

Ten Commandments of Food: Theology & Advocacy Guide for Congregations

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

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Introduction

Ten Commandments of Food were proposed by World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and formulated with the input from the WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance's Strategy Group guiding the 'Food for Life' Campaign. By distilling the key principles, 'Ten Commandments of food' addresses the existential challenge of hunger and inequity in this world in an innovative and spiritually engaging manner.

'The Advocacy tool for congregations' accompanies the Ten Commandments of Food. It helps individuals and groups to look in-depth into each commandment and to read it through the lens of the Bible in the current context. It helps to open up the discussions, to expose the challenges and opportunities, and to help communities to take specific steps to make a difference in people's lives.

If you have thoughts and suggestions to make regarding this document, we invite you to kindly share it with the Coordinator of the 'Food for Life Campaign' at mku@wcc-coe.org.

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FOOD



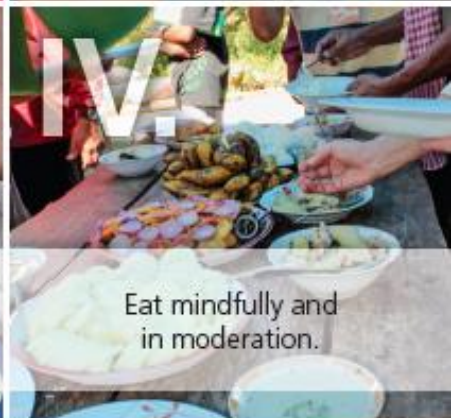
I.
Give thanks for
the food you eat.



II.
Eat food grown as close as
possible to where you live.



III.
Strive for all people to have
knowledge about and access to
affordable, nutritious food.



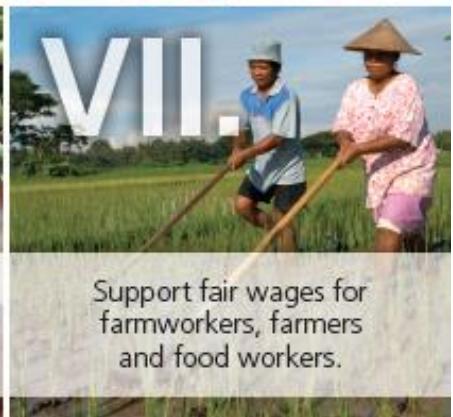
IV.
Eat mindfully and
in moderation.



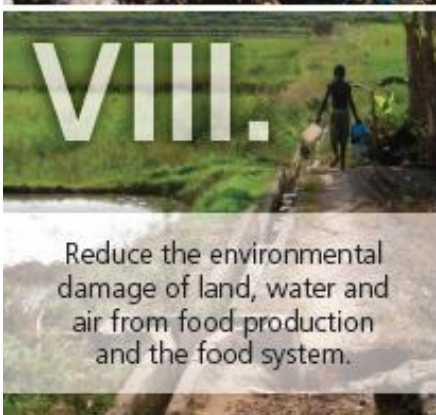
V.
Do not waste food.



VI.
Be grateful to those who
grow and prepare food
for your table.



VII.
Support fair wages for
farmworkers, farmers
and food workers.



VIII.
Reduce the environmental
damage of land, water and
air from food production
and the food system.



IX.
Protect the biodiversity of
seeds, soils, ecosystems and the
cultures of food producers.



X.
Rejoice and share the
sacred gift of food with all.

1. Give thanks for the food you eat.

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19

"giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." **Ephesians 5:20**

As we follow the example of Jesus and thank God for providing our daily sustenance, we acknowledge that all things come from God (Romans 11:36). We recognise God as the source of everything we have and praying before meals helps to remind us of that truth. Praying before eating with a thankful heart brings glory to God and focuses our minds on the great love that the Lord bestows on us and to all creation. Our eating should also remind us of God's goodness, and make us deeply thankful for it. *"Taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Psalm 34:8).

When we eat our food, we need to be aware and recognise the many factors, many components, and many people who make up an interconnected, living chain and creates the wonder that is food.

Food that provides us energy, maintains our life and helps us to grow.

Food that contributes to being who we are and to become what we aspire to be.

We are reminded to be grateful for an interconnected world. We become aware that we have to depend on the sun, the earth, rains, people and the environments that contribute to the growing and preparation of our food. We are also reminded that we are dependent even on microorganisms, be it in the soil which fertilises the plants or those in our guts, which assists digestion and to insects like bees to pollinate the flowers, to create fruits and seeds. It takes an orchestra of many musicians, from the smallest of creatures to a great star called Sun, to create the delightful symphony of foods, in a beautiful, dynamic, diverse yet fragile blue planet called Earth. Each creature playing its' role in the food chain, rising from the earth and ultimately returning to the earth, after completing its life's mission.

