

# Feed My Sheep John 21.18

A Newsletter of the Hunger Task Force of the Southern Ohio Synod

September-October, 2012

## FOOD CRISIS LOOMS WORLDWIDE



It's being called a "silent tsunami" – the first worldwide food crisis since WWII is threatening over 100 million people, including 20 million of the world's poorest children. Rising prices for staples like rice means that fewer people are getting the food they need, pushing more people into poverty, and causing violence and instability. There are fears that the drought in the United States, which has pushed grain prices to record highs, could spark another crisis like the one seen in 2007-2008, which pushed the total number of hungry people to over a billion. All nations, including the United States, may be affected.

When food prices rise, almost everyone notices. But for a poor family struggling to make ends meet, the effects can be crippling. It's not only that they have a lower level of income, there are other factors that come into play. In fact, the poorest households may spend as much as 60-80 percent of their incomes on food. When prices go up, they must spend even more of their meager resources on food. That means they have less for their other needs, such as clothes, shelter, medicines, and school books for the children. Little by little, non-essentials get cut. People start reducing the quality of the food they eat. That means less fresh fruit and vegetables, and less meat. They concentrate on staples, usually grain such as wheat, maize or rice. This impacts their intake of vitamins and protein, which can be harmful, especially when children are under two. After that, families might start cutting the number of times they eat each day, from three to two and then even to one. As things get tough, families start to look for other ways to make savings. If someone in the family needs costly medicine, that may be cut. Education also starts to seem non-essential. The long-term consequences of a lack of education can be severe. Children may never go back to school. If that happens, their chances of pulling themselves and their families out of poverty are reduced – possibly forever.

But world food experts believe swift, coordinated international action can stop that from happening. Urgent action is needed to make sure that these price shocks do not turn into a catastrophe, because, according to international food experts, ***hunger is the world's greatest solvable problem.*** (Source: United Nations, World Food Program)

In 2008, the UN established a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis which has been working to present a unified response to the challenge of high prices. It has recommended a twin-track approach which supports long-term investment in agriculture and emergency assistance to ease the effects of high prices on the poor and hungry. The World Food Program (WFP), partnering with other charitable organizations, like ELCA Hunger Appeal, Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Charities, World Vision, etc., has worked to prepare for spikes in international food pricing. As a result, there are some programs which exist to help the current situation:

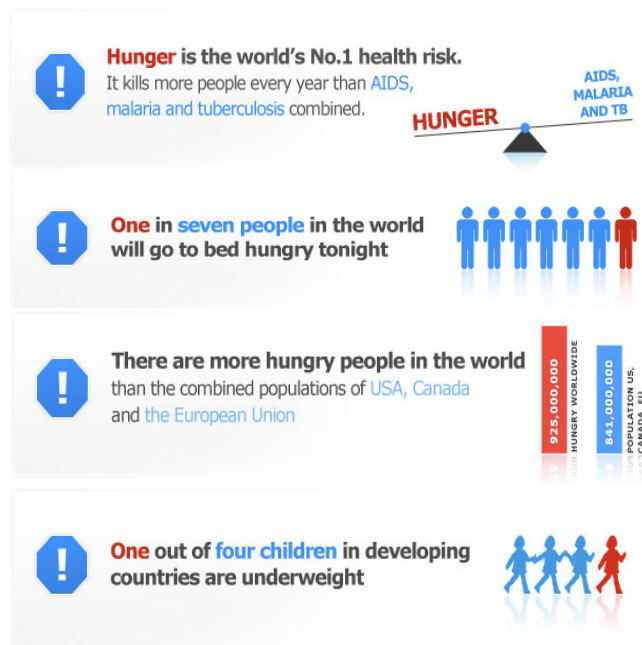
1. **Global stocks** of rice and wheat are higher than they were in 2008. The price and supplies of rice, a staple food for many millions of people, are relatively stable in Asia.
2. In 2008, several major food-producing countries imposed **export bans**, which caused shortages on world markets. Meanwhile, in food-deficit countries, there was panic-buying, with governments paying very high prices, especially for rice. So far this time this has not happened.
3. In contrast to 2008, global economic growth is presently weak, so demand is not pushing prices further upwards.
4. Many countries are better prepared to face the current situation. Some have worked on establishing and improving social safety nets such as school meals, and public works programs.
5. Better tools exist at the international level to coordinate the policy response. For example, in 2011 the G20 set up the **Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)**, which tracks food commodity markets and aims to improve transparency and act as an early warning system.

