



Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

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I recently read a social media meme that stated: Imagine a faith so empty that you think offering prayer in schools is following Jesus, but offering free lunch to children in need is not.

Mere hours ahead of a critical midnight deadline when funding for federal agencies was set to run out, President Joe Biden signed into law the stopgap bill to avert a government shutdown. The Senate passed the measure Saturday evening after the House abruptly reversed course earlier in the day and passed a bipartisan bill to temporarily extend government funding until mid-November after days of uncertainty over whether a shutdown could be averted.

Scripture records, in the sixth chapter of the Gospel Matthew, Jesus' model for prayer shared with the early disciples. The first petition of that prayer reads: "give us this day our daily bread." The Greek word *artos*, translated as bread in this text, undoubtedly denotes not only food but everything necessary to sustain life. The communal nature of the prayer suggests these petitions are for the benefit of everyone and not a selective few.

With the threat of a government shutdown still looming, currently proposed budget cuts by House Republicans would translate to a 30% reduction in resources and services for the most vulnerable among us. If adopted, the cuts in the House appropriations bills would:

- cause 3.2 million women, infants, and children to lose vital nutrition assistance through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
- decrease Title I funding by 80%, impacting 26 million students in schools that teach low-income students by forcing a reduction of up to 226,000 teachers, aides or other key staff.

- eliminate tens of thousands of Head Start slots for preschoolers who would lose access to high-quality preschool—undermining their education, leaving 290,000 children ill-prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn, and making it more difficult for parents to join the workforce.
- eliminate funding for Housing Choice Vouchers for 20,000 households, including approximately 6,000 households headed by seniors.
- cut the HOME Investment Partnerships Program by 70%, resulting in 20,000 fewer affordable homes being constructed, rehabbed, or purchased in communities across the country.
- slash critical job training and work development programs, resulting in half a million fewer people receiving job training and employments services.
- rescind more than \$564 million in funding from programs that mitigate housing-related risks of lead poisoning and other illnesses and hazards to lower income families, especially children, resulting in 55,000 fewer homes safe of hazards and adversely impacting approximately 78,000 children.

The jockeying for power by political parties should not be the primary concern for people of Faith. Our ultimate concern is the provision of daily bread for everyone. Such draconian laws severely restrict our collective ability to care for others. They make it more difficult to treat people's needs as holy as Dr. Obery Hendricks contends in his book, *The Politics of Jesus*.

For people of Faith, this is not a matter of politics but rather a matter of principles.

In her book, *Always with Us: What Jesus Really Said about the Poor*, public theologian, author, and activist Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis offers a strong critique of malformed theologies of the poor. She suggests Jesus' declaration that "the poor will be with you always" is not a declaration of the inevitability of economic inequity, but rather an indictment of social greed and depravity.

The poor need not be with us always.

Poverty is a systemic sin resulting from unjust policies enacted at the expense of the most vulnerable among us. Poverty is not inevitable, because we hold the power to enact just laws. We can

have policies that ensure daily bread is available to all if we treat all the people's needs as holy, and the role of the church is to repent and move beyond the maintenance of safety nets necessary to buffer the effects of poverty toward the redemptive work of dismantling the systems and structures that make poverty possible.

It is Jesus who taught the early disciples to pray, "give us this day our daily bread." May we mean it as we pray.

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