Giving thanks for our food is our humble recognition of the creation and the Creator. The prayer also reminds us that eating is a sacred act of life. It is also an opportunity for us to remember that this world is not perfect, as far as access to food is concerned and that many in the world go hungry as we eat. It helps us to eat with respect and to live life with a purpose to serve many.

What can we do to become more grateful for the food we receive?

- To give thanks to God for the food, each time we eat.
- To think and empathise with those who lack food.
- Recognise and respect the food that we eat.
- Understand what food is, where it comes from, how it is made and who has prepared it.
- Recognise the efforts that have been made for the food to be laid on the table.
- Acknowledge the resources spend on food and the lives of the animals that have sacrificed to provide us with the food.

2. Eat food grown as close as possible to where you live.

Prophet Micah and Prophet Isaiah predicts of the day when the reign of God will be established, where there will be peace, and nations will give up their warring ways and will invest in development and in agriculture.

A key outcome of peace and development is indicated in the verse-

'...they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid;

for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.' **Micah 4:4**

Real peace and development are only achieved when communities can live, mobilising their resources, benefit from the fruits of their labor, in their own environment and live without domination and fear.

*'beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;'*

Micah 4:3, Isaiah 4:4¹

There are great economic, environmental, health and social benefits in consuming locally grown food. Food that is grown closer to home is fresher, loses fewer nutrients during transportation, hence tastes better and is more nutritious and support local farmers. It has fewer transportation emissions associated with it. As the distance that food travels decreases, so does the need for processing and refrigeration to reduce spoilage. Depending on locally grown food is crucial, both regarding tackling climate change and in rebuilding a resilient local food network.

Local food supports local farm families who sell directly to consumers cutting out the many middle people and get full retail price for their food, sustaining local farmers and contributing to the local economy. By depending on locally sourced products, as consumers, we have a greater possibility to ensuring the quality and freshness of the food we eat. The demand for local farm products also ensures the promotion of local varieties, and preserving biodiversity in agriculture and animal husbandry. When we buy locally grown food, we also become more aware of the landscape and climate of where we live in and contribute to the preserving the agricultural landscape.

¹ All bible verses quoted from New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

If we neglect locally sourced products, our markets become saturated with highly processed foods, sweetened beverages, and meat from factory farms. When family farms decline and are replaced by big corporations with the aim of producing as much as they could, as quickly as possible and at the lowest price, environmentally harmful practices became more prevalent. Animals are given antibiotics and growth hormones; fields are saturated with harmful chemicals, and machinery has replaced human hands in the slaughtering and harvesting processes. This result is irreparable damage to the environment and to our health.

What can we do to promote food grown as close as possible to where we live?

- Be aware of the source and origin; content and quality of the foods that we buy and consume;
- Make efforts to purchase locally sourced food;
- Promote, participate and support the development of kitchen gardens in homes, congregations, and communities;
- Promote good food by sponsoring farmers' markets and preserving local culinary traditions

Useful References:

Local Harvest
localharvest.org

Local Foods
www.worldwatch.org/node/6064

Manual "A Vegetable Garden for All"
www.fao.org/3/a-i3556e.pdf

Factsheet-Smallholders and Family Farmers
[www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet SMALLHOLDERS.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf)

3. Strive for all people to have knowledge about and access to affordable, nutritious food.

'Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." Acts of the Apostles 6: 1-4

'Just access' to food was given a very high priority by the followers of Jesus in the first century. The disciples assigned seven deacons with impeccable credentials for food distribution, when questions were raised regarding the fairness of food distribution, with allegations of discrimination experienced by one group of widows with regards to receiving food rations. Stephen, the first martyr among the followers of Christ, led the group assigned to oversee the food distribution.

The high priority accorded to the management and distribution of food in the ancient world (between 2000 and 1600 BC) is reflected in the decision of the Pharaoh to entrust the best talent in the land- Joseph, with the responsibility of assuring the food supply of Egypt. (Genesis 41.33-57)

In a world, which has enough to feed each living person, one in nine people (795 million) do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. As followers of Christ today, we have the responsibility to strive for all children of God to have knowledge about and access to affordable and adequate nutritious food.

Knowledge is important in the fight against malnutrition. But it is clear that lasting transformation in dietary habits will take place only if knowledge is accompanied by an environment that is conducive to healthy living.

