



**Food for Life Campaign**  
**Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance**  
**Sermon Competition 2010-2011**  
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## Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

As the global gathering entered the ancient, awe-inspiring sanctuary, each worshiper received either a small basket or a small bowl cradling seeds. The call to mission was to take these seeds to our homes around the world, where we would plant, water and nourish them. This gifting of seeds was the culmination of, and a symbolic response to, this world assembly's theme: "Give us today our daily bread". It would be the transition for our corporate mission, from gathering together to being sent out.

My bowl of seeds burned like a hot coal in my hands, pondering, as I couldn't help doing, other seeds which had made the news that past week. This troubling news erupted from a humble home in El Salvador, my adopted homeland. Unable to make their precious corn supply last until the August harvest, less than a month away, desperate but enterprising parents had taken the seed corn donated by the government, anxious to feed their hungry family with the *tortillas* it would make. They were aware of the risk, though evidently not adequately. Since this seed corn had been coated with the pesticide "carbamate", they diligently washed the kernels, intent on cleansing them from this poisonous covering. Their best efforts were insufficient. The whole family became ill from eating the *tortillas* made from that corn. Two of the children, aged 10 and 12, never recovered. Their deaths were senseless and easily avoidable deaths. ". . . Bread of life", was being proclaimed. "Seeds of life" were what we as worshipers held in our hands. "Seeds of death", was what I was pondering.

Corn--next only to water--is the lifeblood of the Salvadoran people. Salvadoran people are "*el pueblo de maíz*", corn people. Their *tortillas*, without which a meal isn't a meal, are made from dried and ground corn kernels.

Life-giving kernels of corn should never be associated with tragic death. They are rather to be associated with life, abundant life, the dance of life, a dance in many movements. A *campesino* peasant heads to his field at the start of the rainy season, in May, first to prepare the terrain--plough the soil and string out the rows--then to seed the field. He might go barefoot, more likely in sandals, but he goes with a pouch tied around his waist, filled with the precious life-seeds. The pole in his hand is practically an extension of his body, known by otherwise not-so-common terms as *huisute*, *macana*, *chuso*, *pico*. He moves gracefully along the carefully-laid-out rows, digging a small hole with this hoe, reaching for 2 or 3 kernels from the pouch and dropping them tenderly into the hole, deftly covering the hole with this same tool. It's a subtle but rhythmic dance, seemingly unending, danced to the music of the warblers and pigeons in the

nearby trees and the incessant barking of the ever-playful semi-stray dogs. Or maybe the *campesino* can hear an old radio he's hung on a tree branch. Younger *campesinos*, especially those receiving "*remesas*", or remittances, from some family member working *mojado*, as a wetback in "*el norte* (the USA)", might be attached to an MP3 player or a cell phone, listening to the latest *reggaeton* or *perreo* dance music. A welcome breeze rustles the leaves of the trees surrounding his plot of land, and refreshes him as he toils under the scorching sun. This dance-of-the-sower is a subtle but compelling dance, for its repetitiveness, and for its promise of nourishment, sustenance, life.

Rounds of fertilizer (a formula made up of carbon, nitrogen and potassium, though the trend is shifting back to more organic fertilizers like compost and manure) and herbicides (such as gramazon, before and after seeding) and pesticides (strong chemicals to kill caterpillars, with brand names like karate) accompany the rain and the growth, carrying the process through to harvest in August. Then, a joyous harvest festival of fresh corn-on-the-cob, and "*atol*", a hot, thick, sweet corn-drink, is celebrated by the entire community. The festivities also include music and poetry, the expression of the community, a way of building up the community. It is a joyful time, not just for everyone's stomachs, but for the collective soul and spirit as well.

The majority of the harvest--the "*mazorcas*", or cobs--is left to dry, after the dried stalks are broken and bent. At harvest, these corn husks are broken off and are brought to the house, where the mounds of cobs fill every available storage space, even much of the living space, waiting to be husked and degrained. This labour-intensive process, danced while seated and often while socializing, fills every waking hour. The kernels are then stored in cylindrical metal grain bins, often inside the farmhouse. They are mixed with sulfur, for preservation from insects and humidity, breezes and oxidation, at least if the bins are not well-sealed.

From the bin, mother draws the kernels needed for day-to-day consumption, for the nutrition and sustenance of her family. They are ground and mixed with water to form the dough, the "*masa*". Kneading the dough on a smooth, concave-shaped stone is another movement in the corn-dance, requiring strong arms and shoulders, perseverance and endurance. The dough is hand-shaped into perfectly rounded, flat, thick *tortillas*, to be baked over the fire on a clay "*comal*", or large, round, platter-like baking pan. Hot, crisp and toasted, these *tortillas* accompany every meal, offering balanced sustenance, life itself, to these farmers and their families. This life-giving promise of *tortillas* must never be at risk.

