

Broken Bread

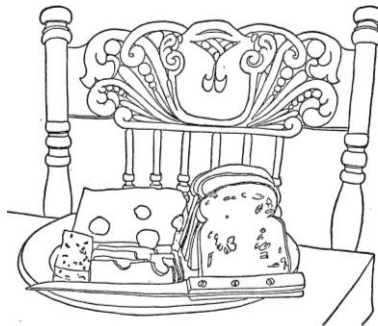
Newsletter of Social Ministries for Peace & Justice, Des Moines Presbytery
Volume 30 · Number 1

A FOOD JUSTICE GATHERING



225 Presbyterians from around the country—including five members of the Presbytery of Des Moines (Rev. Liz Knott, Roberta Victor, Connie DePond, Rev. Betty Sandy, and Nancy Lister-Settle)—were in Washington, D.C. from April 4-8 to attend the PC(U.S.A.) Compassion, Peace and Justice Training and Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD). Of the 750 EAD participants at the 2013 event, Presbyterians greatly outnumbered any other denomination (twice as many as the next highest)!

Des Moines Presbytery's Social Ministries Task Force, Joining Hands Coordinating Team, and Cents-Ability program provided grants for those attending, and they are eager to share what they learned. The following articles are highlights offered by participants from the Presbytery, along with memorable quotes from workshops, worship and plenary speakers.



A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Rev. Liz Knott, Honorably Retired, Indianola

The theme of this year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) was "A Place at the Table." You may ask, "who's table?" and "for whom?" Unequivo-

cally it is God's table! We heard this proclaimed in song, scripture, lectures, prayers and workshops. The theme was soaked, rinsed and blessed in the Word of God, and all are invited and welcomed. There is a place for every human being at the great table! Praise God for inclusiveness!

But we have a problem because hunger is not only a pressing global issue, it is a major U.S. problem and growing.

Here are some of my learnings about hunger in our country:

-The tragedy of hunger is obesity!

-1 in 6 adults and 1 in 5 children are hungry in the U.S.A.

-48.8 million Americans are at risk of hunger

-The majority of those receiving assistance are children, the elderly, or people living with a disability.

-Every dollar of SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) benefits distributed results in \$1.84 for local economies.

-The farm bill is the single largest piece of federal policy impacting our food system.

-A good farm bill can strengthen nutrition programs, help struggling communities and support new and socially disadvantaged farmers.

-Most poor families do not have access to fresh fruit and vegetables and cost is prohibitive with their limited incomes.

-Fully stocked grocery stores as we are accustomed to are not located in poor neighborhoods.

-1 out of every 6 people work in the fields to provide our food.

I am still reflecting on and exploring these statements: *Eating is a moral act! We need to see what we are overlooking!*

Not only were the major presentations, workshops and worship experiences excellent, the energy, enthusiasm and excitement was fantastic! What a rich feeding experience! I hope the Church can be just as inclusive, inviting and caring for our

neighbors—as well as working for the common good in this land of great variety and resources.

Throughout the weekend the words to this powerful song were sung as we gathered:

FOR EVERYONE BORN

Text: Shirley Erena Murray
Tune: Brian Mann

For everyone born, a place at the table;
For everyone born, clean water and bread,
A shelter, a space, a safe place for growing;
For everyone born, a star overhead.

And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace.

And God will delight when we are creators of justice...justice and joy.

Text: 1998 Hope Publishing Co.
Tune: 2006 General Board of global Ministries, United Methodist Church, Oncelicense.net ##E-802383.

“Those who do the back-breaking work to bring us the elements [for communion]—those who pick the grapes and harvest the wheat—are some of the most vulnerable.”

Jennifer Ayres
“Good Food:
A Theological and Moral Framework for Engaging Our Food System”
CPJ Training Day



FOOD DESERTS

*Dr. Roberta Victor,
Director of CROSS
Ministries, Cottage Grove
Avenue Presbyterian
Church, Des Moines*

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, Director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, opened the 2013 *Compassion, Peace and Justice Training Day* with these words: “We are not just called to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless...We are called to ask *why* are people hungry? *Why* are people homeless?”

As people of faith, it is not sufficient for us to just be aware of these problems. We must also ask ourselves, how does Christ call us to respond? What can we do? Throughout this year’s Ecumenical Advocacy Days, *At God’s Table: Food Justice for a Healthy World*, speakers and workshops addressed the complex issues of poverty, hunger, and our faith-

based call to advocate for justice for all people both at home and internationally.

