

FOR RETURNING CONGREGATIONS/ FAMILY/ FRIENDS/ CO-WORKERS GROUPS

Dear Returning Congregation/Family/Friends/Co-workers Groups:

Welcome back!... And thank you for your continued concern about the issue of hunger in our community. To refresh your learnings about hunger in our area, read the [Facts on Hunger](http://citysoup Philly.org/FactsOnHunger/index.html) (<http://citysoup Philly.org/FactsOnHunger/index.html>) and [Problems Defined](http://citysoup Philly.org/FactsOnHunger/index.html) (<http://citysoup Philly.org/FactsOnHunger/index.html>) sections of City Soup Philadelphia.

Updates:

Unfortunately, since last year, the hunger numbers in Philadelphia have not improved. Over the past 3 years, the number of persons using food cupboard supports has tripled to over 500,000 persons in Philadelphia and nearly 1 million persons in the region. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) usage has increased to over 440,000 people, with another 180,000 persons eligible but not receiving benefits. The number of working families, children and seniors impacted by food worry has increased.

That's why our continued study of this issue, and becoming well informed hunger advocates is essential!

So this year we ask those of you who took last year's journey with us, to continue your study, advocacy and action.

One of the most effective ways to keep current on how hunger is affecting the Delaware Valley and Philadelphia in particular, is to read the writings of the journalists and issue leaders in our city. Keep a watch for articles written in the Inquirer and other periodicals that focus on safety net programs. If you've not seen it, spend some time with the 2010 Philadelphia Inquirer Series written by Alfred Lubrano, entitled "**A Portrait of Hunger.**" The "A Portrait of Hunger" series can be found in its entirety here: www.philly.com/philly/news/special_packages/104415168.html

Policy/Advocacy Updates:

One important area of advocacy we undertook in City Soup yielded the following results:

The Child Nutrition Act: Congress prepared in late 2010 to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act, the major federal legislation that directs school food policy and resources. The Child Nutrition Act (CNA) is a United States federal law signed on October 11, 1966 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Act was created as a result of the "years of cumulative successful experience" under the National School Lunch Program to help meet the nutritional needs of children. The Act is reauthorized every five years, therefore this was an important time of opportunity to help shape the near-future of school food policy, particularly in light of First Lady Michelle Obama's call to end childhood obesity in a generation, and President Obama's desire to increase understanding of the role school food plays in student health and learning.

In 2010, City Soup-aligned advocates signed and delivered over 5,000 postcards and letters to members of Congress, asking for support of this important legislation. This newly authorized \$4.5 billion bill intends to make school food more nutritious, expand farm-to-school programs, afford free meals in high-poverty areas, improve fitness and nutrition education, and actively fight childhood obesity.

Unfortunately, the passage of the Child Nutrition Act came at the expense of the Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program). Congress funded the Child Nutrition Act legislation by cutting \$2.2 billion from future SNAP benefits. This means a family of four would see their benefits reduced by \$59 per month. President Barack Obama and Congress have promised to work toward restoring those cuts to SNAP, which had already been slashed by more than \$12 billion to fund a bill to aid states earlier in the session. It is imperative that Congress and President Obama keep to the promise to address the cuts to SNAP and to safeguard this vital nutrition program from further cuts.

- **SNAP Asset Test:** SNAP (Food Stamps) is again being threatened with cuts. In January 2012, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania announced that an “asset test” for SNAP eligibility would be introduced. The policy is to go into effect on May 1, 2012, and stipulates that if a senior citizen has savings of \$3250 or more, or a younger person has financial assets of \$2000, they would be ineligible for food assistance. As soon as it was announced, there was widespread criticism of the plan. The Interfaith Justice Coalition, which includes representatives from the Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant faith traditions, has argued that this is putting an unfair burden on people just trying to survive through these hard economic times. Many seniors set aside funds for medicine and even to cover their funerals.

Those in the hunger serving community predict this policy change will drive more people into already-overburdened soup kitchens and food pantries. And, business leaders have spoken out about their loss of revenue when there are fewer SNAP dollars to be spent.

Political leaders such as U.S. Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack, Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter, former Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, and U.S. Congressman Bob Brady have argued that asset testing just doesn't make economic sense: SNAP is funded by the federal government, so the state is not saving money. In fact, the state will have to spend money to implement the new guidelines.

Some might think that the new asset test policy might be in response to abuse of the system. But Pennsylvania has one of the lowest rates of fraud in the country — less than 1 per cent, according to the USDA. In that regard, it is unnecessary.

All in all, tightening the eligibility for food assistance is going to hurt those who are already hurting — the elderly, the poor, those who are unemployed and trying to get back on their feet. The Pennsylvania Legislature will probably have hearings about this new policy in March and April of 2012.

