

World hunger is a problem that seems too huge to tackle. It ranks up there with the drug crisis, apartheid, and military dictators. Each one of us has personal issues that are beyond our control, too--a close friend with terminal cancer, the threat of losing one's job, a separation in the family. Everyone is concerned when someone else is in crisis, but it's hard to know what to do.

When I was growing up, children learned a straightforward solution to the hunger problem: Clean your plate because children are starving in Europe. The relationship between our food and their hunger was hard to see. We would have happily boxed up our broccoli and asparagus to send to any one of those starving waifs, but somehow that wasn't the point. Comedian Allan Sherman used to say, "So I cleaned the plate--four or five or six times a day. But they kept starving, and I got fat." We did learn not to waste food and to respect it as something holy.

Indeed it seems the most successful attempt at fighting world hunger in recent years was the Live Aid rock concert in England organized by Bob Geldorf. Boy George, George Michael, Sting, and Michael Jackson among others performed what might be the most successful fund-raising event in history. But even Live Aid could not cure the problem, and now Live Aid II is in the works.

Whenever a problem is in a system, whether it be in government, in business, or the culture, people feel we have no power. There are generally two ways to get power: one is through money; the other is through numbers. Live Aid was a successful attempt to use popular names to raise money for a cause more worthy than soft drinks and tennis shoes. And it worked. But those of us who cannot raise that kind of money still have power in our numbers.

This weekend St. Regis parish is becoming a covenant church with an organization called Bread for the World. It's a very concrete way in which we can use our numbers to fight the problem of world hunger.

Bread for the World is a national organization of citizens who fight hunger with pen and paper. Each month we receive a letter explaining why hunger exists in a certain pocket of our nation or our world; and each month we learn what to say in a letter to our representatives and senators. We lobby for laws that will appropriate our tax dollars to fight world hunger.

I say "we" because I've been a member of Bread for the World for 10 years now. The idea that St. Regis could become a covenant church comes not from me but from our Social Services Council, and, of course, I'm only too happy to endorse it. Bread for the World is one of the charities I give to because they give me the satisfaction of directing how I want my tax dollars spent.

We chose Epiphany Sunday to become a Covenant Church. We do this because of the message of the Magi. Of all the people who came to Bethlehem, the magi were the only foreigners. (If you don't count the angels.) When they arrived, they lay down before the child and adored him. They are a symbol that all the nations will adore Christ because Jesus came to save us all. Christians are part of a global family. With Christ we can be bread for the world.

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