponsor a project that would unite Advocate's interest in eating and health and CWS's long history of working with hunger and justice issues.

A Practicing Our Faith grant from the Valparaiso Practice Grant Program provided just the right framework for our project. Faith practices are things that we do that incorporate our faith commitments into the most basic parts of our lives—for instance honoring the body, providing hospitality, and keeping sabbath. The Valparaiso Program funds individuals or groups that help specific communities nurture a way of life shaped by Christian practices. (For more information go to www.practicingourfaith.org.) With a grant from Valparaiso we hired a curriculum writer, Jennifer Halteman Schrock, who created a seven-week study program around several themes we thought were important.

Six churches piloted the draft curriculum and provided vital feedback to us about how it had gone. Their experience and responses were incorporated into extensive revisions that were funded by grants from the Chicago Presbytery Hunger Mission Team and the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). A grant from the United Church of Christ Genesis Fund provided assistance for the design and formatting of the material in preparation for printing. Finally, the Presbyterian Hunger Program designed and printed the curriculum.

The development of this program has been a wonderful collaboration of many people and organizations. Special acknowledgement goes to Jennifer Halteman Schrock, the curriculum writer, who was able to work gracefully with so many "cooks" and to skillfully incorporate all of our ideas and passions.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Advocate Health Care

Advocate Health Care is a faith-based health system serving the metropolitan Chicago area. Affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Advocate has eight hospitals with 3,500 beds and over 200 sites of care. Advocate's mission is to serve the health needs of individuals, families and communities through a holistic philosophy rooted in our fundamental understanding of human beings as created in the image of God.



Because Advocate is a faith-based organization, its relationship with congregations is an important part of its identity and service. These relationships are nurtured primarily through the Office for Mission and Spiritual Care and the Congregational Health Partnerships (CHP) program. CHP works with faith communities to develop and support ministries of healing for the congregation and community.

Church World Service

Founded in 1946, Church World Service is the relief, development, and refugee assistance ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations in the United States. Working in partnership with indigenous organizations in more than 80 countries, CWS works worldwide to meet human needs and foster self-reliance for all whose way is hard.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Within the United States, CWS assists communities in responding to disasters, resettles refugees, promotes fair national and international policies, provides educational resources, and offers opportunities to join a people-to-people network of local and global caring through participation in CROP WALKS, the TOOLS & BLANKETS Program, and the "Gift of the Heart" Kit Program.

Presbyterian Hunger Program

The Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP), a ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), works to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes, responding with compassion and justice to poor and hungry people in local communities, in the United States and throughout the world.



PHP provides grants for direct food relief, development assistance, public policy advocacy, hunger education, and lifestyle integrity. PHP's Joining Hands Against Hunger offers a new strategy for holistic international hunger ministry; Enough for Everyone provides concrete ways for congregations to act as faithful disciples in the global economy; the Food & Faith initiative brings awareness about the need to build food systems that are socially just and sustain the integrity of God's creation.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

JUST EATING? *Practicing Our Faith at the Table*

Just Eating? While this phrase could mean *only* eating, the word, *just*, also means “being honorable and fair in one’s dealings.” This play on words captures a paradox that this curriculum addresses. Eating can be a mundane activity done with little thought or reflection; or it can be an opportunity to thoughtfully live our beliefs about justice — a vehicle for practicing our faith.

What does it mean to practice our faith at the table? The *Just Eating?* curriculum will help you better understand the relationship between our Christian heritage and our food. Drawing on Jesus’ story and the rituals of the Christian faith, this curriculum examines four aspects of our lives with food:

- the health of our bodies
- the access others have to food
- the health of the earth which our food choices influence, and
- the ways we use food to extend hospitality and enrich relationships

You will be challenged to think about each of these areas, to see how they relate to each other, and to consider what changes your faith may ask of you. Together with other believers, you will reflect on selected scripture, pray together, dialog and celebrate the Eucharist. You will also be invited to try spiritual disciplines that may be new to you, such as fasting, using food preparation as a time of prayer, engaging in food advocacy, or changing items in your diet.

We all spend a lot of time thinking about eating, preparing to eat and eating, and these habits reflect our values and shape our lives. *Practicing Our Faith at the Table* is an approach that attempts to apply our Christian faith in wholistic and healthy ways. May God bless you as you explore *Just Eating?*, and may your life be enriched.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

*T*his curriculum aims to shape a way of life with food that flows out of a deep understanding of how food connects us with God and all of Creation. Food is a basic need, but it is also the stuff of reconciliation, healing, transformation, comfort, courage, and justice. Using the Christian practice of the Eucharist as our starting point, we will explore what it means to eat well in relationship to our own bodies, other people, and the earth.

Objectives of this Curriculum

- to bring into dialog our day-to-day eating habits, the Christian faith, and the needs of the broader world
- to explore faith practices which encourage healthful eating
- to support each other in taking personal and congregational action that reaches beyond this seven-week curriculum

Format

The Just Eating curriculum includes four components:

A series of seven group meetings. Group time will include discussion, thought-provoking exercises, sharing new ideas, and mutual support. Groups meeting during a Christian education hour will meet weekly, but a bi-weekly or monthly schedule may serve some groups better. The leader's guide provides suggestions for shared meals for groups who wish to eat together during the course.

Readings for reflection and action organized in six units, with an introduction and five readings related to each unit. Each day's reading includes:

- a faith practice named in the title at the top of the page
- a suggested scripture reading
- a short reflection on the day's scripture
- a related reading labeled "From Our Own Times"
- a suggestion for action or reflection called a Faith in Action Step. Steps that deal with personal eating habits are labeled Healthy Eating Tips

Additional Resources. A list of Healthy Eating Tips and more choices for Faith in Action Steps follow each unit. A bibliography and worksheets labeled "Resource" provide direction for those who want to work at an area in more depth.

An invitation to change. During the seventh session, you will be invited to commit to at least one change in your behavior related to food. For example, one person might commit to buying fair trade coffee on a regular basis; another might work at a local food pantry; another might give up meat two days a week. Your group will also discuss how to support each other in making these changes and consider whether you feel drawn toward a group action.

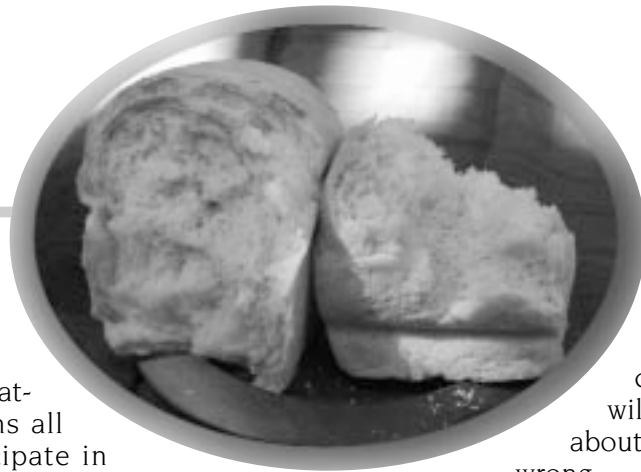
Each Participant's Role

- to attend as many group sessions as possible and participate in discussions
- to read the offerings for daily reflection in the participant guide
- to try at least one Faith in Action Step and one Healthy Eating Tip each week
- to assist your group in making a decision about future directions during session 7

U N I T 1

FOOD SHARING AS SACRAMENTAL

Breaking Bread Together as a Guide to Eating Well



Before he was crucified, Jesus introduced a way of eating together that Christians all over the world still participate in today. In most churches, it is represented by sharing bread and wine or juice and is considered a sacrament. Some churches call this ritual *the Eucharist*, a Greek word meaning “to give thanks.” Others call it the *Lord’s Supper*, which emphasizes its commemoration of Jesus’ last meal with his disciples the night he was betrayed and his sacrifice on our behalf. Among other believers, it is called *Holy Communion*, a term that focuses on the sharing between God and human beings that takes place. Several times in the New Testament, it is referred to as “the breaking of the bread.” Whatever we call it, this ritual of sharing carries more meaning than we can easily comprehend.

What does it mean to break bread together? A bit of New Testament history is helpful here. Today, most churches celebrate the Eucharist in a worship service – a practice disconnected from our everyday life, but this was not always the case. For the earliest Christians, breaking bread together was not a tidy rite divorced from real eating and drinking. Then, Holy Communion was part of a full meal that nourished the body as well as the spirit. Early Christian life revolved around shared meals as well as shared worship. We will see hints of these sacramental meals in Acts 2:46, where the church is described as a joyful community that breaks bread together. We learn of the dilemmas that sharing meals pose for the first Christians in Acts 6:1-6, where managing

communal meals requires calling new leadership. And, we will read in I Corinthians 11:17-33 about a potluck that goes dreadfully wrong.

We also see echoes of this ritual in the way the writers of the Gospels tell us their stories. They do not give us one communion story: they give us a plethora of stories. Writing decades after the Lord’s Supper had begun to shape the church, these writers emphasize meals. Especially in Luke, Jesus is always eating a meal, coming from a meal, or going to a meal. The bread and wine is a shorthand for the many meals that Jesus shared with his followers — meals with Pharisees, meals with tax collectors, the feeding of the five thousand, the wedding at Cana, and the resurrection breakfast on the shore of Lake Galilee. Jesus taught us how to eat and drink, how to share the fundamental necessities of life — lessons we can apply when we break bread together.

Perhaps sharing a meal seems like a small thing in a world wracked by hatred, despair and violence. But perhaps not. If we believe in the power of the holy sacraments to change lives, the key question we need to ask ourselves at the communion table is this: *Are we open to being changed by receiving this gift?*

The Christian tradition affirms that when the body of Christ gathers to share food and drink, God is there and is moving to transform us. May this affirmation be true in your life as you struggle to grasp the mystery of the bread and the cup.

Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental, Day 1

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER: Recognizing God with Us

A sacrament makes the presence of God visible in a way human beings can grasp. When we share food with others, God is there.

Luke 24:13-35



The two travelers in today's text are not just walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus; they are on a long walk from the despair of crucifixion to resurrection hope. The turning point in their story comes when Cleopas and his unnamed companion

invite a stranger to share their supper. This man takes the bread, blesses, breaks, and gives it. Only then — as they break bread together — do they recognize him as the risen Christ.

Jesus was not just remembered at this meal: he was newly present. God broke in to Cleopas' home in some mysterious way beyond rational explanation. Whatever happened was enough to send two tired people back out on the road to walk seven miles in the dark. *Mysterion*, or mystery, is the Greek word that describes an experience like this. *Sacrament* is the Latin word that later Christians substituted. A sacrament makes the presence of God tangible in a way human beings can grasp.

Cleopas' story describes a personal encounter, but it is more than that. It is also the story of the early Church, which knew Christ primarily in two ways: through the interpretation of scripture and through the breaking of the bread. These encounters with the risen Christ at communal meals transformed a few discouraged Galileans into a worldwide movement. At its best, the Eucharist, today, still has this power to transform.

From Our Own Times



"During my days as president of St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, I had what I call a mystical experience of the Eucharist. It happened during a worship service in the seminary chapel. As time neared for the Eucharistic

liturgy, I had an unsettling vision. The communion table with the elements became superimposed on my desk in the president's office, so that the two became one, inseparably joined, an organic fusion. The elements now, as it were, rested on top of my communion table/office desk-become-one. The bread and chalice touched everything on my desk and everybody who entered the room. Nothing escaped the embrace of the bread and the wine. After that experience, I never administered the seminary in quite the same way."

— *Abridged from William K. McElvaney, Eating and Drinking at the Welcome Table: The Holy Supper for All People. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998, pp. 28-29.*

Faith in Action Step



This week, set an extra place at your table every time you eat to remind yourself of Christ's presence. Be open to any unexpected guests who may drop in and fill your chair. Treat them as if you were entertaining Jesus Christ; listen as if they had come bringing a special message for you.

Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental, Day 2

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER: Giving Thanks

Cultivating the habit of thankfulness is essential to eating well.

Acts 2:43-47



One only needs to eat a meal with an average five-year-old to be reminded that being thankful is not the ordinary human state. Each dish is viewed with squinty-eyed suspicion. Are there any onions in the food? What's this green

stuff? Why isn't there any dessert? Adults have more sophisticated ways of expressing dissatisfaction with life.

One of the functions of breaking bread together is to train our sullen spirits into thanksgiving. Although some Christians persist in celebrating Eucharist as if it were a funeral, the very word suggests that joy is central to this sharing around a table. *Eucharist* is made up of two Greek roots, *eu* meaning *good* or *well*, and *charis*, meaning *gift* or *grace*. These roots are also found in the traditional prayer that Jesus and his disciples repeated at Passover and other meals:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

This expression of thankfulness underlies the Christian Eucharist and is vividly portrayed in today's scripture reading.

From Our Own Times



"Three plastic bags sit in my kitchen in an old basket. One is full of freshly ground corn meal. One is full of peanuts, still showing the evidence of the ground they were grown in. The third is full of rice. I received these

gifts from my students, who carried them from their hometowns on crowded trains. All week long, my students study English at XinXiang College in central China, but when the call comes from their parents to return home, they do it without questioning. They know they are needed, not merely wanted. Last month, several young men joined together to help a student whose mother is widowed. They traveled by bus, standing-room only; slept three to a cot and spent the weekend stooped in mud harvesting rice.

"I am only beginning to understand thankfulness and appreciation for the foods that are so necessary for life and the hard struggles to coax them from the ground. How easy it is to forget. This week's English lesson was about weddings in the West. The students listened with rapt attention as I told about the engagement ring, the cake, the dresses. We held a mock wedding, and all the students were giddy and embarrassed and excited. Then, I did the unthinkable. The wedding over, we tossed small handfuls of rice onto the smiling 'couple.'

"The young men were gracious. Infinitely gracious. They did not stop smiling — but the touch of irony in their smiles did not elude me."

— Ruth Leonard teaches English in XinXiang, China, with China Educational Exchange

Faith in Action Step

For many of us, saying grace at the table feels awkward, trite, or even annoying. This is not because giving thanks for the food is a stupid idea. More likely, it is because we have never devoted attention to making this ritual all it can be. Think about how to bring meaning and thankfulness to your table. Write a prayer; dare to say grace in a setting that does not lend itself to prayer; try out a new family ritual.



Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental, Day 3

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER: Dealing with Brokenness

The Eucharist brings us face to face with suffering, death, and the broken pieces of our own lives. When we break bread together, we acknowledge God's power to transform even these things.

Mark 14:17-26



The Last Supper – or the first Lord's Supper – was by no means a perfect meal. Never mind the soothing and orderly picture of the Last Supper that Leonardo DaVinci gave us some 1,400 years later. The actual event more likely resembled a

failed Christmas dinner with dysfunctional in-laws than with the celebration of unity we seek when we repeat this event.

First of all, there is Jesus' troubling announcement that one of his disciples will betray him. This news hangs over the table like a November sky, causing whispering, suspicion, and anxiety. Something is dreadfully wrong. As if that wasn't enough to ruin a festive occasion, Jesus follows up with an appalling liturgical breach. It was Passover: the night when Jewish families ate lamb and unleavened bread and retold the story of the Exodus. At this holy meal, Jews gave thanks to the God who had conducted a spectacular showdown with Egypt's imperial power and won. They recalled the plagues that rained down on Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea; they reclined on couches like rich people, reminding themselves they were no longer slaves. Jesus officiates at this ritual Seder meal, but instead of passing out the unleavened bread and recounting God's victory over the Egyptians in a blaze of wind and flame, he foretells suffering, not glory. He breaks the bread and says, "My body, broken for you."

This shift in perspective, from a God who swoops in with armed angels to a God who knows suffering from the inside out, is at the core of Christian faith. When we break bread together, we acknowledge God's willingness to be with us in our brokenness. We are reminded that though we cannot trivialize the power of evil, God's goodness enters into brokenness and transforms it.

From Our Own Times



In her book, Honoring the Body, Stephanie Paulsell tells about her friend, Diana, a seminary student who suffers from cerebral palsy. Although she had many gifts for ministry, Diana was haunted by a fear that her halting gait might cause her to drop the cup she served during the Eucharist.

"One spring Sunday, Diana served again as cup-bearer and walked from person to person kneeling at the rail at the front of her church, offering them a drink. 'The blood of Christ,' she said to each one, 'the cup of salvation.' And as she raised the cup to each person's lips, taking the utmost care not to fall, she saw her own reflection in the shiny silver chalice. Over and over again, she saw the reflection of her body in the cup. This is my broken body, she thought, serving this church. This is my body, teaching people what we do with brokenness in the church. Here in this cup is new life, and here is my body, expressing the truth of what this new life means!"⁴

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Faith in Action Step



Do you see any failures in our food system? In the way resources are shared in the world at large? In your family's approach to meals? In your relationship with your body? Describe what you see in a journal entry or to a friend. If nothing comes to mind, walk around a public place in your community. Ask God to show you what's broken.

Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental, Day 4

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER: Seeking Unity

God desires unity for a world fractured by wealth and poverty, race and class. Sharing a meal across dividing lines is one way Christians express this dream.

I Corinthians 11:17-33



At the time the Apostle Paul wrote I Corinthians, a variety of groups ate together; clubs, civic associations, trade guilds, funeral societies, and the devotees of various gods. What made Christian meals unique was the range of people included at the

meal. Two thousand years removed from Paul's social world, we miss the high drama behind texts such as this one from I Corinthians 11. Because the Eucharist was a real meal at this time and not a token bite of bread and ritual sip of wine, it forced early Christians to wrestle with wealth and poverty, race and social class. Jews did not normally eat with Gentiles and the poor could not afford membership in many of the clubs and other societies that ate together. Christian table fellowship was an eating adventure in uncharted territory!

For example, how do you serve a group of equals when the layout of your house is designed to accommodate a dozen "first class" diners reclining on couches in one room while everyone else stands or sits in another? When do you serve supper when your well-to-do guests are finished with the workday two or three hours earlier than those who are slaves? What do you do if the wealthy folk eat all the beef stew before the poor, who come bearing a handful of grain, even arrive? These are some of the questions scholars believe underlie I Corinthians. To ignore these challenges is not the Lord's supper, Paul says. It violates the very heart of what Christ died for.

From Our Own Times



Turn to the Unit 5 divider and spend some time with this photograph. You may wonder how the two people pictured here came to be washing dishes together. They were two of over 7,000 Christians from all over the world who met in Bul-

awayo, Zimbabwe, for a conference in July 2003. Mennonite World Conference planned the event around the theme, "Sharing Sufferings and Joy." This international fellowship of churches organizes "family reunions" every six or seven years where Christians can worship together, eat together, and learn from each other.

