

13 OUR DAILY BREAD

FRED: Come on, people! At this rate, we'll never get enough food collected.

VANESSA: I know. We've been out an hour and only been to one block! Pastor challenged us to fill up Don's van! We'll never make it.

DON: I know we're running behind, but when people ask what the food is for, I think we should talk to them and tell them.

CHERYL: I had one man say he wouldn't give any food just so those lazy people could get a free ride! Can you imagine that?

DON: I know! I had the same thing at that house down there. I'm glad we studied about hunger before starting out on this drive. Frankly, it changed my mind. I pretty much thought that if people were willing to work, there was no need for anybody to be hungry.

CHERYL: It's a lot more complicated than that!

FRED: Will you two come on? There are doors to knock on and shelves to fill, okay?

● Have you ever been part of a food drive through your school or church? Many young people have. Most people hate the idea of people going without proper food, shelter, or other basic needs.

God hates the idea, too. When Jesus taught his followers the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer, the Fourth Petition was "Give us today our daily bread." When we pray this petition, we are not only asking for something, we are committing ourselves to something.

3 STATEMENTS

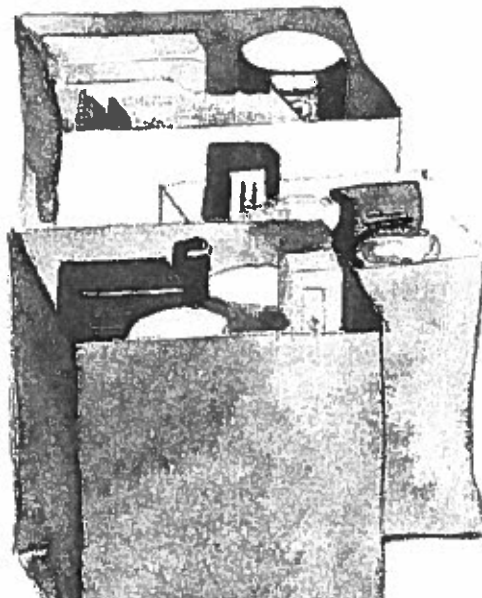
- Daily bread includes everything we need for this life.
- Deprivation results from human sin, not divine neglect.
- To pray for our daily bread is to commit ourselves to preserving the earth and its treasures.

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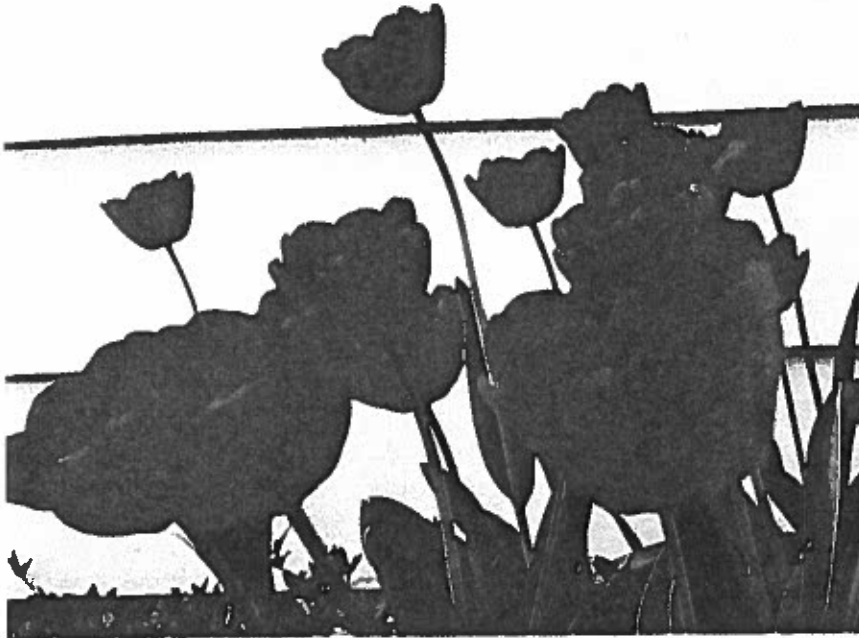
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GOD PROVIDES

Before thinking about the meaning of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, consider a baffling Bible passage from Matthew's gospel. It seems to promise something that God doesn't deliver.



NEAL ALLEN



KENDRA BOND

Read Matthew 6:25-34 and then answer the following questions to check your comprehension of the passage.

1. What are the three anxieties Jesus tell his listeners not to worry about?

2. Why does Jesus say not to be anxious about these things?

3. What does Jesus tell us to seek first?

4. What do you think verse 34 means?

5. What does Jesus say in Matthew 6:11?

Do verses 11 and 34 seem to conflict with each other? Many people might take a quick look at Matthew 6:34 and wonder if Jesus was crazy. From nearly everyone, we get the advice that we need to prepare for tomorrow,

don't we? Beyond that, there are many Christians around the world who do not have adequate food, drink, clothing or housing. Is there something wrong with them or with God? What's going on here?

To unravel this, look first at Martin Luther's explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

WHAT DOES MARTIN LUTHER SAY?