What you can do: Contact the Governor's Office of Health and Human Services and let them know how you, as a person of faith, understand this issue.

This year our advocacy focus will be to urge our local and national leaders to end hunger in Philadelphia.

- Know that **City Soup Philadelphia** organized the [Orange Card Postcard](http://citysoup Philly.org/Returning/OrangeCard.html) campaign (<http://citysoup Philly.org/Returning/OrangeCard.html>) during late 2011. The Orange Card Campaign was an advocacy effort created to demand improved city-wide planning for hunger alleviation. Campaigners distributed over 40,000 postcards to regional congregations, universities, campus ministries and organizations, with tens of thousands of signed postcards being delivered to Mayor Nutter in City Hall. The postcard asked the Mayor to convene the political/community will and imagination needed to change the hunger dynamics of this city. The request for a better organized, “solutions oriented” plan is what thousands of Philadelphians resonated to and acted upon. The Orange Card Campaign is believed to be one of the largest postcard advocacy efforts ever undertaken in Philadelphia. We await, in determined anticipation, the Mayor's reply. Other US cities are already organizing for future success... see below!
- **Know that the U.S. Conference of Mayors** decided (January 19, 2012) to launch a food policy task force, which will share information on food policy projects that work as

well as help ensure that federal food policy supports local food efforts. Starting in 2009, Baltimore, Maryland developed its own food policy initiative involving city departments of health, planning, sustainability and development and an advisory group of more than 30 organizations. "It's starting to become a growing movement, which is exactly what we would like it to be," said Holly Freishtat, director of the city's Food Policy Initiative.

We will be writing and urging public officials to get about the work of: coordinating efforts and monies, convening the right talent and treasures, and commencing the planning efforts needed to relieve, and then end hunger in Philadelphia within this decade. [Click here to get involved.](#)

A Framework for Returning Congregation's Study or Gatherings:

Below you'll find an outline of activities to guide your weekly Gatherings. We encourage returning congregations/groups to **commit to experiential learning** this year. Get out and see, or bring in and **view, important films and documentaries** that speak to the food quality, health and well being issues that lie at the foot of the hunger problem. **Take a field trip** and expand your group's understanding of how the food system in our region works/ and doesn't work. **Create a discussion time** that expands and builds on the information you've already learned. Please use the **City Soup weekly liturgical/scriptural readings** to support your study, or create meaningful prayers or scriptural references to inspire your gatherings and your actions. ([download the Liturgies pdf document](http://citysippilly.org/docs/CitySoupWeb03-2LitaniesandPrayersforReturningCitySoupparticipants.pdf) <http://citysippilly.org/docs/CitySoupWeb03-2LitaniesandPrayersforReturningCitySoupparticipants.pdf>)

A Four Week Study/Experience outline follows. Enjoy!

Week One: Give Us Strength to See

View one or more of these films:

1. **Hungry in America: People Not Getting Enough to Eat — and Some Solutions**
A documentary series puts faces on a national crisis

View the video online at: www.aarp.org/giving-back/charitable-giving/info-09-2011/hungry-in-america-documentary-series.html

The introduction to the series reads:

Who are the 9 million older Americans not getting enough to eat in the world's wealthiest nation? What are their circumstances? And who is trying to help them?

AARP and AARP Foundation wanted to find out. Working with the renowned Magnum Photos agency and the Homelands Productions journalism cooperative, they sent teams of journalists into the field around the country.

The stories and images these journalists collected are the basis of the four-part documentary *Hungry in America*

The series can be watched all in one sitting, or over a 4 week period.

2. When it is released, organize a trip to the movie theater to see the Sundance Film Festival documentary on hunger entitled ***Finding North***. Or **Rent the DVD**. A synopsis of the film from the Sundance program reads:

America has lost its way in taking care of its own. The shocking fact is that one in six Americans doesn't get enough to eat on a regular basis. Even more disturbing is the fact that this new face of hunger is largely invisible. There are no breadlines in the streets, but increasing numbers of soup kitchens and food banks are feeding people who—though employed full-time—can't make ends meet.

Finding North unveils the human stories behind the statistics: a rancher juggling two jobs and a small-town policeman rely on food pantries to survive between paychecks; a single working mom can't afford consistent meals for her children; a short-order cook must travel more than an hour to purchase fruits and vegetables.

As it unravels the real societal costs and applies transparency to the causes of this hunger crisis in the richest country in the world, Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush's bracing film explores ways that we as a nation can correct this alarming and unnecessary state of affairs. - C.L.