The work is not done. People are still hungry, starving and dying for lack of food. Help is still needed. Earlier this month, at the recent Global Hunger Event, WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin stated, "This crisis comes at a time when the eyes of the world [have been] focused on the pinnacle of human physical achievement at the London Olympics. For far too many children, a lack of food and nutrition means that, sadly, they will never have a chance to compete in life. That is not good enough. As . . . we look ahead to Rio de Janeiro in 2016, governments, UN agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organizations must commit themselves to ensuring that chronic malnutrition is no longer an obstacle that stands in the way of future generations."

There is work to do. It is time to become involved. ***It is time to help solve the world's most solvable problem.***

## TOP 4 HUNGER STATS

Every year, authors, journalists, teachers, researchers, schoolchildren and students ask the World Food Program for statistics about hunger and malnutrition. To help answer these questions, the WFP has compiled a database of useful facts and figures on world hunger.



For more hunger statistics visit the World Food Program at [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org).

## WATER AND SUSTAINABILITY

In biblical times, water was a mixed blessing at best. Necessary for life, and often sent as a blessing, it was also associated with chaos and death.

In many communities where ELCA and LWR work, water can also be a mixed blessing. The water, when available, is swimming with life, but it is far from life giving. Parasites, bacteria, and other microorganisms lurk in the waters causing illness. Where it is scarce, it means lack of food and most often starvation and death.

Africa, like other parts of the world, is currently in the midst of a drought, and a food crisis. But, believe it or not, even in the midst of a drought, there is water to be found in Africa—and Lutherans are helping farmers get to it.

In some regions of arid and semi-arid countries like Niger, supplies of underground water are held in place by naturally formed dams, which keep the water at a level where it can be accessed through wells. But in some communities, there are no natural dams so the underground water flows away and the water level is dropping. To get to water, people have to drill deeper, a costly and time-consuming process.



▲ Farmers lay stones in a subsurface dam, which will collect and hold water from underground streams.

In these areas, Lutherans are helping farmers improve their agricultural livelihoods, adapt to changing climate patterns and help struggling farmers use their resources in more sustainable ways.

To improve access to water, Lutherans, their partners, and farmers worked together in Niger to build a subsurface dam to make water easier to obtain. A subsurface dam is an underground, waterproof barrier made from dry sand and rock that collects and holds water from underground streams.

As the dam collects water, it raises the water level so that farmers can access it more easily. This saves the farmers the time and expense of drilling for water.

Lutheran World Relief and its partners use a **cash-for-work approach** to build the dams. The projects will have both immediate and long term benefits. Farmers, who helped build the dam and did other work to protect and improve soil and water sources, received wages they could use to support their families.

So far, 51,422 people have participated in the **cash-for-work** project and the dams have been so successful the program has caught the attention of civil engineers. They are calling for the construction of even more subsurface dams in other areas, so that more people can experience the same kind of success.

To learn more about the water, wells, and dams projects, visit Lutheran World Relief at [www.lwr.org/water](http://www.lwr.org/water), or Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at [www.elca.org/water](http://www.elca.org/water).



## A GLANCE AT 2012 DOMESTIC GRANT AWARD WINNERS

*Editor's note:* In the next few issues of **Feed My Sheep**, there will be a story featuring the work of at least one agency which has been awarded a 2012 ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant. It is hoped these stories will inspire congregations and agencies in the SOS area to consider applying for a grant, and inform others of the great work going on in our synod to help others in difficult circumstances

### MEIGS COOPERATIVE PARISH, INC.

Meigs County is listed as one of the four most economically distressed counties in the State of Ohio. 20% of the population of the county is listed as below the poverty level. Due to the high poverty level, individuals often have need of emergency food and other assistance.

The Meigs Cooperative Parish, Inc. located in Pomeroy, in Southeastern Ohio's Appalachian region, is an ecumenically formed organization with 24 churches, including American Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Independent, Lutheran, and United Methodist, as member churches. There are other churches in the area that support the work of the Parish, but they are not currently member churches. The governing board includes a nine member board elected from both clergy and laity representatives from the member churches. The current operating budget is \$134, 650, which comes from individuals, businesses, membership dues, church donations, and grants. The Cooperative Parish has one part-time paid employee, with other staff positions being staffed with volunteers, independent contractors, Meigs County Senior Center's Aging Program participants, and people receiving benefits from the Meigs County Jobs and Family services programs.

The Parish, formed in 1972, to help the rural United Methodist Churches work together in ministry, has evolved into an interfaith multi-purpose complex that houses many services. The Parish is located in an unused elementary school which was purchased in 2003, has undergone reconstruction, and is currently involved in renovation. The following programs are housed in The Parish and serve the needs of the county's poorest people.

