

The Significance of Saying Grace
National Episcopal Health Ministries
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Saying grace expresses our gratitude for healthful, abundant food and acknowledges our interdependence with others and all creation.

Workshop Goals

Health ministry leaders who participate in this workshop will

- develop a more detailed picture of the many aspects of today's "food movement."
- identify issues related to the three legged stool of a healthy, sustainable food system: economy, ecology and human well-being.
- explore what congregations can do as participants in and advocates for food system change, including such things as auditing congregational food practices and developing community gardens and kitchens.
- deepen their appreciation of saying grace.

Workshop Outline

I. Participant Introductions

including reflection on our practices of saying grace

II. Faces of the "Food Movement"

an overview of some current issues according to participant interest such as

- A. Local? Organic? Natural?
- B. Fast, Cheap and Easy - the American way of unhealthful eating
- C. Genetically Engineered Crops
- D. Feeding the World

III. Toward Sustainable and Healthful Food Systems

Beyond Consumer Responses in Our Homes and Congregations

- A. Production
- B. Advocacy
- C. Celebration

IV. Rethinking Saying Grace

BACKGROUNDER ON FOOD SYSTEM ISSUES

Episcopal Committee on Science, Technology and Faith
April 2011

I. Why should Episcopalians be concerned about food system issues?

Perhaps the most obvious reason is that a meal is at the center of our life together. In the Eucharist we are connected to one another both spiritually and materially - that is, sacramentally, in the sharing of bread and wine. The stuff of our meal comes from the abundance of creation and the work of human hands. It represents not just our connection to God and one another, but our connection to earth's living things. Surely part of the work God has given us to do, as we go forth from the church's table, is to care about food - where it comes from, whose labors contribute to it, who has enough. There are many stories of meals - of the hospitable sharing of food, and of the growing of food in good times and in bad - in our scriptures.

As we grow in our awareness of what it means to live sacramentally, we recognize that every meal we eat, every sharing of food, each connection we make among parts of our food system, becomes an extension of Eucharistic living.

Food is of existential importance, too. We would not exist without it! We are aware of the billion plus people on our planet who do not have adequate food to sustain a healthy, active life. Without food we would have no energy to ask why we should care, no energy to reflect theologically or to work for justice. Food carries meanings for human health, environmental health, and cultural health for people of all faiths and none.

Currently our global food system is not working very well, if we judge success according to the UN (FAO) definition of adequate food. Over a billion people simply do not have enough to eat, many more have a diet lacking in one or more essential nutrients, while another billion are obese. The quality of food varies widely and wildly depending on people's context and income.

Our global food system is also a factor in key environmental issues.

Some agriculture sectors - notably livestock - make a significant contribution to greenhouse gases. On the other hand, agroecological practices can help to sequester CO₂.

Stocks for biofuels, to satisfy our energy wants, compete for arable land with food and fiber crops as soil quality declines in most places.

Increasing water scarcity and related agricultural challenges due to changing climates impact global politics and economics.

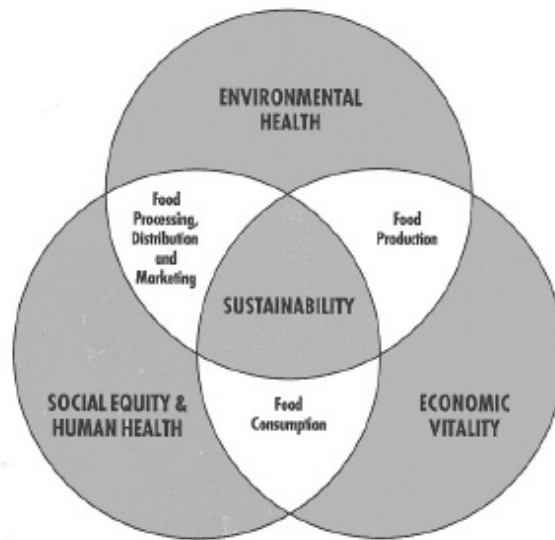
Corporate control of seed stocks has accelerated the decline in the variety and genetic diversity of crops, diminishing the resilience of our food system.

Thus, all of the key issues which the Committee on Science, Technology and Faith has committed to work on during the 2009-2012 triennium are interrelated.

Many people look to technology to solve our food system imbalances. Better technologies for distribution, synthetic foods and vitamin supplementation, more efficient irrigation and

desalinization of sea water, as well as genetic modification of food species, are all identified as possibilities for reducing the number of people in the world who suffer from an inadequate diet. But those involved with hunger in the developing world report that experience teaches a different lesson. Technological solutions can have unintended consequences, some of which do profound harm to the very ecosystems which sustain agriculture. More and more food sovereignty advocates are suggesting that the solution will be many locally appropriate technologies, manageable locally, not a universal silver bullet. Such solutions, combined with political and economic reforms that address other millennium development goals, seem to hold the best long term prospects for alleviating hunger and malnutrition, and restoring a stronger role for local food cultures.

