



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for Food and Hunger

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us explore Christian attitudes about food and responses to world hunger. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

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What has the Passover meal meant to Jewish and Christian communities of faith? Paul says the Corinthian Christians, as “unleavened” people, should lead “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth.” He bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, “our paschal lamb.”

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Focus Article:

📖 Table Fellowship
of God's People
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 11-17)

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Jesus and the Passover

What has the Passover meal meant to Jewish and Christian communities of faith? Paul says the Corinthian Christians, as "unleavened" people, should lead "unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth." He bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, "our paschal lamb."

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:7-23

Responsive Reading (1 Corinthians 5:6-8):

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened.

For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Reflection

"Festivals were part and parcel of Israel's life together as God's covenanted people," Todd Still notes. Jerusalem overflowed with pilgrims for three weeklong feasts every year: (1) Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread commemorated the Exodus from slavery in Egypt; (2) the Festival of Weeks (or, Pentecost) celebrated the harvest of wheat; and (3) the Festival of Tabernacles remembered with penitence the people's wilderness suffering.

The Passover is the most significant festival in the Gospels. Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for Passover every year (Luke 2:41). Perhaps he attended in his early adult years; from the three references to the festival in John 2:13, 6:4, and 11:55, the tradition grew that his public ministry lasted three years. Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem was near the time of Passover (Luke 22:1; Mark 14:1; Matthew 26:2; John 11:55).

The Gospel of John says Jesus was crucified on the day of Preparation, at the hour when Passover lambs were slain at the Temple (19:14-16). The Synoptic Gospels, however, report that Jesus' last meal with his disciples occurred at the time of the Passover feast (Mark 14:12, 16; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:8, 15). They do not describe the usual Passover menu; instead, Jesus compared a shared loaf of bread with his body and a common cup of wine with his blood. "These significant variations signal that the supper Jesus shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal was different in kind from the Passover meals that were shared at other Jewish tables," writes Still. "The fact that this meal, which we call 'the Last Supper,' is the model for the Lord's Supper in the earliest churches suggests that Jesus' first followers considered his instructions to the twelve during their final meal to be especially valuable and readily applicable to all would-be disciples (note especially 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)."

Several scripture passages go further and identify Jesus with the slaughtered paschal (Passover) lamb. Two of these draw out the implications for holy living.



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"Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves" and "do not be conformed to the desires you formally had in ignorance," the writer of 1 Peter urges, because "you know that you were ransomed from the futile ways...with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish." With our minds readied and desires disciplined, we'll be prepared to show "genuine mutual love, [and] love one another deeply from the heart" (1:13-22).

Similarly, Paul warns the Corinthian congregation about its need for moral purity. Because "our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed," they now should live "unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth." They must "clean out the old yeast," which here serves as a metaphor for malice and evil (cf. Galatians 5:7-10), so that they may be the "new batch" that they have already become in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). In Paul's wonderful metaphor, they are called to "celebrate the festival" as "unleavened," morally righteous people.

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of each menu item of the Passover meal (Exodus 12:1-13; Deuteronomy 16:1-8)? It is not especially delicious fare. How does it build a community of faithful disciples?
2. Bishop Melito of Sardis, in the oldest known Easter sermon, explores the link between Passover and the Lord's Supper with remarkable metaphors: "For [Jesus Christ], who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit, and the members of our bodies by his own blood" (*Peri Pasha*, 68). How can knowing its background in the Passover meal deepen your experience of the Lord's Supper?
3. In what contexts of worship does your congregation observe the Lord's Supper? Do you remember an especially significant celebration of this meal? What made it special?
4. Study how the metaphor of Jesus as our paschal lamb is employed in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 1 Peter 1:13-22. What similarities do you notice? Are there important differences?

Departing Hymn: "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread" (verses 1 & 2)

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
Your table in our heart.

There eat with us in love divine;
Your body and Your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

James Montgomery, 1825 (altered)
Suggested Tune: ST. AGNES



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Table Fellowship
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(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 11-17)

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Table Fellowship

The Corinthian church's divisions at the Lord's Supper were a microcosm of their fractured, dysfunctional fellowship. Yet, if properly celebrated, the Supper would foster the assembly's unity as a body of believers.

Prayer:[†]

Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands
that holy things have taken;
let ears that now have heard Your songs
to clamor never waken.

Lord, may the tongues which 'Holy' sang
keep free from all deceiving;
the eyes which saw Your love be bright,
Your blessed hope perceiving.

The feet that tread Your holy courts
from light, Lord, do not banish;
the bodies by Your body fed
with Your new life replenish.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Reflection

In Christian congregations, the Apostle Paul knew, we are deeply shaped by our table fellowship. Through our choices about what, where, and with whom to eat, we are forming basic commitments to other people, the creation, and God.

Paul had thoughtfully adopted some comparatively radical stances toward food and eating, including:

- ▶ *eating with Gentile believers.* Paul even rebuked Peter for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch after "certain men from James" arrived from Jerusalem. "Paul believed Peter's conservatism was fueled by cowardice and insincerity," writes Still, "and that the pillar apostle's tactical adjustments at the dining table compromised the very 'truth of the gospel' (Galatians 2:11-14)."
- ▶ *enjoying food offered to idols.* Paul held a less guarded position on "idol foods" than did many Christians (Acts 15:29; Revelation 2:14, 20). Applying Psalm 24:1 ("the earth is the Lord's and everything in it"), he told the Corinthians to "eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the grounds of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:25-26).
- ▶ *relaxing diet restrictions.* Because "a new day had dawned in Christ ... [Paul believed] the traditional Jewish boundary lines needed to be redrawn and well-established Jewish beliefs needed to be re-configured," Still observes. "He promoted the ideal that there was neither Jew nor Greek in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Gentiles, therefore, could be full-fledged members of the people of God without adhering to Jewish... dietary laws."

Nevertheless, Paul was sensitive toward Christians who held stricter dietary views. He urged Roman believers not to despise "weaker" disciples who are vegetarians, but to "[walk] in love"



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with them in order not to “cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (14:1-3, 15).

He had sharp words for the ‘strong’ Corinthians who welcomed his view of Christian freedom, yet abused others by their arrogance and greed. They carelessly continued to eat in temples for idol sacrifice. Comparing three meals—the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), Jewish feasts associated with sacrifice (18), and meals served in pagan temples (19-21)—Paul warned that a common table fosters fellowship among the partakers, and between them and the one they honor in the meal. So, he warned them to “flee from the worship of idols” and the “table of demons” (10:14, 21). He was outraged when they turned their love feasts and Lord’s Supper “into a humiliating, divisive laughingstock,” says Still. “Instead of sharing their food, some church members were eating and drinking in excess, while other believers were left wanting and without.... Paul cautions that their behavior at the Lord’s Supper is literally a matter of life and death—physically and spiritually, individually and collectively (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).”