Take a moment to read Luther's explanation to the Fourth Petition (see page 173). Luther is saying something that he said about the other petitions. Notice how he says, "God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all people, though sinful."

Once again another petition of the Lord's Prayer has us asking for something we are going to receive, whether we pray for it or not. Why? Read on.

He says that "we ask in this prayer that he will help us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanks." This petition has the effect of changing us, rather than God. We are changed by realizing God's care for us and by having our needs met with thankful hearts.

Daily bread includes everything we need for this life.

If you read the second question, "What is meant by 'daily bread,'" notice that Luther wants us to understand that we are praying for everything we need to live the lives God would want for us. Underline those things in Luther's explanation. It's a pretty complete list, isn't it? With those things, we could live a life without anxiety.

EVERYTHING WE NEED

Luther seems to have taken his lead from Jesus and wants us to know that the things we need will come from God. *Daily bread includes everything we need for this life.*

In the Bible passage from Matthew 6:25-34, it seems a little outrageous that Jesus promises we will receive from God everything we need. And why does Jesus say, "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well"?

The answer to the puzzle is once again found in Jesus' reference to the kingdom. Do you remember that the kingdom of God is the reign of God and that the kingdom flashes into our world whenever the will of God is done?

In the opening dialog, Fred and his friends from church were a flash of the kingdom, weren't they? They hit the streets to find a way to care for those who had no food. Imagine for a moment what would happen if for even just one day, all of God's people were to flash the kingdom into the world by feeding the hungry. A lot of food would change hands from those of us who have more than enough to those who have less than enough.

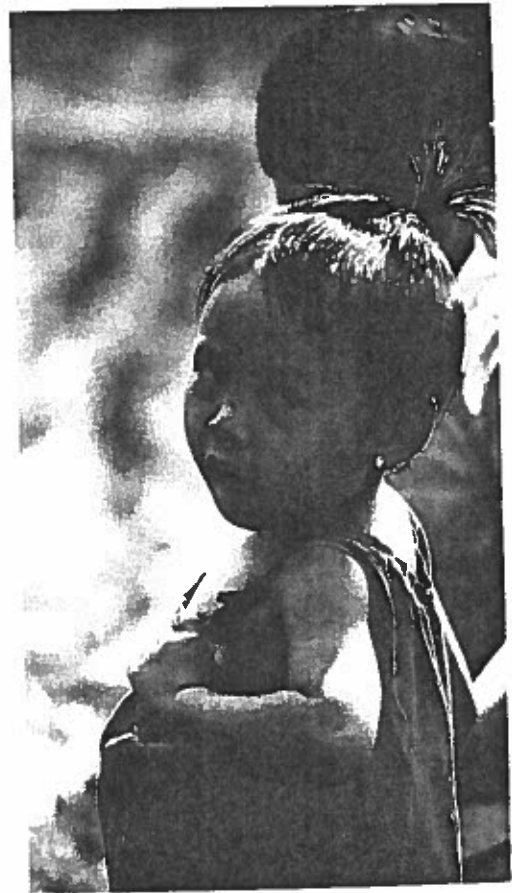
Those of us who follow our baptismal mission and pray this Petition of the Lord's Prayer are dedicating ourselves to flashing the kingdom into the world and working to see that the will of God is done. From what Jesus

taught, the will of God is that no one be hungry, naked, or thirsty. Luther only expands those things to the other things we really can't do without like work, family, good government, and so forth.

WHY POVERTY, HUNGER, HOMELESSNESS?

Well, then, why is there poverty, hunger, and homelessness in our world? Because there is sin.

God has provided enough resources for everyone, but the problem is that too many of the resources are hoarded by too few people. Too many of us also waste resources. Sin is a broken relationship with God or with people God loves. The shortages we experience in our world are the result of these relationships being broken. In other words, *deprivation results from human sin, not divine neglect.*



Deprivation results from human sin, not divine neglect.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Take a closer look at the Fourth Petition. Does it say "Give me today my daily bread?" Or does it say, "Give us today our daily bread?" Of course this petition says "us" and "our."

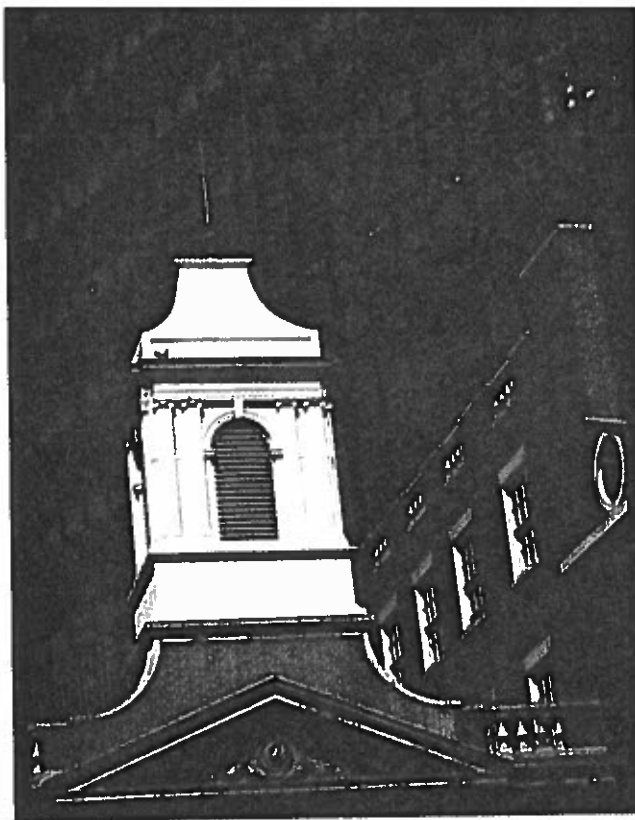
Think about what that means. We are once again praying for something God is already doing. When we pray this petition, we are asking that God change us. We are asking that God make us aware of the bounty of creation. We are asking that God make us thankful for this bounty. That's the easy part.

