

JUSTICE & PEACE

Global Food Crisis

Food crisis? There's a food crisis? Most of us live in a world where the people we meet on a daily basis have plenty, or perhaps too much, to eat. Recently, a college student observed that in order to prepare for Thanksgiving Day (in the United States) she had to go through her refrigerator and actually throw food out to make room for the upcoming feast.

However, about 15 percent of the world's population (roughly one in six people) is suffering from hunger. The international press has covered food riots in several countries in Africa, as well as in Haiti and Bangladesh. Food prices, especially for grains, are escalating out of control worldwide. According to Catholic Relief Services, the price of wheat has doubled in less than a year, while the price of a bushel of corn has increased by 75%. Rice, which is a staple food for about 3 billion people (equaling roughly half the population worldwide), tripled in cost in 2009. In some countries, prices for milk and meat have more than doubled.

What are some of the causes of this global food crisis? Several issues have converged to make the current crisis especially destructive for people living in developing countries:

- ◆ Adverse weather due to climate change is affecting crop harvests in Asia, Africa, South America, and yes, even in North America. Climate change contributes to a decrease in crops by causing a scarcity of natural resources-- in particular, water. In the past several years we have experienced more frequent extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, which affect crops.
- ◆ The booming middle class of China and India can afford resource consuming foods such as meat and dairy which utilize large amounts of land, water and grain to produce.
- ◆ The demand for biofuel derived from corn has increased. It is estimated that in 2010, biofuels will consume greater than 30 percent of the corn produced in the United States (Average from



several sources, estimates vary). This leaves less corn available as food for livestock and people.

- ◆ There have been cutbacks in funding of crop research and aid to developing countries, resulting in lower crop productivity and an increase in crops lost to disease or insect infestations.
- ◆ There exists a low agricultural productivity in contrast to the growth in population; the population growth rate is highest in many of the most insecure countries.

These factors indicate that we need to consider both immediate action to address humanitarian needs, as well as longer term action to increase agricultural productivity and ensure food security.



The first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger. Sadly, with the 2015 MDG target date fast approaching, the number of hungry people globally is actually increasing rather than decreasing.

Food security is not only about alleviating hunger; it is a complex and interrelated issue that affects peace, economic security, environmental stability, the empowerment of women and sustainable development. Catholic Relief Services reports that in countries most affected by the food crisis, families eat fewer meals or even skip days, and children stop going to school to save on fees to pay for food. Malnutrition in children is increasing worldwide, while pregnant and nursing women are among the hardest hit by lack of food.

The food crisis has affected those in developed countries as well. The most damaging impact is on the poorest people, who spend a far higher proportion of their income on food. Five years ago, economically poor households spent 40 to 50 percent of their incomes on food; now, they are finding it increasingly difficult to afford basic rations. Those who are struggling to pay for food will eat less or eat cheaper food with lower nutritional value.

Food is mentioned throughout our Judeo-Christian scriptures. In the Exodus journey, the Israelites experienced God's alternate food policy: gather as much as you need but only enough for the day. Do not hoard. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." The Kingdom of God is represented as a banquet where all are welcome.

The banquet tradition implies abundance; God intends abundance for all.

In the world today, don't we seem instead to have abundance for the few and scarcity for the many? Who is welcome at our table? Do all have access (not just to food, but also at the board room table where decisions are being made)? Food has become a market commodity. We need a market system for managing and distributing it. However, we also need to challenge the system. For example, productive land in the Third World is removed from food production in order to produce commercial flowers or to raise cheaper meat for the rich. Are we aware of the cost of our overconsumption of meat? In our economic crisis, are funds promised for development of agriculture in the Third World withdrawn in order to provide stimulus for First World economies?

Most of us have never seen the pain in the eyes of a parent who has lost a child to the effects of malnutrition or hunger. We have never been part of a community that has been devastated by a weather related disaster or has suffered because of food insecurity. So what can we do to fulfill our gospel mandate to feed the poor, give water to the thirsty? First, we must educate ourselves on the issues and actively support legislation that will alleviate suffering and allow all people to live with dignity. We must challenge the treatment of food and water as mere commodities. Finally, there are two websites which agree to donate food with a click of the mouse—freerice.com and hungersite.com.