Study Questions

1. Paul objects to the arrogance of the ‘strong’ Corinthians in two regards: their careless association with pagan temple meals and their humiliating treatment of fellow Christians. How do the Apostle’s images of the bread and cup in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 address each concern?
2. Examine the occasions for table fellowship—both shared meals and the Lord’s Supper—among members of the study group and within the congregation. How do these build up a faithful community? Do they reveal hurtful divisions?
3. How can sharing the Lord’s Supper shape our discipleship, according to the opening prayer (“Strengthen for service, Lord”) and the spiritual, “Let Us Break Bread Together”?
4. Are there any “tables of demons” today, in the sense of places where it would be wrong for a Christian to eat?

Departing Hymn: “Let Us Break Bread Together”

Let us break bread together on our knees,
let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees,
let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees,
let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

African-American spiritual

‘From a deacon’s prayer in a fifth-century Nestorian rite of the Mar Thomas Christians on the southern coast of India; translated from Syriac by C. W. Humphreys and Percy Dearmer in *The English Hymnal* (1906). (altered)



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Focus Articles:

📖 Hungry Souls
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 18-25))

📖 The Culture of Food
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 84-88)

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Hungry Souls

Oscillating between the extremes of gluttonous indulgence and puritanical self-denial, we miss the true joy of eating. Furthermore, we distort our meals with our individualistic ways. No wonder many of us are leaving the table with hungry souls.

Prayer†

We cannot love God unless we love each other.

**We know God in the breaking of bread,
and we know each other in the breaking of bread,
and we are not alone anymore.**

Heaven is a banquet, and life is, too—even with a crust—
as long as there is companionship.

We have all known loneliness.

**We have learned that the only solution is love.
And love comes with community.**

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:43-47

Reflection

Luke paints a word-picture of the exuberant hospitality of the first Christian communities: "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47a). In this snapshot, we also catch a winsome glimpse of their temperance.

The ancient virtue of temperance, *sôphrosunê*, is not the abstinence urged by modern "temperance societies." It's neither a constant struggle against bodily appetites nor a painful rejection of the joys of food and drink. Wendell Berry writes about "eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance," and a settled disposition toward this "fullest pleasure" is what the ancients had in mind. The point of temperance is "to make possible a right ordering of pleasure, an experience of pleasure at the right things in the right way," Hibbs says. "It is marked by ease and delight, not calculation and anxiety."

Overeating may be the most common way of missing the mark of temperance today, for polls show that about two-thirds of Americans are overweight. Yet, even the physically fit can miss the mark in another direction when they "exhibit a maniacal and excruciating devotion to a model of the perfect body."

The true joy of eating has a social dimension, but in our individualistic ways we're tempted to miss the mark of temperance by "consuming fast food in the privacy of our automobile or in front of the television, or in our communal eating we are preoccupied with private calculations of carbs and calories," writes Hibbs. "We are also...increasingly cut off from the natural sources of food production, from the planting and nourishing of the sources of food in the setting of the local farm."

The banquet celebration in the film *Babette's Feast* (1987) wonderfully depicts the "fullest pleasure" of eating. In the movie, an ascetic Christian community that has fallen into bickering and accusations is transformed during a lavish dinner. Their cook, Babette, prepares the sumptuous feast out of gratitude for the community's giving her



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refuge from war and in memory of their founding pastor. *Babette's Feast* "makes clear that bodily goods and sensible pleasures can be vehicles for the manifestation of grace, that is, they can be occasions of communal transformation," says Hibbs. "The reunification of the community through the feast confirms Wendell Berry's thesis that 'healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation.'"

Study Questions

1. How do your eating habits, and those of your family, measure up to the ancient virtue of temperance? Are you eating with the "fullest pleasure – pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance"?
2. Do you agree that *Babette's Feast* "transcends our popular way of framing the debate over appetite, which pits a repressive Puritanism [or, religious moralizing] against a celebration of the indulgence of untutored desire"?
3. What is the relation between Christian practice and true joy in Isaac Watts' "Come, We That Love the Lord"? Has this been true of your Christian discipleship?
4. Perhaps the most famous fictional cannibals are the Cyclops of Homer's *Odyssey* and Dr. Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Describe how they are similar, and how they differ. How do they illustrate the ancient and contemporary views of human beings' relation to the world?
5. After reading Wirzba's "The Culture of Food," can you see ways your congregation could "become a place wherein food's deep spiritual resonances are heard and celebrated"?

Departing Hymn: "Come, We That Love the Lord" (verses 1, 3, 9, and 10)

Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known;
join in a song with sweet accord,
and thus surround the throne.

Let those refuse to sing,
who never knew our God;
but children of the heavenly King
may speak their joys abroad.

The hill of Zion yields
a thousand sacred sweets
before we reach the heavenly fields,
or walk the golden streets.

Then let our songs abound,
and every tear be dry;
we're marching through Immanuel's ground,
to fairer worlds on high.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), altered
Tune: ST. THOMAS (Williams)

[†]Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: An Autobiography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 285-286.



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Focus Article:

📖 Heavenly Hunger
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 62-71)

Suggested Article:

📖 We Are *How* We Eat
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 89-93)

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Heavenly Hunger

A new Christian fitness culture is dramatically redirecting older concerns about gluttony and corpulence into schemes for getting “slim for Him.” Though participants in devotional fitness regimens are well-meaning and moral, the implications of this growing fixation on appearance are sobering.

Prayer†

Gracious God of Word and Table, to You be thanks and praise!
For the garden of the earth, filled with all manner of things that are pleasing to the eye and delightful to the tongue:
For fruits in their seasons — apples and melons; figs, grapes, and pomegranates; plums and oranges and peaches dripping with nectar;
For seasonings and spices — almond and vanilla; cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg; rosemary and marjoram; bay leaf and oregano and thyme;
For fellow creatures with whom to share the fruitfulness of the garden and the responsibility for tending it with care;
For our own bodies, born of the earth by Your hands and animated by Your breath;
For the serenity to hush our anxiety over appearances, our fretfulness about “conforming” to the standards of this age;
For the insight to be “transformed” into appreciation of a more richly variegated beauty;
For the capacity to savor food with pleasure and gratitude, and to stop when we have eaten to our fill;
For the wisdom to discern in our appetites a deeper hunger which opens us to others and to grace; Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Reflection

The Apostle Paul, turning his attention in Romans 12:1-2 to the guidelines for Christian living, offers this warning: Don’t be conformed to the world’s way of thinking! Our bodies should be living sacrifices to God and our thoughts are to be transformed, so that we may discern God’s will through the church.