Guests enjoyed traditional Zimbabwean stews and maize porridge prepared in gigantic cast-iron pots over open fires. All dishes were washed by hand with help from the gathered community. For many local people, some of whom go hungry, the opportunity to eat meat daily was the highlight of the event. North American guests were struck by the amount of cornmeal served rather than the amount of meat, but they too found the food tasty.

- For more information, see the Mennonite World Conference website at www.mwc-cmm.org. Click on the World Assembly 2003 link.

Faith in Action Step

Invite someone to eat a meal with you. Choose someone of a different race or social class or someone you would be unlikely to connect with if you did not share a common faith. Notice what issues come up for you as you attempt to bridge dividing lines. Did you succeed?



Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental, Day 5

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER: Living in Hope

When we break bread together, we affirm that God will be with us in the future as well as the present.

Isaiah 25:6-10



Each of the Last Supper accounts in the New Testament is ripe with the hope of a bright future. “From now on, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes,” Jesus says in Matthew 26:29. He is speaking out of a long Jewish tradition that depicted God as the host of a great feast.

The most vivid description of this understanding is found in today’s text from Isaiah, where the prophet envisions a banquet of rich food and well-aged wines. All the peoples of the world are gathered at this feast, and all tears are wiped away. When we break bread together, even when our circumstances seem dire, we affirm this hope.

Hope is rooted in memory. The wine of the Eucharist challenges us to remember the glimpses of God’s reign we have been privileged to see and promises more in the future. We are all like the child mentioned below, longing to join the reign of God more fully than our present state and our feeble attempts at worship will allow. Like Silvie, we remember the richness we have experienced and we wait for something that has not yet arrived.

From Our Own Times



“My eight-year-old daughter, Silvie, is hooked on the Jesus Supper, as our family calls the feast. No, she doesn’t participate – directly – with adult believers in our local congregation. But she is enthralled with this communal ritual,

and longs intensely to join in more fully as an expression of her devotion to Jesus and his way.

“Several experiences have whetted her appetite ... [M]ost significant is her memory of the high drama of monthly coconut communion when our family was in the Philippines. There the United Church of Christ in the Philippines congregation welcomed her to participate along with adults. After the congregation rehearsed the life-sustaining properties of the coconut for Filipino society, the liturgy came to a high point. Holding up the coconut, the presider recited, ‘The body of Christ which is broken for us,’ and then with a couple of loud whacks of a bolo knife, cracked it open (a feat requiring considerable skill.) After letting the juice flow into a bowl, the liturgist raised the bowl and proclaimed, ‘The blood of Christ which is shed for us.’ The stillness was filled with an awe that was palpable each time. The gathered congregation, children and adults together, then came forward and joyfully partook of coconut meat dipped in coconut milk.”

— From Gordon Zerbe, “Children and the Jesus Supper: Some Anecdotal and Theological Reflections,” in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, Spring 2001, Vol. 2:1, p. 84.

Faith in Action Step



At the Last Supper, Jesus asked his followers to remember him. Much of what we remember is preserved in the form of stories. During a shared meal sometime this week, take time to tell stories that give you hope. Invite each person to tell about a favorite communion experience, a favorite Bible story, or a personal experience.

Unit 1: Food Sharing as Sacramental

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. As an antidote to the many ads you see each day selling junk food, prepare an “advertisement” for the Eucharist somewhere in your home: a symbol that reminds you of what it means to eat thankfully and well. You and a child might make a chalice and a *paten* (small plate for bread) out of clay together or find and frame a picture of the Lord’s Supper.
2. When do you find it easiest to be thankful? Most difficult? What conditions, physical or spiritual, cramp your capacity for thankfulness? If living thankfully were your goal in life, what would need to change? Journal on these questions. Then make one of the changes you identified.
3. Is there someone you know who has not received communion for some time, perhaps because he or she is ill, away at school, or estranged from a former congregation? Be a shepherd or an advocate for this person. Invite him/her to attend a communion service with you if he/she is able, or find another way appropriate to your denomination to share a sacramental meal.
4. Do you play a musical instrument or sing? Learn new communion hymns or enjoy those you know.
5. If your congregation began celebrating communion in homes within the context of a meal, what issues might arise? How might your congregation change? Write about this question or discuss it with another member of your group.

HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. Changing your habits takes time and attention. How will you find time to complete this curriculum? Use Resource 1-2, a worksheet on Food and Time, to reflect on changes you might make. Make a list of trade-offs you will need to make in your schedule in order to concentrate on this important area of life.
2. Placing a loaf of homemade bread and a bunch of fresh grapes on your table once a week is another way to bring holiness to a shared meal. Learning to bake whole grain bread can also improve your diet. Take a look at Resource 2-3 on whole grains and bake a loaf of whole grain bread this week. Note that you can substitute whole grain flour for up to 1/3 of the flour in any bread recipe. Use your kneading time to pray and reflect.
3. Where do you eat? Make a list of all the settings where you consume food. Which ones encourage you to eat well? Which ones discourage you? Many of our unnecessary calories are munched while we are alone — for example, at a computer or TV, or in the car. This week, make eating a social experience as often as possible.
4. Take stock of your drinking habits. When you drink something other than water, black coffee, or tea, it adds calories to your diet. Soft drinks are the worst culprit. A 12-ounce soft drink has no nutritional value and contains 7-9 teaspoons of sugar. One can a day adds an extra 150 calories or an extra 15 pounds per year if you drink it without cutting back on food. Boycott soft drinks this week.

U N I T 2

NURTURING THE BODY



*F*or many of us, the food issues we struggle with most often involve daily decisions about which foods and how much of them we should eat. These considerations occupy some of us every waking moment. We are too fat, too thin, too compulsive, scarred by our childhood conditioning, or simply unhappy with the genetic cards we were dealt. Messages from secular culture are a mixed bag at best. Bodies are big business. People spend billions on cosmetics, deodorants, soaps, fashionable clothing, jewelry, fitness equipment, and other items to make their bodies appealing. Meanwhile, our high-tech and high cost medical system extends our lifespans, as doctors patch up our bodies when they fail.

Christians of earlier eras have responded to our physical embodiment in various ways. Some fought passionately to prevent Christianity from drifting off into the realm of disembodied, lofty ideas; others struggled to subdue their desires for food, warmth, and sex. Some were better at rejecting the ways their society over-emphasized bodies than they were at embracing the ways Christianity is with and for bodies. What *can* Christianity teach us about the body?

First of all, Christianity affirms that the physical order, this world of birthing and dying, eating and dancing, is good. Life in a body is not just a prelude to some heavenly afterlife; it was created and blessed by God.

Second, God dignified bone and sinew, muscle and fat, by wearing them. Every time we participate in a Eucharist that uses the traditional words of institution, we are reminded that Christ had a body: "This is Christ's *body*, broken for you." We do not know

whether the body Jesus lived with was lean or stocky, but we do know he suffered hunger and thirst, felt pain and fatigue, sweated and wept. According to Luke and

John, the risen Christ had a scarred, imperfect body – a detail that some people with disabilities find especially meaningful.

Third, the biblical record celebrates the body in stories of intimate healings and God's attention to human hungers. God listens to hungry travelers in the desert and provides manna. God multiplies loaves and fish for a famished crowd of 5,000. In the New Testament, Jesus is not just a teacher of ethics, he heals bodies that have turned their owners into outcasts and touches untouchables.

Fourth, the Bible includes stories of physical passion. In the Song of Songs, an unnamed couple delights in each other's bodies without ever revealing their exact size and shape to the reader. What cup size, pray tell, would a woman whose breasts were like twin fawns have worn? How big was that delectable heap of wheat that reminded the man of his beloved's belly? The Song of Songs praises bodies, yet conceals more than it reveals. No particular body shape is held up as the ideal.

If Christianity affirms the physical in all these ways, then body issues are significant issues. To be unable to enjoy moving freely, to feel ashamed of one's body, to taste only the flavor of guilt in our food, to be controlled and consumed by our own lack of self-control: these are tragedies. They are worthy of attention and serious theological reflection. Learning, also, how to avoid excess is a faith issue, and the obesity epidemic – growing worldwide – is one of the critical issues of our time.

Unit 2: Nurturing the Body, Day 1

BLESSING OUR BODIES

Jesus touched and blessed people's bodies — even bodies whom others found unworthy.



Matthew 8:1-4, 19:13-15

These two texts give us a brief, tender picture of Jesus caring for others' bodies. In both cases, he overrode voices of protest

and took the time to physically touch someone: in Matthew 8, he touches a leper, and in Matthew 19, a number of small children. Blessing children would be pleasant enough if the line wasn't too long. But one wonders how clean Jesus' lap was when he was done. All those little bodies played in the dust of Palestine before the era of disposable diapers and running water!

Leprosy was another matter. Although curable today, in the first century it often progressed from scaly red patches and lesions on the skin to slow-growing swellings, deformity, and nerve damage. Sometimes fingers or arms had to be amputated. Since the disease was contagious and the consequences grim, leprosy made someone a social outcast. Presumably, Jesus could have healed this man without touching him—he heals at a distance in other stories—but here, Jesus chooses to make physical contact with a person whose body others found repulsive. His open arms remind us of God's compassion for our whole being, no matter what our bodies are like.

excerpt below, she tells how her husband's acceptance and patience taught her to run again:

"He suggested we start out slowly, running a mile and a half, twelve laps around the track. I had never run a mile and a half in my life, but okay, we started running. Within two laps, my lungs were burning. But within four, I was starting to feel my stride lengthen as we ran side by side; I started to feel myself speeding up. By the time we began closing in on our twelfth lap, I was panting and groaning loudly enough for everyone on the track to hear, but Kevin kept saying, 'You're doing great, let's finish big, let's speed up at the end.' And in a burst of energy, I did. I sprinted down the last half of the track, Kevin matching me stride for stride, and felt in every muscle the pleasure of exertion, of pushing my body beyond its boundaries. It was a physical pleasure, the pleasure of feeling myself wholly embodied, of feeling blood and breath moving through me. It was a spiritual pleasure, the relief of feeling old fears and inhibitions drained of their power, a feeling of freedom and possibility. And it was a sexual pleasure, the pleasure of feeling someone I love drawing out my strength, urging me on, matching his body's rhythm to mine. It is one of my husband's enduring gifts to me that he reintroduced me to the joy of bodily exertion. Through honoring my body and its strength, he helped me begin to do the same."

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Faith in Action Step

In a journal, write about an experience that shaped your body image for better or for worse. Write a prayer giving thanks for this experience or asking God to heal it.

From Our Own Times

In *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*,⁷ Stephanie Paulsell describes how an embarrassing junior high experience kept her from running for years. In the



Unit 2: Nurturing the Body, Day 2

NURTURING OUR BODIES

*A basic understanding of nutrition helps us eat well.
Good nutrition is stewardship of a gift God gave us — our bodies.*



Isaiah 55:1-2

Every day on my way to work, I see a McDonalds billboard. “It’s about *value*,” the ad proclaims. Yes, the food is inexpensive, but what about the fact that a 12-ounce soda has no nutri-

tional value? Or that the closest thing to a vegetable in your combo (besides a pickle slice) were the french fries, loaded with trans fats? Or the fact that you would have to walk seventeen miles to burn off the calories in one large combo?⁸ Is this *value*?

Although written in a very different context, Isaiah’s invitation to abundant life is still poignant today. “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?” he queries. “Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” These few verses remind us that God wishes genuine nourishment for us and that choosing well will be a pleasure, not a sacrifice.

From Our Own Times



Walter C. Willett, an M.D. and chair of the Department of Nutrition at Harvard, describes most nutritional debate as a “lively but mostly evidence-free food fight.” In response, his book, *Eat Drink and Be Healthy*,⁹ provides advice grounded in studies that tracked the health and eating

habits of thousands of people for more than twenty years. According to Willett and many other nutrition professionals, the most important things you can do for your health are:

- 1. Keep your weight in the healthy range.** Next to whether you smoke, your weight is the most important measure of your future health. It is more important to your long-term health than exactly what mixture of fats, carbohydrates, and antioxidants you consume.
- 2. Replace saturated fats and trans fats with unsaturated fats.** “Eating more good fats — and

staying away from bad ones — is second only to weight control on the list of healthy nutritional strategies.” Fats high in unsaturated fatty acids are liquid or soft at room temperature and include olive, corn, soybean, safflower and canola oils. Fats high in saturated fatty acids are found especially in dairy products, red meat, coconuts, and chocolate. See Resource 2-2 for more information.

- 3. Substitute whole grain carbohydrates for those made with refined grains.** Eating more whole grains has been shown to protect people against diabetes, to keep heart disease at bay, to improve gastrointestinal health, and to reduce the chances of developing certain kinds of cancer. Replace white bread, white rice, and pasta with brown rice, whole grain breads, and whole wheat pasta. Eat whole grain cereal or oatmeal for breakfast.
- 4. Choose healthier sources of proteins.** Trade red meat for nuts, beans, chicken, and fish. Animal proteins such as beef or whole milk dairy products come with a heavy helping of saturated fats. Vegetable proteins come with plenty of fiber and vitamins.
- 5. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.** Following this timeless advice can decrease the chances of having a heart attack or stroke, protect against a variety of cancers, lower blood pressure, help you avoid intestinal ailments, and guard against cataracts and macular degeneration. Five servings a day should be a minimum goal. More is better. Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables because each contains a different set of nutrients.

Faith in Action Step

Which one of the above recommendations do you need to work on most? Choose one of the points above and design a plan for making changes in your eating habits. Suggestions are provided for each of these areas on Resources 2-2 through 2-6.



ENGAGING THE POWERS

Powerful economic forces seek to undermine our desire to eat well. Following their lead like sheep is dangerous. People of faith need to be aware of and engaged with these powers.



I John 2:15-17, 3:16-17

In the feisty epistle of I John, the Church and the “world” are sharply drawn opposites. John describes the world as full of human

self-seeking and pride in riches. (2:16) In contrast, believers are those who have love for each other; a self-giving love willing to sacrifice for others as Christ sacrificed for us. (3:16) Other New Testament writers speak of realities similar to John’s “world” as principalities and powers. Parallels today include corporations, governments, and other social structures. Although most Christians don’t see these entities as enemy territory, it is hard to argue that self-giving love is the spirituality that governs most multinational corporations.

Walter Wink, who has written a three-part series on the powers, titles his last book, *Engaging the Powers*. He says he chose this title rather than “combating the powers” or “overcoming the powers” because they are not simply evil. God created social structures good, but they are fallen and in need of redemption like all of us. As John says in 2:17, they represent a way of life that is not sustainable and will pass away.

Eating is a politically and economically charged act, and attempts to change our lifestyles push up against a larger reality that is different from Christ’s loving community. We cannot be naïve about the powerful forces that benefit from humanity’s bad habits. John calls us to recognize the spiritual core of the social structures that make up our food system and evaluate them against the Christian standard of self-giving love. We may also be called to confront them, resist them, or work to transform them.



From Our Own Times

“I first became aware of the food industry as an influence on government nutrition policies and on the opinions of nutrition

experts when I moved to Washington, DC, in 1986 to work for the Public Health Service. My job was to manage the editorial production of the first — and as yet only — Surgeon General’s Report on Nutrition and Health, which appeared as a 700-page book in the summer of 1988. This report was an ambitious government effort to summarize the entire body of research linking dietary factors such as fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, salt, sugar, and alcohol to leading chronic diseases. My first day on the job, I was given the rules: No matter what the research indicated, the report could not recommend ‘eat less meat’ as a way to reduce intake of saturated fat, nor could it suggest restrictions on intake of any other category of food [such as sugar]. In the industry-friendly climate of the Reagan administration, the producers of foods that might be affected by such advice would complain to their beneficiaries in Congress, and the report would never be published.”

— Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.



Healthy Eating Tip

This week, boycott TV or watch less of it. Watching TV invites the powers into your living room. It gives food companies access to your mind and makes you vulnerable to the power of suggestion. At minimum, mute the commercials.

Unit 2: Nurturing the Body, Day 4

LIVING WITHIN LIMITS

Setting limits that fit our values is part of eating well.



Leviticus 11:1-12

Many modern Christians find the food laws in the book of Leviticus bizarre. Why, they wonder, is eating clams such an abomination? What's wrong with roast pork? You can consult commentaries on Leviticus if these questions intrigue you, but perhaps the most important questions to glean from a trip through this ancient policy manual are these:

consult commentaries on Leviticus if these questions intrigue you, but perhaps the most important questions to glean from a trip through this ancient policy manual are these:

How are our faith life and our food life connected? Levitical laws teach us that the pursuit of holiness permeates all of life, even its most mundane corners like the breakfast table. The same rules about what and what not to eat will not work in all times and places, but all people of faith need to struggle with how their beliefs and their behavior at the table fit together.

What guidelines govern our consumption of meat? The Jewish philosopher, Philo, believed that God had forbidden pork because it was so delicious that eating it would lead to gluttony. Others see environmental or public health benefits underlying the Levitical code. Whatever the reasons for the food laws in Leviticus, one of the main consequences of keeping them was a limited access to meat. Only a few species could be used as food and these animals had to be brought to the priest to be offered to God. Anything else was bloodshed. (See Lev. 17:1-4) Ancient Hebrew priests had few opinions about how to cook a turnip, but they devoted extensive regulation to sacrificing the life of an animal. Nearly a quarter of the laws in the Torah deal with animal sacrifice. Today's kosher laws speak to the sharpness of the knife, the placement of the cut, and even the character of the ritual slaughterer. These limits result in dignified treatment of animals and emphasize the seriousness of taking a life. Contrast the kosher approach with the way early European settlers slaughtered herds of American buffalo.

What dietary limits would benefit our community?

What would happen if a congregation chose two or three simple limits consistent with current knowledge about health and justice, and lived by them? Imagine.



From Our Own Times

“The single most important first step in rediscovering the traditional, healthy diet is changing where you shop. As long as you are wading through 15,000 choices in a supermarket, coming up with something healthy will seem like an incredible challenge. But if you are shopping in a community cooperative store filled with whole foods and foods from local producers, all your senses will be tantalized -- but in the right direction for your health.”

— Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet*, 20th Anniversary Edition, NY: Ballantine Books, 1991, pp. 138-139.