For instance, even though it is essential to teach children in school regarding healthy eating and a balanced diet, instructions given in isolation can only bring about limited transformation. If the child comes from an impoverished environment, and is not fed adequately at home before she/he comes to school, and if the school does not have a provision to give the child a nutritious meal during the day, it is unlikely that the child even gets to the school regularly. So it is also critical that nutritious school meals that are accessible to all, are offered in schools. It is also vital to

support the procurement of local and sustainably grown products and to find new products that are healthier and less processed.

For far too many people and especially for those living in low-income communities', healthy food is simply out of reach. Men and women end up working for long hours often earning less than a living wage and spend many hours travelling to work from distant townships or unsanitary slums where they are able to find affordable accommodation. Finding fresh and quality food means either traveling significant distances or paying exorbitant prices. Many have neither the time nor money to prepare and eat health food.

To break the vicious cycle of poverty and hunger, people who are extremely poor and hungry have to be assisted through social protection. Adequate, well-designed social protection² would enable the people in this category to quickly overcome poverty, hunger and under-nutrition.

Women and girls are overrepresented among those who are food-insecure and worldwide, an estimated 60% of undernourished people are women or girls. Limited access to nutritious food and relatively easier access to less nutritious, ultra processed foods is linked to poor diets and, ultimately leading to under nutrition and stunting of growth among children. Simultaneously, the adults and older populations are at the risks of developing obesity, diabetes, and other preventable food-related health challenges. This double burden of malnutrition with the coexistence of under-nutrition along with overweight and obesity is being increasingly becoming evident in poorer communities across the world.

What can we do work that all people to have knowledge about and access to affordable, nutritious food?

- Ensure nutrition education for all, including schools and congregations.
- Highlight the gender dimension of malnutrition and work to make women and girls less vulnerable.

² Social protection includes three broad components: social assistance, social insurance and labor market protection. Social assistance programmes are publicly provided conditional or unconditional cash or in-kind transfers or public work programmes. Social insurance programmes are contributory programmes that provide cover for designated contingencies affecting household welfare or income. Labor market programmes provide unemployment benefits, build skills and enhance workers' productivity and employability.

- Ensure that person/ children attending congregation's facilities and related institutions, including schools, have access to healthy meals.
- Are social protection systems in place especially to serve the underserved and poorer sections of your society?
- If not, work to bring about the policy change with governments, faith communities and civil society, to make it a reality.
- If systems are in place, monitor their functioning and advocate for continuing ensuring high standards of service and quality of support provided.
- Advocate with local and retail stores to stock fresh and healthy food options, including fruits and vegetables.
- Advocate for transparent and informative labelling of foods.

Useful References:

The Global Nutrition Report 2016: From Promise to Impact: Ending malnutrition by 2030.
ebrary.ifpri.org/utis/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/130354/filename/130565.pdf

The Double Burden of Malnutrition: A Review of Global Evidence
documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/905651468339879888/pdf/795250WP0Doub100Box037737900PUBLIC0.pdf

4. Eat mindfully and in moderation.

"..... 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" (...) Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" (...) The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. Exodus 16: 12, 15b, 16,31

The food the Israelites received during their forty-year long perilous journey through the wilderness, in the form of manna and quails reflects God's gracious care of people in times of trouble, depending on God. The care is manifested in the sustenance provided by God, each day, that nourished the community. Food that was dependable, regular, nourishing and sufficient. The people were also given the clear instructions to collect food only for their daily needs, and not to hoard, except when preparing for the Sabbath, when they could collect enough manna for two days.

It is in that same spirit that Lord Jesus taught us to pray for our daily sustenance.

Give us this/each day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3)

The word 'daily' is translated from ancient (Koine) Greek word *'epiousios'* (ἐπιούσιον), uniquely used in only two instances in the Bible, as quoted above. Early Christians found it challenging to translate the word *epiousios* and "daily," albeit succinct, does not do justice to the holistic meaning of the word. From the writings of the early Church Fathers (including Origen and Jerome), *'epiousios'* could be best translated as "that which is sufficient to our life/ existence." So, the verse would read as "Give us this day, food/ bread that is sufficient to our life".

It is also in line with the appeal in Proverbs 30:8 *'Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need,'*

The bible points us to depend on God, each day for our sustenance, to have the energy and dynamism, to work to extend the reign of God, today, here and now. We look to God, not to gratify a luxurious appetite, but only for the necessities of life, and that not for many years, but from day to day. The bible also teaches us to moderate our desires of worldly things and to focus on following God's statutes.