Informed and compelled by my work at CROSS Ministries, the focus of the workshops that I selected to attend addressed issues related to domestic food insecurity. One concern that was mentioned often in these workshops was the problem of “food deserts.” Simply stated, a food desert refers to those areas in which there is limited or no access to large grocery stores that offer healthy and affordable foods. These areas are frequently found in the inner cities but can also be located in rural communities. When a small town doesn’t have sufficient people to support a large grocery store they are facing the same problems as inner city residents.

Historically, with the population shift from the farm to the city, corner grocery stores provided food for each small neighborhood. Later, as middle class families purchased cars and moved from the cities into the suburbs, big-box supermarkets emerged, offering greater varieties of food at significantly more affordable prices. The small neighborhood markets simply could not

compete with the greater buying power, and lower prices, offered by the big chain stores.

Why didn’t the chains also build in the inner city? There are a variety of reasons. One reason is that the large space needed to build in the inner city is not always available and would be more costly than building in a suburban area. Not surprisingly, retail stores also assess factors that affect their profitability prior to building in new locations. Traffic patterns are explored and a priority is placed on catering to larger more affluent households who can pile lots of groceries into their vehicles. In contrast, inner cities often consist of single person or smaller households who have a lower socio-economic status. Simply stated, they have a lack of spending power.

The end result is that the poor live in areas with high concentrations of fast food restaurants and higher priced convenience stores with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Studies reported in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine tell us that the cost of food in these areas can be upwards of 37% higher. Due to the economic and physical limitations placed on lower

income people shopping in food deserts, a greater proportion purchase processed foods as well as smaller quantities of food. Obesity and diabetes are prevalent and are at substantially higher rates with 60% more in some neighborhoods in the U.S.

The conclusion of the conference included an advocacy day on Capitol Hill in which we met with our legislators to promote the farm bill that has only been extended until September 30, 2013. The farm bill impacts all of us in the Des Moines Presbytery as well as the entire state of Iowa as it relates to our food system, good soil and water management on our farms, and anti-hunger programs. Although we pursued a number of topics related to the farm bill, the specific area that I addressed was related to alleviating hunger and malnutrition. One in six adults and one in five children experience hunger and food insecurity. Congress needs to protect the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP formerly known as food stamps) from cuts and harmful structural changes.

One of the positive ways in which we can address food deserts and food insecurity is through our

local farmers' markets. It is a win-win situation for all! Bringing fresh produce into urban areas makes it possible for people with limited transportation to purchase healthier foods. When food stamps can also be used to purchase these items, food-buying power is increased. The farmers win too as they bring their food to the consumers.

Jesus began his ministry by spending 40 days in the desert without food. Within the context of Jesus' ministry, it is clear that he understood the importance of both physical and spiritual food. From including "give us this day our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer to the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus addressed issues of food insecurity. As we seek to continue Jesus' ministry, let us follow his example of not only concern but also actively addressing the causes and solutions to food deserts and food insecurity.

"In food deserts, the poor pay more for food of lesser quality."

Cynthia White
 Coordinator, SDOP
 "Oasis in the Desert"
 CPJ Training Day



COMMUNITY GARDENS

Connie DePond, Indianola

Most Christians can relate to the idea of bread and wine as being a sacrament. However, at the EAD conference the concept was presented that all consumption of food is sacramental. Especially when you are hungry. Especially when food is shared. The idea that the earth is God's table was also a theme that was supported. So the overpowering concept is that food grown, shared and used to create and provide for community and relationships is very holy and sacramental.

Community gardens, faith gardens, or whatever you wish to name them are a wonderful way to create friendship, food and fun. They need to have a goal that is more than simply the end result of providing food. They need to encourage interaction, learning, teaching, self assurance and support to those who desire to help themselves. They need to grow relationships that sustain the holy and

sacred in each person participating.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program has a wonderful handbook that is entitled *Food Sovereignty for All.* It explains and instructs on creating effective projects. These include Faith-based Community Gardens, Community Kitchens, Buying Clubs and other Farm-to-Congregation Partnerships. A thought I had while attending EAD and learning about these resources was that hunger is prevalent even here in Iowa. Sometimes children and older adults cannot provide fresh produce for themselves. In our smaller churches and rural communities, Des Moines Presbytery could encourage congregations to consider forming a community garden to help. It could be as small as one plot with one vegetable—tomatoes? zucchini squash? It would be a means to build fellowship and help the health and nutrition of the community!