Healthy Eating Tip

This week, set a limit for yourself that feels right, and live by it. For example, consider where you buy food. Make a list of all the businesses you patronize, including restaurants, grocery stores, vending machines, convenience stores, etc. Where would you like to spend more money? Less? Eliminate businesses which you don't wish to support or which discourage healthy eating.



HONORING CHRIST'S BODY

To eat well is to consider not only your own body's needs but also the needs and weaknesses of others.



I Corinthians 8:1-13, 13:1-7

The Apostle Paul's thoughts on food offered to idols are not nearly so popular as his "Love Chapter" in I Corinthians

13, but both passages deal with what it means to care for one another within the body of Christ. In Corinth in the first century, most meat was slaughtered in temples as part of a religious ritual and was offered to one god or another before it made its way to the marketplace. Furthermore, temples often had banquet rooms attached to them where people celebrated events such as birthdays, weddings, or a healing attributed to the god of that particular temple. Dinners like these would have been a routine part of the social life of the wealthier members of the Corinthian church. Some members claimed that since these gods didn't really exist, there was no reason to give up eating meat or attending these meals. Others, who took the Greco-Roman gods more seriously, saw this practice as a disturbing compromise with the powers of evil.

Although the original context of chapter 8 is unfamiliar to us, Paul's conclusion sounds eerily relevant. He argues that what is important is acting for the well-being of fellow believers. "But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ," Paul says. "Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall."

What kinds of foods are appropriate when the body of Christ eats together at potlucks or shares meals in homes? Given the serious risks that accompany obesity, how can we support each other in our attempts to pursue a healthy diet? These are the questions Paul might ask Christians today.



From Our Own Times: Facts About Obesity

- Today, over 64% of Americans are overweight and over 30% are obese.¹² In contrast, only 13.3% of Americans were obese in the early 1960s.¹³ About 16% of children ages 6 to 19 are overweight, while in the early 1960s, about 5% were in this category.¹⁴
- Excess body weight results in an increased risk of heart failure. The risk is 34% higher for overweight individuals and 104% higher for obese people.¹⁵ Obesity also increases the chances of developing Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, gallstones, asthma, and many other illnesses.¹⁶
- The medical costs of being overweight and obese may now rival those of smokers according to a new Health Affairs study. In 1998, overweight individuals paid an average of 11.4% more in out-of-pocket medical costs than their thinner peers did. Obese individuals paid 26.1% more.¹⁷



Faith in Action Step

Where in your food life would you need to make changes if you took Paul's words about the weaknesses of others seriously? Think of three things you could do differently; act on at least one of them.

Unit 2: Nurturing the Body

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. This week, devote time to a form of exercise you enjoy. Revel in the bodily pleasure of it. Give your body a blessing when you finish.
2. At a shared meal, ask each person to name three things his or her body does well. Give thanks for these things together.
3. Find out if and how food companies are involved in your local schools. Visit or talk to school officials. Are soda pop machines and fast food companies represented in the hallways? Are educational materials offered “free” with a heavy dose of advertising? Organize to stop these practices.
4. In Matthew 7:7-12, Jesus urges his followers to ask God for what they need and gives us an amusing image of a father offering his hungry child a stone or a snake. “Surely not!” Jesus says. Reflect on this passage and ask yourself, “Who can help me change my diet? God? My family? My faith community? My grocery store?” Summon the courage to ask for what you need.
5. Do you sometimes give gifts of rich food to people who obviously don’t need them? Curb this habit.

MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. It’s easy to think that what we eat at a sitting is one serving. This week, keep a measuring cup and postal scale at the table. Measure your food to get a sense of how much one serving really is. Follow the portion size recommendations on processed food. When sautéing or stir-frying, measure the oil rather than just sloshing it into the pan. One teaspoon of oil is considered a serving of fat and is enough to stir-fry about 2 cups of vegetables.
Other single serving sizes:
Protein/Dairy: 1 cup milk, yogurt or soymilk, 1-1/2 ounces cheese, 3 ounces meat or fish, 4 ounces of tofu; 2 tablespoons nut butter, 1 large or two small eggs
Carbohydrates: 1/2 cup pasta, grain or cereal, 1 slice bread
Fruits: 1/2 cup sliced, 1/2 cup juice or 1 medium apple, orange, banana
Vegetables: 1 cup leafy, 1/2 cup solid
2. In 2005, the American Cancer Society reported the results of an extensive study which confirmed that high consumption of red and processed meat increases your risk of colon cancer, the third most common cancer that annually kills 56,000 men and women in the U.S. High consumption was defined as only 3 or more ounces per day for men and 2 or more for women. Consider eating less red meat. See www.cancer.org for more information.
3. Plan your life so that you make as few trips to the grocery store as possible. Marketers have shown that the more time you spend in a store, the more unnecessary food you will buy.
4. Assess your congregation’s eating habits, or the corporate habits of another group you belong to. Does coffee hour always feature sugary sweets? Are options available for diabetics at potlucks? Are ingredients labeled for people with allergies? Small changes, such as a healthy alternative in addition to cookies, may be better received than large ones.
5. Remember that Resources 2-2 to 2-6 contain more suggestions for reshaping your diet.

HUNGER



There is food enough for all, yet hunger persists. Hunger continues to plague our world because people either do not have access to food or they cannot afford to buy the food that is available. Over 852 million people around the world receive insufficient nutrition. One in five of them is a child. Most live in the so-called “developing world.” But hunger haunts us at home too, and the number of poor and hungry among our fellow citizens continues to rise. While the world has made great strides in the struggle against hunger, we are a long way from realizing the goal of the last World Food Conference to cut hunger in half by 2015. The roots of hunger are found in poverty, war, inequitable trade patterns, ignorance, disease, and environmental degradation.

Why, in a world of plenty, are so many hungry? ¹⁸

- **Poverty:** 1.2 billion people in developing countries live on an income of \$1 a day or less. While poverty has declined in some areas, especially East Asia, in other regions, especially Africa, the number of persons living in extreme poverty has increased. Living at such a marginal level means an incredible vulnerability to changes in climate, crop prices, and health problems.
- **Powerlessness:** Hungry people often feel, and are, unable to affect their circumstances due to illiteracy, political oppression, or lack of access to land, credit, education, and political decision-making. Gender discrimination also plays a role. Despite the fact that women are often the primary producers of food, seventy percent of those who suffer from hunger worldwide are women and girls.
- **Debt:** Debt obligations, often amassed by long-gone leaders, leave vulnerable nations with vastly reduced resources to meet people's needs. Despite recent efforts at debt relief, some countries are still spending more on debt repayment than on education, health care, and nutrition combined.

- **Violence and Militarism:**

Civil conflict disrupts agriculture, uproots people, destroys infrastructure, increases debt from military expenditure, and drains precious resources from social programs. At present there are almost 15 million refugees and 25 million internally displaced persons worldwide.

- **Population:** Increasing populations test the limits of fragile environments and further tax impoverished nations' abilities to meet their people's education, health, and nutritional needs. On the other hand children, especially male children, are the only form of social security many will ever know. So in Africa, where a child is 20 times more likely to die by age 5 than in the U.S., it makes sense to have a large family.

- **Economic Globalization:** The integration of societies and economies, characterized by the opening of borders to foreign investment and trade, has stimulated growth and opportunity for some, but caused poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity for many others. The benefits tend to accrue to the strongest and wealthiest countries and companies, and the gap between rich and poor increases daily.
- **AIDS:** AIDS has killed around 7 million agricultural workers since 1985 in the 25 worst-affected African countries.
- **Environmental degradation:** Healthy ecosystems produce abundantly; abused land does not. Misused land, depleted soils, and scarce fresh water contribute to hunger and spark conflicts that add to the problem.

The next time you take communion, know that you are enacting an alternative to the harsh face of hunger: a world where resources are shared, where leaders are servants of all, and where all have enough to eat. This ritual is also a call to engage the world, that the reality we enact at communion might become a reality for hungry people around the world.

Unit 3: Hunger, Day 1

HEARING THE CRIES OF THE HUNGRY

Opening ourselves to hear the voices of those who suffer hunger is the first step toward addressing this painful reality.

Lamentations 1:11, 2:11-12, 4:2-4



In 586 B.C.E., King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The city was besieged for a year and a half until its inhabitants were starving; then the Babylonians breached the walls, burned the buildings, looted the temple,

slaughtered the princes, raped the women, and marched long lines of captives into exile. A few poor people were left behind in the rubble.

In five poems, the book of Lamentations explores this horror and the hunger that accompanied it. The first four poems are acrostics: the first stanza beginning with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second stanza with the second letter, and so on. One wonders whether the author needed a rigid structure to hold his grief, lest it explode. Within this format, he spares us none of the details: treasures sold for food, children fainting in the streets from hunger, women boiling their own babies. The poet weeps and wails to a silent God. Praise and words of assurance typically found in Hebrew poetry — even in laments — are absent. Have the people of Jerusalem been utterly abandoned by Yahweh, if such a being exists?

In her book, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, Kathleen O'Connor weighs the value of this kind of prayer. Even though the poet's grief and rage border on blasphemy, she sees this expression of pain as a healthy form of faith. First, because it can only occur in a genuine relationship, and secondly, because it tells the truth about human suffering. Hope is one of many voices that emerge out of the depths of pain, and to deny those other voices — despair, rage, alienation — would be a lie.

From Our Own Times



"It wasn't my turn." - a U.S. child when asked if he had eaten breakfast that morning, quoted in Grace at the Table. (See bibliography.)

"Lack of work worries me. My children were hungry and I told them the rice is cooking, until they fell

asleep from hunger." - An Egyptian parent quoted in Voices of the Poor, www.worldbank.org

"I pray for a home of my own, that I do not want, that I can eat, have enough clothes to wear. It is not enough to hope and pray. This I ask of God and he does not reply." - A Bangladeshi elder, quoted in *A Dry Roof and a Cow: Portraits of Our Neighbors*. Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1994.

"My husband knew he was going to be in the field for three weeks. He also knew that I would be here by myself with very little money and no dishes or pots and pans. So he went down to McDonald's on Sunday when hamburgers were thirty-nine cents and bought twenty-one of them. I've been eating one hamburger every day for the last twenty days." - A young marine wife, quoted in a chapter on "Hunger and the Military" in Loretta Schwartz-Nobel, *Growing Up Empty*, NY: HarperCollins, 2002.

Faith in Action Step



Set aside a time to listen to the voices of the hungry several times this week. Imagine yourself in the shoes of the people who made the comments above. Ponder the introduction to this unit and the facts in the hunger quiz on Resource 3-2. Use your heart as well as your head.

Unit 3: Hunger, Day 2

PLANTING MUSTARD SEEDS

Overwhelming problems like world hunger must be addressed one small step at a time. Such actions, committed in faith, can have far-reaching effects.



Matthew 13:31-33

We can best appreciate these simple parables about seeds, trees, yeast, and the ordinary acts of baking and sowing by focusing on the details.

The mustard Jesus was talking about was probably common black mustard, which has seeds considerably smaller than what we think of as mustard seed. This wild mustard is a large herb that can rapidly grow over ten feet tall in good conditions, with a stem as thick as your arm.

The woman baking bread in Jesus' parable does not end up with just a few loaves. "The three measures of flour" that she leavens with a little yeast is equivalent to about fifty pounds of grain. This is enough for over a hundred loaves of bread or a slice each for over a thousand people! God's reign is like that, Jesus says. A small act, a tiny glimmer of hope can expand into something wondrous.

From Our Own Times



CROP WALKS are a fun and easy way to learn about hunger and begin making a difference. Church World Service sponsors these community-organized fund raising events nationwide. Walkers pledge to complete a several mile walk and find friends and family to sponsor them. The money is usually donated to

Church World Service for its international relief and development efforts or to a hunger agency of the sponsor's choosing. A portion of the proceeds also support local hunger agencies (www.cropwalk.org). Meet a few of the walkers, below, who participated.

Alma Wells, Topeka, Kansas, began walking as a way of supporting a local agency that is a part of her

church's outreach ministry. Wells became hooked, and continues to walk, striving each year to raise more money than she did the year before. In the 2003 WALK, she raised \$2,660.

Sarah Dougherty walks almost every day — three days a week in her neighborhood and three days a week at the YMCA. One day, she heard a presentation about the work of Church World Service and how the CROP WALK helps so many people around the world. "It inspired me," says Dougherty. "I decided to put up a table at the Y and just see if people would sponsor me." Dougherty's goal the first year was to raise \$500. She raised \$1,501, a sum three times her goal.

Reverend Joanne Mitchell, 94, walks part of the Kenosha, Wisconsin, CROP WALK and is pushed in her wheelchair the other part. She enjoys the opportunity to go up and down her street and meet neighbors when she collects pledges. She also likes the ecumenical aspect of the CROP WALK, bringing churches together for a cause.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, a special Children's CROP WALK takes place every year on the grounds of St. Pius the Tenth School. Some 300+ children don CROP WALK T-shirts and walk as many times as their legs will carry them around the school's outdoor track.

Faith in Action Step

Take a small step in your own community. Visit a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, or other service to hungry people a few times this month. Talk with and get to know the people you meet there.



Unit 3: Hunger, Day 3

BEING AN ADVOCATE

Faith empowers us to speak for the hungry. Persistence brings change.



Mark 7:24-30

The story of Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman is a difficult one. Many a scholar has tried to make it more comfortable for us, but the fact remains that in this story, Jesus at first refuses to heal a woman's

daughter because of her race. Maybe we could excuse Jesus since he is on vacation. A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that Jesus was not just the all-powerful healer and teacher; he was also very human and exhausted half the time. He fell asleep in boats and snuck off to the desert to be alone every chance he got.

On this much-needed getaway in a foreign town, Jesus is bird-dogged by a woman on a mission. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," he tells her. Most of us have made similar decisions about priorities and limited resources, but coming out of Jesus' mouth, it is disturbing.

How did a story with a line like that make it into the scripture? I believe this text was included to help us see the potential for good in the leaders we may badger on behalf of those in need. In this case, a nameless woman from Tyre had faith that was greater than Jesus' energy at that moment. Because of her persistence, she received what her child needed. May our persistence do the same for us when we fight for children's bread. And, for those of us who hold the keys to the coffers, may this determined person remind us to go a step further than we think we can.



From Our Own Times

"...Every year since 1975, a relatively modest number of letters from each congres-

sional district across the land has convinced our nation's leaders to act in ways that make a huge difference for a large number of hungry people.

"Consider Africa, where hungry people have few defenders in Congress. Bread for the World's 1995 campaign to protect crucial development aid to Africa mobilized approximately 70,000 letters and reduced by about \$100 million the cuts that took place. In this case the average letter leveraged more than one thousand dollars to Africans in dire need.

"In 1991 Bread for the World mobilized 100 thousand letters and helped get the U.S. State Department to mediate a peace agreement in Ethiopia that saved half a million lives. By any reasonable calculation, each letter in that campaign saved at least one life.

"One person can make a difference for the hungry people in this country, too. In 1998 Congress and the president acted to restore food stamps to about 250 thousand of the most vulnerable legal immigrants — children, elderly and disabled people. This [gave] them \$818 million in food assistance over a five-year period... Each letter to Congress on this issue had the effect, on average, of helping two or three immigrants receive their daily bread for five years — quite a return for writing a letter."

- David Beckmann and Arthur Simon, *Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God's World*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.

Used with permission of Paulist Press, www.paulistpress.com



Faith in Action Step

Bread for the World is a Christian citizens' movement seeking justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers. Visit Bread for the World's website at www.bread.org. Find out about pending legislation and write a letter.

Unit 3: Hunger, Day 4

CALLING MINISTERS

Finding and nurturing the gifts of people who will work against hunger is one of the Church's responsibilities.



Acts 6:1-7

What today's text lacks in flash, it makes up in relevance to contemporary problems. Here, we see the Spirit of Christ at work in the mundane and everyday

administration of a faith community. Although this early church is committed to sharing food (see Acts 2), rapid growth has caused some glitches in management, and a group of Greek-speaking widows is not getting what they need. These women were probably Jews who spoke Greek rather than the local Aramaic because they were from other parts of the Roman empire. A language barrier may have been part of the problem.

In Acts, the Gospel spreads outward from Jerusalem. In this passage, we see it spreading through a transfer of leadership. Up until Acts 6, the leaders of the Jesus movement are Palestinian disciples who knew Jesus personally. Now, a group of people with Greek names is commissioned for a task that is too big for the original leadership. Likely they were selected not only because they were wise and full of the Spirit, but also because they knew the Greek community.

This text raises a number of thought-provoking issues for the Church today. What roles do we call leaders to fill? Are ministries to the poorest of the poor and the hungry on that list? Do we recognize the gifts of those who work in these ministries? How can we find and support committed people in our own communities like the Brazilian woman below?

From Our Own Times



In their book, Hope's Edge, food researcher Frances Moore Lappé and her daughter Anna Lappé tell about a visit to Belo Horizonte, Brazil's fourth largest city. In this city, food is a right of citizenship just as education is a

right in our country. The commitment to feed all its citizens consumes less than 1% of Belo's budget. The Lappés meet Adriana Aranha, who oversees Belo's food programs. They also visit some of her projects: a produce market, a People's Restaurant, a day care center, all with low cost, wholesome food.

"At the end of our visit, Anna and I sit down again with Adriana in her cheery office. We tell her how moved we've been by how much has developed in so little time, just since 1993...

"...I ask, 'When you began, did you realize how important what you are doing was? How much difference it might make? How rare it is in the entire world?'

"...I see her eyes moisten and try to guess why. Through our interpreter, I learn.

"I knew we had so much hunger in the world,' she said. 'But what is so upsetting, what I didn't know when I started this, is it's so easy. It's so easy to end it.'" ¹⁹

Faith in Action Step



Do you know someone who works with hungry people in some way? Send a note of appreciation this week. Or check websites that list hunger-related employment opportunities²⁰ and invite someone you know to consider a vocation related to hunger. Do any of these opportunities fit you?

REFUSING TO CONFORM

Choosing a simple diet frees up resources to meet genuine needs and can provoke dialog with your friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors. It is one way to stand in solidarity with the rest of the world.



Daniel 1:1-21

Our culture prides itself on freedom. Food, like religion and speech, is regarded as a matter of personal choice. But if you have ever

been the weird mom who brought tofu treats to the Little League game, the vegetarian at the beef barbecue, or the lone non-drinker, you know what an awkward and disturbing thing it is to refuse the accepted diet.

