

## **Lenten Fast from Violence 2006:**

### **Week 1**

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#### **FASTING TO BRING FOCUS TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE VIOLENCE THEY SEEK TO DISRUPT**

*“They will answer him, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ Then the Lord will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these friends of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:37-40 NIV).*

#### **A CALL TO REDUCE GLOBAL POVERTY AND HUNGER AND TO ADDRESS THE VIOLENCE CAUSED BY THE MANY INJUSTICES IN OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY**

To all who are concerned with making known to a suffering world the teachings and compassion of Jesus Christ, now is a critical time for addressing the crisis of extreme poverty and widespread hunger. While the number of persons living in a continuous state of hunger remains staggering, for the first time in history it is believed that humankind has the prospect of resolving this suffering within a generation. Response to hunger and human need is not a new calling for Christians. The churches have a long history of such ministry in their communities and around the world. Through the serving of meals in local soup kitchens and by providing shelter for the homeless, congregations live out the biblical mandate to “share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house” (Isa. 58:7).

Our call through this Lenten fast is to challenge all persons of faith in these early years of the 21st century to join with many sisters and brothers who are also speaking with renewed vigor about a global response to the poor and the hungry. The collective voices of the Christian churches, as well as people of other faiths, have focused on a series of broad goals to bring health and wholeness to communities around the world. Crafted through a United Nations process, these goals are grounded in the same moral directives and high regard for all humankind to which Christians have committed themselves throughout history.

In summary, these goals are to:

- 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
- 2) achieve universal primary education,
- 3) promote gender equality and empower women,
- 4) reduce child mortality,
- 5) improve maternal health,

- 6) combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases,
- 7) ensure environmental stability, and
- 8) develop a global partnership.

Together, these have been called the Millennium Development Goals. These global objectives set forth tangible and measurable steps for building a healthier, safer, and more just world by 2015. The United States signed and committed to achieve the Millennium Declaration along with 188 other countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. Faith-based groups, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and individuals are urged to join together with the efforts of governments in attaining these outcomes.

Christians around the globe should be encouraged by this swelling global voice to redress critical human want on a broader scale. It is exciting to watch as we recommit ourselves to follow the teachings of Jesus that prompt our loving response to the poor and hungry.

Individuals, congregations, and denominations are invited to prayerfully engage the questions of hunger and poverty and the many faces of violence that it brings. All levels of church structure are asked to identify with and pursue the Millennium Development Goals, joining others in advocacy and action and building upon decades of experience locally and globally.

“Draw out your soul to the hungry,” states one version of Isaiah 58:10. “In a world where injustice and inequities are the cause of so much suffering, misery, and death, the church cannot be silent. The church, as Christ’s body, must place itself clearly on the side of the poor and the oppressed.” Through prayer, study, and concrete action, let us resolve to act so that those who know extreme poverty and hunger might enter more fully into the abundance of God’s love.\*

### **The Millennium Development Goals**

#### ***Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger***

- Halve, between 1999 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.
- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

#### ***Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education***

- Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

#### ***Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women***

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

***Goal 4: Reduce child mortality***

- Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

***Goal 5: Improve maternal health***

- Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

***Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases***

- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

***Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability***

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
- Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

***Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development***

- Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally).
- Address the special needs of the Least Development Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries' exports, enhanced program of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction).
- Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions).
- Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term. Some of the indicators are monitored separately for the least developed countries, Africa, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states.
- In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of

new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.

## ***Prayers of Peace and Lent***

### **In Times Like These**

#### **A Personal Prayer for Direction**

God should I fast this Lent? What is it you would have me consider; give up, let go of, distance myself from...? Should I go to Sudan and help refugees? Should I go to Iraq and “get in the way?” How about those Millennium Development Goals? Any chance they might actually make a difference? What do you want from me this season of reflection? More Bible study, more direct witness, more money, more service? I have forty days not counting Sundays...who made up this idea anyway? Seems like a short time to get my act together and yet an awful long time for deep reflection. Did Jesus struggle like I do? Is my wilderness as out of “wack” as his was? I know I can’t turn rocks into bread and I really have no desire for authority over kingdoms and sometimes I think if I even take a small leap of faith I’m doomed...

God, help me find a place to start, or a way to get better at what I’m trying to do. Maybe this purging, fasting thing won’t work. Open me up God to these next forty-six days, yeah, I’m including Sundays as an extra bonus, to your spirit and your guidance. Challenge me in new ways and embolden me with courage. Please God, help me not just let the days come and go...these forty-six, and the next infinite number that come my way. I love you God. Amen (*P. Jones, 1/06*)

#### **A Prayer to Open Our Eyes**

Take all hate from our hearts, O God, and teach us how to take it from the hearts of others. Open our eyes and show us what things make it easy for hatred to flourish and hard for us to conquer it. Then help us to change these things. (*by Alan Paton, EPF*)

#### **A Christian Prayer of Confession**

Spirit of God, forgive us. For 2000 years, we Christians have failed to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Instead of sharing with our sisters and brothers, instead of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and healing the sick, we have stored up treasures and sent the vulnerable, sick, hungry, and homeless from our door.

