

**Corporal Works of Mercy – Respecting Life through “Feeding the Hungry”  
“For I was hungry and you gave me food.” (Matthew 25:35)**

The foundational principle in Catholic social teaching, the right to life, means people are entitled to those things that are necessary to live and thrive, including food. According to the U.S. Bishops, “our faith demands we be creatively engaged in sharing the food that sustains life. There is no more basic human need.” The Corporal Work of Mercy, *Give Food to the Hungry*, calls us to address issues of hunger, which are closely linked to issues of poverty.

Hunger is a symptom of poverty and inequality—not food scarcity—because the world produces enough food to feed each person between 3,000 to 4,000 calories per day (video: *The Global Banquet: Politics of Food*). When considering issues of hunger, we often think of poverty in the developing world. However, hunger is also prevalent throughout the U.S. and Minnesota, even though we are the richest country and export a significant amount of food.

The U.S. government defines food insecurity as households that struggle to put food on the table at some point during the year, resulting in regularly missing meals. Data has consistently shown a strong relationship between food insecurity and poverty. In a low-income budget, food is often the most flexible item—rent, transportation, child care, and utilities are fixed expenses. In addition, without a financial cushion, even minor emergencies—such as a car repair or child’s illness—can consume the monthly grocery budget quickly.

Both hunger and poverty have become more pronounced since the recession began. According to the U.S. Dept of Agriculture, four million households became food insecure in 2008, the largest increase ever recorded. By 2009, roughly 1 in 7 American households (14.7%) suffered from food insecurity. This is the highest level recorded since data collection began in 1995. More than 49 million Americans—including 16.7 million children—live in these food insecure households. In the midst of widespread unemployment and a struggling economy, the number of food insecure households would have been even higher without several key safety net programs like food stamps.

As more Minnesota households experience food insecurity, state food shelves have also seen a significant increase in demand. According to Minnesota Food Share, there was a 25% increase in food shelf visits statewide between 2008 and 2009—the largest recorded increase in 28 years. In 2010, there were more than 3 million food shelf visits throughout the state, and more than 63 million pounds of food were distributed to Minnesota families. Of those visiting food shelves, 56% were families with children and 20% were seniors.

Although hunger is a complex policy issue rooted in systemic poverty, President Obama and others have set a goal to end hunger in the United States by 2015. A long-term solution will certainly require robust nutritional assistance programs that meet people’s immediate needs. These include things like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the food stamp program), the Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program. However, it will also

require seeking solutions that put more money into the pockets of low-income workers. This includes ensuring a livable minimum wage and strengthening tax credits that benefit low-income families, particularly the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit.

There are many ways individuals can address charity and justice issues related to hunger and poverty. For the extended version of this article and to learn what steps you can take to *Give Food to the Hungry*, visit the Social Justice Committee's section of St. Stan's website: [www.ststans.org](http://www.ststans.org).