

PRAY O God,
Even with all the challenges in
my life, I know I have been given
many blessings. Open my ears
and eyes, my heart and life, that
I may in these coming days be
able to do some work of justice
and peace for you. Amen.

SPiRIT

“What I eat is a material question,” says David Beckmann. “What my neighbor eats is a spiritual question. Our spiritual survival depends on responding to the least among us.”

Beckmann is a Lutheran minister but has no congregation. He is an economist but no longer works for the World Bank. Instead as president of Bread for the World, Beckmann lobbies members of the, U.S. Congress to pass legislation to feed people who are hungry both at home and around the globe.

Bread for the World draws individuals and congregations into its work of lobbying for legislation to reduce hunger. “Churches, synagogues, and mosques do great work with food shelves and Thanksgiving baskets but

they can’t feed the hungry alone,” says Beckmann. “All the charitable feeding programs amount to only 6% of the food the poor receive through government nutrition programs.”

Bread for the World specializes in the work of advocacy. “When I talk in parishes,” says Beckmann, “I tell people that every time they bring a can of food for the food shelf or work in a feeding program, they should also write to their legislators. Do both. Feeding the hungry requires both charity and advocacy.”

Congregations and parishes that belong to Bread for the World send offerings of letters to representatives in Congress to give voice to the needs of people who are poor. “Our Christian faith gives us a habit of hopefulness,” says Beckmann.

Bread for the World has helped parishes and congregations work

to achieve the United Nations’ first Millennium Development Goal—to cut in half the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. The nations of the world met the goal five years early. Globally 836 million people still live in extreme poverty. Ending extreme poverty by 2030 is the number one United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal. About one in five persons in developing regions lives on less than \$1.25 per day, especially in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Wars and the pandemic work against the goal.

Beckmann became a pastor before he became an economist. “I believe God is moving in our history. The faith-filled advocates for the hungry and poor of our world have a chance to bend history and lead an exodus from hunger.”

President David Beckmann opens Bread for the World’s summer gathering.



Advocate to End Hunger

By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Why does Beckmann see an exodus from hunger? True, with the recession more people in the U.S. live below the poverty line today than in 1976. True, no president has made ending poverty in the world one of his top 20 priorities.

Also true, says Beckmann, “We know the greatest return on investment

Bread for the World photo



is early childhood education. We reformed the use of food stamps in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by giving people debit cards that makes tracking how benefits are spent easy. We know the effects of malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of life damages children’s mental capacities and leaves them dependent, unable get out of poverty. We have ready-to-use therapeutic food that can change that.”

In lobbying the members of Congress, Beckmann often sees children’s drawings and letters framed or posted in their offices. In one church teens led the adults. “The adults felt reluctant to do an offering of letters,” Beckman recalls. “A high school youth group studied hunger issues, introduced the issues to the congregation, and then asked people to stop at a booth on the way out of church and write a letter. Now the whole church writes letters every year.”

Beckmann values Catholic social teaching. “It is a great gift to the rest of Christianity,” he

says. “The consistent, authoritative teaching over decades gives continuity.”

How did Beckmann become a pastor, economist, advocate to end hunger? “I was baptized in H2O and bathed in God’s love in my family,” says Beckmann. “Experiencing the love and forgiveness of God in Jesus was built

into my personality in the way I was raised. I’m terribly grateful for that.

“My mom and dad were conservative, small town Nebraska kids who knew the Lord and were trying to do what the Lord wants. Their faith and commitment affected my four sisters and me.

“As a girl my mom had to leave home because her parents couldn’t feed her. She was the oldest girl. She left the farm and became a companion and household helper for a lady in Lincoln, Nebraska. With her first wages she bought furniture for the family back home. Through the years she taught a lot of women to sew clothes for their families, but in helping people in need, she never had any sense of reaching down because she had been there.

“My parents believed in education. My dad got a Ph.D. People’s rights really mattered to him. He was active in an organization of the Lutheran Church that worked on race issues and racial tolerance. He took me to civil rights meetings.

“My parents invited a man named John Samuel from India to our home. He was studying to be a teacher with my dad and became part of our family for a year. We invited him to our church, but because of his dark skin, people

To set a table of plenty with enough food for all requires four legs.

GOVERNMENT

“is a means to do together what we cannot do alone.” It serves the common good, provides a safety net for the vulnerable, helps overcome discrimination, and ensures equal opportunity.

COMMUNITY AND CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

help families make good choices, overcome discrimination, build community, confront injustice, and demand that public officials are accountable. For example, Catholic schools, Catholic health care, Catholic Charities, and Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

MARKETPLACE AND BUSINESS, COMMERCE AND LABOR

not only drive growth and productivity but must contribute to the common good and reflect our values and priorities.

FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS.

Every person has a responsibility to respect the dignity of others and to work to secure not only their own rights but also the rights of others. Families raise children with an ethic of service and passion for justice.

In their pastoral letter *A Table of Plenty*, the U.S. bishops identify four legs that support this table—families and individuals, community organizations such as schools, parishes, marketplace and businesses, and government.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Feast of Christ the King

Who inherits God's kingdom?

NARRATOR: Jesus spoke to his disciples.

JESUS: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left. The king will speak to those on his right.

KING: Come. You have my Father's blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of all the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you

comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.

JESUS: Then the just will ask—

JUST: Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?

