

Our Daily Bread

FOOD SECURITY AND THE CALL TO SOLIDARITY

Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



1. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus offers his disciples a formula for prayer. This line of petition to the Father frames our letter on food security:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

2. Food security means having access to the food we need.¹ It is something we are more and more aware of when we leave the grocery store or, for a growing number of people, the food bank. The cost of our daily bread has gone

up significantly, with the result that many, even in an affluent country like Canada, find themselves in a situation of food insecurity. According to the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development’s Governing Council:

The world is facing the largest food crisis in modern history as progress on achieving Zero Hunger moves backwards. Currently, more than 1 in 10 people are suffering severe food insecurity and over 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet.²

3. The prayer for “our daily bread” is certainly a cry that God is used to hearing. But do we hear it? This letter is an attempt to approach the problem of food insecurity from the perspective of God’s revelation and his loving desire to respond to our individual and collective cries for help.

4. To our prayer for “daily bread,” God has already provided an abundance of gifts through his bountiful creation. He has entrusted this creation to us, who have the task of using our God-given intellect to determine how best to care for and nurture these gifts. It is in this context that we will present some basic ideas



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1 According to the 1996 *World Food Summit Plan of Action*, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” <https://www.fao.org/3/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>.

2 IFAD website, background information on the 2023 Governing Council, <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/events/governing-council-46>.

*Give us this day
our daily bread.*



“The earth belongs to everyone,
not to the rich.”

Populorum progressio, no. 23

about food security, locally and globally, with the overarching understanding and belief that God does indeed provide our daily bread through the wonderful gifts of creation, which are gifts for all. In 1967, St. Pope Paul VI wrote in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*:

Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: “You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”³

5. In structuring our letter, we suggest three hopeful themes which have both personal and global implications: *Solidarity*, *Harmony*, and *Harvest*.

SOLIDARITY

6. Solidarity “is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible *for all*.”⁴ It means living in supportive

communion with our neighbours and in harmony with all creation, co-operating with the graces and gifts given abundantly by our Creator. Yet, sadly, it is not difficult to observe today that too often the garden of the Creator and the fruit of the earth, our daily bread, are wasted, trampled, and even stolen from the mouths of children by a consumer culture with a throwaway mentality. As Pope Francis said in 2014 in his address to the participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements:

[Solidarity] is a word that means much more than an occasional gesture of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all take priority over the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means fighting against the structural causes of poverty and inequality; of the lack of work, land and housing; and of the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced dislocation, painful emigration, human trafficking, drugs, war, violence and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called upon to transform.⁵

3 Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), no. 23, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

4 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 193 (citation of John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [1987], no. 38).

5 Francis, Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Rome, October 28, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html.



7. When it comes to food security, the change we may be called to can take different forms. One example could be simplifying our food purchases or consumption and reducing food waste so that others may eat. We could also choose locally grown produce rather than more exotic fruits and vegetables.



Photo: FangXiaNuo/iStock.com

8. We can also envision changes to government policy for the common good of food security that would help to give all fellow citizens the basic ability to have their daily bread. These could include taking measures to assure a just living wage to afford the increased cost of food, not forgetting the vital necessity for the farmers, fishers, and others who produce the food. According to PROOF, an interdisciplinary research program based at the University of

Toronto that studies effective policy approaches to reduce food insecurity:

Research has repeatedly shown that household food insecurity can be reduced by policy interventions that improve the financial circumstances of households at the bottom of the income spectrum. When food-insecure households receive additional income, they spend it in ways that improve their food security.⁶

9. Food security for many in our country is made more difficult by the related problem of housing affordability. Both of these challenges are directly connected to the concept of what the social doctrine of the Church calls a “just



Photo: Tents and other structures are seen in an aerial view at a homeless encampment at Strathcona Park after a 10 a.m. deadline for people to vacate the park, in Vancouver, B.C., Friday, April 30, 2021. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Darryl Dyck

6 PROOF, *What Can Be Done to Reduce Food Insecurity in Canada?* (2022), <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada>.

wage,” as St. John Paul II clearly states in his 1981 Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*:

A just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socio-economic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly. It is not the only means of checking, but it is a particularly important one and, in a sense, the key means.⁷

10. At the international level, we can see that when food security is lost, there is often a lack of peace and stability, the growth of war and conflict, and an escalation of the arms trade. When human actions lead to the desertification of certain parts of the earth, the destruction of the biodiversity of an area due to unsustainable forestry practices, or mega-projects of resource extraction or power production, the result is often conflict and an increase in displaced persons, migrants, and refugees. As Pope Francis said in 2023 in his greeting to participants in an international conference on food security:

This challenge is a pressing one, as all too often situations marked by natural disasters, as well as by armed conflict, ... political or economic corruption and exploitation of the earth, our common home, hinder food production, undermine the resilience of agricultural systems and dangerously threaten the nutritional supply of entire populations.⁸

11. Many Indigenous people in Canada and throughout the world still obtain a significant portion of their diet directly from the land. For them, food security is directly linked to their ability to access their lands and waters, which provide sustenance and well-being. Factors such as climate change and industrial development have the potential to disrupt the delicate balance that provides food security for people whose existence is directly interconnected with where they live on the land.

7 John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), no. 19, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

8 Francis, Greeting to Participants in the Conference “Food and Humanitarian Crises: Science and Policies for Their Prevention and Mitigation,” Rome, May 10, 2023, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/may/documents/20230510-pas.html>.