Thousands of years ago, a group of young Jewish men were selected as privileged foreign exchange students after their nation was reduced to rubble by the Babylonian army. Although they accepted foreign names and a Babylonian education, they drew the line at the dinner table and begged for simple vegetarian meals. Scholars differ in their opinions about why Daniel and his friends refused to eat the king's rations. Some say the Babylonian food violated Jewish purity laws. Others say the meat on the royal menu had been offered to foreign gods. Surprisingly, few commentators make the connection between the hunger described in our reading from Lamentations and Daniel's resistance to a luxurious diet.

Although the book of Daniel was written years later than Lamentations, the story is set at the same time — when Daniel's hometown of Jerusalem was laid to waste. Elite Jews sent to serve the personnel needs of Babylon likely lived with the knowledge that their kindred were hungry, and that the obscene abundance of the king's court had been extracted from conquered nations.

Daniel's story offers us more than a generic model of someone who had the courage to take a stand. Two and a half millennia later, the specific issue he struggled with is still current. How do we in North America handle our "right" to eat like kings? Even asking the question is rare. The attempts to answer it are likely to provoke dialog and disagreement just as happened to Daniel.

From Our Own Times



The author of the following excerpt is a food nonconformist who advocates Christian vegetarianism. See his book for the full rationale.

"There is power in the blood of meat, a deep craving for red and juicy flesh that can blind meat lovers to the consequences of their diet... Seventy percent* of all the grain in the United States goes to feeding herds of livestock. It takes up to sixteen pounds of grain to produce a pound of beef. In fact, the world's cattle alone consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people — more than the entire human population on earth. Such an inefficient use of resources explains why President Truman, on October 5, 1947, asked the American people to forego meat on two days a week in order to save precious grain for distribution to starving Europeans."

- Stephen Webb, *Good Eating. The Christian Practice of Everyday Life Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001, p. 24.*

* Pimentel (1997) calculates more than 50% worldwide; 40% in the U.S..

Faith in Action Step



Make a list of situations where you conform to the eating habits of our culture with mixed emotions. How would you like to eat instead? What would happen if you did not conform? Choose a situation this week and try out a behavior that fits more comfortably with who you are and what you believe. Donate any money saved to a hunger organization.

Unit 3: Hunger

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. Organize a CROP WALK. These WALKS raise awareness about hunger and money for hunger-related causes. For resources, contact Church World Service at 1-888-CWS-CROP (1-888-297-2767) or see their website at www.churchworldservice.org. CWS is a cooperative ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations, providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in more than 80 countries.
2. Plan a vacation Bible school or other group activity for children centering on hunger. Use your denomination's hunger education resources, or request *Build A Better World: Activities for Children* from Church World Service. For intergenerational activities, request *What Do You Know About Hunger? Hunger Activities That Work* and CWS's *Facts Have Faces* leaflets. See the contact information above.
3. Subscribe to your denomination's hunger, poverty, and health information and advocacy e-mail list serves. Most denominations use Bread for the World www.bread.org as one way of advocating around hunger concerns through Offerings of Letters. Church World Service also provides a Speak Out e-mail list serve which provides updates and alerts on public policy issues related to hunger and related issues. You can sign up at www.churchworldservice.org.
4. Call up your middle governing body or national staff to learn about ways to get involved in the cause of ending hunger. Visit your denomination's hunger website. For example, the Presbyterian Hunger Program has developed innovative approaches to addressing the underlying causes of hunger and related injustices, such as their Food & Faith Initiative, Enough for Everyone, and Joining Hands Against Hunger. All of these can be accessed through their website at www.pcusa.org/hunger/.
5. International trade rules that affect agricultural products can threaten the food security of people and entire nations. Learn how *just* trade can help fight hunger and poverty. Great places to begin are the websites of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Just Trade www.pcusa.org/trade, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance www.e-alliance.ch, Church World Service www.churchworldservice.org, and the U.S. Interfaith Trade Justice Campaign www.tradejusticeusa.org.
6. If Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only 10 percent for one year, it would free 12 million tons of grain for human consumption – or enough to feed 60 million people (Robbins, 2002). If you do eat meat, talk with your household about why you eat meat, any concerns, and what limits you might want to put on your consumption. For example, some people buy only meat that is certified humanely raised; others avoid beef but eat fish and chicken; others limit quantity; others, of course, get all their protein from plant sources.
7. Find a copy of your church budget and review your congregation's financial commitments. How is your church connected to hunger? What percentage of your budget reaches people who are needy enough to struggle with hunger?
8. Learn what it is like to eat and feed your family while living in poverty. See the innovative "Poverty Diet" program of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org. A free, full curriculum including personal stories and statistics concerning hunger and poverty is available for download.

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MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. Review Resources 2-2 through 2-6 for more healthy eating tips or continue the ones you tried last week.
2. Find out how much meat you eat this week by keeping a list of your diet. If you are not pleased with what you find out, see Resource 2-6 for suggestions on ways to reduce the amount of meat in your diet. This month, try one new vegetarian recipe each week.
3. Get acquainted with your own hunger this week. When you feel hungry for a snack, wait and live with your hunger for an hour or two. In Unit 6, we will reflect on fasting, but you may wish to try skipping a meal or fast for a day. Before you eat and while you are eating, ask yourself, "Am I hungry for this or am I just eating?" Our bodies know what we need and don't need if we learn to listen to them.

U N I T 4

FOOD AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Eating is an environmental act. No matter how insulated we might be in office cubicles and urban streets, no matter how little time we spend outdoors, each and every one of us is tied to the earth by the food we eat. The simple act of breaking bread together in church could link us to erosion problems on a wheat farm in the Midwest or pesticide poisoning among grape farmers in Chile. A quick pick-up from a fast food restaurant can put us in touch with the shrinking number of potato varieties grown in the U.S. and the excess manure produced by a factory farm. Every time we buy food, we participate in environmental degradation or support practices that sustain God's creation or, perhaps, we do some of each.

Because of the *amount* of land agriculture covers, the world's farmers play a critical role as land stewards of our current and future well-being. How we raise our food has an enormous impact on the health of our planet, especially now with more than six billion mouths to feed. While less than five percent of U.S. land is urbanized, about *one third* of our three billion acres is farm or ranch land.²¹ Agricultural water usage and waste production also have a huge impact on the environment. While California has its share of homes, golf courses, and swimming pools, agriculture consumes 83% of its water supply.²² Human waste is an environmental problem in some places, but in the U.S. farm animals produce 130 times as much manure as we do.²³

Yet farmers are only one small part of our food system: they receive less than 10 cents of every dollar you spend on groceries, and if you bought a loaf of bread this week, you paid as much for the wrapper as for the wheat in the bread.²⁴ Farming practices are shaped by the corporations who sell the seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers; who buy, process, package, ship, and market the food. They are also



shaped by *you*: the consumer. Because you eat, you occupy an honorary seat on the earth stewardship committee.

Why should Christians be especially passionate when it comes to caring about the earth and the way their food is grown? The most obvious reason is our affirmation that God created the world and that bats and wombats, tigers and tree toads, are all examples of divine creativity and delight.

This fundamental Christian affirmation takes on a more profound and intriguing meaning if we apply it to our day-to-day planetary housekeeping. Habitat destruction? Species extinction? *This* is how we're treating God's creation? Should this be tolerated?

Theologian Sallie McFague suggests another reason for engagement with environmental concerns in her book, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*. She claims that a Christian nature spirituality is simply Christian practice applied to the earth. "Christians are those who should love the oppressed, the most vulnerable of God's creation," she says, and in our times, it is the natural world that is sick, oppressed, and in need.²⁵ Just as 19th century Christians failed to recognize slaves as worthy people God cared about, so we need help seeing the extent of God's passionate love for other species. If we see rivers and mountains as fellow members of God's choir as they are described in Psalm 98, then earthworms and ecosystems deserve our deepest love and care.

The daily readings in this unit focus on familiar Christian virtues: hope, humility, gratitude, loving your neighbor, and intercession. Probably you see human faces when you hear such words. What would happen if we also applied these Christ-like virtues to our relationship with the earth? To the choices we make about food?

Unit 4: Food and the Environment, Day 1

HOPE

Christians live with hope for a future that includes a redeemed creation.

Romans 8:18-27



In today's passage, Paul claims that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians have a basis for hope: they are given glimpses of what whole relationships with God, others, and creation look like. Because of

this, they can more easily imagine God's reign encompassing all creation at some future time. In Romans, this hope is not in a spiritual salvation in another realm; it is in a redeemed creation here on earth. All of creation is in partnership with us, longing and straining toward this hope. Hope is embedded in creation. It is evident in every sprouting seed, in every green leaf straining toward the sun; in the dependable rhythm of the seasons; even in the wood decomposing on a healthy forest floor.

In the face of environmental degradation, it is easy for us to feel cynical and hopeless. But hope is not just an emotion; it is a faith practice. We practice hope when we teach younger generations to care for the earth. We practice hope when we support businesses and nonprofits that care for the earth. We practice hope when we recognize and cherish flourishing ecosystems and healthy farming communities. Faithful action defeats despair.

When you find a farm, market, or company that demonstrates love for the earth, people, and future generations, celebrate hope. Buy their food, eat it with gusto, and thank God.

From Our Own Times



Brent and Regina Beidler, Randolph Center, VT, worked on a conventional dairy farm before they owned their own organic dairy farm and have a

healthy respect for the hard work conventional farming requires. On the conventional farm, cows were managed for maximum production. This required

three milkings a day starting at 3 a.m. and a lot of pampering with antibiotics to keep stressed cows healthy. Even with good care, today's dairy cows only last 2-3 years. The farmers were stressed as well. "A lot of people feel totally out of control when they're farming because the milk price is so beyond your control," Brent says.

When they bought their own farm, the Beidlers opted to go organic. They still work hard and experience stresses, but are pleased to sell their milk to a cooperative that pays them a fixed price, based on the cost of production. Brent and Regina are voting members of their cooperative and have input into decisions. If you live in Vermont and drink Organic Valley Milk, you might be one of their customers.

Brent and Regina also find that organic dairy farming gives them the kind of lifestyle they want. They have time for a few sidelines they really enjoy: sustainable logging with draft horses and offering sleigh rides in the winter. Also, because their farm has no dangerous machinery or chemicals, their daughter accompanied them everywhere in a backpack when she was a baby. At two, she knew each cow by name and could tell which was its stall.

Unlike cows in confinement operations, the Beidlers' cows spend warm days outdoors grazing. "It feels like you can farm with dignity," Regina says. "You look at a herd lying down together, licking each other and socializing and you say, 'This is how God created cows to be.'"

Faith in Action Step

Learn more about a farmer, store, or group with a vision for environmentally friendly food. Commit to buying their food or supporting their work. Search in your community for farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmers, and organizations working to build a healthy, local food economy. You can also visit www.localharvest.org to search for these and other local food resources.



Unit 4: Food and the Environment, Day 2

HUMILITY

We are not the only creatures God feeds; we are part of an intricate web of relationships.



Psalm 104:10-30

Genesis 1 is not the only account of God as creator in the Bible. Psalm 104, Psalm 65, Job 38-40, and Psalm 8 are other examples. While human beings

are given a prominent role in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, in this Psalm, as in the latter chapters of Job, humans are simply one species in the vast choir of creation. Psalm 104 describes an intricate system where all creatures are dependent on God for food. Here, the interplay between water, the landscape, and the rhythm of seasons sounds like an ecology textbook, and the human race receives no more attention than lions or wild goats. In the eyes of this hymn writer, the appropriate response to creation is not dominion but humility and praise.

Psalm 104:27-30 reminds us that we are not the only creatures God feeds. All creation is dependent on the breath of God and food from God's hands. Nor does nature exist to serve humanity; indeed most of the creatures mentioned have no economic value. Wild donkeys, wild goats, storks, and lions are all described as part of God's good creation with value independent of how they might benefit human beings. Even Leviathan, a fearsome sea monster, is not a predator or pest; it is God's plaything, formed to "sport" in the water.

The reading below describes the tiny creatures that pollinate our food. Humans can control what crops are planted, and what machinery rumbles over the earth at harvest time, but we are still totally dependent on thousands of species we barely notice. Only because these living things exist do we eat and survive.



From Our Own Times

"Recent surveys document that more than 30 genera of animals — consisting of

hundreds of species of floral visitors — are required to pollinate the 100 or so crops that feed the world. Only 15 percent of these crops are serviced by domestic honeybees; at least 80 percent are pollinated by wild bees and other wildlife. Who are the pollinators? Our recent analyses of global inventories of biodiversity indicate that more than 100,000 different animal species — perhaps as many as 200,000 — play roles in pollinating the 250,000 kinds of wild flowering plants on this planet. In addition to countless bees (the world contains an estimated 40,000 species of bees) wasps, moths, butterflies, flies, beetles, and other invertebrates, perhaps 1,500 species of vertebrates such as birds and mammals serve as pollinators. Hummingbirds are the best-known wildlife pollinators in the Americas, but perching birds, flying foxes, fruit bats, opossums, lemurs, and even geckos function as effective pollinators elsewhere in the world...

"...According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), there is an 'impending pollination crisis,' in which both wild and managed pollinators are disappearing at alarming rates owing to habitat loss, pesticide poisoning, diseases, and pests."

- Buchmann, Stephen L. and Gary Paul Nabhan.
The Forgotten Pollinators. Washington, D.C.:
Island Press, 1996.

Faith in Action Step

Spend 10 minutes several days this week watching another species eat: birds, bees, bugs, lizards, whatever. Give thanks for these creatures and reflect on the web of life that connects you. For more information on pollinators, see Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins

Bloomberg School of Public Health, www.jhsph.edu/Environment/About_CLF/Canary/pollinators.html.

RECEIVING FOOD AS A GIFT FROM GOD

Food is sacred because it is a precious gift from God and from the earth.



Genesis 1:29-31

Biblical scholars spend a great deal of time debating what Genesis 1 has to say to us about being made in the image of God. They say less about what the cre-

ation story has to say about food, but this point is equally important. In Genesis 1 and elsewhere throughout the Bible, food is described as a gift from God. God provides plants for the first people to eat; rains manna and quail on the grumpy Israelites complaining in the desert; later brings them into a land flowing with milk and honey and feeds Elijah with the help of ravens, widows and angels. Jesus teaches his followers to ask God daily for bread. He also tells them not to worry about food because God feeds even the sparrows. In the biblical tradition, food is an expression of God's tenderness and affection. It is sacred because it is a gift from a lover.

Today it is harder to see God's fingerprints on the food we eat. Ninety percent of the average American's food budget is spent on processed food.²⁶ Our food comes to us packaged, stamped and dated, with a wrapper declaring who made it: Kroger or Libby or Dole or the elves at the Keebler tree house. This shift from food as gift to food as commodity affects our souls as well as our waistlines. A commodity is best bought on sale; a gift is something we receive with thanks. A commodity can be wasted, gobbled, easily replaced; a gift is treasured. When we eat whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables, we honor our bodies' needs for fiber and nutrients. We also honor God who brings these things forth from the earth. A meal fresh from the ground reminds us of the sacredness of food and of the One who provides it.

From Our Own Times

"Whaling celebrations among the In upiaq people of Barrow, Alaska, are not

commercialized festivals. Visitors to Barrow can't plan to see one. Only after the community receives the gift of the whale can the successful whaling captain declare a day of *Nalukataq*. It would be presumptuous to schedule a feast for a gift not yet received.

"When a feast day arrives, the schedule for the day is leisurely. It opens with a prayer of thanksgiving and then there is much time for visiting. Throughout the day, the whaling captain and crew distribute various parts of the whale to all who are gathered. It is a ritual sharing, not the major distribution of the many tons of meat from each whale. One flipper is simply left in the area. Anyone may carve off what they need, a practice reminiscent of the grain left in the fields for gleaners in Old Testament times.

"According to persisting ancient belief, the whale has given itself to the people of the community. The captain's gifts only reflect the whale's gift. It is a great honor to the captain and his crew for this privilege, but there is also a sense of humility — a recognition of being gifted. Tourists privileged to participate in this ancient ritual are always surprised that everything is free. No one buys or sells any meat — that is strictly forbidden. The whaling festival revolves around giving and sharing."

- From James E. Roghair, "The Gift of the Whale: Community as Steward," unpublished master's thesis, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, 2000.

Faith in Action Step



Buy five foods that remind you that food is a gift from God. Eat them with relish and respect. Then research your options: where is the best place to buy unprocessed, whole foods? Is there a farmers' market in your town, or a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer nearby?



Unit 4: Food and the Environment, Day 4

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

The people who grow and pick our food are our neighbors.



Mark 12:28-34

When Jesus taught that loving God was the greatest commandment, he was offering one of his most uncontroversial pieces of advice. Loving God with all

your heart was the center of the *Shema*, a prayer from Deuteronomy 6 that Jews recited daily. To love your neighbor as yourself is a little more challenging. Even more challenging is the lawyer's question in Luke's version of this story (Luke 10:25-37). "Who is my neighbor?" he wonders. As Jesus' story about the good Samaritan illustrates, the answer is not always obvious. One could argue that the creatures of the earth are our neighbors, or even those generations yet unborn who will inherit our environmental sins.

If Jesus were alive today, he likely would embrace farm workers as neighbors. Every day, we eat food that invisible hands have picked, processed, and packed. Even in the U.S., 85 percent of fruits and vegetables are hand cultivated and/or hand harvested. This is lowest paid occupation in the country. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, three out of five farm worker households in the U.S. live in poverty and three quarters of all farm workers earn less than \$10,000 per year.²⁷ Farm workers also face risks to their health from farm machinery and agricultural poisons. According to the World Health Organization, about "one million serious, unintentional pesticide poisonings take place globally every year, with millions of additional milder cases likely."²⁸

The scribe in Mark 12:33 who observes that loving one's neighbor is more important than offering burnt sacrifices raises another interesting question. How and when are our charitable contributions underwritten by injustice? If cheap food grown at the expense of the future fertility of the land and harvested by the poor enables us to give away surplus money and get tax deductions, would God be pleased?



From Our Own Times

Fair Trade is a growing approach to trade that has its roots in the development

efforts of several church organizations. The model relies on informed consumers, honest and fair trade relationships, and cooperative principles. Below are internationally recognized fair trade standards as described on the website of Equal Exchange, an organization that sells coffee, tea, cocoa, and chocolate.

Pay a Fair Price: A fair price includes a guaranteed minimum price regardless of how low the commodity market falls. This ensures farmers a living wage even when market prices are too low to maintain acceptable living standards.