KING: I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers and sisters, you did it for me.

JESUS: Then the king will speak to those on his left.

KING: Out of my sight, you condemned, into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil

and his angels! I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was away from home and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing. I was ill and in prison and you did not come to comfort me.

UNJUST: Lord, when did we see you hungry and thirsty or away from home or naked or ill or in prison and not attend to your needs?

KING: I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me.

JESUS: These will go off to eternal punishment and the just to eternal life.

Matthew 25.31-46

wondered why we had brought a colored man into our church.

"I arrived from Nebraska at Yale with corn coming out of my ears," Beckmann remembers of his college days. "I showed up in the middle of the antiwar and black power movements in the 60s. Stokely Carmichael came to Yale and spoke to a mix of black and white students. 'Don't come to our neighborhood to fix the problem,' he said. 'The problem is in your neighborhood, too. Go to your neighborhood to fix the problem.'"

When he graduated in the late 1960s, Beckmann received a fellowship

and an airline ticket. He quickly realized that he could just as cheaply fly around the world to get to his job in Ghana as fly directly there and back. "I found student activism everywhere and learned what was going on in the world. Being in developing countries as a young person is important."

Beckmann went to the seminary of the church in which he grew up—the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. When he finished, the congregation in which Beckmann served as a student pastor ordained him as a missionary economist, not a traditional pastor. Beckmann then studied at the London School of Economics and worked for the World Bank.

Twenty years ago Beckmann moved from economics to hunger advocacy. "I took a two-thirds pay cut when I came to Bread for the World. It made me realize I really feel called to this work. But I also feel inadequate. I love the gospel passage that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. God wakes me up every morning and says, 'You're David, you could be better but here's the job.' As Mother Teresa says, 'Do what's in front of you.'"

QUESTIONS

- 1 How does the work of advocacy differ from works of mercy?
- 2 What interests you in joining in the work of advocating to end hunger?
- 3 How has Beckmann's family contributed to his vocation and work?
- 4 What is attractive about combining the work of pastor, economist, and advocate?
- 5 Who does the works of mercy in your area?
- 6 Who does the work of advocacy?
- 7 How can you help? What's in front of you to do?



Pennsylvania Bread for the World members lobby Senator Robert Casey's office.

Walking with justice

Neither the just or the unjust in Sunday's gospel parable have a clue when they have fed, clothed, or sheltered Jesus or neglected him. Both the just and the unjust have to ask, "When did we see you hungry or thirsty or away from home or naked or ill or in prison?"

Jesus' answer calls us to minister to others. "As often as you did these things for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me." Jesus identifies himself with the poor, the refugee, the nerd, the airhead, the classmate who doesn't know about deodorant.

Jesus also identifies himself with our friends, our parents, our brothers and sisters, our teachers, our coworkers. Jesus' call extends to the relationships we experience every day. He calls us to treat all people with compassion and love.

How can we be sure we are among the just rather than the unjust? How can we be sure that we do all that Jesus asks of us?

There is no single, right way to go about doing the works of mercy. We can start by examining the way we treat the people we see every day such as our family and friends. These people may not be physically hungry or ill. Instead, the works of mercy call us to forgive them when they make us angry, listen to them when they feel lonely, and laugh with them when they are down.



Making breakfast at a shelter.

Yet, Jesus is clear that we also must minister to the least in society. Some people choose to volunteer at homeless shelters or food kitchens. These types of actions fall under the category of charity. Charity addresses an immediate need such as feeding a hungry person, when he or she is standing before us hungry. Charity directly serves the needs of an individual or group.

Some people choose to host hunger banquets or write legislation to aid hungry people. These actions fall under the category of social justice. Social justice addresses the root cause of a problem and attempts to change that cause.

Charity that directly helps people makes us feel good. Justice that directly challenges the way we live our own lives may make us feel uncomfortable. Because social justice calls us to question why people suffer, it can be more difficult than charity.

Charity

- Helping people survive their present crisis
- Working with food shelves, food baskets, clothing centers
- Volunteer work at shelters
- Helping the elderly with errands or small jobs
- Tutoring children
- Providing activities for disadvantaged youth
- Other volunteer work

Justice

- Removing the causes of social problems
- Voter registration or lobbying
- Supporting candidates who support people issues
- Legislative letters and calls
- Organizing people to work together on a problem
- Getting government agencies to change policies that cause problems
- Educating friends and classmates about problems

It can be easier to give away old clothes that I don't like to a thrift store than to try to stop buying the latest fashion when I really don't need it. It can be easier to spend one day a week serving food at a shelter than to be sure I don't waste food. It can be easier to visit the neglected than to right the relationships I neglect in my own life.

In Sunday's gospel, Jesus calls us to follow him with both feet—the foot of charity and the foot of justice.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 As we approach Advent, set up a Christmas fund to be used for "the least" Jesus speaks of. Individually or with family or friends, try giving up soda or snacks to save money you can donate at Christmas.
- 2 Get information about Catholic Relief Services (crs.org) or Catholic Charities (catholiccharitiesusa.org). What efforts are they sponsoring that you can support in your parish or school?
- 3 How much food is thrown away at lunch time in your school? Start a food trade box. Designate an area in the cafeteria and put out a large box. People who don't like an item in their lunch can put it in the box instead of throwing it away.