

Conducting an **Offering of Letters**



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Introduction

Each year, Bread for the World urges elected leaders in Washington, D.C., to enable people in our nation and our world to feed their families and move out of poverty. An Offering of Letters event—when people in your congregation, campus, or group sit down together to write to members of Congress on specific issues—is an effective tool that helps shape our government’s response to hunger.

Whether you are new to letter writing or are experienced in organizing people to speak out to our leaders in Washington, this “how-to” section of this toolkit for event organizers will help you prepare for an Offering of Letters. Setting up an Offering of Letters event is doable. It doesn’t take as much time as you might expect, and you will find that it enriches your faith experience. This toolkit, Bread’s website (www.bread.org), and the Bread staff members who serve your region as organizers (www.bread.org/organizers) are resources for planning and carrying out your Offering of Letters. Telling us about your event is important, too. We urge you to visit www.bread.org/OL/evaluation, or fill out the form in the toolkit, and let us know what happened.



Bread for the World photo

A campus group writes letters to their members of Congress.

Why an Offering of Letters?

The Offering of Letters campaign is part of Bread for the World’s larger campaign to end hunger by 2030, called Bread Rising. Your efforts can make a big difference.

Even in this era of digital technology, studies show that hand-written letters are still one of the best ways to reach members of Congress. Personal letters stand out and tell your senators and

A greater response to hunger



breadrising
WORKING TOGETHER TO END HUNGER BY 2030

This toolkit helps you carry out an Offering of Letters as one method of responding to hunger. Bread for the World’s overall campaign, Bread Rising, encourages U.S. Christians to pray, act, and give through the Offering of Letters and other ways so we can end hunger by 2030.

- We pray as a means to orient our spiritual lives so that we encounter God and stand with people who struggle with hunger and poverty. Our voices and our prayers for the nation’s leaders can change hearts in a divided government.
- We act in order to translate our faith into something tangible, such as Bread’s Offering of Letters, while also par-

ticipating in local and international hunger ministries that support people as they create a better future for themselves and their families.

- We give by contributing money to help end hunger—including financial support of Bread for the World’s advocacy mission.

Many members, including thousands of congregations, campuses, and groups across the country, support Bread for the World’s work in each of these three ways. We invite you be part of Bread Rising. Visit www.bread.org/breadrising, or call 800-822-7323.

Introduction



Bread for the World photo

We are serving God when we raise issues of hunger and poverty with our government.

When these letters reach our nation's leaders in Washington, they are a powerful witness to grassroots concerns. Over the years, these letters have helped win significant victories on hunger issues. Bread for the World also advocates on other issues that are not part of the Offering of Letters campaign but are critical in ending hunger. Using personalized emails, phone calls, visits, Facebook, and Twitter, Bread members speak out to Congress on those additional issues throughout the year. We hope you and others will take part in these other campaigns as well as the Offering of Letters.

Getting started

Please read this handbook and its companion materials, which provide background on this year's Offering of Letters issue advocacy campaign. If you have questions, contact the Bread organizing staff for your area, or call 800-822-7323.

Remember: there is no single model for an Offering of Letters. We offer examples not to limit you, but to stimulate your creativity. You know your congregation or campus best, so develop plans that make sense in your setting. We hope this will become a regular activity in your community.

Bread for the World is grateful for your commitment, and we are eager to support you in any way we can. God is working to end hunger, and we are blessed that you are taking part in this exodus from hunger.

representative that you, as a constituent, really care about an issue. Members of Congress want to hear from constituents about the issues on which they will vote in the Senate and House of Representatives. Hand-written letters—along with face-to-face visits, personalized emails, and phone calls—are among the most effective ways for you to share your views. The Offering of Letters is both an effective tool in shaping public policy and a strong expression of our faith in action.

Each year, Bread for the World, in consultation with its partners, chooses a specific hunger issue for its Offering of Letters campaign. Then tens of thousands of people like you use our resources to engage church members, students, women's and youth groups, adult education classes, and mission committees in letter-writing events—the Offering of Letters.

The Bible and the Offering of Letters

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Moved by God's grace in Jesus Christ, we reach out to our neighbors, whether they live in the next house, the next state, or on the next continent.

We experience God's grace and love through our faith in the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16).

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it."

— Proverbs 3:27

places. We work to end hunger and poverty in our communities, in our country, and in other countries.