"Compost = resurrection."
 Rev. Ashley Goff
 Church of the Pilgrim PC(USA)
 Washington, DC
 "Food Justice Organizing"





STANDING IN SOLIDARITY

Rev. Betty Sandy, Des Moines

This was my first experience with Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice which had 56 sponsors this year including the PC(USA). We heard preachers in worship, and speakers in plenary, and attended workshops where fantastic personal stories and information were shared. The high point for me was on Monday, the day most of the 750 people of faith went to Capitol Hill and spoke to our Representatives and Senators about the Farm Bill.

Nancy, Roberta and I first went to Congressman Latham's office. Each of us took a piece of the Farm Bill and related our "ask" according to personal story or experience.

Roberta spoke about sufficient, nutritious food for the working poor she knows through her work at

CROSS Ministries and the food pantry at Cottage Grove Presbyterian Church. She related that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) only provides enough for about three weeks worth of food each month. And often that isn't the most healthy, nutritious food since a SNAP allotment is only \$3.50 per person per day. She discovered that once a month assistance from the food pantry sometimes isn't enough when one day a woman and her young daughter came in for the second time. She told them that she couldn't give them anymore until the next month because that was the policy of the food pantry. Then she looked down into the big brown eyes of the little girl who said with the innocence of a child, "But we don't have any food in our house." Of course Roberta found some food for this family. But there are many people like this in Des Moines. One in 6 adults and one in 5 children are at risk of hunger in the U.S. Most are the very young, the elderly, or people with disabilities. Many have low-wage full-time jobs. Some are military families. Roberta asked that funding for SNAP and other nutrition programs be protected.

Nancy related that food aid is one area of foreign aid that is supported by almost everyone. When natural disasters or conflict create famine and starvation, lowans want to help. She asked that when food aid is needed, local and regional resources be used so that struggling economies are not further damaged by an influx of free commodities, and so food can get to people quickly without added costs for shipping and distribution. Robust international food aid should also focus on nutritious food for the very young. The first 1,000 days—prenatal up to two years of age—is critical in order for children to reach their full potential as healthy, vital human beings able to contribute their very best to society. We urged support for elements of the Farm Bill that help alleviate hunger and malnutrition in the world.

Finally, I spoke about our hope that congress would support programs that help small farmers grow their businesses and help underserved communities get better access to healthy foods through farmers markets. Local markets benefit everyone, those who need access to fresh produce and those who produce it. Additionally, in the area I serve, the average age of

farmers is at least 58 years or more. I asked that Congress support programs that help young and beginning farmers without inherited land, women farmers, and ethnic and minority farmers who want to grow crops indigenous to their culture. Ethnic and organic foods are popular items in Iowa's grocery stores. Programs that support these new and emerging farmers are important for an effective Farm Bill.

We also stressed that, as people from the faith community a major concern is for a Farm Bill that protects God's creation. Conservation programs should prioritize water systems and soil protection.

We were joined by Iowans from other Districts—a seminary student from Sioux City and a pastor from Davenport—when we visited with Senator Harkin's staffer and with Senator Grassley about these same issues.

The whole EAD experience was awesome, and I am grateful that I got to go and had the chance, with my colleagues, to stand in solidarity with the disenfranchised and be a voice for those afraid or unable to speak and be a

presence for those ignored or unseen.

“The earth--the land--is God's table. The modern relationship with the land is with the supermarket, where we have to pay for that relationship.”

Dr. Nancy Cardoso Pereira
Member of the Pastoral Land
Commission and Professor of
Ancient History, Porto Alegre
Institute of the Methodist
Church, Brazil
“A Faithful Table”



“WE HAVE FAMILIES WHO NEED TO EAT”

www.bread.org *Voices of SNAP is a regular feature in which people who have received assistance from the federal program give a first-person account of the experience.*

By Dawn Phipps

Many people think those of us who need food assistance are nothing but deadbeats and leeches; if we would just put down

the bon-bons, get off the couch and get a job, life would be splendid. Ah, there's a nice fantasy. The truth is that most of us are not deadbeats and leeches. We have jobs. We have families who need to eat. We have children who are wondering when dinner will be ready.