The bible is also very clear against overconsumption, gluttony and drunkenness and guides us to follow purpose driven and disciplined lives. (Genesis 25:29-34; Proverbs 23: 20,21; Proverbs 28:7; James 5:5)

In the last hundred years, with increasing mechanisation and large-scale agriculture and food production, the types of food available have drastically changed. Industrially produced and ultra-processed foods, sugars and beverages, which are aggressively marketed, are becoming increasingly cheap and ubiquitously available, and increasingly replacing healthier wholesome and more nutritious foods in the diets of people world-wide. Increasingly sedentary nature of many forms of work, changing modes of transportation, increasing unplanned urbanization, with poor work and living environments are also contributing to a global obesity epidemic.

Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980. Nearly 2 billion adults, 18 years and older, are overweight. Of these over 600 million were obese. Most of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight. Increases in rates of obesity and related chronic diseases that are linked to poor diets, such as diabetes and heart disease, are major public health concerns.

'We harm the body by overfeeding it and the soul by depriving it of spiritual food.'
Homilies of Chrysostom on Amos

What can we do to promote mindfulness and moderation in eating?

- It is not only important to monitor what you eat, but also to be aware of how you are eating.
- Eat regularly, a balanced diet, and eat in moderation. Stop eating before you feel full.
- Strive for variety and balance. Food with lots of interesting flavours and textures with variety in food groups will be more nutritious and fulfilling.
- Eat meals mindfully, preferably in silence immersing in the experience of eating.
- Avoid distractions while eating such as watching the television, working on the computer, talking on the phone or engaging in animated conversations.
- Eat slowly, chewing well, relishing the taste, aroma, texture and appreciating the presentation. The distractions often leads to mindless eating!
- To control the intake of energy-dense foods that are high in fat and the consumption of sweet beverages and excessive use of alcohol.
- Incorporate physical activity in one's life style.
- Promote education and discussions to overcome obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Useful References:

World Health Organization- Obesity and overweight

www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/

Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity

apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/204176/1/9789241510066_eng.pdf?ua=1

5. Do not waste food.

*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **John 6: 11- 13***

According to the bible, food has a profoundly sacred role. It is a gift from God. Apart from the physical role food in providing substance and strength to live; sharing and partaking of food has a socially binding and building role in strengthening relationships amongst the children of God. Food also has a paramount spiritual role in the celebration of the Eucharist and reaffirming our relationship with God. The little boy's contribution of five barley loaves and two fish indicates the importance of sharing what we have, and the significance of each person's contribution (v.9) notwithstanding ones age, gender or status. Jesus's initiative of feeding the five thousand people and the collection of the 12 basketsful of fragments of the barley loaves (vv. 5-13) is seen by the people as a sign that Jesus is representing God (vv. 14).

Based on the conversation Jesus has with the same people who experienced the miracle, when they search for and met Jesus in Capernaum, we understand that God gives bread from heaven (v.32), sends and commissions Jesus to give lasting life to believers (v.37), drawing people to him, teaching, feeding them with the living bread, granting lasting life and to ensure that none are lost (vv. 39, 44, 65). The abundance and surplus provided by the sign 'on the mountain' (v.3) reminds us of the messianic banquet on God's mountain anticipated by Prophet Isaiah (Isa 2: 2,3; 25:6). The "twelve baskets full" symbolically could represent abundance and blessing for the work of the 12 apostles or indicate that the 12 tribes of Israel would never be in want.

Food in Christianity is not just a commodity or a product. It is both physical and spiritual. It is a sacred gift from God. Its abundance is clearly linked with how we deal with food. A gift to be relished, shared, and not to be wasted.

One-third of food produced for human consumption is wasted globally. This amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year. Apart from the waste of a tremendous quantity of resources used in food production, we need to consider the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the production of food that is wasted. Food is lost or wasted throughout the supply chain, from initial agricultural production down to

final household consumption. In medium- and high-income countries food is to a significant extent is discarded even if it is still suitable for human consumption. Significant losses also occur early in the food supply chains in the industrialized regions. In low-income countries food is lost mostly during the early and middle stages of the food supply chain; much less food is wasted at the consumer level.

What can we do to reduce the wasting of food?

- Follow many Christian and Jewish traditions, where they pray also at the end of meal- as a moment to reflect on what we have eaten.
- Advocate for greater investments in low and middle-income countries to improve:
 - Infrastructure
 - Technical enhancements in harvesting techniques
 - Storage and cooling facilities in difficult climatic conditions
 - Packaging and marketing systems

Such improvements will have immediate and significant impact on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in developing countries.