To view a clip of the film: www.indiewire.com/article/watch-exclusive-trailer-for-sundance-hunger-documentary-finding-north

3. Or, for children, view the Sesame Street one hour special entitled ***Growing Hope Against Hunger*** where a new Muppet named Lily, whose family has an ongoing struggle with hunger, was introduced. See a clip of this program at www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/sesame-street-new-muppet-Brad-Paisley-243625 (scroll down the page to play the trailer).

Week 2: God and Justice

Debrief: Talk about the film you watched last week. Create a series of discussion-starting questions... and let people talk about how the film effected them, what they learned, and what they intend to do with this new learning.

Use the series of texts ([download the Liturgies pdf document](#)) to support your discussion of any film that has helped your group to see more clearly the state of hunger affairs in your community or in the Nation.

Week 3: Give us Hope

How are we doing on childhood hunger? What would it mean to end childhood hunger by 2015?

Read one New York Times writer's thoughts on the **Let's Move** initiative's progress: opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/13/lets-move-she-said-and-we-have

Here are some ideas to consider: frac.org/initiatives/ending-child-hunger-by-2015

Consider some recent summaries of numbers of the hungry: www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/us_hunger_facts.htm.

How is global progress on the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal #1, "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger," proceeding? www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml

A number of resources exist to pray for guidance and direction. For example, from **Bread for**

the World, Upon the Halfway Point Between 2000 and 2015 (litany from 2007, Bread for the World, revised): ([Download the pdf version](http://citysoup Philly.org/docs/CitySoup03-Week3-LitanyHandout.pdf) <http://citysoup Philly.org/docs/CitySoup03-Week3-LitanyHandout.pdf>)

Leader: God of all nations, we join our voices with those all around the world who long for justice and equality for all the earth. As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Leader: We pray for the eradication of extreme poverty,

#1: For all those people living on less than \$1 a day,

#2: For all those people who are chronically hungry,

#3: And for those individuals living in poverty and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Leader: We pray for universal primary education,

#1: For girls and children in minority groups and rural areas,

#2: For all school-aged children without access to schools or who must work out of necessity rather than attend school,

#3: And for those children, school systems, and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

Leader: We pray for gender equality and women's empowerment,

#1: For all women who have recently become elected officials or simply seek equality in the home,

#2: For all women who face inequalities in the workplace,

#3: And for those women and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality.

Leader: We pray for the reduction of child mortality,

#1: For parents who cry for their weak children,

#2: For those who provide mosquito nets and needed vaccines,

#3: And for parents and children in areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health.

Leader: We pray for improved maternal health,

#1: For mothers at risk during their pregnancies,

#2: For midwives, skilled birth attendants, doctors, and nurses who assist women in giving birth,

#3: And for women, children, obstetricians, and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases.

Leader: We pray for the ability to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases,

#1: For individuals affected by these diseases,

#2: For education, drug research, and access to medication,

#3: For those individuals and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability.

Leader: We pray for environmental sustainability,

#1: For all people who care for the earth,

#2: For ecosystems, clean, and those who lack access to these resources,

#3: For those animals, plants, and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

Leader: We pray for a global partnership for development.

#1: For cooperation between countries,

#2: For developing countries, and the children and adults, men and women who live there,

#3: For those individuals, countries, and areas of the world we now name... [pause]

Leader: As we step back this year to examine our efforts,

People: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

Leader: Show us, O God, the way to go from here.

People: Be our pillar of cloud by day and our pillar of fire by night.

Leader: Guide us, lead us, and empower us

People: As we seek to make this world a better place for all of your creation.

or more Millennium Development Goal resources, prayers, and litanies, see *Making Poverty History: Hunger Education Activities that Work!* www.churchworldservice.org/hungerbooklet

Week 4: Light for the Journey

Get your group organized and go visit a soup kitchen, one of the large food cupboards (Feast of Justice, or some other), a community garden, one of the local food support organizations (Philabundance, SHARE, Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, The Food Trust, etc.) or a congregation/ organization struggling with feeding its flock, or supporting their community in a significant way.

Get into the communities of need, find out what school meals really look like, expand your group's horizons and visit a agency whose work you admire and with whom you may want to more deeply partner.

Please use the City Soup weekly liturgical/scriptural readings to support your study, or create meaningful prayers or scriptural references to inspire your gatherings and your actions.

(download [the Liturgies pdf document](http://citysippilly.org/docs/CitySoupWeb03-2LitaniesandPrayersforReturningCitySoupParticipants.pdf) <http://citysippilly.org/docs/CitySoupWeb03-2LitaniesandPrayersforReturningCitySoupParticipants.pdf>)

Wondering what you can do?

As a returning congregation, you have learned about the crisis of hunger in our region, and heard and read the stories of our neighbors who struggle to provide for themselves and their families. You have prayed for those who are hungry, and your congregation now hungers to build a more just and compassionate society where all are fed.