I had children who were wondering when dinner would be ready. One time, instead of telling my daughters I had nothing in the house to make for dinner, I called my ex-husband and made up some excuse about needing him to watch the kids. That way I could take them to his house and they would get dinner.

I eventually went to a food pantry. I was ashamed that I had to ask for help, but I felt welcomed and not judged. They gave me a big box of food. Healthy food. I was ecstatic that I could put something in the cupboard and fix something for my kids to eat. I am a single mom who has always worked full time, who rarely receives child support, and whose extended family has needs of their own, so I have been the sole means of support for my son and myself for quite some time.

When the recession hit a few years ago, I was laid

off by my employer, who was a bankruptcy attorney. Three weeks later, I began to receive unemployment. It was helpful, but certainly did not replace what I was making. And all the while I was looking for a job.

I started to apply for every job that I could. Eventually I found myself applying at McDonald's. They told me I was over-qualified. I was feeling desperate and defeated. I realized that if I was going to adequately take care of my son, I was going to have to ask for help. For me, this was like admitting defeat.

Everything went well at the Health & Welfare office, where I applied for benefits, including SNAP. What I was not prepared for was how society would treat me. The first time I received my food stamps, I went shopping for the whole month. It seemed like the smartest way to plan. When people at the grocery store saw my cart, they were not pleased. I had purchased meat, fresh vegetables and fresh fruit. I didn't know buying healthy food was frowned upon. There were rude comments, eye rolling, whispering, people pointing at my cart—even some hostility from the cashier. I started shopping late at night so I might avoid all those judging people.

I even considered shopping in another town where no one would know me.

In January 2011, I finally found a full-time job with the state and in May of that year I received my last disbursement of food stamps. While my son and I were standing in line to purchase the last groceries I would have to use food stamps for, a woman in front of me in line started to chat with me. She said, "I should have known better than to come to the store on the first of the month with these losers and their food stamps. Don't you feel the same?"

Knowing exactly how I am when it comes to judgmental people, my son told me not to say anything to her: "Please Mom, don't!" I told my son, "I have to!" I had always made sure that my son had no idea that I was receiving food assistance so I quietly told her I received food stamps so she must think I'm quite a loser as well. I said "I'm sorry you feel this way when you don't even know me." I was not going to stand in the same check-out with this person. As I moved my cart to another lane she called out, "Well, you don't LOOK like you're on food stamps!"

Look like I'm on food stamps? I had no idea what I was supposed to look like.

I can tell you that people who receive food stamps don't have a certain look. They are people like me and you who need a hand. I can never fully know another person's path in this life so I do my best not to judge anyone. Solving the problems that contribute to hunger is a huge challenge that will take time and the efforts of all of us. But if we put aside our judgments and work together, we can make sure that families like mine never have to face hard times or hunger alone.

Dawn Phipps is a nurse and hunger activist living in Boise, Idaho.

"A person's worth isn't ours to give."

Gerardo Reyes Chavez
Coalition of Immokalee
Workers
Compassion, Peace & Justice
Training Day





BETTER TIPPING ISN'T THE ANSWER

Nancy Lister-Settle, Dallas Center, Hunger Action Enabler for the Presbytery of Des Moines

Do these statistics surprise you as much as they did me?

There are 20 million workers in the U.S. food system—one-sixth of the entire workforce. 80% of them earn low (poverty) wages.

Farm workers are excluded from provisions that the National Labor Relations Act offers other workers. 400,000 children work in the fields here in the United States.

White restaurant workers earn an average of \$3 per hour more than workers of color. Segregation is noticeable: servers tend to be white, bussers and cooks are brown skinned, and the dishwashers are blacks and immigrants.

Seven of the lowest paying jobs in the U.S. are

in the restaurant industry. More than half of food workers work in restaurants.

The minimum wage for tipped workers is \$2.13 per hour—this rate has been frozen since 1991.

In 2011 a sick restaurant worker infected 3,000 diners because he had no sick leave and no job security.

Restaurants are the largest and fastest growing industry in the U.S. Half of all Americans eat out at least once a week. The restaurant has become our second kitchen. Who's behind the kitchen door? How are they treated?