Of all our thoughts, none are more resistant to being transformed by God’s Spirit than how we judge our selves and our bodies. Marie Griffith confirms this in her review of the culture of Christian food restraint. She worries that it “has consequences not always clearly perceived even by its more careful supporters,” such as:

- ▶ *idealizing a particular type of feminine beauty.* “Christian literature about fitness, weight-loss, and beauty frequently instructs its readers to uphold a pleasing image in the world, as...prototypes of the redeemed life to which non-Christians hopefully would aspire,” Griffith notes. “Yet it embraces American ideals of slender beauty which stand in glaring contrast to attitudes in the developing world that have long associated fat with beauty, wealth, and merit or divine blessing.”
- ▶ *embracing the material rewards of slenderness offered by the secular world.* “Patricia Kreml’s *Slim for Him* exemplifies the common pattern of urging her readers against vanity even while assur-



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ing them that they will become more beautiful via her regimen." Though the primary goal of dieting is sacrificial obedience to God, several writers promise it also will make a person "more beautiful, sexy, desirable, and naturally more envied by those who fail where she succeeds."

► *teaching us to read one another's body for signs of sin and virtue.* In today's image-saturated media culture, our bodies "have become the very medium of self-improvement, the primary stuff upon which to practice purification, obedience, and discipline and to establish perfection.... Like the culture into which it's interwoven, American Christianity has aligned with the pseudo-religion of physical fitness in a new way, dramatically redirecting older anxieties about gluttony and corpulence into schemes for getting 'slim for Him.'"

"What we do with our bodies, how we work to make them ever appealing and desirable, the health care policies we obtain for ourselves and allow for others—all of these are religious matters," Griffith writes. "They speak louder than our words about what kinds of bodies we adore and what types we despise or at least are willing to abandon. If no critique emerges to challenge today's Christian fitness and beauty culture, we may soon be faced with a still narrower set of Christian exemplars: an army of born-again bodies and malnourished souls."

Study Questions

1. Are the three consequences of "the culture of Christian food restraint" discussed by Griffith very harmful?
2. How can we distinguish a proper respect for fitness and health from an excessive interest in dieting and weight-loss?
3. "A recent resurgence of fasting in American Christian circles is closely connected to Christian weight loss and fitness concerns," Griffith writes. "Such disciplines today are unashamedly linked to aspirations for personal and political power." Do you agree?
4. Sara Covin Juengst's *Breaking Bread* and Holly Whitcomb's *Feasting with God* help us recapture the joy of food (pp. 90-92). What ideas do they spark for your family and congregation to enjoy eating as an act of stewardship, hospitality, bonding, compassion, celebration, and hope and restoration?

Departing Hymn: "Jesus, Our Lord and King" (verses 1 & 4)

Jesus, our Lord and King,
to You our praises rise;
to You our bodies we present,
a living sacrifice.

Baptized into Your death,
with You again we rise,
to newness of a life of faith,
to new and endless joys.

Anonymous

Suggested Tunes: ST. THOMAS or FESTAL SONG

[†]Adapted from Mary Louise Bringle, *The God of Thinness: Gluttony and Other Weighty Matters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 153-154. Used by permission.



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Who's Hungry? Who Cares?
(*Food and Hunger*, pp. 26-32)
- 📖 Sharing Our Bread
(*Food and Hunger*, pp. 54-57)

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Who's Hungry and Who Cares?

Efforts to reduce chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity have shown some success recently. But who is still hungry? We can influence governments and organizations to respond to the one in seven people who are hungry in the world.

Prayer†

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger.
Give them, through our hands, this day their daily bread; and by our understanding love, give peace and joy. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146

Reflection

Most of the world's 842 million hungry people "live in developing countries, where efforts to reduce hunger have shown some success over the last decade," writes Jack Marcum. Yet food insecurity, defined as "a condition of uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way," persists in even the most highly industrialized nations.

The trends of world hunger during the 1990's include:

- ▶ *an overall decrease in number and percentage of people who are hungry.* The number of hungry people in the developing world declined from 817 to 798 million and from 20% to 17% of the population. Major declines occurred in China (193 to 135 million, 17 to 11%), South America (42 to 33 million, 14 to 10%), Southeast Asia (76 to 66 million, 17 to 13%), and West Africa (36 to 33 million; 21 to 15%).
- ▶ *no change in the number of hungry people, but a decline in percentage due to population growth in India* (214 million, 25 to 21%). The pattern is similar in the rest of South Asia (77 to 79 million, 29 to 25%), East Africa (73 to 81 million, 44 to 39%), Southern Africa (34 to 37 million, 48 to 41%), the Caribbean (8 million, 28 to 25%), and North Africa (6 million, 5 to 4%).
- ▶ *a dramatic increase in hunger in Central Africa* (22 to 48 million, 35 to 58%). The hungry population also grew in Central America (5 to 8 million, 17 to 21%) and the Near East (20 to 35 million, 10 to 14%).
- ▶ *continuing high levels of food insecurity in the United States.* Of all U.S. households, 11% (containing 35 million people) were food insecure at some time during 2002. The rates are higher in black (22%), Hispanic (22%), and female-headed, single-parent households (32%). More children (16%) are food insecure than the elderly (6%). These rates have been relatively constant since 1995, when statistics were first reported.

What do American Christians think about the current hunger situation? Based on a 2003 survey of Presbyterians, we are more confident of ending hunger in the U.S. than in the rest of the world (77% to 44%). The pessimism about the world may be based on a misperception that the hunger problem has gotten worse or remained the same (63% and 13%) over the last decade.



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Very few respondents blame the hungry for their circumstances, but most expect them to take responsibility for themselves after food assistance helps them get back on their feet. Most believe the best way to fight hunger is to help poor people obtain better paying jobs (87%) rather than to simply provide them food (10%). Respondents want “major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support” to end hunger, but believe these efforts should be more efficient, accomplishing more while spending less. Interestingly, while support for major new efforts to end hunger varies little across different views of the Bible or theology, those who attend church weekly are significantly more likely to support such efforts (81%, versus 69% of members who attend once a month or less).

In church we learn how to care for one another as the body of Christ, and to join together in caring for people beyond the congregation. The “offering of letters” described by David Beckmann is an innovative way to integrate worship, study, and ministry to the hungry. Church members write notes to members of Congress about legislation that will impact hungry people in the U.S. and around the world. “Because the United States is the world’s most powerful nation,” Beckmann notes, “American citizens can help shape decisions that influence hungry people throughout the world. A single decision by Congress or the President can either offset our individual contributions to charitable organizations, or multiply them many times over.” Over the last thirty years, hundreds of thousands of letters written and collected in worship services “have moved members of Congress to win increases in nutrition programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to relieve the debt of poor countries, to appropriate money for battling the spread the AIDS, and to make international assistance programs more effective.”

