

# Food Justice: Respecting God's Gracious Gifts

A booklet for people of faith

Fredonia Presbyterian Church

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This booklet is a brief overview of the issues of food justice. It is intended as a simple introduction to some of the issues including the spirituality of food, healthy eating, environmental concerns, and social justice around food production. It is hoped that it will be of interest and value. Websites are included for those interested in pursuing any of these issues.

## **Food and Spirituality: Coming Closer to God Through How We Understand Food**

### *What does Scripture say?*

*Review some of these scripture passages and consider what they tell you about God's relationship to the food that we eat. Feasting, and the symbol of feasting, is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament (see Genesis 14.18-20 and Exodus 18.12). The sharing of food is a central theme in the New Testament as well. It is mentioned 31 times in Luke, 26 in Mark, 20 in Matthew, and 14 in John. In I Corinthians, eating is a central theological issue and is mentioned by Paul 22 times. These are just some of the relevant passages.*

Genesis 1.29-31: When God created the world, God intended that various plants and vegetation would be our food.

Deuteronomy 8:7-10: The Promised Land will be a place where we will eat and be full.

Exodus 12.1-28: The first Passover.

Leviticus 19.9-10: Leave crops in the field for the poor and the sojourners.

Psalms 104.13-15: God wants us to have food and to enjoy it.

Psalms 111.5: God provides food for those in awe of God.

Psalms 146.5-8: Happy are those who give food to the poor.

Proverbs 22.9: "He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." (Also see Proverbs 13.23; 19.22; 21.13; 22.9)

Proverbs 23.20-21: Don't associate with those who drink or eat too much.

Ecclesiastes 2.24-25: "There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I say, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment." (see also Ecclesiastes 3.13)

Isaiah 25.6: God's people are promised plenty in all that they need to survive as their relationship with God is restored in the future.

Isaiah 58.6-7: "Share your food with the hungry."

Daniel 1: Daniel is strengthened by a vegetarian diet.

Matthew 6.11: We ask God for our daily bread.

Matthew 6.31-33: We should trust God to provide what we most need.

Matthew 25.31-46: Jesus says, "I was hungry and you fed me."

Mark 6.30-44: Feeding the multitudes (see also Mark 8.1-9 and parallels in Matthew, Luke and John).

Mark 14.17-26: The Last Supper (see also Matthew 26.26-29 and Luke 22.14-23).

Luke 6.21: "Blessed are you who hunger, for you will be filled."

Luke 14.7-14: A marriage feast is compared to the kingdom of God (see also Luke 14.15-24).

Luke 16.19-31: The rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 24.28-35: Jesus is recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread at Emmaus.

John 21.9-14: Jesus prepares breakfast for the disciples with his own hands.

Acts 2.43-47: The early church attends temple together and breaks bread in their homes.

Acts 14.17: God is "Filling you with food and your hearts with joy."

Acts 20.7: The early church gathers on the first day of the week to break bread.

I Corinthians 11.17-22: Abuses around the agape meal.

I Corinthian 11.11.23-26: Paul describes the Lord's Supper.

II Corinthians 6.16: "We are the temple of the Living God."

James 2.16-17: Responding to the needs of others brings life to our faith.

Revelation 19.7-9: The marriage supper of the Lamb.

### *What do you have to say?*

*After considering these scripture passages, consider the following questions either as an individual or as a family.*

- Think about your typical table grace and how to enrich it. How do you express gratitude to God for food? Is your table grace said casually or does it truly express your sense of being "strangely sustained, nurtured and nourished," as Walter Brueggemann says. Are there ways of making it more meaningful?

-How do your eating habits reflect our relationship with God? Do any reflect careless stewardship? Jot down habits and examine them. List three things you and your family could do to treat food more sacramentally and respectfully.

-Ecclesiastes says "Bread is made for laughter." Name ways you have fun with food.

-What does "Give us our daily bread" mean to you? What images come to mind? What would this prayer mean to someone in Africa who is starving or a hungry person in America?

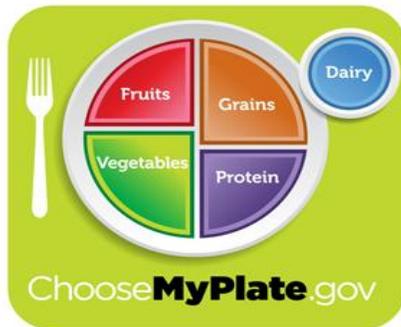
-Jesus frequently feasted with sinners and tax collectors. What does this say to you about Jesus' understanding of celebrations? How could you open your celebrations to others?

-Imagine yourself at the banquet table in the New Jerusalem. What hungers do you have that will be filled there?

