



Presbyterian Hunger Program

BIBLE STUDY

This one-session Bible study will give participants the opportunity to reflect on the biblical call to work as partners with people who have been made poor in order to address hunger and its causes.

What you will need

- Copies of the Bible (NRSV)
- A blank business or index card and pens for each participant
- A way to easily access RELUFA's "Food Sovereignty" video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrvV8EVwGzU and project it so that all can see and hear.

Suggestions for Leaders

- Your instructions are in italicized print throughout the Bible study.
- Invite different participants to read aloud the paragraphs in each section as the group listens.
- Depending on the size of your group and the time allotted, you may wish to divide the group into two small groups which each take one "The Word Alive in our World" sections and then reconvene as a large group to share their reflections from the small groups. There are time suggestions for each section, but you should feel free to adjust the material to meet the needs and interests of the group.
- You may wish to use the "Beyond the Video" information (available at the end of this study) to stimulate further conversation on the communal grain banks in Cameroon.
- As both example stories come from the Joining Hands ministry of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, you may wish to provide additional information on this ministry. Visit www.pcusa.org/joininghands. Participants can get an overview of the Presbyterian Hunger Program's work at www.pcusa.org/hunger.
- Try to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to contribute to the conversation.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Welcome participants to this one session Bible study on hunger and how the Presbyterian Church is working to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes. Through the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, ministries such as the ones described in this study are making a difference here in the US and around the world. Additional information about the Presbyterian Hunger Program, its ministries and resources is available at www.pcusa.org/hunger.



One in ten households in the United States experience hunger or the risk of hunger. Further impacted by economic crises, individuals and families in our own neighborhoods and around the world are struggling to survive in the face of soaring food prices and declining incomes.

As we prepare to pray, let's pause to remember the world in which we live. The United Nations estimates that currently there are 945 million people in our world who are undernourished because of prolonged low levels of food intake.¹ Every day almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes.² Here in the U.S., 50.2 million people—including 17.2 million children—live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger.³ This represents more than one in ten households. Further impacted by food and economic crises, families in our own neighborhoods and around the world are struggling to survive in the face of soaring food prices and declining incomes.

Trusting God's faithfulness, let us join in prayer using the words of Psalm 146. *Participants may take a verse each, or one person may read one verse and everyone respond with the next.*

Hunger, Vulnerability and Slavery in Genesis

Suggested time: 8 minutes

In the ancient world people also struggled against hunger. The Bible has many stories of people facing hunger or fleeing famine. Most of us are familiar with the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers and rose to become a powerful advisor to the Pharaoh and governor over Egypt. The Pharaoh had a dream which Joseph interpreted as a coming famine. Joseph instructed that the Pharaoh should “gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities...that food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt...” (Gen. 41:35-37). When the famine occurred, all the people of Egypt and people from surrounding nations came to Joseph for food. Because of the grain banks Joseph had established, there was enough food and Joseph was even reunited with his family.

This is where we usually stop reading. But the story doesn't end here. Do you know what happened next? Let's listen for God's word to us as it comes to us from the book of Genesis.

Read Genesis 47:13-26

For Discussion:

- Had you ever heard about or read this part of the Joseph story before?
- What surprises or unsettles you most about this story?
- How does Joseph enslave the people to Pharaoh?
- What warnings might this Biblical story hold for our efforts to prevent or address hunger?

The Word Alive in our World: Creating Food Sovereignty in Cameroon

Suggested time 17 minutes (including the 13-minute video)

Grain banks are not only an ancient way of ensuring food during lean years they continue to be a source of sustenance today. But as in the day of Joseph, whether they sustain or enslave depends on who is in control of the grain banks.

This brief video from our partner RELUFA in Cameroon describes how farmers from 34 villages formed communal grain banks to ensure community control of their food production and well-being for their families.

Show the 13-minute video available at www.pcusa.org/resource/hunger-program-bible-study.

You may wish to augment discussion of the video with the “Beyond the Video” information at the end of this study, which includes responses to these questions from Christi Boyd, who was a PC(USA) mission co-worker with RELUFA.

For Discussion:

- According to the video, what problems are facing northern Cameroonian farming families?
- What causes these problems?
- How did the community/partners determine an appropriate solution? What did they do?
- What was the church’s role?
- Who controls the grain banks?
- What have the grain banks ensured?
- How do these grain banks differ from the grain banks Joseph set up for Pharaoh in Genesis?