Work with Democratically Run Cooperatives: Partners are small farmer co-ops that are governed by the farmers themselves. They are dedicated to sharing income fairly and providing services such as healthcare and education for their members.

Buy Direct: Buying directly means that the benefits and profits from trade actually reach the farmers and their communities, not the middlemen.

Provide Advance Credit: Traditionally, credit was either unavailable or only offered at exorbitant interest rates that kept farmers trapped in debt. Fair trade organizations make vital credit available to farmers.

Encourage Ecologically Sustainable Farming Practices: Sustainable farming helps build a long-term economic base for farmers while protecting their communities, the environment, and consumers from dangerous chemicals.

Faith in Action Step

Switch to fair trade coffee and tea or take the first step toward switching your congregation over to fair trade. Visit the Interfaith Program of Equal Exchange www.equalexchange.com for more information.



INTERCESSION

Concerns related to earth care belong in our prayers and worship services.

Mark 2:1-12



Mark's account of the paralyzed man with four friends is one of the most colorful healing stories in the Bible. How four people managed to get up on a roof hauling a stretcher is hard to imagine, but it must have involved a good deal of

grunting and sweating. This is a fitting description of intercession — the act of bringing the needs of others before God.

Although going through a roof to find healing is exceptional, interceding for sick friends is something many churches do well. Parishioners faithfully call upon their pastors to share urgent medical concerns in worship services or through e-mail prayer chains. Unfortunately, this kind of prayerful attention is rarely extended to our other sick friends — the pieces of the natural world that are quietly disintegrating around us.

Reshaping our worship services and communal life so that they might receive intercessions on behalf of the earth requires an imaginative leap and a bit of courage. Mark's story offers us both. What would happen if we borrowed this text as a metaphor for intercessory prayer on behalf of the earth? What if we collectively carried the sick pieces of our planet into our gathered communities and offered them up to God?

From Our Own Times



What does sick land look like? Below is a beginner's guide to intercession for the earth. When you see these things, know that human agriculture is taking a toll on surrounding ecosystems.

Muddy rivers: Historically, rivers ran clear, even after a rain. Trees and other vegetation along riverbanks held the soil in place; wetlands soaked up excess

water and released it slowly, preventing rapid runoff. Farming practices that contribute to soil erosion include farming too close to a river without a buffer zone, not leaving enough vegetation on a field to hold the soil after it is harvested, or farming slopes without using proper contour techniques.

Monocultures: Most of us think of “the country” as a series of lush, green, rolling cornfields. What looks like “nature” to us is not at all natural, and more like a factory than an ecosystem. A single crop sucks the same nutrients out of the soil year after year and is a bonanza for that crop's pests. In contrast, a healthy ecosystem is a tangled and diverse interconnected web where plants and insects, pests and predators, help solve each other's problems. Organic farmers capitalize on this by planting several crops side by side and diversifying their operations.

Missing farms: If you live in an urban area, do you see verdant plots of farmland in your city, reserved for growing food for local people? Is your grocery store raising tomatoes on the roof? Can you find a farmer's market? Most cities do not organize their lives this way, and urban sprawl is replacing U.S. farmland at a rate of about three million acres a year.²⁹

Faith in Action Step



Look for the above symptoms in your area. When you see them, take a moment to pray for the ecosystems in your local community. Share a concern you see with your faith community.

Unit 4: Food and the Environment

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. What food issues related to the environment make you feel helpless? Tell at least one other person about your concerns and then place your list in the hands of God in some symbolic way. Watch for signs of hope in response.
2. How is organic farming different from conventional farming? The following websites may be helpful as you research organic methods: www.agroecology.org/ and www.rodaleinstitute.org. The largest three seed firms are DuPont, Monsanto, and Syngenta. The top agrochemical corporations are Syngenta, Monsanto, and Bayer. See their websites to learn more about agriculture from an industrial agriculture perspective. For photos comparing organic farms with industrial farms, see *Fatal Harvest* listed in the bibliography.
3. Many people argue that the cost of organic and/or locally grown food makes it impractical or beyond their reach. Use Resources 4-1 to help you count the cost of switching to organic foods. Do comparison shopping in your own community and figure out the cost per month. What compromises or lifestyle changes would you need to make to buy organic/locally grown foods? To consistently buy *one* food locally?
4. If you garden, plant heirloom seeds this year. Heirloom varieties are known for their taste and preserve genes lost from varieties bred for shipping and storing. Find a merchant of heirloom seeds in or near your bioregion at www.halcyon.com/tmend/links.htm.
5. Make a fruit or vegetable centerpiece for your table one day this week. Revel in the colors, shapes, textures. Try to describe or draw your creation.
6. Cruise the Pesticide Action Network website www.panna.org to find out how pesticides affect farm workers. Learn about the National Farm Worker Ministry at www.nfwm.org.
7. Interview local farmers. What are their experiences running a farm? Is it economically viable? What are the biggest challenges? If you can't find a farmer, interview a person who grew up on a farm.
8. Ask your grocery store manager or the owner of your favorite restaurant about their food sources. Businesses will sell what customers ask for. See the Eater's Bill of Rights and questions at the National Catholic Rural Life Conference site, www.ncrlc.com.
9. Raise an earth-related concern in your congregation's worship or sharing time, in a Christian education hour, or over a meal with friends. See www.earthministry.org for ideas.
10. Some churches are full of generic representations of nature paired with spiritual sayings on posters or with worship songs on PowerPoint slides. Caring for the earth is not a generic activity: it requires knowledge of, and loyalty to, a particular place. Replace some of these images with photographs taken in your own area. Include photos of locally grown crops.

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MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. This week when you go grocery shopping, select organic and locally grown foods that more accurately reflect what it costs to grow food in healthy ways. Splurge on hormone-free milk, pasture-fed eggs or those organic salad greens you don't normally buy because they are too expensive. Serve a meal highlighting these "luxuries." Did paying more break your budget or increase your respect for the food you eat?
2. Resource 2-5 offers a chart of fruits and vegetables indicating those foods most likely to contain pesticides. Review this chart and shop accordingly.
3. Farmers' markets frequently offer offbeat local foods you can't find in a grocery store: Jerusalem artichokes, black tomatoes, ground cherries, elderberry jelly, and so on. Shop at a farmer's market this week and experiment with one new fruit or vegetable.
4. If you have children, have fun with a fruits and vegetables contest. Give prizes for the greatest number of servings of fruits and vegetables in a day's or week's time; the greatest variety of plants consumed; the bravest attempt to try something new.
5. Learn why pasture raised meat is healthier and better for the environment at the Grace Factory Farm Project at www.factoryfarm.org and www.eatwild.com and also find a source in your area.
6. Review Resources 2-1 to 2-6 and choose another area to work on this week.

U N I T 5

CREATING COMMUNITY WITH FOOD



“*W*hat was going on last night?” a mother in my congregation asked her teenage son after hearing a vigorous discussion in her living room late the night before.

“Oh, we had the best discussion,” her son replied. “But everyone thought I was crazy.”

“What were you talking about?”

“I said that when people sit down and eat together, something happens; something more than just the food. Everyone else said, no, you just order a pizza and eat it. What’s so great about eating together?”

This son, raised in the Church and in a family that values shared meals, had caught a glimpse of the profound sense of community that sometimes emerges when people gather around food. His conversation with his friends reflects another reality more common today: eating as refueling. While broken bread and a cup shared around a table evoke the relationship between God, people and the earth, a vending machine is an apt symbol of the opposite: eating as refueling. Packaged and processed items, each an individual choice and a single serving, appear at the press of a button with no root, leaf, or human hand in sight.

This unit on creating community with food operates on several levels. For some of us, simply finding time to share a table with our own household is a challenge. Food has become a matter of refueling in between meetings, sporting events, and other commitments. If we have fallen into a vending machine

lifestyle, we may need to focus on sharing food and fellowship with those closest to us. Taking the time to eat together as a household or have treasured friends over for a meal may be the nourishment we need most. If no one is home and

there is no island of warmth around the kitchen table, it is difficult to engage in the more challenging forms of hospitality that cross social boundaries and welcome strangers.

For those who already have a rich communal life related to food, this unit offers the opportunity to reflect on the previous units on nutrition, hunger, and the environment and connect them to group life. Do our ways of eating together express what we most want to pass on to our children and grandchildren? How can our shared meals support our commitment to good nutrition? How can they respond to the brutal facts about hunger in the world and its underlying problems? How can we eat together in ways that remind us of our ties to the earth that feeds us? Ways that demonstrate respect for all of creation?

For those who are ready to go one step further, this unit also challenges us to embark on the kind of food sharing and community-building that is most distinctively Christian: hospitality to the stranger, the least of these, and the enemy. Throughout history, both friends and foes of Christianity have noted this odd willingness to cross social boundaries at the table. Some say it is what got Jesus crucified.

Unit 5: Creating Community with Food, Day 1

PREPARING FOOD

Preparing food is sometimes a burden, but it can also be a spiritual discipline, a joyful expression of creativity, and an act of love.

Luke 10:38-42



These verses give us a snapshot of the hospitality Jesus depended upon throughout his ministry. While most meals in the Gospels just appear on the table, in this story, Martha tells us the truth: hosting an itinerant preacher with

a dozen disciples is a lot of work! More than one host must have gone weak in the knees when the Jesus academy appeared on the doorstep. We hear most often about the disciples who traveled with Jesus, but his ministry would have been impossible without the disciples who stayed home and cooked.

The story of Mary and Martha can be read as a contrast between the contemplative and active modes of life. Jesus' defense of Mary makes more sense, however, if we read his comments as a critique of conventional gender roles. The phrase, "sat at the Lord's feet" means to study with a rabbi. Mary, whose role should have been serving supper, is commended for sitting and thinking. Meanwhile, the male lawyer whose story precedes this text in Luke is told to go and do as the Good Samaritan did, tending and feeding a sick man.

Housework is an inevitable part of hospitality and sometimes a roadblock to sharing our table. Who among us wouldn't have guests more often if it didn't require the "many tasks" that troubled Martha? Most of us can identify with Martha's distraction: the temptation to worry over matters of housekeeping rather than focusing on human beings. Therefore, it is worth our while to reflect on ways to handle the nuts and bolts of hospitality so they do not sabotage our attempts to create community around our tables. We can find ways to simplify, share, or sanctify meal preparation. Some people who have learned to cook well tell us that time in the kitchen preparing for guests is pure joy and their primary art form.

From Our Own Times



"Once, while leading a Bible study class on the story of Zacchaeus, I asked a group of college students to plan the menu they would serve if Jesus were coming to their house. A North American woman said she would

whip up a meat loaf. This was an easy dish for her and that would allow more time to focus on visiting with Jesus. A Korean man had a totally different perspective. He and his wife would cook for days in advance, he said. He lovingly described the elaborate dishes they would prepare for such an honored guest. We left the group stunned by the contrast these two answers had provided for us. Both were valid; both revealed the essence of the people who had shared and the cultures they had come from. Talking about preparing food gave us a holy moment together and new insights into what it means to share a table."

- A lay leader in Columbus, Ohio

Faith in Action Step



Some of the best visiting occurs when guests and hosts work together to prepare and clean up a meal. Invite guests for an informal pitch-in meal this week. Plan a menu that can employ a number of hands, such as one that requires chopping or peeling vegetables. Accept all offers of help to clean up.

Unit 5: Creating Community with Food, Day 2

FEASTING

Feasts are a way of passing on faith because they are abiding vessels for memories.

**Exodus 13:3-10, 23:14-19,
Luke 15:11-32**



A feast is any meal that is rich in memory. Sometimes, elaborate recipes call forth these memories by forcing us to give time and attention to the celebration at hand. Sometimes, they are called forth by a period of abstinence

that accents the abundance of food. Sometimes, a feast reminds us of our link with the earth and the rhythm of the seasons. And occasionally, a feast is a dramatic exclamation point that creates memory by its sheer, joyful extravagance.

Feasting as remembering our past: Food is a language for passing on history that is too precious to travel merely in words. In some feasts, such as the Jewish Seder meal instituted in the book of Exodus, memories are made explicit by liturgy. Children are assigned to ask the ritual questions each year: Why is the family eating bitter herbs and unleavened bread? In order to remember slavery and God's powerful deliverance, they are told. Other meals have power to evoke history as well, but may not be so explicit. In the Kingsolver story below, a food as simple as an orange contains a meaning so rich that extravagance pales in comparison.

Feasting as remembering our link with the land: In earlier days, feasts were tied to the harvest. Harvest festivals like the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths in the Hebrew Bible celebrated the gift of certain crops and offered a portion of them to God. A good feast is the logical response to sudden abundance. Today, our feasting is not constrained by the rhythm of the seasons and this is a loss. A feast of food fresh from the ground, at the peak of its flavor, has much to teach us about our dependence on the earth and the goodness of the created order.

Feasting as a container for love: The feast in the well-known story of the prodigal son is not a tradition; it is an extravagant exclamation point. It says "I love you" in a way that mere words never could. How could that wayward child ever forget the taste of marbled beef after weeks of eating pea pods? He must have known how rarely his father killed a fatted calf.

Feasting is the opposite of eating as refueling. It is sharing food in ways that celebrate what is most important in life and most worth remembering.

From Our Own Times



"My grandfather Kingsolver used to tell me with a light in his eyes about the boxcar that came through Kentucky on the L&N line when he was a boy — only once a year, at Christmas — carrying oysters and oranges

from the coast. Throughout my own childhood, every year at Christmastime while an endless burden of wants burgeoned around everybody else, my grandfather wanted only two things: a bowl of oyster soup and an orange. The depth of his pleasure in that meal was so tangible, even to a child, that my memory of it fills me with wonder at how deeply fulfillment can blossom from a cultivated ground of restraint."

- Barbara Kingsolver, *Small Wonder*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2002, p.118.

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Faith in Action Step

Evaluate the feasting traditions in your family. What meanings are carried in your special meals? Are there memories you long to pass on which could be expressed with food? Is there a "harvest" feast of any sort? Start a new tradition.

RECEIVING HOSPITALITY

By receiving hospitality, we recognize and value what others have to offer.

Luke 10:1-12



The cookbook, *Extending the Table*, includes an anecdote about two North Americans and Salustiano Lopez, a Toba Indian and church leader from the Argentine Chaco area.

The U.S. couple asked him, “How should our mission and service organizations begin to share the gospel with other indigenous people?” Mr. Lopez paused for a moment and said, “I would go and eat their food.”

In today’s text, Jesus sends his forerunners out to eat the food of any household willing to offer them hospitality. They are not to take money or luggage; simply to go and offer peace to the house that takes them in, cure the sick, and announce that the kingdom of God has come near. This is not a strategy commonly practiced by agencies today, but perhaps it should be. To refuse to be on the receiving end of hospitality is arrogance. Eating the food a host offers communicates trust and acknowledges the value of what others have to give.

Jesus uses the image of a rich harvest to describe the communities his followers will enter. Note the images he uses. He does not call these towns eroded fields that need fertilizing, not drought-stricken, spindly plants that will die without the laborers’ irrigation, not fig trees that need pruning. Instead, the word is *harvest*. Think acres of wheat with fat golden heads. Think laden olive trees. What would happen if we thought of our hosts, however unlikely, in these terms? What if we looked for the harvest in their lives?



From Our Own Times

“Persons who have never experienced need or marginality, or who are uncomfortable with their own

vulnerability, often find it easier to be hosts than guests. Sometimes they insist on taking the role of hosts, even in the domain of another. Giving the appearance of generosity, they reinforce existing patterns of status and wealth and avoid questions about distributions of power and resources. They make others, especially poor people, passive recipients in their own families, churches, or communities. Recipients of such ‘hospitality’ thus become guests in their own house.

“I witnessed a powerful expression of this phenomenon when I regularly attended a mission church. Although there was potential for some leadership from within the congregation, the resources almost always came from outside. One holiday season in particular, I watched with deepening dismay as waves of well-meaning suburban congregations came to the mission to help — they provided dinners, brought gifts, and led the worship programs. There was, in fact, nothing that the local congregation needed to do. Everyone assumed that the local people had nothing to offer. They had become guests in their own church building. And despite the festive trimmings, disempowerment would be a generous description of what had happened.”

- Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999, p. 119.



Faith in Action Step

The next time you are a guest, take pains to savor your host’s hospitality. Write a thank-you note to a friend acknowledging his or her gifts, or thank a stranger who received you graciously in a restaurant, hotel, or other public setting.

OFFERING HOSPITALITY

Sharing food with outsiders is one of the ways we encounter God.

Matthew 25:31-46



While most dinner invitations are given with the expectation of mutual benefits and return favors, Christians have been known throughout history for their practice of sharing food with strangers, the poor, and the sick.

Christine Pohl, who explores this idea at length in her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, cites a grumbling quote from Emperor Julian (A.D. 362). Hostile to Christianity, he is nevertheless embarrassed by the fact that Christians care “not only for their own poor, but ours as well.” Sociologist Rodney Stark claims that the Christian habit of nursing and feeding the sick was the main reason the Christian faith survived its first few centuries. When deadly plagues ravaged Roman towns, most citizens fled, leaving the dying to their fate. Christians stayed behind and cared for the stricken. This courageous behavior cost some of them their lives, but it also brought grateful converts to the faith.

A persistent theme in many of the stories of hospitality that have come down to us is the idea that God is present in the stranger and in those in need. “Whatever you’ve done for the least of these, you’ve done for me,” Jesus says in the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. These words, along with Abraham’s entertaining angels in Genesis 18 and Jesus’ humble birth in a stable, have motivated generations of Christians to provide warm and personal hospitality to people others did not value.

“...Each Advent, the young and the old reenact the story of Joseph seeking lodging for his young wife, Mary, who is weary from travel and heavy with child. For nine nights in a row, children and adults assume the identity of the weary couple or of the innkeepers, processing around the inside of the church or throughout the neighborhood, moving from one designated site to the next...

“...For eight days, the scene is reenacted. Finally, on the ninth day, the evening of Christmas, Joseph’s request moves the heart of an innkeeper, who offers the young couple all that he has left — a stable.... In an outpouring of joy and festivity, those gathered on the final night celebrate the generosity of the innkeeper and the *posada* given to Mary and Joseph in song and dance, food and drink. Candy and treats from the piñata shower the children, and the community recalls anew how the stranger at one’s door can be God in disguise.