A food system involves all the inputs, outputs, processes and relationships involved in nourishing a population.



II. A. How do we address food system issues?

CONSUME

Most of the popular messages about food issues in the United States stress our role as consumers. Indeed, we are consumers in the ecological sense. We cannot make our own food from sunlight as green plants can, and hence we are dependent on them, or animals that eat plants, fungi that live on decaying plants, or algae (seaweeds) for our food. But beyond that, we who live in the United States also live in a consumer society, with an economy built around consumer spending. We swim in a sea of consumerism. So when we address environmental or economic justice issues, the first thing we usually think of is how we can address them with our shopping dollars.

There are many guidelines for how to spend our food dollars in ways that promote environmental health and economic justice. A list of helpful web sites is appended to this essay. For an easy way to remember how to frame our efforts, we might borrow from Christian Ecology Link, an ecumenical British organization whose acronymic mnemonic is LOAF: Local, Organic, Animal-friendly, Fair Traded.

PRODUCE

While we cannot produce in the way the photosynthesizers can, we can grow some of our food. A modest effort of an apartment dweller, like tomatoes or herbs on the balcony, is at the least a gesture of care, and a reminder of our dependence on the living world for food. Community gardens are a growth industry in the Episcopal Church, and provide an opportunity for those with no or limited land to add substantially to their diet while stewarding church landscapes. In desert and Mediterranean climate zones we can replace lawns with appropriate annuals and perennials which use less water, don't require synthetic fertilizers, and which yield food. Besides producing food, community and backyard gardeners also help build up soils, make better use of water, provide blooms that nurture populations of native bees and other pollinators, and help preserve biodiversity by growing heirloom varieties and saving seeds.

If we are concerned about both environmental and health impacts of our food systems, we can prepare more of our foods at home, and preserve seasonal bounty with methods which do not require continuous energy inputs, like canning and drying.

And we can pay attention to and support food production in our community and its environs. We can learn who the farmers and farm workers are, and pay attention to their hopes and concerns.

ADVOCATE

While voting for a better food system with consumer dollars can help, advocacy, too, is needed. Much more public attention was paid to the Farm Bill in 2007 and 2008 than in the previous five year cycle, and we can expect attention to legislation affecting our food system to increase because of the impact of popular books and films on our awareness. The promotion of healthful eating by Michelle Obama has also caught the public imagination. Advocacy on food system issues requires creative and systemic thinking, as we seek to balance the needs of the poor with our need to ensure resilient environmental systems.

Congregations and dioceses can do their part by hosting forums on food system issues at the various levels of political activity - local, state, regional, national and global. Health concerns such as nutrition and food safety are often the draw for such events, but once people are engaged the conversation can be extended to civic discourse about government policies which impact eco-agriculture and hunger.

CELEBRATE

Showing care for food system issues is not a joyless or strictly ascetic activity. We can feast on the good things of earth: seasonal, justly produced bounty. An increase in home gardening and home cooking likely will lead to an increasing depth and joy in household celebrations.

Eucharistic celebrations can be extended with feasts of home grown, homemade food. Congregations can model the practices we would like to encourage, like ingredients sourced locally, meals using fewer animal products, low or no waste meals with everything recycled or composted. And they can do it festively, bringing people together to share the pleasure of food traditions.

II. B. Congregational Food Audit and Resources for Action Steps

Recently in a typical Episcopal congregation the person in charge of the kitchen carried out her raid on the refrigerator. She had been telling people she was going to do this for several weeks. She went and threw out old food – half empty jars of condiments long since expired, the salad from the potluck two weeks ago, the old and hard brownies from a coffee hour, bread that had been there who knows how long, moldy fruit, an ancient casserole. A trash bag was filled with items from the refrigerator, and put out for the garbage collection.

Where did all that food come from? why was it left to rot? was the landfill the best place for it to go? As Episcopalians our central act of worship involves a sacred meal, and we often joke that coffee hour is the 8th Sacrament. If that is so, then the care we give to the food in our kitchens is equally important as the care we give to our Sunday liturgy.

What follows are recommendations for a congregation which desires to be more intentional about food. A food audit is a systematic way of assessing what food is being used, where it comes from, and how it is being used. It is designed to help congregations think through the role of food in their common life. Many more resources are available on the web, and some links are provided, giving more information and suggestions for congregations who desire to delve more deeply into issues of food.

Consume – what do we eat?