Throughout Scripture, God calls people into community and sets the expectation that leaders (whether they are kings, pharaohs, or elected officials) should care for their people. Therefore, we also reflect God's love by challenging individuals and institutions that have the power to change laws and structures that keep people vulnerable. As God's hands and feet in the world, we work toward a beloved community in which every person has an equal opportunity to thrive.

The Offering of Letters is one opportunity for Christians to live out this commitment. It invites us to be good stewards, using our voices to encourage our elected representatives to take the necessary steps to end hunger.

Read more about the biblical themes that inform our mission in "The Biblical Basis for Advocacy to End Hunger." Download or order a free copy of this resource at www.bread.org/store or by calling 800-822-7323.

In the Gospels, Jesus was compassionate to all people, especially the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the hungry, the poor—those most vulnerable in society. Jesus loved all people, rich and poor, and actively cared for those in need. He urged his disciples to do the same.

As followers of Christ, we are called to proclaim and embody God's reconciling love at all times and in all

Pastors, priests, and ministers—those who preach on the Scriptures weekly—are among the best leaders in getting their congregations to engage in advocacy.



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

Organizing an Offering of Letters

The Basics

Organizing an Offering of Letters event in your church, campus, or group is not difficult. Here are a few key points to remember and some examples of what has worked in the past. For more details, see www.bread.org/OL.

Key Steps in Planning Your Offering of Letters

1. **Get support** from your pastor, mission committee, and church council if needed, or from your campus ministry or sponsoring professor or staff. Set a date for the Offering that works in your church or campus calendar.
2. **Gather a team** to work with you, and plan how and when you'll get the word out using newsletters, bulletins, announcement boards, and social media. Locate key educational materials and videos; start by looking at www.bread.org/OL. Contact your Bread regional organizer (www.bread.org/organizers) if you need help.
3. **Plan** what will happen the week before and the week of the Offering. Find ways to integrate the hunger topic in the entire worship service or event. Have available sample letters, paper, envelopes, pens, stamps, and names and addresses of members of Congress. Prepare a good place for people to write.
4. **Gather the letters and bless them**, and then thank people for participating. Make sure to count the total letters for each member of Congress, and then mail the individual letters to Capitol Hill or to Bread for the World for personal delivery to Congress.
5. **Report your Offering results** to Bread using either the form in the companion materials or online at www.bread.org/OL.
6. **Celebrate** your success in raising voices to help end hunger—no matter how many people take part. Stay connected to the Offering of Letters campaign, reporting progress to your team and your church or campus.

Ideas for Events

Adult or Youth Education Forum

Host a letter-writing forum after worship or between services. Show the Offering of Letters video(s). Invite a speaker who has first-hand knowledge of the advocacy issue. Set aside 20 to 30 minutes for letter writing. Collect the letters, and end with a blessing. Consider baking bread to entice would-be participants.

The Three-Week Offering of Letters

Many people like to write letters at home instead of on the spot. Set a goal for how many letters your congregation can collect. Distribute the sample letter the week before the beginning of the campaign, and have materials available each Sunday during the campaign. On the last Sunday, bring the letters to the front of the congregation for a blessing.

Movie Night

Host a movie night at church, and show a film related to the topic at hand. Make sure you have the appropriate license to show the film publicly (you do not need a license to show Offering of Letters videos). At the end of the showing, host a short discussion and invite attendees to write letters. End the evening with a blessing of the letters.

Service and Advocacy

Consider conducting an Offering of Letters as part of a service project. For example, if your church is volunteering at a food bank, invite participants to write letters to address the root causes of hunger. If your church is sponsoring a mission trip, be sure to check out Bread's resource "Getting Ready to Come Back: An Advocacy Guide for Mission Teams," available at www.bread.org/store.

Worship Service

If your church sees Bread as a central part of its mission, consider asking congregants to write letters during a worship service. The sermon should tie closely with the issue, and congregants should be given at least 10 minutes to write in silence. We recommend this only for churches that are highly engaged with Bread. Distribute half-sheets of cardstock and pens before service. End by bringing the letters forward for a blessing.