Christi Boyd



Cameroon has faced severe hunger every year for decades. In times of scarcity, villagers had nothing left in their traditional granaries and prices skyrocketed in the markets. In order to feed their families, they had to sell their jewelry, cattle, and other belongings. With the new system of doing grain banks, more than 25,000 people in the area have food security during all seasons of the year. When parents sell their belongings now, it is no longer to purchase food, but to send their children to school.

The Word Alive in Our World: Striving for Food Sovereignty in Haiti

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Current food production in Haiti is not enough to satisfy the needs of its people. Most of its hillsides are depleted of productive soil. Except for what is known as government land, all land in Haiti belongs to the people and is farmed on, even with the knowledge that yields will be poor. Whatever harvest is obtained helps a rural family to survive.

The catastrophic earthquake in January of 2010 killed and displaced thousands of people even as it devastated the land. Small farmers and the many displaced people who depended on them for food were desperate. Monsanto, the US-based agricultural and bio-tech corporation, offered the Haitian government free GM seeds through USAID, the government agency providing U.S. economic and humanitarian assistance. GM or genetically modified, means that the seeds may have been genetically altered, with genetic material from other organisms incorporated into the plants. The Haitian government rejected this offer so Monsanto and USAID then offered free hybrid seeds which the government agreed to distribute. Hybrid seed is produced by artificially cross-pollinating plants to improve certain traits in the plant.

The PC(USA)'s long-term mission partner in Haiti, The Mouvement Peyizan Papay (MPP), was gravely concerned. MPP is Haiti's largest grassroots movement and is composed of small farmers. Because hybrid seeds only reliably produce crops for one season, small farmers would be required to purchase further seeds from Monsanto for subsequent plantings. Further, because corn is wind-pollinated, the donated corn varieties were a potential threat to all of the native Haitian varieties. Farmers with fields of native corn varieties would not be able to harvest pure seeds, if any of their neighbors planted the seeds donated by Monsanto. Finally, the seeds themselves were designed to be planted by machines and were coated in a chemical that is dangerous if handled. Haiti's farmers plant by hand.

On International Earth Day in 2010 FONDAMA members joined 10,000 other Haitians as they marched from Papay to Hinche in protest of the seed donation. They argue that there are plenty of locally produced seeds available and that farmers just lack the means to buy them. Only a few months later, USAID's own report "Seed Security Assessment in Haiti" confirms what farmers have been claiming: "there are no short-term emergency seed security problems, aside from those important ones linked to household finances."

To stimulate agricultural production of traditional Haitian staple foods such as beans and corn, FONDAMA purchased locally produced native seeds and tools and distributed those to peasants throughout rural Haiti. In the long run, FONDAMA hopes its food sovereignty strategy will this way encourage the recovery and further development of the rural economy of Haiti.



Eileen Schuhmann



Pix Mahler

For Discussion:

- What parallels and differences do you see between the offer of help from Monsanto/USAID following the earthquake and that of Joseph to the people in Genesis?
- Imagine you are a small farmer. Your family survives on what you grow. What would you do if the Haitian government offered you hybrid seeds to plant?
- Imagine you are the Presbyterian Hunger Program. What would you do first in this situation?

The Presbyterian Hunger Program asked the MPP how the PC(USA) could help. MPP explained it was organizing over ten thousand small farmers to march to a central location and publicly burn a heap of these hybrid seeds. The march and peaceful action were ways to educate small farmers about the dangers of the hybrid seeds and to express their displeasure to the Haitian government. They asked the PC(USA) to send a representative to accompany them. The leader of MPP then hoped to come to New York and Washington to speak with officials at the UN and USAID.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program, in consultation with our PC(USA) mission co-workers and US congregations involved in the Joining Hands Network, then sent a representative to accompany the Haitian small farmers and then facilitated appointments with US and Haitian officials in the States so that our partners could directly communicate their concerns.

Following these efforts, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Presbyterian Hunger Program sent funds to buy over 150 tons of indigenous corn, bean, peanut, rice and vegetable seeds that reproduce. This meant 10,000 families received 30 pounds of seeds to plant. Those initial seeds helped over 60,000 children eat. Then farmers returned seeds from their harvest to local farmers' organizations working with the church on this project, who distributed the seeds to other families to increase production. Presbyterians working in local, sustainable food may want to visit and learn from Haitian farmers how, with investment in rural communities, Haitians can feed Haitians so they are no longer vulnerable to world food price increases. The Presbyterian Hunger Program is now raising funds to help another 10,000 families get started!⁴

For Discussion:

- Who spoke for the Haitian small farmers in the visits to the UN and USAID?
- How does accompanying differ from advocacy? How is it similar?
- How do you think God "executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry" (Psalm 146)?