During the armed conflict of the 1980's in El Salvador, these peasants were driven from their lands, driven across the River Lempa where the armed forces of these 2 neighbouring countries, El Salvador and Honduras, massacred hundreds of them, survivors being forced to spend almost a decade as refugees at *Mesa Grande*, a UNHCR-sponsored camp in Honduras (United Nations High Commission for Refugees). Here they had no "*milpa*", no land on which to plant their corn, no way of dancing their life-dance. Their corn-dance was taken from them. Now, when they return to *Mesa Grande*, to visit and remember, they dance the chilly night away, surrounded either by mist or dust. Even the elders, who are never seen dancing at home in El Salvador, dance in the dust until dawn. Perhaps they are remembering those prolonged and anguished days of a more stressful time, having passed through the river of death, when the corn-dance was wrenched from them, when all they were left with was social dancing, a crucified people

nevertheless celebrating life in the midst of their pain and anguish.

Such communities living in refugee camps are, of course, supplied with their daily nutritional needs by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), as well as by some of their own local production--God's presence, God's providence. But 14% of the world's population, about 1 billion people, suffers from malnutrition, inadequate sustenance, and 40 million die each year from hunger and starvation.

Daily bread for all is an integral aspect of the reign of God, God's will of abundant life for all of God's people. Daily bread is a primary symbol of life, an integral petition in the prayer which Jesus taught his followers. When this is not the case, there is an invasion of the anti-reign of God, the forces of death over life, provoked by the many idolatries which plague the planet, when accumulation of power and wealth takes priority over just distribution of God's gift of bread, God's gift of life. Bread is the victory of life over death. Bread-for-all is the victory of the reign of God over the anti-reign, the reign of death. Such victory we celebrate at the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, to which all are invited.

The production of bread, the obtaining of bread, is the primary human enterprise, at an individual level, at the family level, at the communal level, at the national level, at the global level. Once bread is produced and obtained, the challenge becomes that of distributing it adequately, justly, again among all the members of the family, among all in the community, all the citizens of the nation, and beyond, to the global level, to all of the world's inhabitants. Bread is a basic gift from God for the sustenance of all in the human family. Everyone has the right and the responsibility to share it, so that all receive all that they need. Just as bread is a symbol of life, shared bread is an extension of that symbol of life, never to be denied to or withheld from others--others whose needs and rights are the same as those of all global citizens. Here bread assumes its social and political and economic dimensions, independently of divergent ideologies and partisan divisions, as the means of sustaining the life of the people, the entire people, through just and efficient distribution. This enterprise calls on all involved to be responsible, to not be wasteful of such a precious resource, but to be good stewards, caring for what has been entrusted by God to all of God's people.

Bread is not only a matter of labour, given to provide sustenance, to keep us from dying, to keep us alive and healthy physically. Rather, it is given in a spirit of celebration, as an invitation to join together around the table, to share and celebrate life, to rejoice together in the day-to-day experiences of living. As bread is consumed, it provides the physical body with energy to go on with the activities of daily life, to go on producing, obtaining, sharing bread. But it is not meant to be endured as drudgery or routine. Jesus showed us the way here through the many banquets he celebrated throughout his life and ministry, as narrated in the Scriptures. This way-of-being--

of celebrating bread in community--culminated in a more somber banquet, the Last Supper, one of farewell and transition, the bread of the body of Christ given to Jesus' followers at the Eucharist.

We are all well-aware . . . indeed, the entire world realizes, that God's will of bread-for-all is not being carried out. Why does God allow this? Beyond the call to produce, obtain and distribute food, comes the challenge, the call, to analyze this reality, to identify why so much of the world's population is not receiving, cannot obtain, the food they need, why so many are faced with hunger, malnutrition, starvation, rather than life in abundance, as God promises to all of God's creation. The greed, the conflicts, the oppression, the persecution, the inefficiency, the waste, must be identified, analyzed and overcome, if bread is to be restored to its universal life-giving place. This will require much truth, much courage, much wisdom, much perseverance, much good will, much unified strategizing, much seeking for and implementation of solutions. As Jesus multiplied the loaves, we as Jesus' followers are called to seek ways of ensuring that the entire people are fed. Is this worth the effort? Is it a realistic hope? Is such hope wiser than resignation?

What will this mean for our theology, our way of understanding God? What will it mean for our church, our understanding of mission and ministry? It will require confronting evil itself, since hunger is a central element of the anti-reign of God, imposed by the forces of evil and the hosts of idolatries they command. The world's cry for bread can mobilize the human spirit, individually and corporately, to love in the spirit of Jesus, in the spirit of the reign of God, with great generosity, even to the point of self-sacrifice, even demonstrating the greatest love of giving up one's life so that all might have bread, so that all might have life, as Jesus gave up his life that all might have life, abundant life.

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11, NRSV). Bread for life. Bread of life. May God grant that we all dance the corn-dance, the bread dance, the dance of life, abundant life, together . . . from those who dance the dance-of-the-sower out in the corn-field, to those who call the steps from their corporate offices.

"Give us each day our daily bread" (Luke 11:3, NRSV).

**Amen.**

**Submitted by Brian Rude, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, serving as a missionary in El Salvador since 1988.**

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