– S MaryAnne Olekszyk (NA), S Maryann Agnes Mueller (NA)

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Second Special Assembly for Africa

“You are the light of the world.”

From October 4-25, 2009, fifteen years after the conclusion of the First Special Assembly for Africa, the Synod Fathers gathered in Rome once more to pray, reflect, discern and allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. The theme of the synod—reconciliation, justice and peace—touched on some of the most urgent problems facing Africa:

“Wherever we look, Africa yearns for reconciliation, justice and peace – from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Somalia, from the war-ravaged Sudan’s Darfur region to the combustible Niger-Delta region in Nigeria. The cry for reconciliation echoes from divided communities; the demand for justice rises from millions of refugees and Internally Displaced People, and the longing for peace flows in the tears of millions of victims of war and conflict in Africa. These collective cries and echoes from the continent set the framework within which to consider the theme of the synod.”

Father Orobator, SJ

From the very outset, the assembly was reminded that a Synod of Bishops cannot be understood as a special session of the United Nations for Africa, with its public declarations. Thus its theme, although of a social concern, would have to be undertaken from a faith perspective and the synod itself would have to show clear signs of being a Church-gathering in the power of the Holy Spirit.



In his address at the synod luncheon, the Holy Father Benedict XVI admitted that the Synod Fathers were aware of two temptations. First, “to politicize the theme, to speak less of pastoral work and more about politics, with the competence that is not ours.” The other danger was precisely to flee from the first temptation, “that of retreating into a purely spiritual world, into an abstract and beautiful but unrealistic world.”

The task of the synod was to deal with reality, to speak of what is and, at the same time, “to indicate a concrete but spiritual word.” The synod had also to make a choice between viewing Africa’s reality as a woe or a challenge. In fact, the report after the discussion (“Relatio post disceptationem”) was entitled: *The Setting of the Second Assembly: Africa’s Woes or Challenges?*

The interventions of the Synod Fathers clearly indicated the need to approach and to live the synodal theme in a Christ-centered manner. Christ is our reconciliation and our peace. Only by being reconciled with God in Christ Jesus, and through his grace (especially sacramental grace) with each other, can we become instruments of justice, peace and reconciliation in the world.

Thus the first and the most powerful appeal of the synod was the call to conversion, evangelization and living deeply and authentically the gift of our Christian vocation; to allow Christ to transform us, especially through the power of the Holy Eucharist, for as was said in the assembly, it is “the Good News of the Precious Blood of Christ, given for the redemption of the whole world which transforms the cup of suffering of the very many victims of bloodshed on the continent.” Promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation needs spirituality, not a strategy!

In this synod it was expressed many times that the Church-Family of God in Africa must be transformed from within; she must transform the continent, its islands and the world like “salt and light.” She envisages an apostolic mission, which her pastors and other pastoral workers have variously articulated in this assembly as:

1. Liberating the continent's people from fear of all sorts;
2. ensuring a conversion that is deep and permanent, and a solid formation of all kinds;
3. dialogue on all levels, including the environment;
4. advocacy roles for various social concerns and needs, especially the place of women in society and the education of children and youth;
5. migration and various forms of population movement which require pastoral care;
6. the challenging ministry of changing attitudes and mentalities, freeing them from effects of past colonialism, exploitation, etc;
7. positioning the continent and its people to resist the onslaught of globalization and the attendant

challenges of ethic, unjust global trade conditions, ethnocentrism, fundamentalisms, etc.

On October 25th, the Synod Fathers submitted 57 propositions to the Holy Father for the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation (to be titled "A New Pentecost") and presented the Final Message of the Synod which concluded with the following words of hope and encouragement:

"Dear brothers in the episcopate, dear sons and daughters of the Church-Family of God in Africa, all you men and women of goodwill in Africa and beyond, we share with you the strong conviction of this synod: that Africa is not helpless. Our destiny is still in our hands. All she is asking for is the space to breathe and thrive. Africa is already moving; and the Church is moving with her, offering her the light of the Gospel.