“Every December, Hispanic communities relive in their flesh the Gospel truth that ‘the Word became flesh and lived among us.’.... In Las Posadas, they ritually participate in being rejected and being welcomed, in slamming the door on the needy and opening it wide. They are in this way renewed in the Christian practice of hospitality, the practice of providing a space where the stranger is taken in and known as one who bears gifts.”

- Ana Maria Pineda, “Hospitality,” in Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997, pp. 29-31.

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From Our Own Times



The reading below describes Las Posadas, an Advent tradition that takes place each year in the Mission District of San Francisco and in many other Hispanic neighborhoods.



Faith in Action Step

Today’s smaller households make it more difficult to share food with outsiders. They lack the flexibility and porous boundaries of the large tables of long ago. Band together with another household to offer hospitality to a group or person you might be reluctant to take on alone.

Unit 5: Creating Community with Food, Day 5

MAKING PEACE AROUND THE TABLE

Sharing food is a powerful symbol of reconciliation and good will. To risk eating together is an act of discipleship and — sometimes — an alternative to violence.

John 13:21-30, Matthew 14:1-21



There are times when the opposite of table fellowship is not just hunger; it is violence. Choosing to share a meal can be a radical act of peacemaking. The Lord's Supper, where Jesus knowingly ate with his betrayer, was one such meal. Judas'

presence at the table puts a challenging twist on the words, "Do this in remembrance of me."

The feeding of the five thousand is another occasion where violence skirts the edges of a meal. Many of us may picture a happy, middle class picnic where the absent-minded parents all forgot to pack a lunch. More likely, the people were chronically hungry, not just empty at the moment. From what we know of the political oppression of the times, this crowd had more of an agenda than a free, continuing education class. Several clues in the text support this interpretation. In both Matthew and Mark, the story of John the Baptist's brutal murder at the hands of King Herod comes directly before the feeding of the 5,000. In Luke, we are told that Herod is looking for Jesus and this is why he has withdrawn to a deserted place. This suggests that the crowds that followed Jesus out into the wilderness were seeking a way to respond to the military dictatorship they lived under, which had recently beheaded a popular figure. Five thousand *men* is not just a crowd; it is a potential army. In fact, five thousand is the number of soldiers in a Roman legion. When Jesus blessed, broke and gave bread, he may have been serving a mob on the edge of riot. No wonder he suggested they sit down!

John ends his version of the story by noting that Jesus slips away because the crowd is about to "take him by force to make him king." This closing comment reminds us that the feeding of the five thousand was not just a nice gesture; it was an expression of Jesus' deliberate decision not to bring in his kingdom with a sword. Instead of marshalling a zealot army, he gathers bread and fish from a child and

feeds the whole crowd. His compassion averts what could have been a bloody and futile uprising.³²



From Our Own Times

"A conciliation commission worked for several years to forge a peace agreement between the Nicaraguan

Sandinista government and YATAMA, the armed opposition group representing the indigenous peoples of the eastern coastal area of Nicaragua. Some of the most memorable moments of the reconciliation process came around the meals that were shared by former enemies — fighters from the rebelling indigenous groups and Sandinista officials.

"On one occasion Commander Lumberto Campbell, a key leader in the Sandinista government, invited the entire YATAMA delegation to his home for a meal. He had a specially prepared meal of turtle, the most sought-after and cherished meat, particularly among the Miskitu. But turtle was scarce at that time and there was only enough for one plate. Lumberto shared that plate with Brooklyn Rivera, the head YATAMA leader. Under the large mango trees and in the stifling heat and humidity of the back patio, two native Costeños (coastal people), on opposite sides of a war, sat together and ate the dish of their ancestors."

- John Paul Lederach, *quoted in Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*, by Joetta Handrich Schlabach. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991, p. 210. To order, call 1-800-245-7894 or go to www.heraldpress.com



Faith in Action Step

Is there a broken relationship in your life that could be healed by sharing food? With whom would you find it hard to eat? Respond to these questions in a journal; act on your insights.

Unit 5: Creating Community with Food

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. Do you have a standard “company meal” that can be served on short notice? Plan a menu that allows you to be spontaneous with your hospitality. Keep the necessary ingredients always in stock or prepare a quantity of a food that can be frozen.
2. If the season permits, host a picnic at a park instead of a meal at your home. This sidesteps the issue of cleaning the house and allows for a simple menu. It also provides after dinner entertainment: a hike, a volleyball game, a chance to catch fireflies.
3. Who prepares the food at your house? Is the workload shared in a way that seems fair to everybody? Discuss this question with your household and make adjustments that may enable you to offer hospitality more freely.
4. Find a way to interweave food preparation and prayer this week. Is there a poem or scripture passage you would like to memorize? Post it over your sink. Is there someone who needs your prayers? Hold this person in your heart as you prepare food each day this week.
5. Reshape a feast which no longer “fits.” Which traditions are so redolent with memories and fellowship that to change them would be a great loss? Which ones include excess that wouldn’t be missed? For example, suppose you are planning a wedding. It is one thing if you’ve always dreamed of a big, frothy wedding cake; quite another if you don’t even *like* wedding cakes. If the latter, consider a creative, healthy alternative. What about dishes that represent the two families involved and the way these traditions will mesh in your household?
6. How does your church or other group receive hospitality from others? Which of your ministries is most like the one described in Luke 10? Reflect and discuss.
7. Invite a minority group at your church to host a meal of foods native to their culture. What can you learn about each other by eating each other’s food?
8. Host a meal that highlights the hospitality you receive from the earth. Choose foods in season. If possible, pick them yourself.
9. In the Hebrew Bible, travelers who needed hospitality hung around the city gate and waited for someone to offer them bed and board. Is there a place in your church fellowship hall where people who might like to share a meal after worship can find each other? Designate a meeting corner or some other creative way to link up. Plant a few hosts at first to get the tradition going.
10. “You would never treat a guest the way you treat me!” spouses sometimes say to each other. This week, make a special effort to offer hospitality to your housemate, husband, wife, or other family member. Listen, learn, serve.
11. Give a gift of food as an act of forgiveness or encouragement: a loaf of bread, a jar of nuts, something special you made. For yourself, this could be a way of attending to a wound you couldn’t talk about or that the other person doesn’t even know he or she caused. For the receiver, your gift could communicate appreciation and respect, healing a simmering resentment you do not even know about.

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MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. Most of us eat more when we have several choices. (Cake and ice cream? I'll have both.) Simplify your next dinner by serving fewer dishes. You can still eat a wide variety of foods without eating a wide variety at one sitting. On the other hand, if you want to eat more fruits and vegetables, serve multiple fruits and vegetables at meals.
2. Prepare for a feast by fasting. Look at your calendar this week and decide which meal is most likely to be a "feast." Prepare for this meal by eating lightly for a day beforehand. Reflect on how this affects your enjoyment of the meal.
3. Hosts are usually eager to please their guests. It may be possible to steer a host away from serving rich food you don't need. If you are honest about why and how you are changing your eating habits, they may be proud to support your efforts. Think of a situation where this might be the case and tell the truth about what you want and need. If you do this in settings where it would not offend, you can eat freely in the situations where it would be more Christ-like to "eat what is set before you."
4. "All we ever do together is eat." If this is true of a group in your life, maybe you need to work at creating community *without* food. Could your group meet around a quilt frame instead of a table? Stuff school kits for a relief effort instead of a turkey? Learn to cross country ski? Plan a food-free service project or other activity.
5. It is easier to begin new traditions than to alter old ones. This year, begin a new family tradition that involves healthy food. For example, pomegranates are available in many grocery stores during November and December. These unusual fruits with their juicy, jewel-like seeds are a festive and healthy holiday treat.
6. Walk a mile in someone else's diet. Interview a person in your congregation who is diabetic or requires a special diet for some reason. How does he or she cope with the way your congregation shares food? What would a feast that this person could eat look like? For one day, eat the food this person needs to eat in order to understand his or her challenges.

DISCERNING GOD'S CALL



“If you should miss the call or successfully resist the call for a period of time, be assured that it will not go away...We may find our call, or trip over it, or fall into it, or reject it, but, like light, it exists separate from our search. And it will continue to seek us out.”

- Ben Campbell Johnson, Hearing God's Call: Ways of Discernment for Clergy and Laity. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns, 2002, p. 27.

If *Just Eating?* has inspired you to try a new way of eating, shopping, ministering, or thinking about food, this last unit on discernment is for you. If, on the other hand, you missed meetings, ate fast food with abandon and failed to live up to every goal you set for yourself, this unit is also for you. Maybe nothing has happened for you these few weeks, but if you have made it this far in the curriculum, God has gotten a toehold in your life with food and will move you inch by inch in the direction you have professed to want to go. God watches our intentions as well as our actions, tossing gifts and opportunities in our paths that reinforce our feeble yearnings.

How do we discern God's call to change our lives? Sometimes it manifests itself as a desire to be free of a habit that binds us. What once seemed attractive or necessary is now slavery. What once appeared normal is appalling. Sometimes a synchronicity of events moves us in a given direction. An unexpected door opens, an unusual and enticing experience beckons, a person we haven't seen for years reappears in our lives. Sometimes others tell us of a gift they see in us which we have been unable to claim.

In this concluding unit, you are encouraged to think about two things:

1. **What individual action or change in behavior is God inviting you to commit to as a response to this course?** It could involve a change in diet, or in the way you shop. You might decide on a form of offering hospitality, or a volunteer role in a hunger ministry. Maybe you want to learn more about a food-related environmental or social issue that concerns you.
2. **What is God calling your group to do next now that you have spent time together talking about food?** Maybe one unit in particular sparked vigorous discussion; maybe several of you share a vocation related to hunger; maybe two of you serve on your church fellowship committee and have a plan you want to pursue.

It is not a given that every *Just Eating?* group should take action together. More to do may be the last thing you need: people who are too busy do not have time to live well or eat well. At minimum, talk about how to support each other in the individual changes you are choosing. Consider having a reunion in a few months to see how everybody's doing.

The faith practices covered in this week's readings are fasting, confession, repentance, examen, and discerning the Spirit of a church. They will guide you as you reflect on how you might like to eat in the future.

Unit 6: Discerning God's Call, Day 1

FASTING

Fasting deepens our spiritual lives and helps us make major decisions. It can also help us identify with those who are hungry.

Luke 4:1-13



It seems fitting that a curriculum on food should recommend fasting as a way to reflect and set new directions. This faith practice is mentioned frequently in the Bible. It appears that the Jewish people did it so routinely

that no one needed to defend or explain it, for not much detail about the mechanics of fasting is provided. In the Old Testament, public fasts are mentioned more frequently than individual exercises of piety. Typical examples include the Ninevites fasting as a sign of repentance in the book of Jonah; Ezra and his followers fasting on the eve of a dangerous journey; and King Jehoshaphat calling the nation to fast when it was attacked. Leviticus 23:26-32 requires the Israelites to fast annually on the Day of Atonement as a sign of sorrow for their sins.

In the New Testament, fasting reappears as a spiritual discipline used when seeking direction. Jesus fasts shortly after his baptism. These forty days of temptation shape his ministry and determine what it will *not* be. In Matthew 17:21, fasting helps when casting out tough demons. In Acts 14:23 and 13:2-3, fasting is part of the process of selecting and appointing leadership. In Acts 10:30, Cornelius is fasting when he has a vision directing him to Peter and the early Church.

Later Christians continued the practice of fasting. The *Didache*, an early church manual, recommends fasting every Wednesday and Friday. By the sixth century, fasting was required of Christians, and in Middle Ages, it was sometimes carried to damaging extremes. In the 1700's, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, refused to ordain anyone who would not practice fasting twice a week. Fasting is still common among Christians in many parts of the world. For example, many Anglican churches in Nigeria fast every Wednesday. Against this backdrop, North American Christianity's lack of interest in fasting stands out as an odd departure.

Those who do fast report many benefits. Some find the experience brings them closer to God and redirects their lives. For others, fasting strengthens empathy and gratitude. It is a way to be in touch with those who have no choice but to live with hunger. Still others use fasting as a way to open up time and resources that can then be shared with those in need.



From Our Own Times

During Gulf War II in early 2003, over 1,200 women fasted and prayed for peace every Wednesday. They shared their

comments via the internet at www.mcc.org/canada/peace/fast. Here are the remarks of two participants:

"I feel that fasting has been a saving grace for me through this sad and scary time. I have done as many other peacebuilding things as I could manage, but the fast grounded me and connected me to so many other people around the world."

"The most moving week was the week I had my nine-year-old grandson and six-year-old granddaughter at my house, and I was explaining to them why I wasn't eating breakfast. Later, I got in touch with the angst Iraqi grandmothers must feel when they cannot protect their grandchildren from hunger, violence, fear, losses."



Faith in Action Step

Fast for one meal or more this week, or for a day. Spend any time this frees up praying for direction as you consider next steps or praying for those who have no choice about fasting. Readers with diabetes or other health conditions should

choose a different action step or consult a doctor before fasting. **See page 47 before you begin.**

CONFESSION

“Sin” is not just an individual act of wrongdoing; it is a web of broken relationships. Naming sin is the beginning of repentance.



Luke 18:9-14

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we see two responses to sin. The Pharisee describes his individual success at rising above it while the tax collector stands far away

from the temple as if to express his distance from God. He mourns and calls himself a sinner.

This text is often read as a condemnation of those who are self-righteous. It can also be read as a word of grace for those of us who perceive how badly entangled we are in unjust systems, messed up family situations, and the human condition. The tax collector described here was probably a Jewish underling who served the Roman empire by collecting road tolls. His fellow Jews regarded these taxes as unjust and considered him a traitor little better than a robber. Jewish rabbis questioned whether it was possible for a tax collector to repent because it would be so difficult to pay back all the people he had bilked. The tax collector in this story suffers not only guilt but also broken relationships.

In her excellent book, *Speaking of Sin*, Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on the language we use to talk about wrecked relationships and all that is wrong, messed up, disconnected, and falling apart. She maintains that whether we use the word, “sin” to describe these experiences or not, we still live with them. “We do wrong,” she says, “but we do not do wrong all alone. We live in a web of creation that binds us to all other living beings. If we want to be saved, then we had better figure out how to do it together since none of us can resign from this web of relationship.”³³

It is interesting that the Pharisee in Luke’s parable “stands alone.” The tax collector *sees* the web he is a part of; the Pharisee does not. This seeing and naming is the beginning of repentance.



From Our Own Times

“Almost every year until the early 1940s was a drought year throughout the Great Plains, with plagues of grasshoppers and dust

storms visiting us, sometimes separately and sometimes together. The drought continued in spite of desperate prayer meetings in the church pastored by my grandfather, where we implored God to send rain. The fervent prayers are as memorable as the storms. But the rains did not come...

“...My parents finally gave up, had an auction, and in 1937 moved the family to Oregon to begin life anew on a little farm. I was very sad that we were leaving, for by then I was a boy of thirteen years and loved the unsettled and open frontier life... Slowly I accepted the conclusion everyone accepted — that our experience in Montana, and in the other states of the Dust Bowl, had been God’s punishment for disobedience, but I did not understand what that disobedience was all about. Many years later I began to realize... that the Dust Bowl was not God’s punishment for our spiritual misdeeds; rather it was the result of terrible sins committed by my parents’ generation. They had not only benefited by taking free land from the dispossessed Assiniboine and Sioux Indians but also, with plows and tractors, destroyed forever the several-inch membrane of plant and animal life that had maintained the prairies for thousands of years. And, with that realization, I became an environmentalist forever.”

- Calvin Redekop, ed. *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. xiii-xiv.



Faith in Action Step

Experiment with the unpopular word *sin*. Use it to name a part of your experience related to food or our food system. How does calling this problem sin change your perspective?

Unit 6: Discerning God's Call, Day 3

EXAMEN (PRAYERFUL REFLECTION ON THE DAY)

Those things that fill us with energy and make us grateful are often clues to the path God is calling us to take.

Proverbs 24:13-14



Honey was the chocolate of the Ancient Near Eastern world. In some texts, it has an almost erotic connotation. More commonly, as in references to “a land flowing with milk and honey,” it suggests richness and abundance.³⁴ In

Proverbs 24:13-14, this enticing food that appeals to the insatiable human sweet tooth refers to wisdom.

The comparison between a desirable food and a quality we associate with restraint, reason, and gray hair is interesting to ponder. Can we come to “wisdom, a future and a hope,” as these verses promise, by following our desires? Kristine Haig, writing in an article entitled “Deepening Our Desire,” distinguishes between superficial cravings and what she calls “deep and holy yearnings.” The latter, she says, “can keep us grounded in God and drawn toward what is good.”³⁵

For centuries, Christians have used the practice of examen, a daily review of the day's joys and sorrows, to separate these two kinds of desire and to identify the “honey” in their lives. When examen is regularly practiced, patterns emerge that can give us new direction and hope.

From Our Own Times



“...For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful? ... I first discovered the power of these two questions...when I taught on the Rosebud Sioux Indian reservation. I had just moved into a housing

project and I decided to risk something new: inviting guests for a meal. I invited eight of my students to dinner and spent the morning boiling soup bones. Then I added a cupful of rice. It seemed to disappear. The same thing happened when I added

the entire box of rice. Not knowing that rice expands as it cooks, I went to four different neighbors and collected about two more boxfuls of rice. I left the soup on the stove to simmer and headed over to school.

“When I returned home with the students, the rice met us at the front door. The inside of my house looked as though a foot of snow had fallen. While some students stayed to help me shovel rice, others headed out to invite their families and friends to help us eat it. Instead of eight Sioux students, that night I fed most of the inhabitants of the reservation (dogs included) ...

“...I remember the rice soup not just because it launched my cooking career, but also because it began a spiritual practice that is still fundamental to my life...Lighting a candle to help me get centered, I told the group I had not felt grateful for the rice that met me at the door when I arrived home. But I was deeply grateful that people of every age were meeting in my home to feast (on rice!) and to pray. Others began to share their own moments of least gratitude and most gratitude from the day, each one lighting a candle as he or she spoke. God's will is generally for us to do more of whatever we are most grateful for or whatever gives us most life. That evening gave us all so much life that during the rest of my time on the reservation, I cooked dinner every Friday... and invited my Sioux students to come and eat, light a candle and share those two questions.”

- Dennis Linn, et. al., *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995, p. 3.



Faith in Action Step

Review the action steps you tried during the last five weeks. Which ones gave you joy and energy? Which ones did not? Which ones would you like to do more?

Unit 6: Discerning God's Call, Day 4

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER IN CHANGE

Repentance is taking steps to change a wrong and finding others to support you.