Study Questions

1. Reading *Who's Hungry? Who Cares?* (pp. 26-32), are you surprised to learn how many people are hungry in the world and where they live? What do you find most interesting about the trends in world hunger during the 1990's?
2. Do you agree that “major new efforts [to combat hunger and food insecurity in the United States], led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support” are needed? If so, what form should these efforts take? Are there model efforts within your community that should be encouraged?
3. Compare Psalm 146 with Jesus’ warning that the nations (or peoples) will be judged to be either sheep or goats (Matthew 25:31-46). What similarities and differences do you notice?
4. Study the Bread for the World website (www.bread.org). What resources on world hunger can this Christian organization provide for your study group and congregation?

Departing Hymn: “Where Is Bread?”

[†]Mother Theresa, in *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words*, compiled by José Luis Gonzalez-Balado (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1997), 9.



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Focus Articles:

📖 Hunger in Christian Art
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 36-42)

📖 Love Serves
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 58-61)

What do you think?

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Christian Reflection

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A Moment of Recognition

Anyone can take a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does this with love. Vincent de Paul taught the Daughters of Charity to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ – always seeing our Lord in those who need us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Responsive Reading:[†]

Here, O our Lord, we see You face to face;
here would we touch and handle things unseen;
**here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
and all our weariness upon You lean.**

Here would we feed upon the bread of God,
here drink with You the royal wine of heaven;
**here would we lay aside each earthly load,
here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.**

Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
the feast, though not the love, is past and gone.
**The bread and wine are gone; but You are here,
nearer than ever, still our shield and sun.**

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by;
yet, passing, points to the glad feast above,
**giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
the Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.**

Reflection

At the center of Luke's account of the Emmaus supper is the wonderful moment of recognition when the disciples' "eyes were opened" to be aware of Christ's presence. Their insight followed immediately after Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30-31). Perhaps they recognized Jesus' grateful and generous way of satisfying their physical and spiritual hunger, for these four gestures echo from the feeding of the multitude and the Last Supper (see Luke 9:16; 22:19).

Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* calls us to their table. "We are more than onlookers; we sit next to an unnamed disciple and participate in his moment of recognition," Heidi Hornik writes. "A delicately balanced bowl of fruit, laden with grapes, teeters precariously on the edge of the table, about to fall into our space. A scallop shell (a symbol of baptism) perches on the disciple's vest on the right, and he beckons us to join their fellowship."

Hornik suggests that like Caravaggio's painting, "Gerard Straub's photographs draw us toward a moment of recognition.... We recognize the face of Christ in the poor, and the ministry of Christ in the ministry to the poor and hungry." Straub portrays the hungry in the context of their poverty. A man in a Philadelphia soup kitchen eats with quiet dignity; a young man, his baseball hat askew on his head, gathers valuables in a Jamaican garbage dump; and a young girl among nondescript objects of her poverty, holds her doll dearly to her face and welcomes us into their private space. Next to another image of a man living on the streets of Philadelphia, that 'city of brotherly love,' the artist writes, "The essence of Jesus' message is:



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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Make every stranger, no matter how poor and dirty, no matter how weak or unlovable, your neighbor. Tough message.”

Straub helps us to notice the hungry around us. In the U.S., food insecurity (defined by Bread for the World as “a condition of uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way”) affects 12 million households, with 35 million people. In relative terms, 11% of all households, containing 12% of the population, are food insecure.

In 1977 in downtown Los Angeles, Sister Alice Marie Quinn, D.C. had eyes to see the Lord in the faces of the elderly who could not get and fix food for themselves. From her concern grew the St. Vincent Meals-On-Wheels Program, which delivers over 2,400 meals daily to people who cannot leave their homes.

“God puts people in your path when He has a special mission for you,” Quinn says. After checking out several meal programs for the elderly, she found the food was not very good. “The seniors had to wait in line with their canes, walkers, and numerous parcels. Often the atmosphere was uninviting and even dirty, with little bugs flying around. I’m sure the food was nutritious, but it was not served with love.” In a small lunchroom, she set up “a lunch program befitting the Christ-like elderly poor.”

“While most of the people we serve are elderly, we do not have an age limit,” Quinn reports. “We are here for anyone who needs us. Our meals are hot, nutritionally balanced, and delivered with love. Our visit, brief as it is, may be more important than the food we deliver. Often we are the only people our clients will see all day. I think their greatest poverty is loneliness.”

Study Questions

1. How does the story of the Emmaus meal echo the feeding of the multitude and the Last Supper? (Compare the language and context of Luke 24:30, 9:16, and 22:19.) In Caravaggio’s *Supper at Emmaus*, do you find hints of one or both of these events?
2. How does Sandra Duguid’s poem, *Road to Emmaus* (*Food and Hunger*, p. 34), shed a different light on the Emmaus meal?
3. Does George Herbert’s poem, *Love bade me welcome* (*Food and Hunger*, p. 35), reveal another aspect of the Emmaus meal?
4. If we were, in the words of Vincent DePaul, “to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ—always seeing our Lord in those who need us,” what practical differences would this make in our ministry to the poor and hungry?
5. “Do you want to honor Christ?” asks John Chrysostom (c. 347-407). “Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked” (*Food and Hunger*, pp. 34-35). How could we restate his point for today?
6. Do individuals or families in your congregation suffer food insecurity? If so, how does the congregation support them? How does your congregation help other people in the community who are food insecure?

Departing Hymn: “Where Is Bread?”

† “Here, O My Lord, I See Thee,” by Horatio Bonar (1855) (verses 1, 3, 6, and 7, altered).

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Jesus and the Passover

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the role of Passover in the formation of the community of disciples.
2. To explore the importance of the Passover festival in interpreting Jesus' ministry.
3. To reflect on the call to holy living implicit in the Passover and Lord's Supper.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread," locate the tune ST. AGNES in your church hymnal or at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with an Story

Many congregations still mark New Year's Eve with a "Watch Night Service." The tradition traces back to 1862, when Blacks gathered in churches and homes on "Freedom's Eve" to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation taking effect. At the stroke of midnight, January 1, 1863, all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free.