## **Food and Our Bodies: Caring for God's Temple**

### WHAT WE EAT MATTERS:

The recommendations for a balanced diet can be seen in the following image and guidelines from the USDA. This is the recommended diet for those ages 31-50. Younger people should increase their intake slightly, those older decrease it. These are not guidelines for weight loss but for a healthy maintenance diet for the physically active. The proportion of protein to fruits to vegetables to grains to dairies does not change, however. For example, half your plate should be made up of fruits and vegetables, no matter whether your servings are larger or smaller than the guidelines. Contact a nutritionist if you have dietary restrictions or want to change your weight. Remember that these are only guidelines. Treats are assumed (!) and should be enjoyed as well, just not all the time! (otherwise they are not treats!)



Fruits: Women should eat 1 ½ cups of fruit a day. Men should eat 2 cups of fruit a day

1 cup of fruit in the recommendations is equivalent to 1 cup of fresh fruit, or 1 cup of 100% fruit juice, or ½ cup of dried fruit.

Vegetables: Women should eat 2 ½ cups of vegetables a day. Men should eat 3 cups of vegetables a day.

1 cup in the recommendations is equivalent to 1 cup of cooked, or raw vegetables, or 2 cups of leafy vegetables.

Grains: Women should eat 6 ounces of grains a day. Men should eat 7 ounces of grains a day.

1 ounce in the recommendations is equivalent to 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal or ½ cup of rice or pasta. Note that at least ½ of all grains consumed each day should be whole grain. Whole grains include whole wheat, bulgur wheat, oatmeal, whole cornmeal and brown rice. Processed grains include white flour, white bread and white rice.

Protein: Women should eat 5 oz. of protein a day. Men should eat 6 oz. of protein a day.

Eating a balanced diet helps not only long term health but also your daily energy level. It also honors God's gift of this amazing body we have received.

If you are interested in more information go to [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)

Nutritionists are available to give consultations at Brooks Hospital at 366-1111.

## WHERE WE EAT MATTERS

These suggestions can be followed whether you live alone or with others.

1. Take the time to set an appealing place setting for your meal. By creating a special setting, you will value your food, and the whole experience, even more.
2. One night, place an empty chair at your table for Christ to make yourself more aware of God's presence at your meal.
3. Consider occasionally using a bunch of grapes and a loaf of bread for a centerpiece to remind you of the sacred and spiritual nature of all meals.

## HOW WE EAT MATTERS:

1. Don't let your meals be lost in the hurry of the day, or as nothing but a secondary activity while watching TV. Take time to present your meal in an appetizing way, and give it your attention. Allow yourself to enjoy your food and the experience of eating it. Remember that it is a blessing to have this food so give thanks for it in how you enjoy your meal. If you live with others, make sure to share a meal together as a family regularly.
2. When you give thanks for your meal, take a moment to thank God not only for the goodness of the food, but also for all of those involved in bringing it to your table: farmers, field workers, and more. Make yourself aware of all of the blessings involved in making this meal possible. Also, remember those that are without.
3. Some table graces you could use are given below. Also consider purchasing a set of the table grace prayer cards "Table Blessings" from the church office.

## SAMPLE TABLE GRACES

*These table graces are taken from a variety of resources. Though most of them use plural pronouns, you can adapt that to your circumstances. Or use the plural pronouns and include the whole congregation in your prayers.*

Dear God, I gratefully bow my head to thank you for our daily bread. And may there be a goodly share on every table, everywhere. Amen

O Creator of all life, bless this food that is before us. Strengthen our commitment to share the gifts you have given us so that all may have food each day. Amen

O God, to those who have hunger give bread; to those who have bread, give hunger for justice. Amen

Gracious God, we thank you for this food. Let it nourish our bodies to make us strong in your service. Amen

Come Lord Jesus be our guest. Let Your gifts to us be blessed. May there be a goodly share on every table everywhere. Amen

We thank you, Gracious God, that we are guests at Your table. As we have been fed by Your gifts of life, so we will share with the world all that You give to us in love. Amen

Oh God, we praise You for Your power. Thank You for the bounty which You have given to us, our families and congregation. Your miracles today are as great as when the thousands on the hillside were fed and filled and the disciples found that there was even a surplus. Help us to always be mindful of those who are hungry and to be willing to share a portion of our many blessings with them. In Jesus' name, Amen

We pray for all who grew our food; May they eat well tonight. Protect them from unfairness, and keep them in your sight. Amen

## **Food and God's Creation: Caring for God's World**

*Our choices of food, and how they are packaged, have an effect on the environment in which we live. Everything from how the food is grown and prepared to how it is delivered can have an impact on the environment.*

1. When purchasing food, try to select foods with the least amount of packaging possible since the packaging uses up natural resources and produces waste which is often not recyclable.

2. Buy organic food when possible. Not only is it healthier for you because of the absence of pesticides, but the growers have not used any (or as many) chemicals in its growing that could have hurt the environment. To find out about organic food available locally, go to Nature's Network on Main Street in Fredonia next to Lakeshore Bank. Tops also has fruits and vegetables that are clearly marked as organically grown.