- Support small farmers to organise and to diversify and upscale their production and marketing, thus enhancing the food supply chains in developing countries.
- Raising awareness among food industries, retailers and consumers on the need to find good and beneficial use for safe food that is presently being thrown away.
- At the consumer level, encouraging behaviour change in:
 - Sufficient purchase planning and inspecting food before buying
 - Storing foods properly, refrigeration and using older products first (First In, First Out).
 - Planning meals properly.
 - Aiming to use as much of the food being cooked, whenever possible.
 - Find ways to use leftovers scraps of food.
 - Donating food that won't be used- in good time, so it can be consumed by someone who needs it. To be aware of and contribute to nearest food bank.
 - Canning fruits and pickling fruits and vegetables when excessive amounts of produce are available.
 - Composting food scraps.

Useful References:

Global Food Losses and Food Waste
www.fao.org/docrep/014/mb060e/mb060e00.htm

6. Be grateful to those who grow and prepare food for your table.

So he (Elijah) set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." 1 Kings 17:10-14

Elijah, the prophet of God, prophesies a drought to come upon the whole land as King Ahab provoked the anger of the Lord (1 Kings 16:33; 17:1–7). Hounded by the angry king and guided by God, Elijah hid near the brook of Wadi Cherith, where ravens fed him. As the drought and famine in the land deepen, the creek dried up and Elijah sought refuge with a widow in Zarephath, in a foreign territory. (A Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast between Sidon and Tyre, where Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab and the daughter of Ithobaal I, the King of Tyre would have been influential.)

The Prophet of God found refuge with an impoverished widow, with a child to support, who was on the brink of starvation. In spite of her poverty and powerlessness, she was willing to host and feed the holy man who was being hounded by powerful enemies. She did so at great personal risk, because she was a devout woman who recognised the Living God (v. 12) and had faith in the assurance and the words of the Prophet.

Our prayer to God to give us this day, food for our sustenance, is not usually answered by manna falling from heaven. But is usually provided by children of God—women and men who till the soil and work the fields, and (most often) by women who, lovingly and selflessly prepare the food we eat. But most often we take the food placed on our tables and the people who work to provide it, for granted.

The world largely does not recognise the massive contribution of mainly women, in engaging in productive activities such as cooking, cleaning and in caring for the members of the household. It is also 'unpaid work', which is almost invisible concerning the immense contribution to the welfare of society and in sustaining economies. If this unpaid work were to be financed by the public purse, it would

represent 94% of the total tax revenue of the Republic of Korea, and 182% of the total tax revenue of India.

This also has serious implications at the community level, as women work longer hours each day than men when unpaid work is factored in. On average, employed women in the 23 developing countries with data spend 9 hours and 20 minutes per day on paid and unpaid work. Employed men in those countries spend 8 hours and 7 minutes per day, which is about 1 hour and 10 minutes less than women. In developed countries the difference is Women not only prepare the food, but they also are responsible 40–60 per cent of the total agriculture. In many regions, there is also a trend for men to stay away from agriculture, resulting in growing feminization of agriculture. But women and girls worldwide face many inequities and constraints, often embedded in norms, practices and in legal provisions. Some laws, such as those governing access to land, institutionalise discrimination. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, it is estimated that they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 per cent. smaller- but still around 30 minutes more work done by women over men.

These facts and figures give an idea of the considerable debt of society as a whole to women who perform the vast majority of this work, which is largely unpaid, undervalued, and unrecognised.

What can we do to be more grateful to those who grow and prepare food for your table?

- Reflect on the role and contribution of those who grow and prepare food.
- To pray for who grow and prepare food when we pray before meals.
- Take steps at home to share in taking up chores amongst all members of the household, especially by men and boys.
- Recognise the disproportionate burden on women from the “care economy” and advocate for better education, work opportunities and conditions for work for women.

Useful References:

Gender Equality and Food Security: Women’s Empowerment as a Tool against Hunger, FAO & ADB, 2013 www.fao.org/wairdocs/ar259e/ar259e.pdf

The World's Women 2015- Work

unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter4_t.pdf

7. Support fair wages for farm workers, farmers and food workers.

*Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat."*

Amos 8: 4-6

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

James 5:1-4

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Amos 5:24

Prophet Amos, was from a small village bordering the wilderness of Judah, of humble origins, a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, with no priestly or prophetic lineage. He preached in the eighth century BC, during the time of King Uzziah and was called by God to go and prophesy in Israel during the time of King Jeroboam II, when both nations were experiencing peace and prosperity. But it was also a period during which a privileged few in Israel were enjoying unprecedented prosperity while most Israelites were facing dire poverty. Amos had some very severe warnings to the nominal believers of God- to turn from their evil and exploitative ways before it's too late.

