



## Zero Hunger

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Chief of Staff

Throughout the holiday season—from Thanksgiving, through Advent and Christmas, to the New Year—I find myself reflecting on a few consistent themes. Gratitude and giving are tops among them. In the busyness of the season, with so many seasonal distractions and obligations, practicing gratitude and giving provide a healthy check against cultural influences toward excess. They help me answer the question, what does it mean to have enough? And they widen my perspective by enabling me to recognize opportunities I have for supporting others who clearly do not have enough.

Around the world, more than 700 million people experience hunger every day. Two-thirds of them live in Asia. In India, 40% of children are stunted due to malnutrition. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to a quarter of those who experience hunger daily. In the Middle East, Syria has seen the destruction of vast amounts of farmland during its civil war; four million people receive food assistance each month. Hunger has also increased in recent years in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, where the impact of climate change has exacerbated poverty and violence. In the United States, more than 40 million people, including 12 million children (that's 1 in 6 kids), struggle with food insecurity. The problem isn't a lack of food: there is enough for everyone. Poverty, distribution, and social and political will create barriers to access. And the challenges from hunger don't end in the household. Along with the negative impacts on personal health and well-being, widespread hunger can lead to social disruption, political turmoil, mass migration, and more.

The United Church of Christ recognizes that food security is a basic human right and a critical need. Expenditures from the One Great

Hour of Sharing offering prioritize sustainable development for the self-empowerment of communities and individuals struggling against hunger, poverty, and systemic injustice. Among the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, “Zero Hunger” is a focus of our work and support.

The UCC has partners all over the world, through relationships held by Global Ministries, who provide emergency and sustainable food assistance, increasing access and addressing barriers in their local communities. The Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola, for example, supports agricultural development. Through Emanuel do Dondi Seminary, pastoral training includes equipping seminarians with agricultural skills and horticultural best practices. Other partners provide vocational training, developing job skills and supporting small enterprises, which in turn create household stability. One such program is run by the Department of Service for Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches. Another of their services is providing medical clinics for pre-natal and neo-natal care, which includes addressing child hunger with a community that even under pre-war times experienced systemic barriers to good nutrition.

Other partners provide a mix of services and advocacy work. The World Council of Churches, Church World Service, Growing Hope Globally, and Bread for the World are among those who work with and amplify the voice of those vulnerable to hunger and food insecurity. Their advocacy works alongside the work of the UCC Washington D.C. office, which presses for global engagement and domestic needs. Their current focus is calling for more robust funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Currently facing a funding shortfall for the first time in decades, it’s estimated that 600,000 eligible women and children will be turned away from WIC.

The challenges are real, but they are not insurmountable. This holiday season, as I reflect on gratitude and giving, I give thanks for good partners all over the world who, like the United Church of Christ, believe in and work for a just world for all. And I give thanks for you, church, for your gifts and your work which make a difference in the lives of many. May our efforts continue, in growing relationship with those experiencing hunger and food insecurity, until all people know what it is to have enough.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joshua Baird is the Chief of Staff for the United Church of Christ.

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