The Opening Question

Suggested time: 8 minutes

When we hear or see people suffering, we want to help. The urge to do is tremendous. We want to relieve pain to change circumstances, to make it stop. In a world filled with talk, it is important to live our faith, not merely talk about it. And yet, if we do not pause to converse with people we intend to help, how will we know best how to be helpful? Let's listen now for the word of God as it comes to us from the Gospel of Mark.

Read Mark 10:46-52

For Discussion:

- What does Bartimaeus do? What is he asking for?
- What does the crowd do?
- What do the disciples do?
- What does Jesus do?
- Can you think of an example when someone who was poor or hungry was silenced either by an individual or group ignoring them or helping them without asking?

We notice that Jesus doesn't just rush in and heal Bartimaeus, even when he is crying out "have mercy on me!" Instead Jesus asks Bartimaeus himself, not his disciples, not the crowd around him, but Bartimaeus himself, "What do you want me to do for you?" The question that Jesus poses is provocative. For when we ask this of people we wish to assist it has the power to begin an illuminating conversation.

Haitian small farmers faced a dilemma: they needed seeds but the seeds offered would make them dependent on a foreign corporation and were a danger to their health. The Presbyterian Hunger Program didn't assume it knew what would be the best next step for the farmers. Instead it asked MPP, our long term partners, "how can we help?" The Presbyterians listened to the answer and used the various connections and resources the church had to ensure that Haitian farmers were heard by political decision-makers and that Presbyterians could concretely assist in direct, healthy, sustainable food relief by providing good seeds.

Consider the church and the small farmers in Cameroon. The church did not assume it knew what the problem was or how to solve it. They realized that people on the ground best knew the causes of their problems and would best be positioned to determine what would work effectively. During the conversation between community representatives, non-profits and church groups you may recall that developing communal grain banks was but one of a number of options discussed.



Farmers in Cameroon struggle with losing land to large international fruit companies. However, there is hope for these farmers who are working with Christi Boyd and Joining Hands, a ministry of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Christi, whose husband, Jeff, is a PC(USA) regional liaison, is helping the network develop a fair trade dried fruit project that promises to greatly improve the livelihood of local farmers. Through Fair Trade, the producer receives 20–45 percent of the retail price compared with only one percent in conventional trade.

Asking “what do you want me to do for you” assures that poor or hungry communities set the direction and maintain control of any assistance. After all it is only poor communities, like the farmers in Cameroon and Haiti, who are in a position to say whether an effort has been effective. It is their children who are dying; their livelihoods that are compromised.

Jesus showed a profound respect for Bartimeaus when he asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” And it is a good opening question for us as well.

Ask for any closing thoughts from members of the group before drawing the session to a close.

Opening Ourselves to God’s Leading

Suggested time: 5 minutes

To pray means to want something enough to speak it before God. It is an act of openness. It is also an act of decision. Those who pray do not resign themselves to the way the world is but, in the name of God, seek to become part of changing it, together, into the world that God desires.

In the next few minutes, you are invited to reflect on how God is calling you to make a difference. Allow your body, heart, soul and mind to freely roam at God’s leading. And see if you can discern the one next step you will take to address hunger and its causes. It need not be grand; it is a step. But like a seed it will have within it the potential for growth into something more. When you have identified that next step, write it on the card provided. Then place that card in your wallet where you will be reminded of your commitment.

To conclude the time and draw people’s attention begin singing “Guide My Feet” or “Spirit of the Living God” or a verse or two of another appropriate hymn until all have concluded writing and are singing. You may wish to invite participants to share their commitments with one another.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer together

FOOTNOTES

1. The State of Food Insecurity in the World, FAO, 2010, <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/> (accessed on 4/8/11).
2. Bread for the World, Global Hunger webpage, <http://www.bread.org/hunger/global/> (accessed on 4/8/11).
3. http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/stats_graphs.htm#how_many, (accessed on 5/9/11).
4. The FONDAMA network, unites the MPP, Service Chretien d’Haiti (a partner of Church World Service), and the Presbyterian Hunger Program’s Joining Hands ministry in working to “restore the Haitian environment toward food sovereignty and sustainability.” FONDAMA carries forward the church’s partnership work with our Haitian sisters and brothers on this indigenous seeds project and other efforts. To contribute funds to the indigenous seeds project in Haiti which is purchasing more seeds and building seed silos, visit www.pcusa.org/hunger and give online to the H000014 Haiti.