Amos refers to the unscrupulous traders waiting for the passing of the sabbatical year - when the remission of all debts was granted according to the Jewish law (v.5). (Deuteronomy 15:1). Ironically, in open mockery of the divine statutes, they were waiting to use the occasion which was supposed to bring respite to the poor, to manipulate their measures and balances to give people less merchandise than what they pay for (v.5). Also, the traders' adulterated wheat they were selling, with the chaff and dirt. Their greed to acquire more profits, contributing to the economic ruin of

impoverished people. When the poor lost their lands and livelihood, (v.4) and the debts were outstanding, the poor families and their children were sold into slavery, for material benefit of the rich (v.6)

The Epistle of James follows in the strong prophetic tradition, challenging injustices and the status quo in society. James's indignation in the quoted text focuses on wealthier Christians who have unfairly and fraudulently held back the wages of farm workers and other laborers in violation of the social legislation in the Bible (Deuteronomy 24:14,15).

Two Thousands of years later, in a world which is far more advanced and wealthy, the level of injustice and exploitation of workers continues to be shamefully pervasive. The food that we eat – be it cereals, fruits, vegetables, poultry and dairy products, meat and fish, may be tainted by the blood and sweat of exploited workers. If we are not aware and alert we may be benefitting from and supporting this injustice and violation against God and humanity.

In its Global Estimate of Forced Labor (2012), the International Labor Organization estimated that 20.9 million men and women are trapped in forced labor. Almost 19 million victims are exploited by private individuals or enterprises and over 2 million by the state or rebel groups. Forced labor in the private economy generates US\$ 150 billion in illegal profits per year. Domestic work, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and entertainment are among the sectors most concerned. Of those exploited by individuals or enterprises, 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation. Migrant workers and indigenous people are particularly vulnerable to forced labor.

What can we do to Support fair wages for farm workers, farmers and food workers?

- Get involved and be aware—locally and globally.
- Examine and correct our own policies, practices and wages we pay workers at our own homes, farms and enterprises; congregations and communities.
- Support organised labor and support worker advocacy organizations.
- Boycott food products, which benefits from or involves exploitative labor practices.
- Promote universal education.

Useful References:

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8. Reduce the environmental damage of land, water and air from food production and the food system.

*How long will the land mourn,
and the grass of every field wither?
For the wickedness of those who live in it
the animals and the birds are swept away,
and because people said, "He is blind to our ways."*

Jeremiah 12 :4

Deeply disturbed, Jeremiah indignantly asks 'God, how long will the land suffer and this injustice continue? The land is devastated and deforested; animals are driven to extinction; birds' no longer flies the skies; and the earth is no longer sustains habitation or agriculture. This great tragedy is caused by the greed, selfishness and wickedness of some people. Earlier in the chapter, Jeremiah bitterly complains that while the general population who are innocent, suffer greatly, those who are guilty and treacherous, prosper and thrive. To add insult to injury, the perpetrators are convinced that they are not accountable to anybody, as God and all authority seems to be blind to their misdeeds.

Jeremiah served as one of God's prophets through the rule of five kings of Judah, during the 6th and 5th Century BC and continued to plead God's case against Judah during the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. He spoke the truth at great personal cost, being mocked, impoverished, tortured and persecuted by those who were in power. The rich and powerful were deeply troubled by his disturbing warnings and predictions (Jeremiah 12:7; Jeremiah 38:1-6). He was even betrayed by his own family members (Jeremiah 12:6).

But finally, the predictions come to pass, and the invaders overrun, pillaged the lands and enslaved the people. In the midst of war, defeat and destruction, God instructed Jeremiah to purchase a piece of property in Anathoth, which was already under Babylonian control, from his cousin, for no obvious immediate benefit. This was done through proper legal proceedings, as a sign of hope for the future and as a prophetic act to emphasise God's gracious promise of restoring the dispossessed to their lands in the future. It was also a divine call to invest for the future generations, however dire the present situation may seem. (Jeremiah 32).

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Jeremiah was addressing one nation. But through the ages the message has been applicable to the whole world. The devastation described by the Prophet has been scaled up to global proportions. The

environmental damage of land, water and air from food production and the food system is an important component of the overall destructive, and consuming

Land and water resources and the way they are used are central to the challenge of improving food security across the world and in ensuring environmental sustainability. But we have to feed the world in a sustainable manner. The increasing dependence on Industrial crop and livestock production over diversified agroecological farming has serious consequences. Industrial crop and livestock production rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, antibiotics, protein feed, in order to thrive in uniform, intensive systems. They contribute to:

- Pest resistance and vulnerability to diseases
- Water contamination and over-usage
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Loss of biodiversity and erosion of the genetic pool

Around 50% of the world's habitable land has already been converted to farming land. Agricultural ecosystems provide important habitats for many wild plant and animal species. This is especially the case for traditional farming areas that cultivate diverse species. But the industrial scale commercial farming and intensive monocultures are causing highly destructive large-scale clearing of natural habitats. Examples include the conversion of rainforests in Indonesia to oil palm plantations, and of large areas of the Amazon rainforest and Brazilian savanna to soybean and cattle farms. Over and above the habitat loss due to the clearing of forests, unsustainable agricultural practices are contributing to 12 million hectares of land being lost each year to desertification.

