

IT'S TIME TO SHARE...

Background

For over 70 years, the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS)—known as Week of Compassion (WoC) in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ—has been helping American and Canadian Christians bring God's hope and healing to hurting people both in the U.S. and around the world. Since the closing years of World War II, OGHS has raised funds to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, and bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by natural disaster.

Each year, the Offering is gathered by several denominations under a single theme developed by the ecumenical OGHS Committee. In addition to posters, brochures, and interactive media, the Committee commissions a Planning and Resource Guide that contains a variety of resources and activities for pastors and church leaders to use as they promote and receive the offering.

“So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all.”

Galatians 6:9-10 [The Message]

Theme Development and Scriptural Exegesis

“Give a person a fish and you feed them for one day. Teach a person to fish and you feed them forever.”¹ The meaning of this phrase seems clear—take care of a need now or empower others to do for themselves.

While the Apostle Paul does not talk about fishing or hunger or food insecurity in his letter to the Galatians, he does talk about how Christians are to live: generously helping and caring for others.

In Paul's day, more than half of the population lived at or below subsistence level, barely able to make ends meet. Many died prematurely due to malnutrition and ailments that resulted from lack of healthy and plentiful food. Most people—adults and children—experienced food insecurity.

Those who had money and power contributed to building roads and water systems, and hosted lavish banquets for their colleagues. Their public displays of generosity were often self-serving, though: the bigger and more public their acts of giving, the more they were esteemed in the eyes of those they wanted to impress. Acts of charity, on any scale to make a difference for those in need, were few and far between. Government safety nets were non-existent.

Paul understands that God raises the bar on community life—the care of the poor and vulnerable; the use of resources to benefit those who really need help; loving one’s neighbor; caring for the environment; and advocating social justice so all can live and thrive. For Paul, communities grounded in Jesus’ sacrificial life and death are to practice radical hospitality and generosity: making a place for all *and* using financial resources to help those who really need help. Community life means meeting immediate needs (giving fish) and working for long term progress (teaching to fish). Food security requires both.

Paul also understands that radical hospitality and generosity are tiring. The needs of people keep growing. The call to help and to share is insistent, urgent, unending, exhausting. Paul reminds the Galatians that their communities are different; they are shaped and sustained by God’s Spirit. Their loving acts are responses to God’s own loving acts towards each of them. God keeps on giving, and so should they.

Paul compares sacrificial, communal love to harvesting. So much is needed for a bountiful harvest, and anything can disrupt its outcome. Embedded in harvesting is fatigue, uncertainty, and anxiety—yet, the planting, pruning, and tending are done as one waits, in hope, for the outcome.

Paul encourages the Galatians, and us, to look at the bigger picture. Guided and strengthened by God’s Spirit, we are called to work, plant, grow, and produce until the final harvest day—the harvest that marks the fulfillment of God’s Reign, already started and yet to be completed in God’s own time.

Perhaps, we grow weary because we do not know if our efforts truly make a difference. Will our dollars improve the devastating effects of climate change? Will our contributions feed all the hungry people of the world? How can we know if our gifts are worth it?

The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering answers these questions. Your gifts help organizations confront food insecurity and hunger. OGHS partners with others to provide immediate aid to those affected by disasters, poverty, or fleeing conflict—providing food, water, shelter, and companionship during times



“Take a Closer Look”

In rural Honduras, your gifts to OGHS enable Church World Services and partners to form CASM² that has provided eco-stoves to Esmerelda Robles and 58 families. They can prepare meals without increasing environmental pollution. Eco-stoves require less firewood, produce less smoke and soot, and are more efficient. “Now we don’t need as much firewood to cook, unlike the stove we had before. And it is very helpful for our lungs that there is no smoke,” Esmerelda says. Today, she uses less firewood, cooks faster, and saves time preparing meals in her kitchen.

Your contributions also provide Esmerelda and her neighbors with training on planting crops, producing fertilizers, and implementing irrigation techniques. They receive seeds and now produce most of the food that families eat. In addition to feeding her family, Esmerelda sells her produce or exchanges it with neighbors. Your dollars empower families like Esmerelda’s to thrive in ways unimaginable before. Her community is more food secure and healthier, because of your generosity.

of distress. Your dollars support soup kitchens and food pantries. OGHS shows up when people are in crisis. This offering provides “fish” when needed most.

In addition, your financial gifts enable the building (and rebuilding) of structures and processes that make a difference for the future, providing education and helping hands for long-term improvements.

OGHS gifts allow families to plant crops, produce fertilizers and receive the physical seeds they need for planting. Contributions to OGHS allow women and men to learn practices of irrigation and sustainable farming techniques. OGHS enables partners to teach about food and nutrition, hygiene, waste management and environmental protection.

OGHS’s programs for food security range from sponsoring gardens that supply food pantries in Indiana to crop diversification in Honduras and Nicaragua to

Food is life. Hunger is the denial of life. Fighting hunger is an affirmation of life.

renewable energy in Bosnia to irrigation techniques in Indonesia. Your dollars enable OGHS partners “to teach sisters and brothers how to fish”—here at home and overseas.

We cannot physically be in all the places that OGHS serves or even see all the results with our own eyes, but through your generous offerings and special gifts, you help promote the loving community that Paul advocates.

others. We cannot grow weary or quit—lives are at stake. God’s Spirit energizes and re-energizes us when we get tired. God helps us to help others.

Food is life. Hunger is the denial of life. Fighting hunger is an affirmation of life.

The need has never been greater. Let us continue this good work. Let us stay energized. Let us give generously. The opportunity is now. It’s time to share.

Scripture Commentary and Sermon Starter: It’s time to share...