1. Take a tour – look into the refrigerator and freezer and cupboards, literally take an audit of the food that is present.
2. For one month keep track of all the food which is consumed at the congregation – at coffee hour, in the office, during parish suppers, etc. Take note of the following: What is offered, what is eaten, how much is leftover and what happens to the leftovers? Commit to cutting down on waste!
3. Where does the food you have in the pantry, fridge and freezer come from? This can be challenging when you ask not just where did that salad dressing come from, but what about all the ingredients in the dressing?
4. Consider applying the acronym LOAF – food which is Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. Start by trying to have at least 10% of all food at the congregation come from local farmers, try to increase that over time to at least 50%. How might LOAF values, not simply cost, become guides for purchasing food in your congregation?
5. If your congregation sponsors a community meal or other charitable endeavors, apply these questions to the food you purchase, give and serve. If not, research hunger issues in your area and consider sponsoring a community meal. Explore potential partners for your endeavor, too, such as a local restaurant or farmer, or other congregations.

Produce – what do we grow?

1. Take stock of the yard. What type of plants and grasses are on the church yard? Are they appropriate for the climate? How are the grasses and plants watered? Water use is a huge issue in food production as well as in our daily lives. Think about and implement water conservation measures. Use rain barrels and drip watering systems, replace grasses which require huge amounts of water with appropriate plants for your climate and soil.
2. Use the resources such as farmers markets or county extension offices to find local farmers. Ask them to come talk about current farm challenges and practices. Try to buy directly from local farmers.
3. Consider a church-based community garden. Many vegetables can be grown in small plots on little land by those who have no land at their homes to grow them. Consider growing produce for parish meals and members, or for a local food pantry. Partner with other congregations in your area whenever possible.
4. Consider offering the church parking lot space for a farmers' market.
5. Offer classes at the church on food preparation, preservation and gardening.
6. Use the traditional Rogation days to offer prayers for the land and for crops.

Advocate

1. Host forums on food issues. Become knowledgeable about issues of hunger and food in your locally, regionally, nationally and globally.
2. Advocate for policies which address root causes of hunger as well as policies that support development of safe and sustainable community food systems.
3. Provide support to local, regional and national organizations that promote farmland protection and sustainable agricultural practices. Write letters to elected officials that let them know of your concerns for good land use laws. Invite elected officials to come discuss issues of food safety and hunger at your congregation. Host an event for the wider community.

Celebrate

1. Extend the sacred meal by celebrating the community's life with food throughout the year. Try to use foods that are seasonal and local. Consider a harvest celebration at the time of year when local farmers have the harvest in. In North American temperate climates a possible date for would be World Food Day, October 16. Or celebrate local crop specialities in season.
2. Share cultural traditions of members of the congregation with heirloom recipe potlucks, and learn about other faith traditions by exploring their sacred meals, food laws and traditions.

Resources

LOAF principles and resources can be found here:

<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/loaf-principles.htm>

One of the best sites for more information is the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Their website is www.emoregon.org For ideas on food system actions see www.emoregon.org/food_farms.php.

A very good introduction to food system issues, with cookbook and study guide is from the Mennonites, *Simply in Season*. See www.worldcommunitycookbook.org

Green Faith also offers an interfaith handbook for congregations addressing food system issues. Repairing Eden <<http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/stewardship/food-and-faith>> also contains ideas for church schools and other religious institutions.

Interfaith Power and Light has recently launched the “Cool Harvest” initiative http://action.interfaithpowerandlight.org/site/c.dmJUKgOZJiI8G/b.6605225/k.97F1/Cool_Harvest.htm

Local county extension agents are a great place to start for information about local soil, climate and crops. Discover if your area has a community gardening network, food system alliance, or other network addressing local food system issues.

This Food Audit for Congregations is currently in production as a separate booklet. For a copy in pdf format please email phinaborgeson@gmail.com

III. Food system issues on which science is important

For an overview see H. Charles J. Godfray *et. al.*, 2010, “Food Security: the Challenge of Feeding 9 Billion People”, *Science* 327 (812).

For a critique of the ways science and technology have been used in agriculture see “Spirituality and Agriculture” by Frederick Kirschenmann, 2005.

http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/spirituality_100805.pdf

Terminology

The ways in which scientists use terms and the ways they are used in policy, advertising and popular media do not always agree. For example, “organic” means one thing in chemistry class and quite another in the rules for certifying food products. Environmental activists speak loosely about carbon, omitting mention of the role the nitrogen cycle plays in ecological health.

“Sustainable” is often used in greenwashing product pitches and company slogans, rather than in the way ecological agriculture or economics might employ it.

The use of terms is evolving rapidly, and there is no comprehensive glossary, but this one on agriculture and climate change is useful:

http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing_files/glossary.pdf

Rich Pirog and Rebecca Rasmussen, 2009, *Understanding Common Terms Used in Discussions about Climate Change and Agriculture*. Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Ames, Iowa.