Written and compiled [in 2011] by the Rev. Noelle Damico, PHP staff, with contributions from RELUFA (PHP partner in Cameroon), MPP (PHP partner in Haiti), Mission Co-workers Christi Boyd and Mark Hare, as well as other PHP staff. May our reflections and actions contribute to God's glorious vision for how we treat one another in a world that grows enough food for all of God's children.



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Behind the Video:

Going Deeper into the story of RELUFA and Communal Grain Banks

Christi Boyd, PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker with RELUFA in Cameroon, provides information that steps us behind what is depicted and described in the video to prompt further reflection and discussion.



Cameroonian women and children benefitting from the grain banks. Photo by Christi Boyd, RELUFA

What problems are facing northern Cameroonian farming families?

They are trapped by poverty and suffer from chronic hunger.

What caused this problem?

- The climate doesn't allow for abundant food production.
- Poverty makes farmers sell part of their already marginal food production to merchants.
- Merchants hoard up on food and create shortages on the market.
- Merchants use market mechanisms to speculate on food, driving food prices up.
- Their stocks depleted, families sell the little assets they have or take loans from usurers to whom they become dependent.
- Altogether the families become poorer and/or go hungry.

How did the community/partners determine an appropriate solution? What did they do?

- People from the affected area served as resources and guides to better understand the root of the problems and other issues at stake.
- Other specialist programs were identified, studied and visited for their approaches and outcomes to determine their strengths and weaknesses.
- A "think tank" of personal resources from the field analyzed the outcome of the study and designed an approach that would take on the problem by its roots, effectively produce long term results and ensure the greatest stewardship of limited resources.
- Altogether they came up with a strategy that would unlock the poverty trap, break dependency from those exploiting their poverty, and render back the power of self-governance to the very people who are suffering the consequences of the exploitation.

What was the church's role?

Speaking about the PCUSA:

- To recognize that problems and solutions are best identified by personal resources from the locality.
- To enable partners to provide a platform for study, analysis and planning by personal resources.
- To equip partners and communities with the personal and financial resources needed to realize the needed response.

- It may not be clear from the content of the video, but to equip and assign mission workers as liaisons with partners AND the communities, to learn and to interpret back to U.S. churches about the issues and communities at stake.
- Altogether the role of the church becomes then also to better equip our Presbyterians constituency with insights and understanding.
- Constituting the Church at large, Presbyterians together can become, this way, better stewards for a more effective witnesses of God's love and concern for the hungry, poor and oppressed be it through financial support or as advocates.

Who controls the grain banks?

- The members of the grain bank cooperative, i.e. the community, controls the grain bank by electing from among themselves a management committee that will make decisions on behalf of the community itself.

What have the grain banks ensured?

- accessibility to food for all
- self-governance of food supplies by the community
- restoration of self-worth to the community members and the community at large

Besides alleviating hunger, what other impact do the community grain banks have for the families involved?

- Lower child mortality rate
- Resources (livestock, money) are spared and serve other needs, resulting in:
 - o More children in school, with better school supplies, creating higher literacy levels
 - o Greater health in the families
- Less migration of the male population during the lean season, resulting in:
 - o Greater family cohesion
 - o Male population attend to their own fields rather than work as laborers in the fields
 - o Better food production for the family
 - o Less risks of STD's and HIV/AIDS transmission

How do these grain banks differ from the grain banks Joseph set up for Pharaoh in Genesis?

- Joseph's grain banks were set up centralized in cities, while with the community grain banks the stocks remain in the village itself. This gives a great difference in accessibility, the efforts and costs involved in obtaining the food. Also, possible loopholes for misuse by influential people who might buy up food and resell at a higher price.
- With Joseph's grain banks, a single ruler or manager makes decisions. Decision making in the community grain banks lies with the community. This democratic model ensures fairer distribution for the sake of the most vulnerable in the community.
- Policies and decision-making processes in Joseph's model rips people from their feeling of self-worth and instills a sense of powerlessness, while in the community grain bank model people feel dignified and empowered.
- Joseph's grain banks impoverish the hungry, makes them dependent and eventually enslaves them. The community grain banks allow hungry families to maintain and increase their resources and they keep their independence such that they can work their own field and not become laborers or slaves to work for other people.
- Joseph's grain bank model only depletes the granaries. The community grain bank model replenishes the village granary every year.