Presenters for the Dignity! Justice! Action! workshop I attended were from two organizations leading the fight for fair food behind the kitchen door. ROC (Restaurant Opportunities Center) works to improve wages and working conditions for the nation's 10 million restaurant workers. The Food Chain Workers Alliance is a

coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain. Both organizations work to build a more sustainable food system that respects workers' rights, based on the principles of social, environmental and racial justice, in which everyone has access to healthy and affordable food.

Don't think better tipping or not eating out is the solution. Ask questions and speak up!

Will my purchase support a just economy? Was this produced with respect for workers' rights and the environment? Who will profit from this purchase?

Let management know that you are a paying customer paying attention!

www.rocunited.org

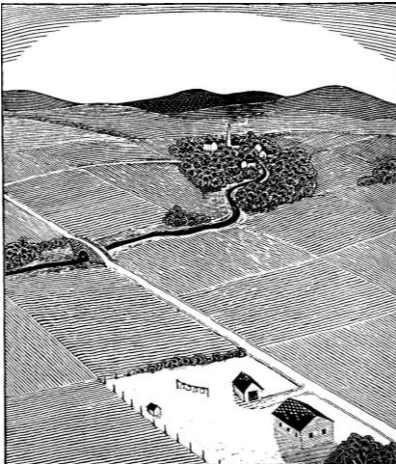
(Restaurant Opportunities Center)

www.foodchainworkers.org

(Food Chain Workers Alliance)

**SAVE THE DATE
FOR THE NEXT
EAD:**

March 21-24, 2014



AT GOD'S TABLE **Food Justice for a** **Healthy World**

*Ecumenical Advocacy
Days 2013 Lobby Day
Congressional Ask*

Our nation's food and farm policies, as embodied in the farm bill, affect people from rural America to inner cities, from our local communities to less industrialized regions around the world. The farm bill is the single largest piece of federal policy impacting our food system. A good farm bill can strengthen nutrition programs, help our struggling rural communities, support new and socially disadvantaged farmers, enhance global food aid to the world's most impoverished, and encourage farming and ranching practices that protect God's creation. Congress failed to pass a farm bill in 2012, and a number of important programs that promote a

just and healthy food system are currently without funding. Other programs are continuing, but need the certainty provided by a multi-year farm bill.

Congress should enact a farm bill this year that alleviates hunger and malnutrition, supports vibrant farms and healthy communities and protects God's creation. We urge Congress to support a full, multi-year reauthorization of the farm bill that:



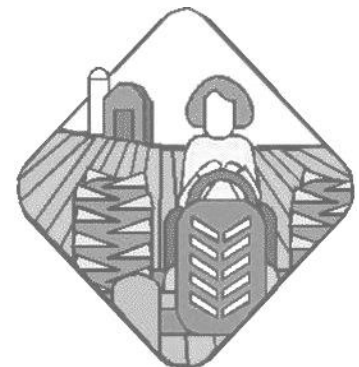
Alleviates hunger and malnutrition:

Protects and strengthens programs that reduce hunger and improve nutrition in the United States. We ask that funding for the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, or SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) be protected from cuts and harmful structural changes that

would increase hunger in our nation.



Sustains robust international food aid and improves the nutritional quality of food aid. In view of the ongoing threat of high food prices, natural disasters and humanitarian crises around the world, we ask for robust funding for programs that provide emergency and non-emergency food aid for the hungry. As the world's largest provider of international food aid, the United States must also lead the way in improving its quality to maximize the nutritional benefit.



Supports vibrant farms and strong communities:
Helps beginning farmers and farmers from socially disadvantaged groups start in the

business of agriculture. We ask Congress to support new farmers by funding programs that are critical in growing the next generation of farmers, an imperative goal in light of the aging of American farmers and in bolstering women and minority farmers.



Builds local and regional food systems and the rural communities at their center. For communities in the United States, we ask Congress to support programs such as the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*, which provides new markets for small and mid sized farmers in suburbs and cities, offering consumers the opportunity to support local producers and giving people in vulnerable communities greater access to fresh food.



For communities around the world, we ask Congress to reform international food aid by purchasing more of the food in the areas where it is consumed. *The Local and Regional Procurement Program* can help more hungry people for the same cost, support rural development in low-income countries and increase global food security.