When I was growing up, Watch Night was a big deal. Church members enjoyed a pot-luck supper, family games, and a movie. At the concluding worship service, my pastor father read the Passover story from the book of Exodus and we celebrated the Lord's Supper. Every year it was a powerful moment – welcoming the New Year by eating the bread and drinking the juice of Holy Communion with my church family. We were reminded that, like the people of ancient Israel, together we had been "bought with a price" and set free (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that God will help members live together in love and truth that is grounded in the Gospel.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 22:7-23 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

A number of New Testament passages, including the descriptions of heavenly worship in the book of Revelation, portray Jesus as our slaughtered paschal (or Passover) lamb. This study, which covers the first half of Todd Still's *Table Fellowship of God's People*, explores some implications of this metaphor for our discipleship. The next study guide, "Table Fellowship," continues the discussion of Still's article by focusing on how the Lord's Supper and common meals can shape communities of faithful disciples today.

It is important to distinguish three meals mentioned in this study: (1) the Passover meal observed from the days of ancient Israel, (2) Jesus' final meal with his disciples as described in the Synoptic Gospels, which we call the "Last Supper," and (3) the Lord's Supper celebrated by the church. Since Luke 22:7-23 weaves the three meals together and reveals their *continuities*, it's a wonderful prism for exploring, with Still, "what prompted our predecessors in the faith to sup together" and discovering "how table fellowship can mold our communities of faith."

Study Questions

1. The Passover menu included (1) a specially prepared, unblemished, year-old male lamb—roasted and eaten on the same night, with its bones preserved unbroken and the remains burned before the next morning, (2) unleavened bread, and (3) bitter herbs. Some of the lamb's blood was to be spread around the door of the house. "For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians," Moses told the elders of Israel; "when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down" (Exodus 12:23). The meal is to be eaten hurriedly, and the people are to be dressed to travel (12:11). The lamb is "a sacrifice for the LORD your God." The unleavened bread is "the bread of affliction—because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste" (Deuteronomy 16:2-3), which is interpreted in the tradition to mean that yeast was not added because there was not enough time to wait for the dough to rise. Scripture does not explain the "bitter herbs" (often, horseradish is used), but tradition says they represent the bitterness of life in slavery.

Each element is symbolic and helps participants to form shared memories: "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you" (Exodus 12:14) in order that "all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 16:3). Their common meal is a reminder of their sharing God's salvation. With this memory, the people are bound forever to one another as recipients of God's grace.

2. Members might meditate on each phrase of Bishop Melito's sermon: (1) We are rescued by one "who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep" — what an incredible paradox and reversal! (2) We are delivered "from servitude to the world" and "released... from bondage to the devil." And (3) Jesus' rescue operation involves not only "his own blood," but also "his own spirit." Bishop Melito emphasizes the continuity of pattern in God's action (it is an improbable rescue from slavery) as well as the distinctiveness of Jesus' death—for he is a paschal lamb who gives himself for us, body and spirit.
3. Invite members to reflect silently for a few minutes in order to remember an especially meaningful celebration of the Lord's Supper. When and where did it occur? Was it shared with friends and relatives, or with strangers? By what method was the Supper served? Why was the occasion significant? Discuss how your congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper. Is it a significant and memory-shaping part of your worship?
4. Members might divide into two groups, one looking for similarities and the other for significant differences. Some similarities include: (1) the opposite of sinful behavior is "sincerity and truth," or "obedience to truth" of the Gospel; and (2) the result of unresolved sinfulness is described as perishing like the grass or suffering "destruction of the flesh." Perhaps another similarity is the general context—a Corinthian congregation divided by "arrogance" and "boasting," and a group that is lacking "genuine mutual love." One difference is that Paul lists specific sins—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, drunkenness, and thievery—while 1 Peter refers generally to disordered "desires that you formerly had in ignorance" (i.e., before knowing God in Christ Jesus, cf. Acts 17:30; Ephesians 4:17-18).

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Table Fellowship

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching goals

1. To explore how table fellowship within a congregation expresses and shapes members' basic commitments to one another, other people, the creation, and God.
2. To introduce the Apostle Paul's comparatively radical stances toward food and eating.
3. To examine the table fellowship in our own congregations.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Todd Still writes: "Recently, at a luncheon where Baptists and Jews shared in table fellowship and theological dialog, I recalled Paul's prayer: 'May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Jesus Christ, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 15:5-6). With this benediction the apostle concludes his instructions on eating and drinking. Here he captures the hope to which we are called, and the love that our table fellowship should embody" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 17). Are our choices about what, where, and with whom we eat fostering harmony among us and bringing glory to God?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study, which covers the second half of Todd Still's "Table Fellowship of God's People," explores how the Lord's Supper and common meals can shape communities of faithful disciples today. By examining a spectacular failure of table fellowship in the church of Corinth, we can learn how God intended table fellowship to build up our congregations.

The letter of 1 Corinthians contains Paul's responses to a report from several church members ("Chloe's people," 1 Corinthians 1:11; cf. 11:18) and a list of questions from the congregation (7:1a). No wonder the members turned to the Apostle, for he had established the church about five years earlier (Acts 18:1-11; cf. 3:6) through his teaching and preaching. Most members were Gentile, though a few prominent Jews had joined the congregation.

One faction in the church, which seems to agree generally with Paul's views on table fellowship (to eat with Gentiles, enjoy foods that are sold in the market after they have been offered to idols, and relax the Jewish dietary rules), is displaying spiritual arrogance. Their correction by the Apostle raises the important question:

Can we hold the proper views, yet misuse our knowledge in arrogant and greedy ways to the detriment of the functioning of the community, the souls of fellow believers, and our own souls?

Study Questions

1. "In order to form a Christian community identity within a pluralistic pagan world, Paul repeatedly calls his readers to a 'conversion of the imagination,'" Richard Hays writes. "He invites them to see the world in dramatically new ways, in light of values shaped by the Christian story" [*First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 11]. This passage is a good example. As we eat together the "common bread" and "cup of blessing" in the Lord's Supper, we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ. This rich link to all other Christians should stop us from humiliating them, especially in our table fellowship. The meal we share is from the Lord and in his honor: we eat at "the table of the Lord" and drink from "the cup of the Lord." This embrace of Christ's gracious gift and welcome of his fellowship is incompatible with showing any honor to "demons," the powers that others mistakenly worship as their gods. Were the 'strong' Corinthians intending to show honor to the pagan deities, or just carelessly unconcerned how other Christians and pagans interpreted their actions?
2. Encourage members to discuss how the Lord's Supper is celebrated. Are regular church dinners, supper clubs, small group meals, or church festivals and picnics provided for families and friends to dine together? Are these events scheduled, priced, and designed to encourage all members to participate? Do these events help members to know one another, or is the time filled with idle conversation? How are new members integrated into the meals? Are new friendships formed, or do factions and cliques eat in separation from others?
3. "Strengthen For Service, Lord" reminds us that in performing the actions of the Lord's Supper, we are forming "bodily memories" — with our hands, ears, tongues, eyes, and feet — that we should take away into our daily lives. We should be prepared to serve others, be discerning about the claims and counter-claims we hear, be truthful in our speech, and hopeful in apparently bad situations. Our bodies should be different and we should live "new lives" because our "bodies [have been] by Your body fed."