The waters may be turbulent. But with our gaze on Christ the Lord, we shall make it safely to the port of reconciliation, justice and peace."

A similar message was given by the Holy Father during the homily at the concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa:

"Courage! Get on your feet! In this way the Lord of life and hope speaks to the Church and the African people, at the end of these three weeks of synodal reflection."



Think OUTSIDE the Bottle

Water is a precious gift, so essential to our lives, our earth and all of creation. It is a basic human right for all of us. However, water for all people and creation is slowly coming to an end. Globally, 1.1 billion people currently lack access to enough clean drinking water and 6,000 children die every day from water related diseases.

This article focuses on the following Action Statement that came from a workshop on Franciscan Nonviolent Peacemaking that a number of sisters attended July 8-13, 2009 in Mt. Arlington, NJ, USA. We must raise awareness and further action on the violence and pollution that is happening to our health and the health of the earth because of bottled water. Thomas Berry, in his book *Dream of the Earth*, reiterates this disaster: "The present threat to both economics and religion is from a single source: the disruption of the natural world. If the water is polluted, it can neither be drunk nor be used for baptism. It is a source not of life, but of death."

An appalling water crisis exists in our world today. For years we have depended on tap water to fulfill our daily water needs. However, over the decades many of us have shied away from this water source due to ecological contamination and/or corrupt filtration systems in different parts of the world. Corporations stepped in immediately, promising a purer and healthier water product than tap water. The idea expanded, causing water to become a profit-driven commodity. Manufacturers marketed the perception that bottled water was a necessity that we cannot do without.



Today, one-fifth of the people in Canada and the United States drink bottled water. Smart marketing and misleading advertising by corporations have made us doubt the safety of our tap and our public water systems. The facts, however, tell a different story:

1. As the years go by, bottled water continues to extract a very heavy price on our environment as well as on humanity:
 - ◆ Carbon dioxide is released in the manufacturing of bottled water.
 - ◆ Waste management has become a large problem with our landfills growing to enormous sizes because of discarded water bottles.
 - ◆ The production and transportation of bottled water results in an increase of crude oil and greenhouse gases.
 - ◆ Bottled water companies produce a product that is far less regulated than tap water.
 - ◆ The city of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, tests its water quality 125,000 times a year. Based on the comments by a Canadian Food & Drug Agency, bottling plants are government inspected, on average, once every three years (Polaris Institute).
 - ◆ In addition, the city of Toronto, Canada, regulates its tap water to meet standards for 160 contaminants: bottled water has standards for less than a half dozen; arsenic and mercury are not among them. Moreover, 650 bacterial tests occur each month

*"The afflicted and needy are seeking water,
but there is none, and their tongue is parched
with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them
Myself, as the God of Israel I will not
forsake them."* Isaiah 41:17

while there is little evidence regarding bacterial tests for bottled water.

2. The television program *20/20* pointed out that many of the bottled water brands are not sourced from the advertised exotic places, such as the Swiss Alps or glacier areas, but from local cities around North America. Some are even processed from city tap water! (Have you seen the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*?!!)
3. Oral hygiene experts say fluoridated water can reduce decay. Most tap water is fluoridated, whereas bottled water is often not, causing a major problem for children in North America.
4. David Suzuki, an environmentalist, said there is uncertainty over the long-term health effects of the chemical composition created by the use of plastic for bottled water.
5. Burning plastic causes toxic gases to be released. Reusing plastic bottles further compromises the quality of the water. More and more phthalate leaches its way into the water as the bottle gets older (All About Water.org).
6. A paper written by William Shontyk of the University of Heidelberg discusses the concentration of certain chemicals, such as antimony, found in plastic bottles. Antimony is a white metallic element that, even in small doses, can cause nausea, dizziness and depression. It is chemically similar to lead and it increases the longer water sits

in a plastic bottle (The Canadian Press 2006-Plastic Bottles Leach Chemicals into Water: Study).

