

What Can You Do?

Conclusion

After reading a report like this, we imagine you may be asking, “Is there anything I can do?” There are a variety of ways to act on what you have learned, and this chapter offers some suggestions.

If you have read this entire report, it’s clear that you value learning. We encourage you to continue to learn about hunger and poverty and to use that knowledge to be an advocate for necessary policy changes such as the ones outlined in this report. Ending hunger and poverty may seem like a monumental task, but in the end, it really comes down to political will. Changing the political dynamics of these issues starts right within our own circles of family and friends and spreads from there to our communities and beyond. By sharing this report with others, you can help mobilize the political will needed to end hunger and poverty in this country and around the world.

Bread for the World Institute can continue to help you to learn about hunger and poverty. The Institute is the research and education partner of Bread for the World, a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. In addition to our annual Hunger Report, the Institute produces other educational resources for Bread for the World members and the public at large. The Institute helps people in the United States tell the story of hunger and poverty in their communities and around the world. You can learn more about the Institute and what we do by visiting our Web site at www.bread.org. You can also

learn from other groups who work on the issues discussed in *Working Harder for Working Families*. We include the Web site information for several at the end of this chapter.

People of faith are often inspired to learn so that they can be better witnesses of Christ’s love for hungry and poor people. As Bread for the World’s president, Rev. David Beckmann, says, “Jesus has taught us we must use both our heart and our head.” We can suggest many books by authors whose work will help to ground your learning in your faith. Larry Hollar, a Bread for the World organizer and Presbyterian elder, has produced a splendid series of books, *Hunger for the Word: Lectionary Reflections on Food and Justice* (Years A, B, and C). Bread for the World’s founder, Rev. Arthur Simon, is a prolific author whose books include *How Much is Enough?* and *Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God’s World* (with David Beckmann). There are many other helpful books, some classic and some new. Ronald Sider’s book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* was published in 1978 and remains as relevant today as ever.

In addition to learning and sharing knowledge, another way to make a difference is by voting in local, state and national elections for candidates who support programs to end hunger and poverty. 2008 is an election year; congressional candidates and possibly presidential candidates may pass through your community to give a speech or

conduct a town-hall meeting. You could use these opportunities to question candidates about how they intend to address hunger and poverty. We encourage you to get to know your elected officials and talk to them about hunger and poverty on a regular basis. Write a letter, call their offices, and visit them and their staff. View this as an opportunity to help them better understand the policy questions. They are responsible for representing your community on all issues, and it is not possible for them to be specialists on

every topic. They may not see the web of connections associated with hunger and poverty as well as you.

We encourage you to join Bread for the World if you are not a member already. When you join Bread for the World, you will be part of an organization with members from across the country who are advocating for hungry and poor people. Bread for the World members focus on using the power we have as citizens in a democracy to influence government policies affecting hungry people. It is the commitment, energy and faith of our members that makes Bread for the World effective.

Bread for the World members often form groups with others from their churches, communities or colleges. Some groups meet a few times

a year to take specific action, such as visiting their members of Congress or planning a workshop for local congregations. Others are much more active and work in networks with other activist groups. Bread for the World member Jane Klopfenstein from Edwardsville, Illinois, describes how she works with other Bread for the World members in her church. Here is her report of a visit she made with five others to talk with Rep. John Shimkus, who represents their district, Illinois-19.

“I presented Representative Shimkus with a copy of the 2007 Hunger Report and briefly showed him what it contained. I pointed out that among the sponsors were the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (his denomination) and Lutheran World Relief—as well as the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Catholics, and many others.

“Our group had met at my house the night before and talked through everything we planned to say. We divided up the points we wanted to make, and had prepared a couple of paragraphs on each one, about half a page each. After each person spoke, she handed him the written piece summarizing what she’d said. I think we showed him that we do our homework and are a credible voice.”

Bread for the World members have, in fact, been a credible voice on hunger and poverty since 1974. Bread for the World is 58,000 members strong and growing rapidly. Year after year, Bread for the World wins legislative victories



Senator Ben Cardin meets with a Bread for the World delegation from Maryland during the annual Lobby Day in June 2007.

for hungry people because of people like you. Bread for the World members make a difference!

Some members use the media to bring issues of hunger and poverty before the public. Over the past decade, Bread for the World member Ellen Fisher of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has cultivated relationships with three successive editors at the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. Ellen has persuaded the *Gazette* to write a number of editorials related to hunger and poverty. Some of these caught the attention of her member of Congress, former representative Jim Nussle, who was the chair of the House Budget Committee and represented Ellen along with other residents of Iowa's first and second districts. In the past few years, Ellen has written op-eds for the *Gazette* and the *Des Moines Register*, recruited dozens of people to write letters to the editor, pitched ideas for articles, appeared on a local TV program, *Ethical Perspectives on the News*, and worked to get hunger issues covered in her presbytery's newsletter.