Food and Climate Change

In addition to the glossary above, part one of a recent book contains a well-researched summary of the science involved in how agricultural activity contributes to climate change.

Diet for a Hot Planet by Anna Lappe. Bloomsbury 2010.

On-line, a guide for those who grow their own food from the Union of Concerned Scientists, “The Climate Friendly Gardener: A Guide to Combating Global Warming from the Ground Up.”

http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/climate-friendly-gardener.pdf
Cambridge, MA 2010

Everybody’s heard about carbon dioxide and methane, but nitrogen gases from synthetic fertilizers and livestock also contribute to the greenhouse effect. Calculate your nitrogen footprint and see how you can reduce it. <http://www.n-print.org/N-Calculator>

Some links to research findings on nitrogen in agriculture are here

<http://nitrogen.ucdavis.edu/research/nitrogen>

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Issues of science and technology, as well as ecological, economic and cultural impacts swirl around GMOs.

Pamela C. Ronald and Raoul W. Armanchak, *Tomorrow’s Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food*. (Oxford University Press: 2008) contains some useful tables, a glossary and a huge bibliography. There’s an interesting and clear description of how Ronald does her genetic engineering work and of the issues on Armanchak’s organic teaching farm. The book seems slightly naive about the economic issues, and somewhat fey in including a family recipe for cornbread.

A 2009 American Institute of Biological Science (AIBS) lecture by Hans R. Herren, co-chair of

the International Assessment of Agricultural Science, Technology and Development (IAASTD), provides a good foundation for many global food issues in addition to GMOs. The questions the scientists ask him are particularly telling about their biases..

Scroll down to the 10th item at

https://live.blueskybroadcast.com/bsb/client/CL_DEFAULT.asp?Client=26&PCAT=1211&CAT=1211&thx=post&

Advocates of GMOs speak of a 2nd green revolution, or a green revolution for Africa.

Here's a *Scientific American* article on Bill Gates' efforts and intentions:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=can-the-worlds-richest-man-feed-the-2009-10-16>

Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved*, is one of the many writers challenging this proposal. He talks about the Gates Foundation and GMOs, among other things, here:

<http://www.thenation.com/article/ending-africas-hunger>

Agricultural yields

One of the big questions facing humanity today is what methods produce the most food in a way that sustains both humans and the rest of life on our planet. Is it conventional agriculture, new genetically engineered crops, or agroecology - or some combination?

Evidence suggests that in food poor countries agroecological solutions have done the most to increase yields.

Here is an article reviewing the literature from the Oakland Institute:

<http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/?q=node/view/499>

Biodiversity in agriculture

When we think about biodiversity, we usually imagine tropical rain forests, or coral reefs, or a meadow of California wildflowers. But biodiversity in managed environments is also significant. The resilience of our agricultural activity in the face of climate change and water scarcity will depend on its genetic resources.

Find resources on biodiversity from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations here: <http://www.fao.org/biodiversity/en/>

Visit the AgroBiodiversity web site for recent research.

<http://www.agrobiodiversity-diversitas.org/>

This paper explores the issue of growing transgenic (GM) corn near the center of origin of domesticated corn. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC523889/>

Soil

Soil depletion is a global issue. Soils are complex living communities.

Children and adults can learn more about soils from this interactive web site of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History.

Dig It! The Secrets of Soil

<http://forces.si.edu/soils/>

Other ecological challenges of and to the food system

Invasive species of weeds and animal pests also pose a threat to farming. We can expect migration of agricultural pests as the climate continues to change. Pests and diseases are also

constantly evolving in response to inputs designed to control them.

Invasive.org has a comprehensive directory of invasive plants in the United States with pictures and links to on-line scientific information. It helps to know a bit of botany to use it.

Water and agriculture

Here is a report from a noted environmental scientist in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University

Water Resources, Agriculture and the Environment by David Pimentel et.al. 2004

http://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/352/1/pimentel_report_04-1.pdf

For a popular look at global water issues, many related to agriculture, and the scientists and activist addressing them, see the documentary film *Flow: for Love of Water* (2008)

Seafood, fisheries and aquaculture

For up to date consumer information backed by sound research, visit the site of the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch

<http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx>

The Unnatural History of the Sea by Callum Roberts, Island Press, Washington, D.C., 2007, is a detailed account of our exploitation of the life of sea by a professor of marine conservation at the University of York, United Kingdom.

Food safety and nutrition

A healthy and healthful food system is about more than people getting enough calories or not too many. One reliable and balanced source of information is the work of nutritionist and writer Marion Nestle. Her book *What to Eat?* (Northpoint Press, 2007) is comprehensively researched. Or read her blog here: <http://www.foodpolitics.com/>