The hard part is, since we have already prayed to be turned around and to be kingdom citizens, we are also praying that God use us to make sure that God's will be done. We are asking to be used to help make sure that hunger and poverty are fought just like they were the devil! *To pray for our daily bread is to commit ourselves to preserving the earth and its treasures.*

What can kingdom citizens do? Most people who study poverty, hunger, and homelessness point out at least three broad categories that require determined action. Then, God's will that all people have the necessities of life can be fulfilled. The categories are:

- Direct assistance (providing direct relief for people)
- Political action (being an advocate or pleading the case of another)
- Life-style changes (using resources responsibly)

In the space below, write down some of your ideas of what kingdom citizens can do. Be sure to include at least one idea in each category.



BETTY GROSCHIN

Shaping life

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

St. Somewhere Church is a make-believe church, but it could be any number of real congregations. Read about St. Somewhere's determination to make a difference. Then think about these questions in terms of your own congregation.

- How many of these things is your congregation doing?
- Is your congregation doing anything differently?
- Are there any things your congregation is not doing that you think it could be doing?

Five years ago, Mary Crammer stopped in to see Pastor Wilkins. She had been thinking about how hunger was an absolute violation of God's will and she wanted to know if there was anything St. Somewhere's could do about it.

After their conversation, Pastor Wilkins agreed to set up a hunger committee to look into directing the congregation's efforts against hunger. Six committed members showed up the first night and were ready to forge



FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading and Reflection

Read and reflect on the following Bible passages during this week.

- Exodus 16:13-21
- John 6:25-34
- John 6:35-40
- Mark 8:1-10
- Psalm 103

Memory

Memorize Luther's explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer (see page 173).

Activity 1

Create a daily bread display for your congregation. Feature items that represent a number of different ways that Christians on their baptismal mission can share daily bread. You might include food items to represent giving to a local food shelf. It might include a copy of a letter to a

ahead and do something. But as Jim Long later said, "We didn't have the slightest idea where to start."

The committee decided that the first thing they needed to do was to study hard and learn more about hunger before they could do anything meaningful. For the next three months, the committee worked hard to learn about hunger, its causes, and its cures.

After their study, the committee had a much better idea of how to proceed. They decided to work in three areas at once. Mary Crammer agreed to lead the direct assistance of the congregation. She organized other volunteers to promote churchwide hunger appeals, and found others to help collect food and clothing for the community cupboard.

Jim Long agreed to lead the political action of the congregation. This group wrote to its governmental representatives, asking them to pass legislation to assist some third world nations to get back on their feet. They also attended zoning hearings in their

town to help make sure that adequate housing was available for persons with low or fixed incomes.

Pastor Wilkins headed the lifestyle change group. These people helped teach the congregation how everyone could pitch in and waste less of everything, including food, water, and fuel. They also helped people recognize how to treat their waste products so that they would degrade naturally at the town dump.

It has been a lot of work and it hasn't been easy, but now five years later, a large number of people are involved. St. Somewhere's doesn't expect to wipe out hunger all by itself. As Pastor Wilkins put it, "We're just trying to be good citizens of the kingdom. We're trusting God for the rest."

To pray for our daily bread is to commit ourselves to preserving the earth and its treasures.

FOCUS



ON A SACRED TRUST

Many Christians believe that the earth and its people are a sacred trust given us by God. Below are one person's thoughts.

Don Antonio López Ruíz, a gentle man who had worked the land for years, was asked by his daughter if someday she would be a steward like her father.

He replied, "My beloved daughter, in the eyes of God, we are all stewards, men and women alike. . . . Remember, whatever your future vocation may be, keep with you the qualities of a good steward. Whether you care for the ecology of our land, or advocate for justice, or voice human rights for the people, in all that you do you will be responding to the call God has made to every one of us to care for and administer the fields of [God's] kingdom with honesty and integrity."

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governmental representative in support of legislation. Maybe it would include paper or washable coffee cups to represent the useful effects of staying away from using nonbiodegradable plastic foam products.

Activity 2

Are there ways your class thinks your congregation can better address hunger, poverty, or injustice? Thoughtfully prepare a proposal and then ask the church council's permission for the class to come and present it. Be well prepared!

Activity 3

The correct vowels in the words below have been exchanged for wrong ones. Get the right vowels back into the right places and rearrange the words so they make a sentence from this session.

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