"Let Us Break Bread Together" emphasizes that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a communal prayer: as we eat the bread, drink the wine, and praise God, we are constantly aware of our humble presence together before God. Even as we celebrate and "praise God together," we remember that we are sinners in need of God's grace. This sense of shared acceptance before God should lead us to seek and grant forgiveness from one another.
4. Though Paul explicitly denies that pagan gods exist, he believes that those who worship them become "partners with demons" — that is, they participate in practices that undermine their relationships to God and neighbors. At a "table of demons," we give honor to a distorting power or principality. Encourage members to brainstorm on places (e.g., a restaurant, club, or chain of restaurants), general occasions (e.g., banquets in honor of an immoral industry or individual, or lavish feasts that are inappropriate in the context of hunger), or specific circumstances (e.g., which include inappropriate entertainment, offensive language, or exclusive snobbery) that would be inconsistent with their Christian discipleship.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Hungry Souls

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, and 2 or 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To introduce the ancient virtue of temperance as a disposition to enjoy proper pleasures, rather than to struggle with our appetites.
2. To examine the communal dimension of the proper pleasures of food and to criticize our individualistic ways of eating.
3. To explore contemporary movies and ancient literature for images of the proper attitudes toward eating.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, "Come, We That Love the Lord," locate the tune ST. THOMAS in your church hymnal or at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Comment

Norman Wirzba writes, "Because food is essential to the processes of all life, it connects us directly to God as the Source of life. Whenever we eat, we are not simply consuming a fuel to get us through another day; rather we are participating intimately in God's divine economy of life and death. Eating is a sacramental act, an act that has the potential to bind us faithfully and charitably to each other, the creation as a whole, and God...."

"Our congregations can become places wherein food's deep spiritual resonances are heard and celebrated. With greater attention to the religious dimensions of food, we can become members of grateful, sharing communities rather than remain isolated, fretful consumers" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 88).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 2:43-47 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study compares the image of the early church in Acts 2:43-47 to the depiction of a grace-filled banquet in *Babette's Feast*, and contrasts these to the portrayal of cannibalism in Homer's *Odyssey* and the contemporary Hannibal Lector movies. Encourage a rich discussion of these films and literature, if members are familiar with them. Otherwise, the group can follow Hibbs' summary of these works of art, but focus its discussion on the Scripture passage and Isaac Watts' well-known hymn, "Come, We That Love the Lord."

At first we must struggle against some bodily appetites, employing all of our will-power to resist appetites that we know are desires for too much (or too little) of something, for the wrong sort of thing, or at the wrong time, and so on. Yet the goal of temperance is to move beyond this to a freedom in which our appetites are in harmony with our knowledge of reality. Scripture describes this growth from "knowledge with self-control" to freedom and love: "Thus [God] has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so

that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love" (2 Peter 1:4-7). When our loves are rightly ordered, we enjoy what Wendell Berry calls "the fullest pleasure."

Study Questions

1. Members might discuss what tempts them (1) to eat too much food, (2) to eat unhealthy foods, or (3) to be overly concerned with thinness and dieting. Do family members take time to enjoy eating together, or are meals simply squeezed into busy schedules? Do they usually eat alone, or with friends and family members?
2. Though the religious community is a Pietist group that stresses personal religious experience and devotional practices, Babette is a Roman Catholic from Paris. She does not see their shared Christianity as oppressive, but as illuminating the true joy of eating together in community. She introduces the community to the shared pleasures of the sumptuous banquet, but then willingly binds herself to them and embraces their generally ascetic eating habits. This goes against a common image of Christianity in popular culture, which sees it as indiscriminately repressing desires and spoiling our enjoyment.
3. In four verses Watts extols the "pleasures" and "joys" that we share as Christians (see all ten verses at www.cyberhymnal.org). Verses 8 and 9 employ images of delightful food – "celestial fruits" and "sacred sweets." Verse 2 announces his general theme: "The sorrows of the mind / be banished from the place; / religion never was designed / to make our pleasures less." True joy comes to those who "love the Lord" and "[know] our God" by marching in community to God's city, Zion. Other hymns by Watts are more individualistic (e.g., "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"), but all his pronouns are plural in this beautiful text.
4. Both the Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey* and Hannibal Lector see themselves as superior to everyone and everything – in Homer's phrase, they "acknowledge no gods." Their cannibalism is depicted as a rejection of hospitality, of basic human concern for the stranger.

There are important differences. Homer depicts the Cyclops as physically repulsive, with only one central eye that, quoting Leon Kass, "seems to serve the mouth rather than the mind." Lector is a suave psychiatrist and expert musician, who just happens to enjoy eating his victim's liver "with a side dish of 'fava beans and a fine Chianti.'" Hibbs writes, "In Hannibal's world, where the divine, natural, and human orders have utterly dissipated, the only thing that matters is the cultivation and satisfaction of amoral aesthetic taste; all things, including human persons, become mere instruments of cultivated taste." Both cannibals represent, through their eating, their tyranny over other people and the world. In Cyclops this appears to be a repulsive distortion; in Lector, it's just the choice of a powerful "super-man" who chooses to live beyond good and evil. Which is more frightening?
5. Congregations can teach about pleasurable eating by example and practice as well as by direct instruction. How do members learn to select and prepare foods, share meals with others, and celebrate at mealtime in gratitude to God? Some congregations eat together in supper clubs and pot-luck banquets, share their food with the hungry, or visit the elderly with meals. These can be opportunities to learn about how food choices relate to our physical health, hunger in the world, and support of the people who work to provide our food.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Heavenly Hunger

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine how the Christian diet and fitness industry distort the devotional significance of our bodies.
2. To reflect on the difference between a proper respect for bodily health and fitness, and an excessive interest in dieting and weight-loss.
3. To suggest resources for individuals, families, and congregations to recapture the joy of preparing and sharing food.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, "Jesus, Our Lord and King," locate either of the familiar tunes ST. THOMAS or FESTAL SONG in your church hymnal or at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

"*Fat People Don't Go To Heaven!* screams a headline in the *Globe*, a national weekly tabloid circulated to millions of American readers," notes Marie Griffith. "The story beneath this lurid caption recounts the rise of Gwen Shamblin, founder and CEO of the nation's leading Christian diet company...[with] stringent guidelines for proper Christian body size.... 'I am not a savvy businessperson,' Shamblin pronounced in a front page *Wall Street Journal* feature. 'I'm just a dumb blonde with a genuine heart for God, who found the golden product that everyone wanted.' That coveted discovery, a spiritual route to guaranteed weight loss, is marketed in the Weigh Down Workshop, whose Shamblin-packed videos, audiotapes, books, conferences, and twelve-week seminars teach restrained food eating as a divine command. The eternal costs of overeating are markedly severe: 'Grace,' in Shamblin's words, 'does not go down into the pigpen'" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 62).