We encourage you to contact your local newspaper or television news show and ask them to devote more attention to issues of hunger and poverty. For example, have any of your local media ever discussed asset poverty? Have they investigated or reported on what it costs for a low-income family to get by in your community? "Newspaper editors and radio and television producers love to receive tips from their audience," says Shawnda Hines, Bread for the World's Grassroots Media Associate. Shawnda works with Bread for the World members to help them place articles in their local media outlets.

Perhaps you are already an experienced anti-hunger activist, and the question for you rather is, "How can I be more effective at what I am already doing?" *Working Harder for Working Families* goes beyond what are traditionally considered "hunger issues" to explore the relationships between hunger and a number of other issues you might not have considered. Families at risk of hunger are probably many of those using payday loans and check cashing outlets, for example. Find out what other advocacy groups in your community are doing on these broader issues. For example, hunger may be on the increase in your community because there is not enough affordable housing. Are there groups advocating on housing issues? We are certainly not suggesting that you divert your attention from the work you are already doing. No one can do everything, and you are experienced in working against hunger—but there are ways to support hungry families indirectly as well as directly.

Activists multiply their effectiveness when they are working within networks. Technology is helping activists connect with each other in all sorts of new and creative ways. Mike Batell, a Bread for the World faith outreach



Mike McCurry (front left), Kevin Eckstrom (center) and Barbara Bradley-Haggerty (right) discuss the impact of media on hunger issues at a workshop on Advocacy and the Media at The Gathering 2007, a Bread for the World event that included the annual Lobby Day.

Government Not Doing Enough to Fight Hunger and Poverty, Voters Say

- Emily Nohner

Over the past five years, U.S. voters have been growing increasingly more concerned about hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world, according to polling conducted by the Alliance to End Hunger over this period.

Increasing numbers of Americans also consider hunger and poverty important issues in deciding which presidential and congressional candidates to vote for. Alliance to End Hunger polling indicates that voters are willing to spend significantly more money on programs to address hunger and poverty. Seventy percent of those polled would support spending an additional 1 percent of the federal budget on meeting the needs of the world's poorest people, and 66 percent favor spending up to an additional \$18 billion per year to expand nutrition programs like the Food Stamp Program and the School Breakfast Program.

In the most recent polling (June 2007), 42 percent of those questioned said "fighting hunger and poverty" was the biggest moral issue among all the choices offered, including protecting the environment, abortion and gay marriage. Voters also believe that while fighting hunger has pragmatic benefits both for hungry individuals and for society in general, the moral call to action is the strongest reason to support hunger programs. The polling results point to a significant opportunity for advocates to turn evolving public sentiments into lasting and effective political change.

Read more about the polling at
<http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org/>

Emily Nohner is a program associate with the Alliance to End Hunger.

organizer, tells a story about a visit he made to a college campus in North Dakota, where he suggested to a group of students that they create an online One Campaign page on Facebook. A student left the meeting and did just that, inviting 15 of his friends to join—who then invited other friends to join, and so on. Before he left campus the next morning, Mike learned that there were already 150 people participating. Through the page, they are keeping each other up-to-date on events like campaign stops by candidates, sharing information about hunger and poverty, and building stronger networks for advocacy.

New communication tools like Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are just a few of the ways the Internet is changing how activists work together. But less technology-driven forms of advocacy still work well too. It is for you to decide what works best for you. It all makes a difference for hungry people.

Other Organizations Making a Difference

Many nonprofit organizations are working hard to improve public policies in ways that better support working families. The ones below are a sampling rather than a comprehensive listing. All are good sources for further information about the issues covered in *Working Harder for Working Families*.

ACORN (www.acorn.org) is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families and a leader in the living wage movement.

Center for Community Change (www.communitychange.org) supports and coordinates low-

income community organizing nationwide. A top priority of the Center is to increase the power of groups that are organizing to meet the needs of low-wage workers and their families.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (www.cbpp.org) conducts research and analysis to inform public debates about proposed budget and tax policies, and to help ensure that the needs of low-income families and individuals are considered in these debates.

Corporation for Enterprise Development (www.cfed.org) expands economic opportunity by helping Americans start and grow businesses, go to college, own a home, and save for their children's and their own economic futures.

Good Jobs First (www.goodjobsfirst.org) is a national policy resource center for grassroots groups and public officials, promoting corporate and government accountability in economic development and smart growth for working families.

Jobs With Justice (www.jwj.org) is a national network of more than 40 local coalitions of labor, community groups, students, faith communities and individual activists united to fight for workers' rights and economic justice.

National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children.

RESULTS (www.results.org) is a nonprofit grassroots advocacy organization committed to creating the political will to end hunger and the worst aspects of poverty by lobbying elected officials for effective solutions and key policies that affect hunger and poverty.

Wider Opportunities for Women (www.wowonline.org) works nationally and in its home community of Washington, D.C., to build pathways to economic independence for U.S. families, women and girls.

The Working Poor Families Project (www.workingpoorfamilies.org) was launched in 2002 by national philanthropic leaders who saw the need to strengthen state policies affecting low-income working families. The national initiative is now supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce and Mott foundations.