Organizing an Offering of Letters

Integrating Your Event into the Life of Your Congregation/Campus

Engaging Your Church

- **Motivate** church councils and pastors by organizing an Offering of Letters and promoting Bread for the World at meetings of your faith tradition's synod, diocese, presbytery, or general conference.
- **Gather** a study group to read Bread for the World Institute's Hunger Report and its accompanying Christian study guide. See www.bread.org/hungerreport.
- **Connect** with your church's mission activities by engaging volunteers and recipients at your church, your local food pantry, or shelter. If your church has mission relationships in the United States or abroad, consider connecting with them as well. These connections will help you gather stories that can be used to inform your congregation about how anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs affect their lives.
- **Strengthen** your church's hunger ministry through a Covenant Church relationship with Bread for the World. When you commit to integrating hunger concerns into the life of your congregation, Bread for the World provides tools to help your church learn more about hunger, pray for hungry people, and advocate to end hunger. See www.bread.org/covenant for more information.
- **Celebrate** Bread for the World Sunday in the fall, and renew your church's commitment to overcoming hunger. Visit www.bread.org/sunday for more details.
- **Subscribe** to Bread for the Preacher, a free monthly email resource for pastors. Each edition features Scripture-based preaching reflections and worship resources that address issues of hunger and poverty. Sign up at www.bread.org/preacher.



Mark Fenton for Bread for the World

Only one out of every 20 grocery bags that feed people who are hungry come from church food pantries and other private charities. Federal programs provide the rest.

Engaging Your Campus Groups

- **Raise awareness.** Contact your Bread for the World regional organizer for ways to turn the Offering of Letters campaign into educational activities and actions that focus on the root causes of hunger and poverty. Consider writing letters to members of Congress during your campus' hunger-awareness month or at the end of a hunger fast. End a service event with an advocacy action. Visit www.bread.org/OL for more ideas.
- **Invite a speaker.** A Bread for the World organizer or local activist can come to your campus to speak about the Offering of Letters or about solutions to hunger and poverty. For larger audiences or for additional speaker ideas, contact your Bread for the World organizer. Contact information is available both in the companion materials and online at www.bread.org/organizers.
- **Use social media.** Get the word out about Bread for the World's work to end hunger in the United States and around the world. "Like" us on Facebook (facebook.com/breadfortheworld), or follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/bread4theworld). Encourage others to check out our blog at www.bread.org/blog. Share advocacy ideas and tell others what you're doing!

Organizing an Offering of Letters

Additional Tools to Help you Plan and Execute

Videos and Photos

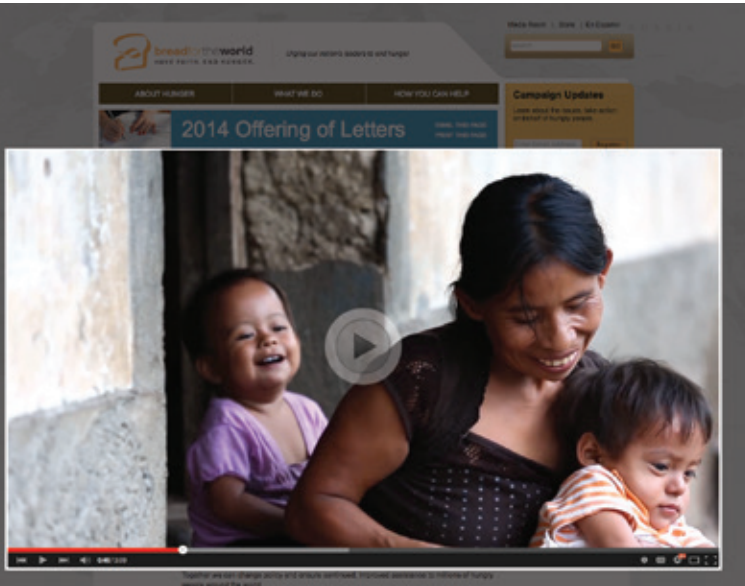
Related to the 2015 Offering of Letters:

- www.bread.org/OL
- on the DVD included in this toolkit
- www.flickr.com/photos/breadfortheworld

Post videos and photos on church or campus ministry websites, blogs, or Facebook pages to promote your Offering of Letters. Videos can also be presented during worship, in a class, during an event, or while letters are being written.

Additional Bread for the World videos and photos:

- www.youtube.com/breadfortheworld
- www.flickr.com/photos/breadfortheworld



Videos that are part of Bread for the World's Offerings of Letters show how the federal government's policies affect real people in real life.

The Hunger Report

www.bread.org/hungerreport

Bread for the World Institute's annual *Hunger Report* provides policy analysis on hunger and strategies to end it. A Christian study guide for the report is available. It invites participants to consider how they might take action in response to the issues discussed in the report. The study guide includes biblical reflections, discussion questions, a summary of the *Hunger Report* theme, and suggested activities.