Be aware that some foods absorb pesticides more than others. Foods that have a higher level of pesticides (making organic a particularly good alternative) are: bell peppers, celery, potatoes, spinach, apples, cherries, nectarines, peaches, pears, raspberries and strawberries.

3. Buy locally – Some foods must be brought long distances to be sold in our area which means pollution-creating transportation.

a. Choose fruits and vegetables that are grown locally. Local farm stands and our Fredonia and Dunkirk Farm markets are available through October. After that, consider asking at your local store if they have any produce from local farmers. Consider encouraging them to indicate what items are locally grown. Local produce is also available through Nature's Network. Go to [www.naturesnetworkonline.com](http://www.naturesnetworkonline.com).

b. Buy meats from local suppliers. For example, our high consumption of beef through fast food is damaging the rain

forest because they are cutting down large areas of the forest to create grazing areas for cattle. This has a devastating effect on the environment and the lives of the former residents of these areas. Also, the beef that is being raised on many ranches has hormones and antibiotics which may be leading to health problems in the consumer. Commercially raised chickens have been found to have a number of harmful effects on both the chickens and the consumers. Local producers whose farms do not bring about these negative effects include:

Someday Maybe Farm

10966 Denison Road, Forestville, NY 14062

965.2757

Their beef is raised naturally with no hormones or antibiotics.

[www.somedaymaybefarms.com](http://www.somedaymaybefarms.com)

Roo Haven Farm

883 Hurlbert Road, Forestville, NY 14062

965.2716

They have free-range, pasture-raised poultry

[www.roohavenfarm.com](http://www.roohavenfarm.com)

## **Food and Our Neighbors**

*The need for food, and pleasure in sharing it with friends and family, is a universal experience for humans. As Christians, we are called to celebrate the gift of food by acting as good stewards. This means, as it does whenever we are stewards, that we remember our food is a gift of God. We are to use it wisely, using only what we need and making sure others have what they need, at least to the best of our ability. Also involved in good stewardship is the tradition of Christian hospitality which goes back to the earliest days of the church. Inviting people into your home is not just about sharing food. It is also about witnessing the importance of fellowship around a meal. Too often we worry about the appearance of our home. Focus more on the chance to welcome others.*

1. Are there people in your neighborhood or in the church that you might welcome to your home for a meal because they are alone or in need?
2. Are there international students at the college that you could invite for a meal?
3. How could you welcome people more often into your home to build fellowship?
4. To fight local hunger, our church has a monthly food collection (first Sunday of the month) and the Christmas Tree of Food. We also give regular donations to the Rural Ministry. What ways could you help the hungry in your immediate area?
  - a. Support our church programs for local hunger
  - b. Consider becoming directly involved at Rural Ministry to help in their food programs.
  - c. Place a small box on your kitchen table and put coins in it for hunger. Consider having a simpler meal once a week or once a month and putting the money saved in the box. Contribute the money to a local hunger program such as Rural Ministries Food Bank or Friendly Kitchen.

## **Food and Social Justice**

*There are many social justice issues relating to food and the needs of our neighbors: fair wages for workers, legislative decisions that affect world hunger, and unjust policies of the international food industry. The call to care for the poor and victims of injustice is clear in scripture. Below are some of the ways to be involved in advocating for those in need.*

1. Purchase coffee and tea from our Equal Exchange table.
2. Support organizations fighting national and international hunger issues by participating in our church's *Centsability* program in December, giving to Souper Bowl Sunday in February and supporting the Presbyterian Hunger Program through *One Great Hour of Sharing in Lent*.
3. Become involved in legislative issues that affect hunger programs nationally and internationally through *Bread for the World* ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)) and *OxFam* ([www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org))
4. Learn more about the conditions of farm workers at [www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org) and [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org).

## **Additional Resources**

*These books discuss a variety of issues relating to Food Justice. All of these books are available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).*

- a. Animal, Vegetable, Miracle. Barbara Kingsolver.
- b. Breaking Bread: The Spiritual Significance of Food. Sara Covin Juengst. (Available from the pastor)
- c. Hope's Edge: the next diet for a small planet. Francis Moore Lappe
- d. Sleeping with Bread: holding what gives you life. Dennis Linn (available from the pastor)
- e. Food for Life: the Spirituality and Ethics of Eating. L. Shannon Jung
- f. Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health. Marion Nestle

*Movies that deal with issues of Food Justice*

- a. "Supersize Me" –an entertaining documentary about the adverse effects of eating fast food
- b. "King Corn" – as we seek to save money in food production, we too often ignore the other costs
- c. "Babette's Feast" - a beautifully prepared feast changes the lives of members of an austere religious group
- d. "Killer at Large" – why obesity is America's greatest threat
- e. "Food, Inc." – and eye opening expose of the modern food industry

*Other Websites to investigate*

- a. [www.pcusa.org/hunger](http://www.pcusa.org/hunger)
- b. [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org)
- c. [www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)