HARMONY

12. The second invitation of our letter is to a greater connection and harmony with the land. When food is simply left to the commodities market, when the land is approached only as material for greedy exploitation, these can create artificial scarcities in some parts of the world and overabundance in others. Yet, we consider it a sign of hope that many urban and rural people today desire to live in greater harmony with the land given to us by our Creator. We see this clearly in the idea of the garden. Whether large or small, gardens contribute to

overall healthy food security. The increase in community gardens in many places is a sign of a growing desire for community involvement and solidarity and is to be encouraged.

13. In its statement for World Hunger Day 2023, Caritas Internationalis reminds us that food security is directly related to harmony and balance with the earth: “In order to end hunger, we must promote sustainable agriculture and food production, reduce food waste and support local food systems.”⁹

14. As we have noted, we should celebrate the use of human ingenuity and its ability to develop new ways of using land, water, fuel, and other resources, as well as technological advances, which are already allowing for an increased harvest without damaging the environment. Indeed, the harvest is great, as God the Creator has created an earth marked not by scarcity but by abundance. We give thanks for the dedication and creativity of our farmers and harvesters, who are tasked with feeding the world while using methods that sustain the land and waters so they can be fertile for generations to come. In this regard, we can recall the model provided by God himself: “you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth” (Psalm 65:9-10).



Photo: Curly leaf lettuce is harvested at Aquaverti Farms, an urban hydroponic vertical farm producing leafy greens, Wednesday, May 17, 2023 in Montreal. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Christinne Muschi

*You provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.*

Psalm 65:9



HARVEST

15. While there have been important achievements in the just distribution of the harvest of God's garden, there is still work to be done. In the face of food crises from climate-related disasters like floods and droughts, as well as the effects of armed conflict, the effective global distribution of food requires a willingness by individuals and nations to acknowledge the universal destination of the goods of the earth.¹⁰ Many non-governmental organizations, as well as governments, provide direct food relief. This is important and welcome, but it is not sufficient to solve the problem of food insecurity that so many millions face for their daily bread.

16. Despite many great advances in distributing the harvests of the earth, it is vital that governments renew their efforts nationally and internationally to develop more permanent and resilient systems of distribution of the great harvest that God our Creator so generously provides. The challenge of food security is a matter of justice and therefore often requires the use of government policy; it cannot be left solely to market forces and commodity pricing. A just system of food distribution requires safeguards to prevent predatory price inflation and profiteering by entities that may exercise control over food access. Food insecurity

ultimately undermines peace, which is essential for human development.



Photo: Harvested wheat fields near Cremona, Alta., Thursday, Oct. 1, 2020. Canada is the world's sixth-largest producer and one of the largest exporters of wheat. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jeff McIntosh

EVERYTHING IS INTERCONNECTED

17. Ensuring the abundance of the Earth ultimately requires turning to the Creator rather than the creature, for it is in God that we grasp the proper order of the created world and the dignity of our brothers and sisters created in his image. The earth cannot be protected when there is a breakdown in human relationships.¹¹

10 *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), no. 504, https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html.

11 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), no. 51: "The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits. Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature." Emphasis in original. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

*It is we human beings above all
who need to change.*

Laudato Si', no. 202

The Book of Ezekiel speaks of God replacing our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). In the area of food security, this conversion will manifest itself in forms of solidarity, by working in movements, and through developing government policies that promote global solidarity and food security for all.

18. As Pope Francis wrote in his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*:

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.¹²

19. This transformation demands a call to act in cooperation with others, but it can also have an individual component. For example, we are all challenged to consider whether our

own diets are sustainable. It is helpful to recall the long-standing spiritual practice of fasting, as well as abstaining from meat on certain prescribed days,¹³ which can not only serve to unite us to the Passion of Our Lord but can also be a concrete expression of our solidarity with those experiencing hunger. Are we willing to periodically give up foods we enjoy so we can grow in holiness and communion with others?



Photo: Anton Skripachev/iStock.com

¹² Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015), no. 202, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

¹³ In the Roman Catholic Church, this has generally included every Friday (unless it falls on a Solemnity). Eastern Catholic Churches share this practice, with additional days of prescribed abstinence.

CONCLUSION

20. As we conclude, we give thanks to God for all the people whose labour and dedication allow us to eat. Although we cannot name all the roles in our complex food industry, we extend our special gratitude to farmers (especially families who farm), those who harvest the sea, the many migrant workers who contribute so much to our agricultural industry, those who prepare food for others (especially within their own homes), and everyone involved in bringing

food from its source to our tables. Through the intercession of our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, who provided food and care to the Holy Family and whose care extends to the entire human family, we implore God's blessing upon all these people who provide us with our daily bread. We ask the Lord to help us all to work together, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to care for his creation and to ensure that his abundant gifts reach all those in need.



QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

21. We end our reflection with some questions for consideration taken from the 2023 document *Our Common Home*,¹⁴ which was jointly developed by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute:

- ✠ The Eucharist reminds us of the deep relationship between the Earth, one another, and God. As we share the Bread of Life, how do we respond to the fact that so many go hungry?
- ✠ We live in a world of both hunger and food waste. Can you resolve to stop wasting food? Are you willing to make sacrifices to change your diet so it is more planet friendly?
- ✠ What needs to change in how we produce and distribute food? What can we do to help bring about these changes? Can you start composting and buy more from local producers?

Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace

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¹⁴ Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute, *Our Common Home: A Guide to Living and Caring for Our Living Planet* (2023), 7, <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/vatican-sei-v10-20231205.pdf>.