How does beauty get so distorted in our culture, and how does the good news of God's grace become so twisted?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read responsively together the prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 12:1-2 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study presents three consequences of the Christian fitness programs described in Marie Griffith's "Heavenly Hunger." If members are not familiar with these programs, you might supplement her descriptions of them with information from their websites. Members who have read about or used these programs may want to share their experiences with the group.

Encourage a free discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs. In her article, Griffith mentions that she participated in one regime and studied many others (p. 66). "From this ethnographic and per-

sonal experience,” she writes, “I can confirm that readers and participants in this Christian fitness culture hold a wide range of views as to the proper Christian way to think about slimness and the body in today’s world. They read selectively and think for themselves, in other words, and it would be a mistake not to highlight the multiplicity of perspectives that find sustenance in this culture.”

Study Questions

1. The first consequence, “idealizing a particular type of feminine beauty,” does physical and emotional harm to women for whom it is an impossible ideal (see the comments of Neva Coyle on p. 69). For others, pursuing the ideal requires a lot of time and effort. To impoverished people in developing countries, the struggle for fashionable thinness appears to be not only vain, but also “deeply indifferent, if not contemptuous” of them.
Embracing “material rewards of slenderness,” the second consequence, promotes vanity and envy, because the rewards are rooted in a deeply flawed, competitive view of beauty.
The third, “teaching us to read one another’s body for signs of sin and virtue,” encourages an excessive interest in the appearance of the body. The superficial judgments it promotes are unfair to people who do not meet the cultural standards, and can be a spiritually dangerous self-deception for those who do.
2. A proper respect for fitness and health differs from an excessive interest in dieting and weight-loss in two ways: (1) the right *goal* is in view, and (2) proper care is taken in the *means* employed. The goal is to care for our health rather than to impress others, build our self-esteem on their approval, or gain power to manipulate others through our physical attractiveness. Furthermore, we are careful to treat our bodies with respect, avoid dangerous fads, and not waste excessive time, energy, or money on a quest for cultural approval.
3. In the Bible and through Christian history, the goals of religious fasting include (1) expressing individual (Joel 2:12-13) or communal (Jonah 3:5-9) repentance; and (2) seeking God’s direction for oneself (Acts 13:2-3) or others (Acts 14:23). Jesus expected his disciples to fast voluntarily, though he warned them about hypocritical fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).
Griffith is concerned that some groups that call for fasting have other goals in view, such as supporting a political party, reestablishing a man’s leadership in the home, or quickly and magically removing “the base impurities from our true character in Christ.” Griffith writes, “Like the Christian diet industry’s promise that material gain accompanies fat loss, the purveyors of abstinence guarantee miracles, as bodily discipline once again acquires merit as a tool for getting precisely what the prayerful faster wants.”
Does your congregation encourage fasting? If so, how is this discipline taught, and what goals are emphasized?
4. Divide into smaller groups to consider the six themes—stewardship, hospitality, bonding, compassion, celebration, and hope and restoration—described in Juengst’s *Breaking Bread* and summarized by Bate-man in “We Are *How* We Eat” (p. 91). (The theme of hospitality could be combined with bonding, and celebration with hope and restoration.) Each group might review their families’ and the congregation’s practices in light of their assigned theme(s). Whitcomb discusses not only entire meals, but also “culinary interludes” that use food in various aspects of devotional reflection. How could a family or congregation incorporate prayer, singing, and sharing during meals and interludes in regard to each theme(s)?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Who's Hungry and Who Cares?

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, and 2 or 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the trends of world hunger during the last decade and the problem of food insecurity within industrialized societies like the U.S.
2. To consider how a local congregation can respond to food insecurity among members and in the surrounding community.
3. To explore resources provided by Bread for the World for individuals and congregations to respond to world hunger.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Central Africa, with economic disruption caused by the AIDS epidemic and warfare, is one region of the world where both the number and percentage of hungry population increased in the 1990's. David Beckmann puts a face on the problem with this story: "During a recent trip to Uganda I met a young AIDS orphan named Deborah, who helped guide me through a Kampala slum," he writes. "Her parents had fled to the city from a spell of violence in Rwanda. They died from AIDS when she was little, and she has no relatives in Kampala. Deborah is lucky if she gets one meal a day and has usually depended on the kindness of neighbors to give her a place to sleep on the floor. At fifteen years old, she now has several men friends who give her food, clothes, and a halfway decent place to sleep. Given the prevalence of AIDS, these relationships pose a great risk to her life.

"Deborah is one of more than fourteen million children who have lost their mother or both parents to AIDS. Yet many more Africans still die from causes related to chronic undernutrition, a continual deficiency of calories or of one or more essential nutrients, than die from the dramatic plague of AIDS" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 54).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 146 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The Psalmist celebrates the Lord God who, as creator of heaven and earth, "keeps faith forever" by executing justice for the oppressed and the hungry, prisoners and the physically suffering, and dispossessed widows, orphans, and strangers. The counsel against putting our trust in princes (146:3-4) does not imply that government should stay out of matters of justice; rather it calls us to abandon our selfish ways of treating the oppressed and to adopt a God-centered perspective. This call to emulate the Creator's concern for the oppressed is found in Jesus' warning of the judgment of the nations (or peoples) as either sheep or goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

The lesson interprets data from several studies of world hunger and a survey of Presbyterians concerning hunger issues. Members may want to look more closely at the data by visiting the websites for the original studies, which are listed in “Suggestions for Further Study,” *Food and Hunger*, p. 32. For instance, *Hunger Issues: The Report of the February 2003 Presbyterian Panel Survey* [Louisville, KY: Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004] finds interesting differences between men and women respondents (e.g., women are more likely to believe that hunger has gotten worse and that we should do more to fight hunger), and between lay and clergy respondents (clergy are much more likely to believe hunger can be solved and that Congress should give equal priority to relieving world hunger as to ending U.S. food insecurity). It also compares the Presbyterians’ responses to a national survey of likely voters.