Instead of forgiving, we have sought vengeance retribution, harsh punishment and death. We have asked the state to kill in our name.

Instead of crying out against injustice, we have dominated, discriminated and demeaned; and we have benefited from the economic oppression of our neighbors.

Instead of holding your Creation in sacred trust, instead of respecting the inter-connectedness and beauty of our universe, we have wasted and polluted, disrupted the balance, and ignored our responsibility to those who come after us.

Instead of loving our enemies, we have demonized them. Instead of peace, nonviolence and reconciliation, we Christians have unleashed in your name violent crusades, slavery, the Holocaust, and nuclear war. We have killed through landmines, depleted uranium, bombing runs, smart weapons, and economic sanctions.

We confess that we have neglected our prayer life and community building. We have lost our way and are not the people you called us to be. Accept our prayer and restore us. In your mercy, forgive us. Forgive us. Forgive us. Amen. *(By Janet Chisholm, Vice Chair of EPF)*

### **A Prayer for the Lenten Journey**

Eight goals, God. Wipe out hunger and poverty. Educate all children. Empower women and the weak. Slow down the death of our kids. Improve the health of all new moms. Fight disease. Save our earth. Share our wealth.

Help me, help us God, to get a handle on all of this. Make Ash Wednesday more than a mark on the forehead. Bring alive our daily devotions. Pump us up on Palm Sunday and bring us light in the darkness of Maunday Thursday. Make Good Friday better and let Jesus not be the only one to rise up on Easter. Eight goals God. The foundation of our faith in Christ. Help us God to be your witness. Amen *(P. Jones, 1/06)*

### **Actions against poverty and hunger**

Church agencies, congregations, and individual members are encouraged to establish their own measures of working to reduce abject poverty and hunger and in seeking to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

#### **Among steps to be considered are the following:**

- reviewing and responding to any and all previous denominational statements on poverty and hunger, AIDS, development, health or other related issues that the Millennium Development Goals address
- banding together with others to raise public awareness and shape political will for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals
- forming age-level groups in the church to study such resources as the “Hunger No More” curriculum prepared by a coalition of denominations through Bread for the World or “God’s Hands: A Christian Call to

- Eradicate Poverty,” a forthcoming study resource on the Millennium Development Goals from the National Council of Churches
- contacting appropriate church staff and/or agencies for background resources on poverty, hunger, and development issues
  - contributing periodic offerings for hunger and poverty relief an effort to build long-term food security production in developing areas
  - launching growing projects in support of Foods Resource Bank, partnering with other congregations and community, agribusiness, and government agencies in extending food self-sufficiency around the world
  - participating in Bread for the World’s annual offering of letters, urging Congress and the administration to end hunger in the US
  - signing the ONE Declaration that rallies Americans, one by one, to fight extreme poverty and global AIDS by calling for the US by 2010 to commit an additional one percent of the federal budget to development and humanitarian assistance
  - participating in the Global Priorities Campaign in an intentional effort at guiding national and global budget priorities away from military spending toward the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals, most specifically toward child survival
  - extending support to legislation that safeguards funding of basic programs for the hungry and poor in the US and to specific legislation that challenges the United States to live up to the commitment it made in the signing of the Millennium Declaration (Senate Resolution 1315 and House Resolution 172).

**Live out of your faith, in a conscious decision making process.  
Give voice to the violence, give witness to the peace of Christ.**

**Helpful resource site for the Millennium Development Goals**

[www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

**Resource sites from faith based response**

[www.one.org](http://www.one.org)

[www.calltorenewal.org](http://www.calltorenewal.org)

[www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)

[www.breadfortheworld.org](http://www.breadfortheworld.org)

[www.nccusa.org](http://www.nccusa.org)

It is time for all Christians, for all those who celebrate the renewal of a time of Lenten fast, and the wonder of Easter, to join in a time of unified prayers of confession, compassionate prayers of care, and faithful prayers of hope for all persons of our globe. In addition, we can seek through faithful involvement in political structures, and through direct witness to the Risen Christ, to distance all persons from the violence of the world's inequities and injustices.

May we participate in this fast gaining strength from our Creator, the Creator of all. May we seek a true understanding of peace for all people, in all places, in all times.

\*Portions of this text taken from the Church of the Brethren General Board resolution on the Millennium Development Goals, October 2005.

**Contributed by Phil Jones, Director, Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office and Co-Chair of the US Committee for the Decade to Overcome Violence**