Carpe diem! Often translated “seize the day,” the phrase has a range of meanings: life is short, create new experiences now; swallow that fear and just do whatever strikes your fancy; stop wasting time and have that adventure; don’t squander time and energy on the small stuff; grab the gusto; be all you can be; take the trip; buy the shoes; eat the chocolate cake. Time is of the essence—do it now!

Roman poet Horace used the phrase in his *Odes*, written over 2,000 years ago. We suppose his intention was to spur people to live their lives fully—in all the ways that hold meaning for them. Perhaps, he wanted people to know that there are experiences that enrich our lives that we might miss if we’re not paying attention. We suppose...but we don’t know, for sure.

In its original language, *carpe diem* is not quite “seize the day.” Latin scholar Maria S. Marsilio states that *carpe diem* is “a horticultural metaphor that, particularly seen in the context of Horace’s poem, is more accurately translated as ‘plucking the day,’ evoking the plucking and gathering of ripening fruits or flowers, enjoying a moment that is rooted in the sensory experience of nature.”³

Paul speaks of reaping, sowing, and harvesting to the Galatian churches. He encourages them to do the right things to extend hospitality and generosity to the community. Paul envisions church communities of men and women from every

**YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES
ALL THE DIFFERENCE.**

Dominggus Liunokas, of West Timor, is the leader of one of five groups participating in the Timor Zero Hunger program. Before the program, farmers could only harvest part of the year because there wasn’t enough water during the dry season. Since joining the program, Dominggus and others have been learning how to make organic liquid fertilizer and how to ward off pests and plant diseases. Group members built a cistern and installed a pipe to bring more water from a spring directly to their group’s land. They

also have built a drip irrigation system. “The Timor Zero Hunger program has been a life changing experience for members,” says Dominggus. “We were able to diversify...Over the past two years we have been able to harvest much more and eat vegetables every day. Once or twice in a week we sell our crops in the local market in the district capital. This program has changed the life of all our members.” This program and its components are made possible because of your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing.

Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.
— Luke 3:11



OGHS is YOUR reach into the world; working in partnership with people we will never meet, yet to whom we are connected. Your contributions are transforming lives for generations to come and are part of the harvest into which Paul invites us. Your gifts bring the Reign/Kindom of God closer to us all.

We *can* make a difference.
We *do* make a difference.
Your generosity makes all the difference in the world.

There is power in doing good and changing the lives of

The suggested Sunday for the OGHS Offering is March 19, 2023.

walk of life, embraced as siblings and cared for as if each were caring for themselves. Their response to God's love and care for them is to love and care for others by doing the works of Jesus—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, and working for justice.

Paul's image of the harvest reminds us that we live in a world in which hunger is widespread and can be brought on by disasters, poverty, or fleeing conflict. Food sustains life. Responding to hunger is an affirmation of life. One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is responding to hunger issues, no matter the cause, both locally and globally.

The OGHS offering supports partnerships and programs that creatively promote food security. One such partnership is with Church Community Services (CCS) in Elkhart, IN. CCS is a faith-based agency that helps people of Elkhart County weather life's storms and build more secure futures through emergency assistance and intensive job and life-skills training. Three of their programs include: a food pantry; *Seed to Feed* community gardening program; and *Soup for Success*, a social enterprise providing hands-on job experience and support for participants.

As you prepare to preach in preparation for lifting the OGHS offering, consider these questions: Is there a sense of urgency in your congregation to respond to sisters and brothers in need? For whom is food insecurity an issue in your congregation and your community? How is your congregation and community responding to the needs of those who are hungry? How does your congregation advocate for those who experience food insecurity? What are some positive

YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

Maribel Espinoza Bermudez is a member of one of 292 families in the Carazo region participating in a holistic food security program. Before joining the program, Maribel's harvest was limited to corn and occasionally beans; she received fruit plants and seeds through the program. Now, Maribel has a diversified rotation of crops, improving her family's nutrition and food security. "May the Lord

increase the blessings on each of the brothers and sisters and their families who dedicate resources to our support, we also tell them those good things come from above and hands that give, never they will come back empty," Maribel says. This program and its components are made possible because of your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing.

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stories you can share about your congregation's and community's work to alleviate hunger? How can volunteers stay motivated as the need for food security increases?

In Galatians 6, Paul urges the churches to take every opportunity or time to do the right thing. The word translated "time" is the Greek *kairos*. *Kairos* is not simply chronological time; it is a decisive and appointed moment and season to do God's work. Whenever we have an opportunity, we can work together—for the good of all, one community at a time,

"Take a Closer Look"

Elkhart, IN's Church Community Services (CCS) was created by a caring group of area churches to serve the immediate needs of their neighbors with food and financial challenges. Today, that mission continues along with an expanding mission of helping families break the cycle of poverty through intensive training and counseling.

CCS sponsors a food pantry for individuals and families living below the poverty level. It serves an average of 1,400 families a month, which is approximately 5,000 people.

Its Seed to Feed program provides homegrown solutions to local hunger by sponsoring gardens throughout the county that are run by churches, motivated individuals, and numerous community organizations. The gardens provide fresh produce year-round for the food pantry—over 138,314 pounds of fresh produce.

Its Soup of Success program is a social enterprise for women that produces dried food mixes, candles, and mittens while participants gain hands-on job experience and support as they move towards self-sufficiency. This is a creative example of a life-changing program.

CCS is at "ground-zero" in the fight against hunger and poverty.

planting seeds of faith, hope, and love to feed a hungry world.

In the spirit of *carpe diem*, let us do what we can, while we can, with all that we have—it is the right thing to do to ensure a bountiful harvest for all of God's children.

Seize, pluck, harvest the day. It's time to share so that no one goes hungry. There is enough for all when we share. The time to share is now.

Carpe diem, indeed, and in deed!