Freshwater and marine areas are also affected. In many situations, Aquaculture is also in direct competition with natural marine and freshwater habitats for space. For instance, some European fish farms have been placed in the migratory routes of wild salmon, while in Asia and Latin America, mangrove forests have been cleared to make space for shrimp farms.

For a sustainable world, we need to shift from industrial modes of agriculture to systems based around diversified agroecological farming.

What can we do to reduce the environmental damage of land, water and air from food production and the food system?

- Support small-scale food producers to have access to and control over the productive natural resources they need to practice just and sustainable agriculture methods.

- Support scaling up just and sustainable agriculture practices.
- Buy locally sourced foods and reduce dependence on ultra refined and imported foods.
- Challenge policies and subsidies that encouraged large-scale industrial farming.
- Advocate against deforestation, and environmental degradation for development of Industrial farms.
- Advocate against the large-scale acquisition (buying or leasing) of large pieces of land or water bodies by domestic and transnational companies, governments, and individuals (Land grabbing and grabbing of water bodies). These are usually intended for the purpose of industrial food and biofuels production.

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9. Protect the biodiversity of seeds, soils, ecosystems and the cultures of food producers

*Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. **Genesis 1:11***

*And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." **Genesis 1:20***

*And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. **Genesis 1:24***

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." **Genesis 1:24***

*Then God said to Noah..., "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." **Genesis 9: 8-11***

The narratives of the creation in the book of Genesis manifests as a wondrous, divinely planned, ordered and solemn process. While we celebrate the beauty and diversity of creation, the whole creation praises God (Psalm 65). We also see the glory of God manifested in the whole creation (Palm 104). As a culmination of the creation process, God created humankind, in the likeness of God. Resembling God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24), in knowledge (Colossians 3:10) and in being upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Human beings were also given stewardship and authority over creation. We are seen to share God's likeness in the qualities of governing the world as a community of people, living in peace with the environment and with all the other creatures.

As the Genesis narrative unfolds, we see humanity staying away from the will of God (Genesis 2 to 4) and the reaffirmation of God's blessing (Genesis 5: 1-32) on humankind. After the deluge and destruction, God establishes a new order in creation, building on God's relationship and enterprise with Noah. But it is clear that the 'Covenant' (divine contract) that the God establishes is not exclusive with

humankind- but includes '*every living creature of the earth*' with the human beings as a third party (Genesis 9: 8-10).

Tragically, we, as human kind have been flagrantly violating this covenant. Of the 8,800 animal breeds known, 7% are extinct and 17% are at risk of extinction. Most experts agree that human activities have accelerated the rate of species extinction- many times the normal background rate of extinction.

Today there are also serious threats to the genetic diversity of forests. Forests cover 30 percent of the world's land area and provide habitats for countless species. These complex ecosystems are also vital to livelihoods and to economic and social development, providing food and raw materials for construction, energy and manufacturing. Of the over 80,000 tree species, less than 1% has been studied for potential use. But unfortunately, the Earth is still losing some 200 square kilometres of forest each day. Given our general lack of knowledge of forest genetic resources, it is impossible to estimate the precise extent of the genetic loss that is resulting from deforestation and forest degradation.

Smallholders and peasants make up almost half the world's people, and they grow at least 70% of the world's food. Most of the world's food is grown from peasant-bred seeds. Peasants breed and nurture 40 livestock species and almost 8,000 breeds, as opposed to the industrial food chain, which focuses on far fewer than 100 breeds of five livestock species. Corporate plant breeders work with 150 crops but focus on barely a dozen. What remains of the world's declining fish stocks comes from 336 species accounting for almost two-thirds of the aquatic species we consume. Fish provide 20% of animal protein to about 3 billion people. Only ten species provide about 30% of marine capture fisheries and ten species provide about 50% of aquaculture production. The only group that has demonstrated the capacity to monitor and manage the wide variety of fish in an ecologically sound manner are artisanal fisher folk.