Organizing an Offering of Letters



Other Tools to Help you Respond Throughout the year

These tools can help you stay up-to-date on Congress and Bread actions throughout the year.

Offering of Letters website

- Latest sample letters to Congress
- Fact sheets
- Updates on the Offering of Letters campaign

Bread on Social Media

-  /breadfortheworld
-  /bread4theworld
- Bread blog (updated daily): blog.bread.org

Email and Action Alerts

Bread's action alerts are critical tools for building political will in Washington, D.C. When hundreds of constituents join their voices on an issue, they can often influence the outcome of votes in Congress. To sign up for action alerts, visit www.bread.org and fill out the email sign-up form. You can also visit our online action center at www.bread.org/act, where you can choose to write on any of the legislative issues affecting hunger moving in Congress at that time.

Newsletter

Published 12 times per year (print and electronic editions), the Bread newsletter covers issues and legislation that affect hungry people as well as the advocacy of our members. To subscribe, visit www.bread.org/newsletter.

National Call

Register for this monthly discussion of current legislative priorities and actions with Bread for the World staff, activists, and special guests from coalition partners or Capitol Hill. To participate, visit www.bread.org/events and sign up for the grassroots webinar and conference call, or call your organizer for more information.

Bread Organizers

Stay updated on developments and resources by keeping in touch with Bread organizers. Find contact information for the organizer in your region in this toolkit or at www.bread.org/contact.



The Bread for the World website provides updates and connections to help you follow the issues and be an effective advocate all year.

Organizing an Offering of Letters

Promoting Your Event

Pulpit Announcement

If a pulpit announcement is part of the worship service, it should reflect the experience of worship—encouraging faith and understanding of God’s message. Don’t just tell the worshippers the details of the Offering of Letters. Tell them why this is important, grounding your words in your own experience of faith. Ultimately, you best know your faith community and what speaks to their hearts, but here are some ideas that can help you develop your announcement:

- **Tell a personal story**, or explain why advocating on behalf of poor and hungry people is a valuable part of your faith walk.
- **Connect the Offering of Letters to the day’s sermon**, reiterating any points made by the pastor, or speaker about helping hungry and poor people.
- **Present a skit** with your ministry team encouraging congregants to live out their faith through advocacy.
- **Show a short Offering of Letters video** that speaks to you, followed by an announcement of where and when the Offering will take place and why you’ll be participating.
- **Compare current facts on hunger and poverty to God’s vision** to help congregants re-envision the world. Recite a few facts from the Hunger and Poverty Facts sheet in this toolkit, and talk about how those facts would change in a world in which no child goes hungry and no parent sacrifices a meal to feed a child.
- **Visit the Offering of Letters website** for more inspiration and facts: www.bread.org/OL.

Sample Pulpit Announcement

[Relate personal experience or facts about hunger.]

What would it take to realize God’s vision for a world in which everyone has enough? We have the resources now to feed all people, but we need the political will to make it happen. Our nation’s leaders have the ability to craft policies that establish pathways out of poverty for our brothers and sisters both at home and abroad. This is God’s vision. But leadership must come from God’s people: you and me.

That is why I am asking you to join me in Bread for the World’s Offering of Letters on [date, time, place] to write letters to our members of Congress asking them to prioritize and protect programs vital to hungry people in the United States and around the world.

Bulletin or Newsletter Announcement

Bulletin announcements should be short and include clear information about the purpose of the Offering of Letters as well as the time and the place. For a newsletter submission, look for a way to make the issue of hunger real and personal, using one of the ideas mentioned in the pulpit announcement section above or a story from the Offering of Letters website.

Sample Bulletin Announcement

Bread for the World’s Offering of Letters aims to realize a world in which all of God’s children are fed. Our goal is to create political will by writing our policy makers and urging them to create pathways out of hunger and poverty. Join the [committee or group] this [date, time, place] as we turn our faith into action by writing letters to our members of Congress. For more information on this year’s Offering of Letters, go to www.bread.org/OL.

Social Media

Many churches reach new audiences and keep their congregation informed of upcoming events through Facebook or Twitter. Does your church or pastor have a blog on which to announce an Offering of Letters? Consider posting pictures after the event and writing about what you have accomplished.