Study Questions

1. The Presbyterian survey, *Hunger Issues*, found that many Christians are mistaken about trends in hunger. Review the absolute numbers and percentage of hungry people in different areas of the world, the three major trends in developing countries (decrease in absolute and relative numbers; no change in absolute, but decrease in relative numbers; and increase in absolute and relative numbers), and the lack of improvement in food security in the U.S. Which of these are surprising? Can members suggest explanations for these patterns?
2. Encourage members to discuss the programs of charitable and religious groups within their community. These might include programs that directly feed the hungry, such as food pantries, holiday or regular meal programs, and food assistance. Other programs address the causes of persistent hunger and food insecurity, such as job training programs, housing assistance, and education in nutrition. Are these programs successful? What resources do they need in order to be more effective? Do members know of other programs that should be started or encouraged in the community?

Encourage members to discuss the role of government in supporting these programs. Should we be concerned about interference of government in religious or charitable institutions, or of faith requirements being put on recipients of hunger assistance?

3. The description of the oppressed is very similar—they are hungry, poor, or imprisoned. Yet these passages have very different literary forms: Psalm 146 is a poem or hymn, while Matthew 25:31-46 is an instruction with parabolic elements. The psalmist indirectly invites us to embrace God’s attitude toward the hungry and others; Jesus’ instruction assumes that collectively we (i.e., “the nations” or “the people”) know that we should do this.

Though Jesus does not expressly identify himself with the “Son of Man” and “King” in the instruction, this identification is clear from the context. This introduces a new motivation for justice and compassion in the nations—they are not merely emulating God’s attitude, they are responding to the presence of Jesus in the hungry and oppressed.

4. Bread for the World’s website offers much free information (statistics on hunger around the world and in the U.S.; a world map with links to hunger statistics by country; overviews of current legislation before Congress; addresses and links to write letters to elected officials, candidates, and news media in each area of the country; and news articles on hunger issues). The online store sells lessons for children’s Sunday school, worship materials, books, and cards. Other pages describe the Offering of Letters and the Covenant Church programs.

Departing Hymn

“Where Is Bread?” is on pp. 44-45 of *Food and Hunger*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

A Moment of Recognition

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Luke 9:10-17
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss your response to food insecurity
Questions 4 and 6	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions 4, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To interpret the Emmaus meal in the context of Luke's Gospel and through Christian art.
2. To explore what practical effects on ministry would result from our seeing Christ in the poor and hungry.
3. To examine how the congregation responds to hunger and food insecurity within its membership and in the surrounding community.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"Rabbi Mendel wanted to know what heaven and hell looked like, and the prophet Elijah took him to show him. Elijah led him into a large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a huge pot of spoons that were longer than their arms, and because the people could not eat with these spoons, they sat around the table and starved. Rabbi Mendel found this room and what he saw there so terrible that he quickly ran outside.... Then Elijah took Rabbi Mendel to heaven and into another large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a big pot of steaming soup on it. And around the table sat people with the same spoons, but they did not have to starve because they were feeding each other" (told by Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that the Spirit of God will guide members to experience Christ in the face of a family member, a friend, and a stranger this week.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 24:13-25 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This study traces the idea of recognizing Christ in the stranger through the story of the Emmaus supper in Luke 24:13-25, the artwork by Caravaggio and Straub, and Sister Alice Marie Quinn's experience with the St. Vincent DePaul Meals-on-Wheels Program in Los Angeles. Consider extending the discussion to two sessions: the group might follow this interpretive thread in the Emmaus meal and the Christian art in the first study session, and then focus on how the recognition of Christ in the stranger impacts our response to the hungry in the congregation and community during a second session.

Study Questions

1. The same four actions—taking, blessing (or giving thanks), breaking, and distributing—are in Luke 24:30, 9:16, and 22:19, though in the feeding of the multitude Jesus gives the pieces of bread and fish to his disciples to distribute. Each story involves not only physical hunger, but also an acknowledged spiritual need.

While Caravaggio depicts the foods mentioned in the Last Supper—a goblet of wine and loaves of bread—he also includes a roasted bird and fresh fruit. (Another artistic tradition, because of the link with the feeding of the multitude, shows a fish and bread as the Emmaus meal.) The inviting gesture by the unnamed disciple on the right reminds us of the disciples' role in distributing the food to others in the multitude. Art historians usually identify the standing figure as an Emmaus innkeeper (not in Luke's account); he does not share in the moment of recognition and exhibits no reaction to Jesus' act of blessing the bread.

2. The spiritually deadening violence in the world around us can blind us to Jesus' presence, just as it blinded the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:18-20)—"There have been crucifixions, too, / in our town." Sandra Duguid vividly describes how we respond to such violence by retreating into "our well-hammered and nailed / kitchens and bedrooms." As the stranger, Christ, is "spelling out the history of the prophets / and a future: / Ought not Christ to have suffered these things / and to enter into his glory?", the poem raises the crucial, searching question, "Could our hearts still burn within us?"

Encourage members to reflect on how violence, as reported in the newspapers and on television, shapes how we see the poor and hungry in the world.

3. George Herbert's poem primarily has the Lord's Supper in view, but this makes it applicable to the invitation to join the Emmaus meal. We may resist the invitation of Love—the Christ—because in our sinful unkindness and ingratitude, we feel dirty and not "worthy to be here." The poet says we intentionally look away from Jesus in shame, for we have "marred" our eyes. In an amazing image, Herbert pictures the Lord taking our hand in his (nail-pierced?) hand, and reminding us "Who bore the blame?" The recognition of Jesus depends on an acknowledgement and acceptance of His grace.

Encourage members to reflect on how unkindness and ingratitude can deform our ability to see Jesus' welcoming glance in the poor and hungry in the world.

4. Sister Quinn suggests that we would respond to the poor and hungry with love, rather than merely out of a sense of justice or pity. We would be concerned for their loneliness as well as their poverty and hunger. Consider the loving details she describes of the St. Vincent DePaul Meals-On-Wheels program and *Hotel Dieu*.

Members might reflect on how Mother Theresa saw the poor: "Hungry not only for food—but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing—but naked for human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks—but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in distressing disguise" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 33).

5. Read the entire quote from John Chrysostom (pronounced "CHRI-so-stom") in *Food and Hunger*, pp. 34-35. (The text of *Homily 50* is online at www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf110.html.) John Chrysostom encourages us to honor Christ by use our resources to care for the poor rather than to build elaborate sanctuaries with fine furnishings. How much money and time is "too much" to spend on a worship center?
6. Food insecurity encompasses "uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way" and can result from poverty, lack of knowledge, or inability to prepare food. It can be a transitory condition. How does the congregation know about the members' food needs? Is there a program to purchase, deliver, and prepare nutritious food? What food programs exist in the community? Are members involved individually or as groups? If so, how do they share these ministry experiences with the congregation?

Departing Hymn

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