

Will Global Hunger Ever End?

Michael Mickler
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Jesus said the poor will always be with us. He didn't say they had to starve. Ending world hunger was one of Rev. Moon's consuming passions. "Feeding others" was a deeply-rooted tradition in his family of origin and a persistent theme throughout his life and ministry.



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In his autobiography, *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen* (2010), Rev. Moon devotes several sections to the problem of hunger. In an early section, "The Joy of Giving Food to Others," he states:

By the time I was born and was growing up, much of the wealth that my great-grandfather had accumulated was gone, and our family had just enough to get by. The family tradition of feeding others was still alive, however, and we would feed others even if it meant there wouldn't be enough to feed our family members. The first thing I learned after I learned to walk was how to serve food to others.

A later section titled, "A Grain of Rice is Greater Than the Earth," describes his experience of hunger, in fact near-starvation, in a North Korean labor camp.

Rev. Moon's upbringing and experiences led him to conclude, "True peace will not come as long as long as humanity does not solve the problem of hunger."

He addressed the problem directly in two of his autobiography's concluding sections. In the first, "Solution to Poverty and Hunger," he took the position that "Simply distributing food supplies by itself will not resolve hunger." He instead advocated a two-step approach: "The first is to provide ample supplies of food at low cost, and the second is to share technology that people can use to overcome hunger on their own."

In the next section, "Going Beyond Charity to End Hunger," Rev. Moon voiced a more internal perspective. He asserted, "The important point is concern for our neighbors. We first need to develop the heart that, when we are eating enough to fill our own stomachs, we think of others who are going hungry and consider how we can help them."

In his view, “To solve the problem of hunger we must have a patient heart that is willing to plant seeds.” As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen highlights a number of his initiatives. These included the purchase of trucks to be used for the distribution of food to the poor in the United States; projects to process and store large quantities of fish; research into high-protein fish powder; a model farm project in the outback of Brazil; and support for technical schools and light industrial factories.

He also noted the charitable and relief work undertaken by the Unification movement’s International Relief and Friendship Foundation (IRFF), the Aewon (“Garden of Love”) Volunteer Service Foundation, and the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP).

Still, these are embryonic, seed-level efforts, particularly in the face of massive needs. Unificationists need to develop and expand upon Rev. Moon’s ideas and initiatives to become change-agents in the elimination of world hunger.

How can Unificationists do this?

The first step is to become better informed. World hunger facts and statistics are well-established. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that nearly 870 million people, or one in eight people in the world, suffered from chronic undernourishment in 2010-12. Almost all of them (852 million) live in developing countries. However, there are 16 million people chronically undernourished in developed countries.

The number of undernourished people decreased nearly 30% in Asia and the Pacific, from 739 million to 563 million, largely due to socio-economic progress. Latin America also made progress, dropping from 65 million hungry in 1990-92 to 49 million in 2010-12. However, the number of hungry grew in Africa over the same period, from 175 million to 239 million, with nearly 20 million added in the last few years. Nearly one in four are hungry. Every ten seconds, a child somewhere in the world is lost to hunger, more than HIV/AIDs, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

There is a consensus as to the principal cause of world hunger. India-born Amartya Sen won a Nobel Prize in Economics for demonstrating that hunger in modern times is not typically the product of a lack of food, i.e., production. In fact, world agriculture produces 17% more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70% population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day according to the FAO’s most recent estimate.

The single most significant factor contributing to world hunger is not war or climate change but poverty. The number of refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing conflict zones amounts to 36 million people worldwide, far short of the 870 million chronically undernourished. World poverty figures correlate much more directly. Harmful economic and political systems are the chief cause of poverty and world hunger. In short, the problem is distribution.

The first UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG), ratified by all 189 United Nations member states in 2000, set as a target to “Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.” In 1990, the percentage of undernourished people globally was 19% of the world’s population. In 2012, the percentage stood at 12%. Accomplishment of that target by 2015 is within reach.

Yet formidable challenges remain. Attaining the Millennium Development Goal target still leaves hundreds of millions hungry. Spikes in food prices, the continual growth of world population (expected to increase by 2.5 billion people in the next 40 years), booming middle classes in China and India consuming more food, and the conversion of cultivated areas from food production to biofuel crops will exert pressure for the foreseeable future.

As a second step, Unificationists can seek out direct exposure to the chronically undernourished and even the experience of hunger. As Rev. Moon put it, “If you are never hungry, you cannot know God.” Exposure to poverty and deprivation was decisive in awakening his consciousness to the plight of the underfed. Unificationists can experience this vicariously through photographs, video downloads, televised appeals, and written accounts. They can experience it directly through service projects, missionary work, or even travel to areas of malnutrition and acute need. The point is to develop a heart of compassion toward one’s fellow human beings. The earlier this occurs in one’s life, as it did for Rev. Moon, the better.

The third step Unificationists can and should take is to act. This can be as simple as effecting lifestyle changes. Pope Francis recently launched a stinging attack on “the culture of waste” in today’s society. He said, “Throwing away food is like stealing from the table of those who are poor and hungry.” According to the FAO, “Around 1.3 billion tons of food, or one third of what is produced for human consumption, get lost or wasted every year.”

Americans waste a reported 9% of the meals they buy, partly because of a trend to super-size everything from cheeseburgers to soft drinks. Not surprisingly, food waste is the largest source of waste entering American landfills. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced a Food Waste Challenge in part focused on recovering wholesome food for human consumption. However, responsible food stewardship can begin in the home.

World hunger is not only a massive but an urgent problem. Rev. Moon wrote in his autobiography, “Solving the food crisis cannot be put off for even a moment. Even now, some twenty thousand people around the world die of hunger-related causes every day.” In the face of such a daunting challenge, Unificationists may feel overwhelmed or even immobilized.

Here, the efforts of former Washington Times managing editor, Josette Sheeran, are instructive. Sheeran subsequently served as Deputy United States Trade Representative and Undersecretary of State for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs. From 2007-12, she was Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), the world’s largest humanitarian organization with 11,000 staff worldwide and a budget of \$3 billion.

As Executive Director, Sheeran worked on the frontline of global hunger, providing emergency food aid to the world’s hungry and addressing the causes of chronic undernourishment. She developed food assistance as opposed to food aid alone and utilized innovative food technologies. She also succeeded in making hunger a top priority for G8 meetings. Her 2011 TED Talks on “Ending Hunger Now” should be required viewing for every Unificationist. In it, she outlines the ways in which “we can, in our lifetime, win the battle against hunger.” Pictures of “children with swollen bellies,” she declares, “will be a thing of history.”

Jesus may have said the poor will always be with us, but he was likely referring to Deuteronomy 15:1, which reads, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” If that’s so, Unificationists will be justified in looking forward to the day in which those who “hunger and thirst” will be confined to those who “hunger and search for righteousness.”

Dr. Michael Mickler’s books include: *Footprints of True Parents’ Providence: The United States of America* (2013) and *40 Years in America: An Intimate History of the Unification Movement, 1959-1999* (2000)