Sample Facebook Post

Join us [date] as we put our faith into action. We will be conducting a Bread for the World Offering of Letters, asking our nation’s leaders to work to end hunger both at home and abroad. We will begin with an adult forum on hunger at [time, place], followed by letter writing and a blessing of the letters before we send them to Washington, D.C. [Find an Offering of Letters picture or video link to include with your announcement at www.bread.org/OL.]

Sample Tweet

Join us for an Offering of Letters [date] & ask Congress to #endhunger at home & abroad.

Organizing an Offering of Letters

Conducting an Adult Forum or Workshop

Educating your congregation or campus on the Offering of Letters campaign is an important way to build awareness and commitment to advocacy. Adult or campus forums, youth group retreats, Sunday school classes, women's groups events, or other settings are places where you can build excitement and knowledge. A concise presentation, clear instructions on writing letters, and powerful stories will inspire members of your community to join our efforts to end hunger.

Here is a suggested outline for a presentation. Tailor this to the time you have; your Bread for the World organizer (regional staff member) can help you decide on goals and outcomes.

In advance: Prepare any handouts, and consider using the PowerPoint presentation on the DVD included in this toolkit to guide your presentation. The PowerPoint file and other resources are also at www.bread.org/OL. The PowerPoint file includes talking points for each slide. Be sure to review the PowerPoint presentation and practice delivering it.

Introduction: Start with a welcome and prayer. Provide some background about how you came to participate in the Offering of Letters, explain why this forum is important, and talk about what you expect to accomplish.

Background: If your group is new to Bread and letter-writing, include in your presentation the slides in the PowerPoint presentation that introduce Bread and the importance of advocacy as a response to hunger. Discuss the biblical grounds for speaking out to leaders about hunger and poverty. If your group already knows Bread, skip those introductory slides, and move into the Offering of Letters slides.

What: Introduce the topic of Bread for the World's 2015 Offering of Letters—feeding programs for children in the United States. Remind participants of the biblical stories in which God provides food to people on journeys or on the margins of society. Show the Offering of Letters video on the DVD in the toolkit. Describe the U.S. government's programs that provide meals to American children and Bread's approach for improving them and ensuring they continue. Invite participants to share their own stories about ending hunger.

How and who: Talk about why hand-written letters will make a difference. Point out which members of Congress in your area are especially important (your Bread organizer can help you identify key leaders). If time permits, write letters during the forum, or let people know when your Offering of Letters will take place. Answer any questions and distribute handouts.

Closing: Summarize the 2015 Offering of Letters campaign, the ask, and any goals you have for your community's engagement (for example, the number of letters you hope to get). Finish with prayer.

Resources for your forum

- Handouts, stories, Offering of Letters videos, and PowerPoint (on DVD and at www.bread.org/OL)
- "We Are Bread for the World" video for those new to Bread (on DVD and at www.bread.org/OL)
- Global poverty and hunger facts and biographical information for your members of Congress (your Bread organizer can help you locate the latter)
- Current sample letter

Tips

- Anticipate who may attend and what questions they may have. Review the questions and answers on the issues in this toolkit and online at www.bread.org/OL.
- Prepare talking points, drawing from notes on the PowerPoint slides.
- Encourage interaction rather than lecturing.
- Words and statistics are good tools, but pictures and stories enliven your points.
- Make sure that logistics (especially technology) are arranged in advance.



Quick-Setup Guide

Use this Quick-Setup Guide to plan and carry out your Offering of Letters event. Or, for more detailed ideas and guidance, read the inside pages of this booklet.

- 1** **Read** the issues part of this toolkit (pages 1-12 in the bound part). Then familiarize yourself with the supplements in the toolkit (items in the pockets of the folder). These are materials to help you promote your event and for participants to learn about the issues and write letters. Order/gather additional supplies as necessary.
- 2** **Determine** what will happen at your event and plan it. **Schedule** your event. Work with your pastor, mission committee, or church council to get permission and support.
- 3** **Promote** your event through announcements (verbal and in the bulletin), newsletters, social media, etc. in the weeks before your event.
- 4** On the day of the event, **integrate** the hunger topic in the entire worship service or event. **Prepare** your space and supplies.
- 5** **Gather** the letters and **bless** them, and then **thank** people for participating. **Count** the total letters for each member of Congress, and then **mail** the individual letters to Capitol Hill. **Report** your Offering results to Bread using either the form in the companion materials or online at www.bread.org/OL.
- 6** **Stay involved.** Keep following the Offering of Letters campaign, and encourage people to continue their advocacy with Bread for the World.