- **The Remnants of Faith**- a low-priced resale store that protects the dignity of the people, but provides much needed clothing and household items. The items are also provided without charge to those without funds, victims of disaster, and ministry needs.
- **The Meigs Cooperative Office** – basic needs/calamity assistance, emergency prescriptions and utility help and in the Spring, the giveaway of seeds and plants for home gardens.
- **Food Pantry** – emergency, holiday, and summer food giveaways.
- **Saviour's Soup** – motto is "Eat your fill and give what you will" serving soup and meals to the community one day a week in summer months and two days a week in winter months.
- **Invincible Industries** – a program for teens to help them develop their full potential.
- **Faith Community Parish Nurse Program** – provides assistance to individuals of all ages and families with their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.
- **Shape-Up Exercise Program** – 30 minute exercise program designed to keep the body healthy.
- **Indoor Walking Path**
- **God's Hands** – a carpentry group that helps with home repairs and handicap accessibility.
- **The Comfort Club** - group that makes and distributes quilts for housing and disaster needs.
- **Community Commercial Kitchen** – allows individuals, organizations and ministries to utilize a safe cooking environment for fundraising, small business development, preparing meals for the community, and the stocking of the food pantry through gleaning programs
- **Gymnasium**- used by community for dance classes, Bloodmobile, 4-H activities, gospel concerts, health fairs, and various other activities
- **Emergency Shelter**- provides shelter to the community during times of disaster, flooding and severe weather.

The Meigs County Cooperative Parish is often seen as a liaison for families when they are in need and must work with the governmental system. The Parish Nurse provides assistance to the elderly and families with navigating governmental regulations in healthcare.

## SEVERE STORMS STRIKE SEVERAL STATES

Severe weather continues to cause widespread destruction across the United States. Deadly tornadoes have devastated areas in Missouri, Alabama, North Carolina, and many other states. In the most recent tornado outbreak, the city of Joplin, Missouri was devastated. Elsewhere, large portions of the country face a continued threat of unprecedented flooding throughout the Fall. As the change in seasons continues, the threat for severe weather is likely to remain high.



The ELCA, through Lutheran Disaster Response, has issued several emergency grants this spring to affiliate organizations in the affected areas. A \$25,000 grant has been issued to Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri for response to the Joplin tornadoes. This follows a previous \$25,000 grant that was issued to that same agency for flooding and tornadoes in the eastern part of the state earlier this spring.

Additionally, grants of \$25,000 have been issued to Lutheran Ministries of Alabama and Lutheran Services of Georgia for the tornadoes of April 27. These grants are all supporting long-term recovery projects in the impacted areas. Lutheran Ministries of Alabama is taking part in an exciting partnership with Mennonite Disaster Service and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) in a rapid rebuilding project there. They also plan to support volunteer coordination as the response unfolds.



Photo credit: REUTERS / Michael Spooneybarger

On Aug. 29, 2012, Hurricane Isaac hit the Gulf Coast of the United States, bringing with it multiple days of heavy rain and winds. The storm effects were felt from western Louisiana to the handle of Texas and as far north as Arkansas. There were federal emergency declarations in Louisiana and Mississippi, where thousands of homes have been affected by flash flooding and blowing winds. Alabama, Florida and Arkansas are also in the midst of assessing damages. Hurricane Isaac made landfall exactly seven years after Hurricane Katrina, affecting the same region of the country. The lessons learned from that disaster response have been extremely useful in recovery from Hurricane Isaac, leading to fewer deaths, injuries and reports of property damage.

ELCA Disaster Response has been in contact with the local affiliates as they begin to assess the situation. This involves connecting with local government agencies that are responding to determine the areas of most need and best investment of resources. It also involves working with the local ELCA synods as they reach out to congregations that may be affected. ELCA Disaster Response also has trained volunteers on call who are ready to deploy as soon as they are needed. They are working to set up teams of long-term volunteers to respond to the continuing needs over the winter months. As the needs become apparent they will continue working through established networks to walk with affected communities as long as needed.

As the communities affected by these severe weather patterns continue their work of recovery, please keep them and those who work on their behalf in prayer.



**Hunger Task Force Members:** Rev. Henry Zorn, chair; Rev. Glen Bengson; David Drumm; Rev. John Eilert; Rev. Joene Herr; Linda Hall; Rev. Donald Moeser; Rev. Mary Molnar; Rev. Mike Poole; Rev. Monte Stevens; Rev. Jeff Wick, synod staff; Susan Truchses, newsletter editor