Galatians 5:22-6:5, 9-10



The book of Galatians was written for a community struggling with legalism. In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul accuses his readers of deserting the grace of Christ for a different “gospel” based on keeping all the Jewish laws.

Throughout this letter, Paul struggles to help his readers understand the difference between living as a slave to a rigid set of laws, living as a slave to self-indulgence and quarreling, and living in a community guided by the Spirit. Mutual accountability and mutual support are the hallmarks of the community Paul is trying to describe. It is not a place for competition, envy, or comparing oneself with others; it is a place where people care enough to help bear a burden or gently set an errant person straight.

Most of us have experienced at least one of the forms of slavery Paul describes; fewer of us have been in a community or church where Paul's vision of life in the Spirit was lived out to the fullest. If your *Just Eating* group begins to call forth this level of love and trust, know it is a precious gift from God.

From Our Own Times



“Several years ago, ... I asked another woman to enter into a support partnership with me, and together we designed a routine. After deciding to start small, each of us chose one area of our lives

that needed work. We clarified what we wanted to change (I wanted to be on time for my appointments) and we clarified why it was important. (I wanted to be a person of my word, and I also wanted to do something about my compulsion to cram too many things into too little time, which is how I act out my idolatrous fantasy of omnipo-

tence.) Next, we picked one or two specific actions that would support us to make the changes we wanted to make. (I will set all my clocks five minutes ahead. I will also get in the car ten minutes earlier than I think I need to, even if it means that I arrive early and — gasp — waste time.) Finally, we agreed to call each other every Sunday to report on how things were going.

“This last step turned out to be the kicker. There was a huge difference between saying (to myself), ‘I want to be on time for my appointments this week’ and saying (to someone else), ‘I will call you on Sunday to tell you whether or not I was.’ My partner never badgered me. She knew that was not her job. Her job was simply to keep reminding me what I had said I wanted, and to help me explore my enormous resistance to change.

“What I learned through this process was that I was used to being sympathized with for my failure to change... What I was not used to was being supported in my bid for new life by someone who said, ‘You want to do things differently? Great! I’ll help you with that.’”

- Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2000, pp. 74-76.

Faith in Action Step



Use Barbara Brown Taylor's example as a way to work at a food-related issue in your own life. In a journal:

- (a) identify what you want to change;
- (b) explain why it's important;
- (c) name specific actions you can take to make the change;
- (d) name people who might be able to support you in this change; and
- (e) talk to one of these people and see what you can work out.

DISCERNING THE SPIRIT OF A CHURCH

Each group of believers embodies the Spirit of Christ in its own way. Discerning how God is at work in a given body is part of what it means to be a Christian.

Revelation 3: 7-13



John was a persecuted preacher, banished to the Island of Patmos, when he received this glorious vision. First, as he writes in Revelation 1:9-20, he saw the risen Christ whole and complete, with uninjured hands and feet, priestly

clothing, and a face shining like the sun. Then he heard Christ speaking to each of the seven churches he pastored. Each time, Christ is described a little differently, using phrases from the original vision. Eugene Peterson, in his book, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, interprets the seven messages this way:

"[W]hile all churches get their identity from Christ, each congregational identity is partial: each church is defined by only a piece of the vision. No single congregation exhibits the wholeness of Christ. It is not possible to look at any one instance of the church and find an entire representation of Christ..."³⁶

For the Church of Philadelphia, in today's text, Christ is the One who holds the key; the one who opens doors.

Revelation's messages to the seven churches focus more on being than doing, more on identity than on prescribing a specific set of ethical guidelines. "What are you called to do?" is an important question, but it comes later. Revelation pushes us to address a more foundational concern: "Who are you called to be?" and "What does the risen Christ look like in your particular congregation?" May God be with you as you grapple with these questions and their connection to all the thinking and talking you have done related to eating.



From Our Own Times

"The fertile fields around Mazon, Illinois, are yielding a rich harvest for hungry people

in Gambia thanks to Church World Service partner, the Foods Resource Bank (FRB). FRB began in 2000 in a remarkable alliance of farmers, agribusiness, churches, and other groups seeking to forge an effective food security program for the world's poorest communities. There are now over 100 community growing projects. Farmers provide equipment, time, and management skills. Local agribusinesses grant good prices or make in-kind contributions. Churches and civic groups raise funds to cover other costs. In Mazon, the members of Mazon United Church of Christ provided the farm side of the equation, while Western Springs United Church of Christ near Chicago contributed financially. The funds raised by the sales of the produce went to Church World Service for constructing wells and developing gardens in Gambia. As one of the farmers, Doug Harford, noted, "Ask me to write a check for a thousand dollars for world hunger... now that would be tough. But we can use our knowledge and skill to put in the crop and then harvest it with our equipment. Shoot! That's no big deal — that's what we do every day. And that's a gift only we can give. Wow!"

- From *Hunger in a World of Plenty*, part of the *Facts Have Faces* series from Church World Service www.churchworldservice.org/FactsHaveFaces/hungerfs.htm. For the complete story about this unique church partnership, go to www.foodsresourcebank.org and click under Growing Projects.



Faith in Action Step

Do you sense Christ is opening a door for your group or congregation? Draw the door or picture it in your mind. What do you see on the other side? Also see Resource 6-1 for a list of additional ideas for possible directions a church might take. Are there any that excite you?

Unit 6: Discerning God's Call

MORE FAITH IN ACTION STEPS

1. Review the readings and suggested bibliography covering the first five weeks of this curriculum. What issues disturbed you most? Which ones are you curious about? Make a list of areas you wish you had time to pursue and resources you'd like to read. Circle your first priority.
2. Tell someone outside of your group about your experiences with a group centered on *Just Eating*? Raise a question that bothers you or describe the ways you have experienced the Spirit of God in this process.
3. On the reading on page 43, Cal Redekop describes what it is like to live under the power of sin. Write about your experiences living under sin or express this in a piece of artwork.
4. Pray about directions your group may wish to take together.

"The longest journey starts with a single step." Lao Tze

Start with this checklist for a few ideas and go to Resource 6-1 and the Food & Faith Initiative www.pcusa.org/hunger/food for greater detail on these and more ideas:

- Design a special communion service
- Examine your communal eating practices
- Start a weight loss group
- Advocate for change at a local grocery store or school
- Organize a CROP WALK
- Adopt a local food pantry or soup kitchen
- Plan a more in-depth study on one of the topics
- Create a congregational cookbook
- Buy fair trade beverages and food
- Start a farmers' market in your church parking lot
- Support each other in the individual changes people make

MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

1. About Fasting: During a fast, drink plenty of water. Fruit or vegetable juices are also helpful, but avoid caffeinated beverages. For more complete information on the hows and whys of fasting, see www.billbright.com/howtofast. To fast longer than a day, consult a doctor. If you have any of the following conditions, NEVER fast without professional supervision: anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders; weakness or anemia; tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or heart disease; chronic problems with major organs; diabetes or any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia. Do not fast if you are pregnant, nursing or seriously underweight. If fasting is not for you, consider other ways to experience hunger. Try giving up snacks between meals for a week.
2. Review the Resources on healthy eating once more and celebrate your progress.

R E S O U R C E S

Resource 1-1



What is Lectio Divina?

At the heart of this curriculum is an invitation to rest in the presence of God and to open yourself to the Holy Spirit's transforming embrace. Christians throughout history have used a faith practice called *lectio divina* to help them do these things. These Latin words mean "divine reading," but today we might call it praying the scriptures. *Lectio divina* is a way of slowly and meditatively reading a short passage of scripture. Ancient Christians compared the practice to a cow chewing its cud. The goal is not to understand or master the passage so much as to hear the scriptures with one's heart; to allow them to penetrate and permeate one's being.

To practice *lectio divina*, choose a short passage of scripture and read it slowly, listening for a point of intensity in the passage. Then sit and savor this word or phrase, listening for God's still, small voice. Use this method of prayer with the scriptures and readings suggested in the participant guide. Each week, your group session will also include a brief period of *lectio divina*.

A Method of Lectio Divina

1. Quiet yourself and find the scripture passage suggested in the daily readings. Note that you can find these readings on the web www.biblegateway.com if it is more convenient for you than using a Bible.
2. Read the passage slowly, listening for a word, phrase, or short segment that attracts you. For longer passages, you may need to scan the reading to get the gist of the story and then begin with just a portion.
3. After you settle on a word or phrase, spend several minutes reflecting on it.
4. Read the passage again, asking yourself, "Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?"
5. Return to your word or phrase and ask yourself, "What does Christ the Word invite me to do or be this week?"
6. Carry your word or phrase with you throughout the day. At a later time, return to the day's reflections in the participant guide.

- Adapted from "Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina," by Father Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.³⁷

Resource 1-2

FOOD AND TIME AUDIT

Completing this curriculum will take time.

You have committed to attend seven meetings and spend at least an hour or two per week on your own. How will you find time to do that? One way to find those extra minutes is to review the amount of time you already spend on food and consider making changes. Are you happy with how, when, and where you spend time on food?

Fill out the survey below and find out.

1. How much time do you spend eating on an average day? Include time waiting in restaurants or driving to them. Estimate minutes or hours.
2. Are you happy with this amount of time?

If not, how much time would you like to spend eating?
3. How much time do you spend shopping for food, preparing food, or cleaning up after meals on an average day? Estimate minutes or hours.
4. Are you happy with this amount of time?

If not, how much time would you like to spend on these activities?
5. When you do not prepare your own food, who prepares it?
6. Does your job involve designing, preparing, serving, or transporting food?

If so, how many hours-per-week do you spend on food in your work life?

How do you feel about the kind of food you prepare or serve?
7. Which of your extracurricular activities involve eating, preparing, or selling food? List them. (For example: Church fellowship committees, school fundraisers, bake sale commitments, snacks for children's teams) How many hours per month do you spend on these tasks?
8. Do you see any places where your use of time clashes with your goal of eating well? Mark them. Make a list of changes you could make that would support your goal of eating well. How much time, if any, could these changes give you to relate to food in more healthy ways?
9. It is possible that in order to eat well, you need to spend MORE time on food, not less. If so, what trade-offs can you make elsewhere in your life to find the time you need?

Resource 1-3

TABLE PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS

We pray for all who grew our food;
May they eat well tonight.
Protect them from unfairness,
And keep them in your sight.

~ Jennifer Halteman Schrock

Blessed art Thou,
O Lord our God,
king of the world,
who bringest forth bread from the earth.

~ Ancient Jewish Blessing

May our garners be full,
providing all manner of store....
Happy the people to whom such blessings fall!
Happy the people whose God is the Lord.

~ Psalm 144:13, 15

What God gives and what we take,
'Tis a gift for Christ His sake:
Be the meal of beans and peas,
God be thanked for those and these:
Have we flesh, or have we fish,
All are fragments from His dish.

~ Robert Herrick

There is no such thing as "my" bread. All bread
is ours and is given to me, to others through me,
and to me through others. For not only bread, but
all things necessary for sustenance in this life are
given on loan to us with others, and because of
others and for others and to others through us.

~ Meister Eckhart

O God, to those who have hunger give bread,
and to us who have bread give us a hunger for
justice.

~ from Latin America

You have come from afar
and have waited long and are wearied:

Let us sit side by side
sharing the same bread
drawn from the same source
to quiet the same hunger
that makes us weak.

Then let us stand together
let us share the same spirit,
the same thoughts
that once again draw us together
in friendship, unity and peace.

~ Prières d'Ozawarnick, Canadian Indian Liturgy

Open my eyes that they may see the deepest
needs of men and women;
Move my hands that they may feed the hungry.
Touch my heart that it may bring warmth to the
despairing;
Teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers;
Let me share my possessions to clothe the naked;
Give me the care that strengthens the sick;
Make me share in the quest to set the prisoners
free;
In sharing our anxiety and our love, our poverty and
our prosperity, we partake of your divine presence.
Amen

~ "Prayer of Commitment" by Canaan Banana,
Zimbabwe from "On Frequent Journeys"

Resource 2-1

NUTRITION QUIZ

Your group leader will share the answers and further information with you. This nutrition quiz and the following nutrition resource pages are based on information from Walter C. Willett, *Eat, Drink and Be Healthy*, NY: Free Press, 2001.

- Which is the best predictor of your future health?
 Your weight
 Whether you are apple or pear-shaped
 The amount of sugar and fat in your diet
 The amount of fruits and vegetables you eat
- Heart disease rates in a given country are most closely linked to:
 The amount of fat in the country's diet
 The amount of saturated fat in the country's diet
 The genetic makeup of the population
- Put an S in front of the item if it is high in saturated fats.
Put a U in front of the item if it is high in unsaturated fats.
 olive oil corn oil canola oil nuts
 red meat cheese coconut oil fish
- Put a check before the items below that typically contain trans fats:
 shortening margarine
 fast food french fries
 most commercial baked goods
 foods with "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" on the ingredient list
- What is lost when whole wheat grains are refined? Put a check before all that apply:
 bran and wheat germ vitamins
 fiber, magnesium unsaturated fats
- Which of the following ailments are you more likely to suffer from if you eat primarily refined grains? Check all that apply:
 diabetes chicken pox
 constipation and other GI problems
 heart disease mouth, stomach, colon, gallbladder, and ovarian cancer
- Which of the following are whole grain products? Check all that apply:
 a bread advertised as "made with wheat flour"
 brown rice
 a bran cereal
 whole wheat noodles
 old fashioned oats
- How many of the following meet the current U.S. recommendation for your daily needs for fruits and vegetables? Put an X by all that apply.
 three apples, 1 cup of cooked green beans
 a cup of blueberries, two cups of a spinach salad with tomatoes and cucumber, a cup of fruit salad containing cantaloupe and bananas, a cup of stir-fry with broccoli, cauliflower and carrots, a glass of orange juice.
 two glasses orange juice, a banana, an order of French fries, a baked potato
- Put an A in front of the items that best describe animal sources of protein (meat and dairy products). Put a V in front of the items that best describe vegetable sources of protein (beans, legumes, nuts, grains).
 Are also a source of saturated fat.
 Are also a source of fiber.
 It is more efficient and creates less pollution to produce this kind of protein.
- Which statement below is most accurate?
 Our bodies need protein daily because we don't store amino acids.
 Vegetarians need to carefully calculate their consumption of complementary proteins to avoid a protein deficiency.

Resource 2-2

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FATS

Objective #1: Replace most saturated fats with unsaturated fats

Why?

Diets high in saturated fats are linked to heart disease.

Saturated fats are found primarily in red meat, poultry, whole milk, butter, cheese, ice cream, chocolate, and coconut products. The fats in dairy products have the most negative effect on arteries.

When and how do you eat saturated fats? Make a list of foods you regularly eat that contain them.

Here are a few steps you can take to reduce your intake of saturated fats. Check off those you already implement. Circle those you would like to try. Add your own.

- _____ Switch from whole milk to 1% milk or skim milk, or to soy or rice milk.
- _____ Replace red meat with chicken or fish whenever possible. Better yet, eat less meat.
- _____ Try an Italian habit: dip bread in olive oil instead of buttering it. Or toast it in a pan with a bit of olive oil. If you must butter your toast, blend 1 part butter, 1 part olive oil for a tasty spread.
- _____ Buy only fair trade chocolate. The difference in price will not only benefit the producers and the environment; it will also reduce your consumption.
- _____ Switch to natural peanut butter. You won't save calories, but this product has less saturated fats than whipped peanut butter.
- _____ Shave, slice, or grate cheese thinly. Use small amounts of highly flavored cheeses like parmesan or extra sharp cheddar. This makes a little go a long way.

Objective #2: Replace trans fats with liquid unsaturated fats when possible

Why?

Trans fats are man-made fats that raise cholesterol and triglycerides and increase the risk of heart disease.

Trans fats are found in many margarines, vegetable shortening, fast food french fries, and commercial baked goods such as breads, crackers and cookies. Any product that lists "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "vegetable shortening" on the label has trans fats in it.

When and how do you eat trans fats? Make a list of foods you regularly eat that contain them.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce your consumption of trans fats. Check off those you already do. Circle those you'd like to try. Add your own ideas.

- _____ When baking, replace solid fats like margarine or shortening with oils.
- _____ Replace commercial baked goods with home made baked goods made with oils.
- _____ Olive oil is an especially good source of monounsaturated fats. However, it is also one of the more expensive oils. Go to your grocery store and compare ounce for ounce costs on these fats. The cost is miniscule compared to the cost of a heart attack, but you will feel better if you know what your commitment will cost.
- _____ Put a decanter of oil by your stove for frying and stir-frying. Use it instead of margarine.
- _____ Assign teenagers or older children the task of screening snack food. Send them to the grocery store to read labels and identify products they would eat that do not contain partially hydrogenated vegetable oil or shortening.
- _____ Replace snack food such as potato chips, crackers, and cookies with nuts.
- _____ Visit the dairy section of your grocery store and read labels on margarine. Look for a brand that is low in saturated fat, high in unsaturated fat, and free of trans fats. Stick with your choice. Also see the bread and oil suggestion under objective 1.
- _____ Avoid fast food.

Objective #3: Eat at least one source of omega-3 fatty acids a day

Why?

Your body can't make them from scratch and they are important raw materials for healthy cell function.

The best sources of omega-3s are fish, walnuts, canola oil, flaxseed, and soybean oil. How could you work these foods into your diet more often?

- _____ Add walnuts to salads or breakfast cereal.
- _____ Use canola oil for stir-frying and baking.
- _____ Explore new recipes that include fish.
- _____ Look for breakfast cereals or breads that contain flaxseed.

Resource 2-3

EATING MORE WHOLE GRAINS

Objective #1:
Eat fewer refined grains and more whole grain foods

Why?

Whole grains protect against diabetes and heart disease, improve intestinal health, and may reduce cancer risks. To better understand the role of carbohydrates in the diet, see Willett's *Eat, Drink and Be Healthy*, chapter 5, pp. 85-100.

Here are some steps you can take to increase the amount of whole grains in your diet. Check off those you already do. Circle those you'd like to try. Add your own ideas.

- _____ Switch from white bread to whole grain breads.
- _____ Switch from white rice to brown rice. Find a place to buy quick-cooking brown rice so that the difference in cooking time doesn't deter you. Soak brown rice longer for best results.
- _____ Buy whole wheat pastas rather than pastas made with refined flour.
- _____ Eat a serving of whole grains for breakfast. For example, eat granola, a whole grain breakfast cereal, or oatmeal made from old fashioned or steel-cut oats.
- _____ Read labels to see if crackers, breads, and cereals include whole grains. *Wheat flour* is not a whole grain; *whole wheat flour* is. Ingredients are listed in order of weight, so a whole grain listed first is more significant than one later on in the list.