7. Theodore Widlanski, a chemistry professor at Indiana University, said his research has found a potential mechanism linking Bisphenol-A, a chemical



found in plastic water bottles, to early-onset puberty, declining sperm counts and the huge increase in breast and prostate cancer. (Study was published in the Aug. 28, 2007 issue of "Chemistry & Biology"). There was a billion dollar class action suit filed in Los Angeles against five leading manufacturers of baby bottles containing this internal pollutant, Bisphenol-A (Green Report: "It's So Not Cool." Macleans, Anne Kingston, May 14, 2007).

8. The internal pollution will increase as more people are tested for chemical contamination. There is evidence that the bottle containers are leaching toxins into the beverages we are drinking. There is "empirical evidence that these plastic ingredients are now in the bodies of every citizen" (Environmental Protection Agency). So much for the illusion that bottled water is healthier than tap water!
9. A great criticism lies with the polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottle. The production of one kilogram of PET requires 17.5 kilograms of water. The water required to create one plastic water bottle is significantly more than the amount that the bottle will actually contain.

What can we do as a Congregation?

1. Switch from bottled water to tap water, or in areas where tap water is not safe, use an alternative filtration system. For example, CBC stated that Vancouver, British Columbia is considering a stainless steel tank on wheels, known as a water wagon, as an alternative to bottled water.
2. Use non-plastic, reusable containers, preferably metal. (The Our Lady of Hope Province water containers!)
3. Advocate your local legislators against the "privatization of water."
4. Support local supplies of water.

– SM Jacqueline Keefe (NA)

Haiti Shocked by Devastating Earthquake



From the moment a magnitude 7.0 earthquake rocked Haiti on Tuesday, January 12, 2010, the world was mesmerized by the scenes on the television, internet, and in newspapers of horror and heartbreak from this devastated country and its people. Destructive aftershocks continue to hit the country, adding to the anxiety and trauma of those who survived. Over 100,000 people are presumed dead or missing; because of the need to bury many of the dead in mass graves, the actual number killed will probably never be known. Adding to the tragedy and the heartbreak of the survivors is the sad reality that many will never know the final resting place of their loved ones.

Even prior to the earthquake, Haiti was one of poorest countries in the world, and the least developed country in the Western Hemisphere. According to the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI), which assesses the quality of human life based on life expectancy, literacy rate of adults, and standard of living, Haiti ranks 146 out of the 177 countries surveyed. The average per capita income is \$2.00 a day. Due to this debilitating poverty, approximately 225,000 children are forced to work as unpaid servants in city households. Ninety percent of children in Haiti suffer from waterborne and intestinal parasitic diseases.

This is not the first time Haiti has been hit by natural disasters in recent years. In 2008, the country was hit by

four tropical storms which resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people and devastated the country's infrastructure and agricultural sector. Moreover, most of the country's forests have been cut down for fuel, which has resulted in poor soil and erosion. Erosion has led to unprecedented flooding in this century; in 2004 alone, over 3,000 people died in floods in the southern part of Haiti.

*Give aid to all without exception;
your vocation obliges you
not to exclude anyone,
for everybody is our neighbor.*

– Blessed Mary Angela

Many of our Felician convents and ministries have already donated money to aid the first responders in Haiti. In the name of the Congregation, Sister Mary Barbara Ann Bosch donated \$5,000 to the Haiti relief efforts in the days immediately following the tragedy. As relief groups assess and identify the long term needs of this devastated nation and brokenhearted people, we are committed to continue praying, to contribute, and to take action as we are able to in order to assist in the recovery of Haiti and its people.

Haiti (continued)



If you wish to make a personal monetary donation:

In the UNITED STATES send to:

Catholic Relief Services
P.O. Box 17090
Baltimore, MD 21203-7090

In CANADA send to:

Haiti Emergency Fund
Development and Peace
1425 ReneLevesques Blvd W. 3rd Floor
Montreal QC H3G 1T7



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Members of the Felician Franciscan Sisters
Congregational Central Office for Justice & Peace:

SM Inga Borko, Congregational Coordinator (RO)
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SM Honorata Grzeszczuk (WA)

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Abbreviations

Rome, Italy – RO
Kraków, Poland – KR
North America – NA
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Warszawa, Poland – WA
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