Protects God's creation:
Strengthens policies and programs that promote conservation of soil and water and protect creation from

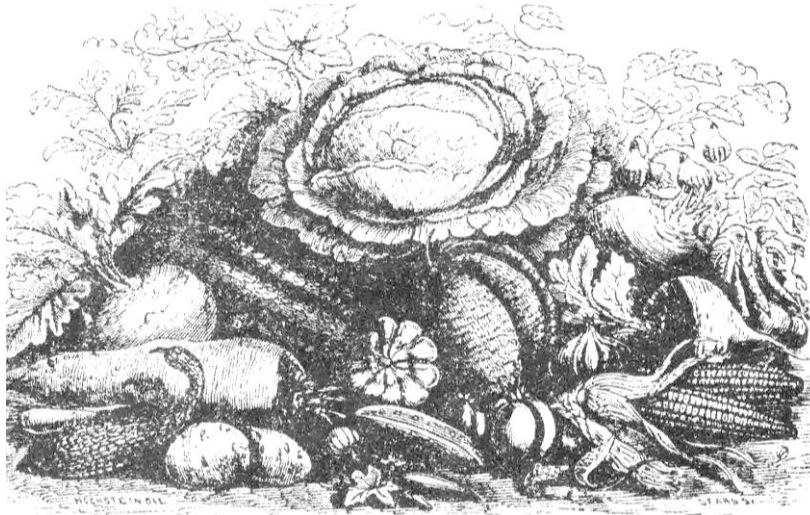
environmental degradation. We ask Congress to protect funding for conservation programs, particularly those for working lands such as the *Conservation Stewardship Program*, which have substantial waiting lists and serve a diverse base of farmers and ranchers. Funds for these programs should not be used to pay for other priorities. Farms and ranches account for a majority of the land base in many states, and play a key role in ensuring soil and water quality and in maintaining open space and wildlife habitat.

As people of faith, we urge our members of Congress to enact a farm bill this year that alleviates hunger and malnutrition, supports vibrant farms and healthy communities, and protects God's creation.

“Only three members of Congress don’t Tweet!”

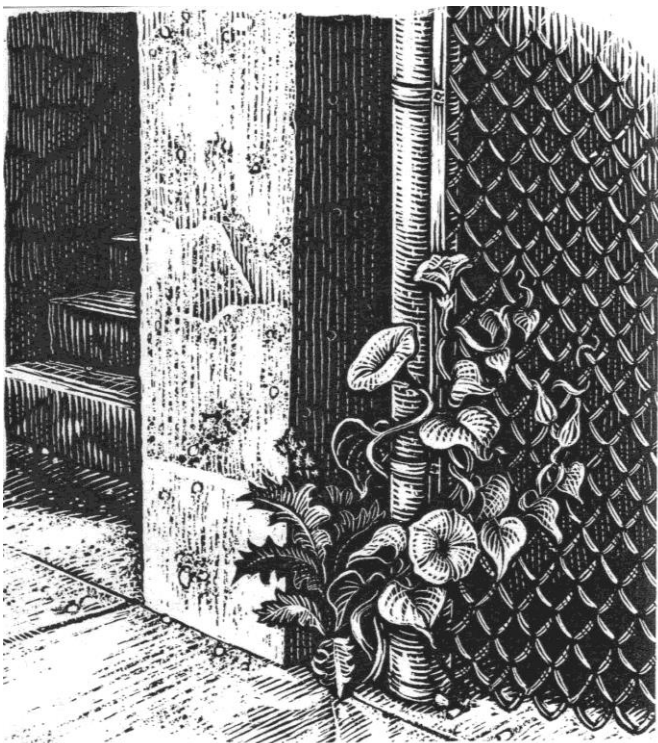
-Robin Stephenson
Bread for the World
“Social Media Advocacy”
EAD Workshop

GRAINS OF TRUTH



(Farm workers) are involved in the planting and the cultivation and the harvesting of the greatest abundance of food known in this society. They bring in so much food to feed you and me and the whole country and enough food to export to other places. The ironic thing and the tragic thing is that after they make this tremendous contribution, they don't have any money or any food left for themselves.

-Cesar Chavez



*Charity begins at home
and justice begins
next door.*

-Charles Dickens

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IN THIS ISSUE:

A Place at the Table
Food Deserts
Community Gardens
Standing in Solidarity
We Have Families Who Need to Eat
Better Tipping Isn't the Answer
At God's Table: Food Justice for a Healthy World
Grains of Truth

A FOOD JUSTICE GATHERING

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