This is an important time for your congregation and for our community. Your participation in City Soup has prepared you to play a leading role in the effort to insure that all our neighbors are provided with the simple dignity of healthy food. Here are a few ways that you can express your leadership and commitment to ending hunger.

1. **Organize and advocate!** We must make our voices heard in City Hall, Harrisburg, and Washington DC. As people of faith, we must speak out for our sisters and brothers who are

suffering, and we must challenge our leaders to adopt policies that protect the most vulnerable among us. Within your congregation, encourage members to form committees to coordinate your anti-hunger service and advocacy activities. Speak with other engaged congregations, and see how you can collaborate to build understanding and strengthen your efforts.

For updates about anti-hunger advocacy, consider subscribing to the following newsletters.

- For local and state issues: Coalition Against Hunger: www.HungerCoalition.org

Sign up for the Coalition Against Hunger e-newsletter and Advocacy Alerts for that the Coalition is highlighting: org2.democracynaction.org/o/6777/signup_page/sign-up

- For state and federal advocacy: Feeding America: www.hungeractioncenter.org
 - Click “**Join Today**” to register and get involved, including to receive updates and alerts.
 - Look at the “Take Action” area explore in ways to take action as an advocate.

2. Become food producers! Creating a garden at your place of worship, or encouraging your congregants to work at community gardens, connects everyone to local food sources while growing valuable produce for our food banks and food cupboards.

Follow these links for inspiration or to find out where to donate the produce you grow.

- Philabundance’s Share the Harvest: www.philabundance.org/2011/10/12/delaware-valley-gardeners-donate-more-than-10000-pounds-of-produce-to-philabundance
- Greensgrow Farms: www.greengrow.org
- Pennsylvania Horticultural Society: www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen/ui_beyondcomgardening.html

3. Spread the word! We need your help to build the anti-hunger movement. Reach out to other congregations, speak to your religious community’s leadership, or host dialogues about hunger.

If you are looking for a speaker about hunger, consider contacting the following organizations.

- City Soup: info@citysoup Philly.org
- Philabundance: www.philabundance.org
- Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger: www.hungercoalition.org

Write to local government and religious officials, or ask one of them to come and speak to your group. The question we need to ask is..“What are we going to do about this?”

4. Be a Partner! Start or deepen a relationship with a hunger relief organization. Find out what they need to build their capacity and what your congregation can do to share their mission. If you are looking for a program with which to partner, contact one of the above organizations. We must believe that with God’s help, and with concerted effort and partnered work, a change can be made.

5. Pray and Act...Hunger is never acceptable, especially in the proportions we are currently experiencing it! It’s time for a new plan of coordinated community action. We as people of faith must take a lead in demanding improvements.

6. Donate or volunteer if you can, to a hunger relief agency of your choice.

7. Walk+Run Against Hunger on Saturday, April 14, 2012. Learn more here: www.hungercoalition.org/story/walkrun-against-hunger

8. Commit to a Day of Prayer for an end to hunger on Friday, April; 20, 2012. Information coming to citysoup Philly.org later in March.

We are grateful for the things we have accomplished together:

March 2010 - **City Soup educational website launched:** 35 Congregations initially participate, \$5000 raised

November 2010 - **5000 postcards delivered to Congress** supporting the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act

April 2011 - **First Interfaith Prayer Breakfast Leading Toward Hunger Free Communities** held: 150 religious leaders and persons of faith attend. Joel Berg, Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Congressman Chaka Fattah speak.

September 2011- **Preparation of Interfaith Religious Leaders to Preach** "Food Justice" on World Food Day offered.

October through December 2012 - **Orange Postcard Campaign** launched. 40,000 postcards distributed throughout Philadelphia city and region; over 300 organizations, congregations, universities and campus ministries participated. 'Ask' is for a better organized, solutions-oriented plan for hunger alleviation. Believed to be the largest postcard campaign ever undertaken. Meeting with the Mayor's Chief of Staff occurred in late December 2011. We wait in determined anticipation for a "Commitment to Plan," not unlike that referenced below!

January 19, 2012 - **From the Conference of US Mayors:** U.S. mayors recently met in Washington, D.C. to launch a food policy task force, which will share information on food policy projects that work as well as help ensure that federal food policy supports local food efforts. Starting in 2009, Baltimore, Md. developed its own food policy initiative, involving city departments of health, planning, sustainability and development and an advisory group of more than 30 organizations. "It's starting to become a growing movement, which is exactly what we would like it to be," said Holly Freishtat, director of the city's Food Policy Initiative.

We have much yet to do together!

Thank you for committing to the journey, and please keep moving with this issue.

Glory be to God, whose powers working through us can do infinitely more than we can ask for... or imagine.