Objective #2:
Learn to eat a greater variety of whole grains

Why?

Each plant food offers different nutritional benefits. Variety prevents boredom.

Below is a list of whole grains. Many are available in a large grocery store; most can be found in your local health food store. Check off the grains you already eat. Then circle several you would like to try. You can learn more about them by reading pp. 195-204 in *Eat, Drink and Be Healthy* or by consulting a whole grain cookbook.

- Amaranth
- Barley: whole, pearled, flakes
- Brown Rice
- Buckwheat
- Bulgar
- Corn: fresh on the cob, cornmeal (preferably stone ground), hominy, grits
- Flaxseed, crushed
- Millet
- Oats: oatmeal, rolled oats, steel-cut, oat bran, oat groats, oat flour
- Quinoa
- Rye: whole kernels, flour
- Spelt: whole kernel, flour
- Wild rice

Print out "The Food Timeline" www.foodtimeline.org to learn and appreciate our culinary history and lore. Did you know that popcorn was first popped in 3,600 BC and beer first brewed in 10,000 BC?

Resource 2-4

EATING MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Objective #1:

Eat the fruits and vegetables you know and love more often

Why?

Plenty of fruits and vegetables can decrease your chances of getting heart attacks, strokes, cancers, high blood pressure, eye diseases, and intestinal ailments.

Here are some tricks that squeeze more plants into your diet. Check off the ones you already do; star the ones you want to try next.

- _____ Make a list of easy-to-eat fruits and vegetables you enjoy enough to snack on. Take a supply of these to work or have them on hand. Have you tried fresh red peppers, eaten like an apple? How about slightly thawed blueberries or cherries on a hot day?
- _____ Plant a garden or a fruit tree. Almost anyone can grow a tomato plant or a few greens in a pot on a balcony. Vegetables you grew yourself are precious gems in the diet of life.
- _____ Add fresh fruit to your breakfast cereal.
- _____ Serve fruits for dessert instead of cookies or ice cream.
- _____ Multiple choices encourage more consumption. Serve several fruits and vegetables at a meal.
- _____ For families with children or the young at heart: Have fruit and vegetable eating contests. Offer prizes for the greatest number of servings a day, the greatest variety eaten, the most unusual vegetable eaten, the most new vegetables tried in a week, and the best new vegetable recipe.

Objective #2:

Improve your skill as a vegetable chef

Why?

Through no fault of their own, most of the vegetables served up in our society are limp, overcooked, unimaginatively prepared, and fall short of the glory of God. You can do better.

- _____ Read a cookbook that tells you how to shop for, store, and prepare vegetables.
- _____ Find two new vegetable dishes that look interesting and try them this week.
- _____ Find out the best places to buy fresh fruits and vegetables in your area. Is there a farmers' market? A nearby CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farmer?
- _____ Find out what fruits and vegetables grow in your area and when they are in season. Make yourself a calendar. Locally grown foods are more nutritious and tastier than those that have endured a long voyage.
- _____ If your grocery store offers limited options and poor quality, book an appointment with the store manager to discuss this problem.

Objective #3:

Learn to eat new fruits and vegetables

Why?

Each plant offers different nutritional benefits. Resource 2-5 provides a list of fruits and vegetables commonly available in North America. They are grouped according to their botanical family because families of plants contain similar nutrients. Circle all the fruits and vegetables you regularly eat. Notice if you are missing one or more families. Then mark foods you are willing to try. Eat from each plant family.

Resource 2-5

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE VIRTUES

*T*hese fruits and vegetables are commonly found in U.S. grocery stores. Check off those you already eat; circle those you'd be willing to try. Find a vegetable cookbook at your library and experiment with new recipes. Note the symbols beside each item:

S= Superfoods! High in vitamins A, C, and fiber too.

P= According to an Environmental Working Group study, these 12 fruits/vegetables are most likely to contain pesticides. Buying organic makes the most difference with these foods. Go to www.foodnews.org/walletguide.php to download a wallet guide.

Vegetables

Alfalfa sprouts	
Asparagus	S
Bell peppers	S, P
Broccoli,	S
Brussels sprouts	S
Cabbage	S
Carrots	S
Cauliflower	S
Celery	P
Collard greens	S
Corn	
Eggplant	
Garbanzo beans	
Garlic	
Green beans	
Kale	S
Kohlrabi	
Lima beans	
Mustard greens	
Onions	
Parsley	
Parsnips	
Peas	
Potatoes	P
Pumpkin	
Radishes	
Romaine lettuce	S
Rutabaga	
Soybeans	
Spinach	S, P
Sprouts	
Sweet potatoes	S
Tomatoes	
Turnips	
Watercress	
Winter squash	S

Fruits

Apples	P
Apricots	
Avocados	
Bananas	
Blackberries	
Blueberries	
Cantaloupe	S
Cherries	P
Cranberries	
Grapefruit	
Grapes	P (imported)
Honeydew	
Kiwi	
Lemons	
Limes	
Nectarines	P
Mangoes	
Oranges	
Papaya	
Peaches	P
Pears	P
Pineapple	
Raspberries	P
Strawberries	S, P
Tangerines	
Watermelon	

Resource 2-6

CHOOSING HEALTHIER SOURCES OF PROTEIN

Objective #1: If you eat meat, choose the most nutritious options with the least saturated fat and do not overeat

Why?

Some meats, especially beef, are higher in saturated fats than others. Cattle also require much more grain than other animals to produce a pound of meat. Fish contain omega-3 fatty acids; few North Americans get enough of these.

Here are some steps that will help you. Check those you have already done; star those you want to try.

- ___ Keep track of how much meat you eat in a week's time, what kinds of meat you eat, and where you eat them. Think about how you could make changes.
- ___ Avoid restaurants such as fast food chains where meals center around large hunks of meat.
- ___ Attend to portion sizes. A serving of meat (3 ounces) is about the size of a deck of cards. A serving of cheese (1 1/2 oz.) is the size of a pair of dice. Limit yourself to one serving or less per meal.
- ___ Use chicken instead of beef in dishes such as stir fries or casseroles where either will do.
- ___ Eat salmon, tuna, tofu, or fish in place of a beef dish once a week — or all the time.
- ___ If you use ground beef, buy the best quality, leanest grade. Frying or grilling does not take out the extra fat that the cheaper grades include.
- ___ Sit down with five of your favorite main dish recipes and modify them. Could you cut half the meat and double the vegetables in a casserole without missing anything? Does a dish duplicate protein, using meat, cottage cheese, eggs and grated cheese all in one meal? Experiment with a leaner version.
- ___ Do you fall prey to sale prices on meats you don't really need or want? Buy only what's on your grocery list.
- ___ Buy only pasture-raised and/or organic meat. Animals raised on grass rather than feedlot grain produce meat that is lower in fat and calories and higher in beneficial omega-3 fats and vitamin E. Go to www.eatwild.com to learn more; then find a supplier in your area. The added cost will also help you reduce your meat consumption.

**Objective #2:
Explore meatless sources of protein**

Why?

Vegetable protein foods are high in fiber, contain no cholesterol and low in saturated fat. Raising meat requires a lot more land than growing plant protein. The meat industry does not always handle animals humanely. See John Robbin's *Food Revolution* for more information.

- ___ Don't worry about getting enough protein. In our culture, it is extremely difficult to develop a protein deficiency. Experts no longer require healthy vegetarians to obsess about complementary proteins.
- ___ When baking, add soy flour, wheat germ or dry milk powder to increase protein content.
- ___ Use nuts or tofu in a stir-fry dish instead of meat.
- ___ Can't avoid fast food? Choose a restaurant that offers vegetarian sandwiches, burritos or entrees. Mexican and Asian restaurants almost always have vegetarian options.
- ___ Invest in a vegetarian cookbook or check one out of the library. Find five new recipes that look interesting and try them.
- ___ Try a new legume: split peas, lentils, garbanzo beans, and soybeans all contain protein.
- ___ Are packed lunches a part of your life? Consider alternatives to the tired, old baloney sandwich: try humus on pita bread, a seasoned tofu mixture, a tortilla with refried beans, a microwaved sweet potato, or vegetable soup in a thermos.

Resource 3-1

THE U.S.A.: WHERE EVERY MEAL IS AN INTERNATIONAL MEAL

*B*elow is the ingredient list from a meal similar to the Wholesome Foods Banquet suggested as an optional meal with Unit 2. The author served this meal in Goshen, Indiana, on April 2, 2004. The distances traveled are based on the online calculator www.indo.com/distance and are approximate. Starred locations indicate that the food was not labeled and a "best guess" is listed, based on either the #1 U.S. producer or the closest top producer of that food.

Food item:	Grown:	Distance Traveled (miles)
Main Dish		
Couscous	France	4,086
Rice	Arkansas	591
Chicken	Georgia*	705
Olive oil	Italy	4,768
Onions	California*	1,900
Tomatoes, canned	Home garden	0
Carrots	Michigan*	50
Cauliflower	New York*	435
Red pepper	Mexico	1,652
Broccoli	California*	1,900
Zucchini	California*	1,900
Parsley, fresh	Home garden	0
Apples	Wenatchee, WA	1,736
Raisins	Caruthers, CA	1,849
Garbanzo beans	Clinton, MI	100
Salad:		
Romaine lettuce	Mexico	1,650
Spinach	Salinas, CA	1,939
Tomatoes, fresh	Florida*	999
Mushrooms	Franklin, CT	708
Cucumbers	Mexico	1,650
Pea Pods	Pescadero, CA	1,963
Beets	Goshen, IN	5
Fruit Salad:		
Grapes	Chile	5,054
Strawberries	Oxnard, CA	1,881
Blueberries	Wakarusa, IN	10
Peaches, canned	Michigan	50
Bananas	Peru	3,736
Cherries	Michigan	50
Mandarin oranges	China	7,000
Cantaloupe	California*	1,900
Coffee	Colombia	2,645

While beef is the most energy-intensive food to produce, all food in our industrial system requires tremendous amounts of petroleum. In fact, between 16-20% of all energy consumed in the U.S. is used by the food system. The distance between field and plate is a key reason for this: The average food item in the U.S. travels upwards of 1,500 miles.

Resource 3-2

HUNGER QUIZ

- The number of hungry people in the world is closest to the entire population of:
A) New York City B) the U.S.
C) North America D) the Western Hemisphere
- True or False:**
World hunger has decreased over the past century, with the greatest gains made since 1995.
- True or False:**
Most people who die of hunger die in a famine related to natural disasters.
- How many people die of hunger each day, worldwide?
A) 4,000 B) 10,000 C) 20,000 D) 24,000
- What percent of the number of deaths above are children under 5?
A) 25% B) 50% C) 75% D) 90%
- What percent of people suffering from hunger worldwide are women and girls?
A) 80% B) 70% C) 60% D) 50%
- In the United States, ___ percent of the population lives in poverty.
A) 6% B) 9% C) 12.5% D) 30%
- If all 36 million Americans faced with food in security stood in line at a food pantry in New York City, the line would stretch to:
A) Chicago B) Denver C) Los Angeles
D) To Los Angeles and back
- True or False:**
It is possible for a family of five to still fall below the poverty line with two parents working full time.
- True or False:**
Globalization benefits hungry people by enabling them to find new markets for their goods.
- Who said, "I never take care of crowds, only of one person. If I stop to look at the crowds, I would never begin."

Resource 3-3

HUNGER QUIZ ANSWERS

1. D) According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the number of chronically hungry people in the world is estimated at 852 million.³⁹ This is closest to the population of the Western Hemisphere, roughly 875 million.
2. False: trick question. Hunger *has* decreased over the last century with the greatest improvements made in Asia. However, the period from the mid-1990s to the present has seen an increase in hungry people. Between 1995 and 2001, the number of malnourished people across the developing world grew an average of 4.5 million a year. The AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa is a factor.⁴⁰
3. False. These deaths account for less than 10% of hunger deaths. Many more die from hunger related to war and even more die from chronic malnutrition due to poverty.⁴¹
4. D) At least 25,000 ⁴²
5. C) 75%
6. B) 70% Gender matters when it comes to hunger. The elderly are another at-risk population.
7. C) 12.5% That's 36 million people.⁴³
8. D) A line of 36 million people would reach to Los Angeles and back twice.
9. True. Two parents working full time at minimum wage (\$5.15/hr.) would earn about \$20,600. The poverty line for a family of five is \$22,030.⁴⁴ Also note that the method for calculating the poverty line was developed in the 1960s before health and housing costs rose dramatically. Many families living over the poverty line still experience hunger.
10. More often than not, this is False. The liberalization of trade, along with communication and transportation advances, has created new market opportunities if one has the capital, infrastructure, training, and vision to take advantage of these opportunities. Poor, hungry people — especially small-scale farmers who make up a large percentage of poor in the world — rarely benefit. On the contrary, the strongest players (developed economies, large companies, and larger-scale, advanced agricultural producers) have been able to take advantage. Local, regional, and national food insecurity — with increasing hunger and the threat of famine — is often the result as cheap imports rush in.

*"If you are rich, globalization means development.
If you are poor, globalization means death."*

– A Filipino who works with people displaced by commercial mining operations in Mindanao, Philippines
11. Mother Theresa

Resource 4-1

SHOPPING FOR ORGANIC AND LOCALLY GROWN FOODS

*B*elow is a chart comparing the costs of several foods purchased in the author's community in northern Indiana. All prices except those in the alternative food store column are from a Kroger Supermarket. Note that although the organic versions of the foods cost more, so do convenience foods. You shouldn't be outraged at the price of organic potatoes if you already buy potato chips.

Food:	Non-organic (supermarket)	Organic (supermarket)	Organic (alternative food store)	Convenience food version: non-organic (supermarket)
Milk	\$2.64/gal.	\$6.00/gal.	\$5.09/gal.	Go-gurts \$9.92/gal.
Eggs	\$1.49/dozen	\$3.09/dozen	\$3.55/dozen (also local)	Eggbeaters 12 servings—\$4.66
Beef: ground chuck	\$1.79/lb.	Not Available	\$4.50/lb. (local)	Meals-Made-Simple Meatloaf \$5.60/lb.
Potatoes	\$2.50 for 5 lb.	Not Available	\$2.99 for 5 lb.	Potato chips \$14.95 for 5 lbs.
Apples	1.29/lb.	Not Available	1.99/lb. Also local	Applesauce in individual serving cups \$1.76/lb.
Coffee	\$3.36/lb. (Maxwell, large can)	\$10/lb.	\$11/lb. Fair trade, Shade grown	Instant coffee, smallest jar, \$18.40/lb.

(Continued on next page . . .)

Resource 6-1

A FEW IDEAS FOR GROUP ACTIONS

Design a communion service for your congregation incorporating ideas and experiences your group has had. Consider asking a local farmer to tell his or her story.

Examine your communal food practices: Do food and fellowship opportunities at your church invariably feature high calorie snacks? Consider a modest change. Add some nutritious options to the coffee hour menu, children and youth meal, or alternate feasts with humbler fare.

Serve your congregation a meal featuring new recipes you have learned to enjoy during this course. Have group members tell a little bit about their experiences and learnings. Explain why food is a faith issue. Present the meal as a gift you want to share, not a heavy-handed sales pitch.

Start a weight loss group.

Advocate for change at a local grocery store: Are there foods on the shelf that appall you? Are there nutritious foods you can't find? Are there organic and fair trade options? Make an appointment with the store manager and visit as a group. Explain what change you would like to see and why. Also pledge your commitment to buy the requested items if they are stocked.

Organize a CROP WALK or increase your congregation's participation in the CROP WALK in your area. For more information, call 1-888-CWS-CROP (1-888-297-2767) or visit www.cropwalk.org.

Adopt a local food pantry or soup kitchen.

Plan a more in-depth study on one of the topics this curriculum covers, focusing on circumstances in your own community.

Start a Congregation Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative at your church by finding people who wish to contract with a local farmer to provide fresh produce during the growing season.

Plan a fellowship meal using ideas from the optional group meals suggested in the leader's guide for this curriculum.

Create a congregational cookbook: Breathe new life into this tired genre by creating a cookbook that features healthful, locally grown food in season. Arrange recipes month by month, along with information on where to purchase the ingredients. Imagine having the wisdom of your whole church at your fingertips next August when nature rains zucchini in bushels!

Buy fair trade coffee for coffee hour and for purchase: Make this a church or workplace policy.

Start a farmer's market in your parking lot or a vegetable exchange table in your fellowship hall.

Support each other in the individual changes people have chosen to make. This is not a small thing!

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Bread for the World, www.bread.org

A nationwide, Christian citizens' movement seeking justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers.

(Continued on next page . . .)

Church World Service www.churchworldservice.org
A cooperative humanitarian ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations. CWS provides sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in more than 80 countries. Resources available from CWS include:

- *Facts Have Faces Series*: covering issues such as hunger, uprooted peoples, AIDS
- *Service Magazine*, a CWS publication
- *Build a Better World*: Activities for Children
- *Speak Out E-mail List*: Make a phone call, send an e-mail to make a difference

National Farm Worker Ministry, www.nfwm.org
An interfaith organization supporting farm workers as they organize for justice.

Presbyterian Hunger Program, www.pcusa.org/hunger
PHP provides ways for Presbyterians and others to be engaged in the fight against hunger in the United States and around the world. PHP seeks to alleviate hunger and to address the structural causes of poverty and hunger through direct food relief, development assistance, education and interpretation, influencing public policy, and lifestyle integrity. In addition to making grants, PHP implements educational and action-oriented programs including Enough for Everyone, Joining Hands Against Hunger, Just Trade, and the Food & Faith Initiative.

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Earth Ministry helps connect Christian faith with care and justice for all creation.

Equal Exchange, www.equalexchange.com
Learn about and order Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolate.

Food & Faith Initiative of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, www.pcusa.org/hunger/food
Learn about the connections between food and faith values; read stories about congregations helping to build local food economies. "Energy, Food and You: On the Path to Reconciliation," educational PowerPoints and other resources are available for download.

(Continued on next page . . .)

National Catholic Rural Life Conference,

www.ncrlc.com

An organization grounded in a spiritual tradition that brings together the Church, care of community, and care of creation. "Eating is a moral act."

Pesticide Action Network, www.panna.org

Information on farm worker safety, types and safety of various pesticides, and recent pesticide incidents.

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