Smallholders and peasants, indigenous communities and artisanal fisher folk, represent among the most impoverished communities in world, pushed to the margins of society by the powerful and market driven world. But their living knowledge and experience are crucial for the survival of the world in an age best by climate change. They remain the tenuous yet closest to the earth, the guardians of the biodiversity of the world and our best hope to help us adapt and flourish in the changing environment.

What can we do to protect the biodiversity of seeds, soils, ecosystems and the cultures of food producers?

- Since consumption of resources is a root cause of biodiversity loss, we can consume less and be more mindful about what we consume.
- We need to leverage our purchasing power to help protect biodiversity by consuming products that do not harm the environment.
- Advocate for the rights of Indigenous communities, especially for the rights to their traditional lands, resources and cultures.
- Conservation of local species (landraces³) of farm animals, plants and crops.
- Promote and strengthen gene banks.
- Promote conservation of forests and woodlands and reforestation.
- Promote smallholder management systems with positive effects on ecosystems (such as- Conservation agriculture and agroforestry).
- Advocate for the regulation and monitoring of Pesticides, its impact on health due to exposure over long periods of time, and impact on the food chain and the environment.

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³ A landrace is a domesticated, regional ecotype, a locally adapted, or traditional variety of a domesticated species of animal or plant that has developed over time, through adaptation to its natural and cultural environment of agriculture and pastoralism, and due to isolation from other populations of the species.

www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/Campaign-reports/Agriculture/Food-and-Farming-Vision/

10. Rejoice and share the sacred gift of food with all.

'...As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him;' **Luke 24: 28-31a**

After Jesus' resurrection, he joined two of his followers on their way to Emmaus and held an extended conversation with them. They were confused and fearful of the situation they found themselves to be in, three days after the crucifixion of Jesus and having hearing about how Jesus overcame death. Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in the scriptures. They were enlightened but they were prevented from recognising Jesus. It is only when the disciples invited the stranger to stay with them and share a meal and when Jesus, the stranger, broke the bread that they recognized their Lord Jesus. By listening to the stranger, receiving and being hospitable to the stranger and in sharing food with the other, God revealed Jesus to them.

Jesus still meets us; we remember his death (passion) and resurrection; he is both our companion on the way and the 'panis' that we share. But if we do not share the food we have for our sustenance, our knowledge of Jesus will be limited to an intellectual understanding. He revels himself to us when we share our food with others.

The word 'Companion' is derived from Latin - 'com - panis' which literally means 'with bread' or sharing bread. The word 'Compassion' comes from the Latin 'com' and the verb 'patior', means to suffer; together it means 'suffer with' or sharing in the suffering. Patior is also the root of "patient".

Friendship and companionship go far beyond relating with each other superficially. It is a holistic relationship, sharing each other's lives', resources, joys and pain. A dynamic relationship with an active desire to alleviate the other's suffering. Lord Jesus as a compassionate companion. He was deeply aware of the suffering of others. He actively participated in liberating the world with a revolutionary life and message. He shared his life, his resources, and his wisdom. He taught us to see God in others and to reflect God in each of our lives. With his life, death and resurrection, he demonstrated that this companionship and compassion cannot be limited by the narrow boundaries of race, social or economic status, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality or political affiliation.

The world produces 17% more food per person today than 30 years ago. Though there is enough food to feed all, too many people in the world don't have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food. Climate change is also rapidly pushing the world's poorest people – those least responsible for it – to the limits of subsistence. The inequity and systemic injustices of societies, perpetuates hunger and suffering.

Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth. The vast majority of the world's hungry people live in developing countries, where 12.9 per cent of the population is undernourished. Though Asia is the continent with the maximum number of hungry people - two thirds of the total, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest prevalence (percentage of population) of hunger. One person in four there is undernourished.

If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by up to 150 million.

Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five - 3.1 million children each year. One out of six children, (approximately 100 million) in developing countries is underweight. One in four of the world's children are stunted⁴. In developing countries the proportion can rise to one in three. 66 million primary school-age children attend classes hungry across the developing world, with 23 million in Africa alone.

How can we better share the sacred gift of food with all?

- Be aware of needs for food in your neighborhood / city, village or town and work to contribute and help.
- Join or initiate Campaigns to overcome hunger and volunteer time and efforts.
- Fundraise and or donate to credible and accountable organizations with a proven track record
- Advocate and work together, with people with a shared vision to overcome the injustice of poverty and inequality.
- To be aware of and contribute to nearest food bank.
- Do we go beyond sharing food and sharing meals? Work to extend hospitality and opening our homes to others.

⁴ "height for age" value to be less than two standard deviations of the WHO Child Growth Standards median.

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