



Jesus Eats with Friends, Rick Beerhorst

LIVING SIMPLY, EATING SIMPLY

BY RUTH FARRELL

When I think of living simply, I immediately think of “stuff.” I don’t immediately connect a simple, faithful life with eating. Yet what we do three times a day, we do 1,000 times a year. Simple, intentional actions around eating have incredible impact on our lives and those around us. Small changes multiplied 1,000 times become profound changes in our relationship to God, our bodies, other human beings and the earth. So, what does a simple, faithful life mean with regard to eating?

We are bombarded with messages that say we aren’t good enough or responsible unless we consume products. Am I damaging my child emotionally by not providing cute little raisin boxes or juice boxes that other kids have? How many times do I buy the two-for-one, the super-size or add the cookie and drink because it makes economic sense? Or, do I feel like a meal is special only when it has a sugary dessert?

If we feel bombarded by these messages, it is because we are being bombarded. The Centers for Disease Control describes our society as *obesogenic*—“characterized by environments that promote increased food intake, nonhealthful food, and physical inactivity.”¹ We know in our hearts that we are so much more than merely consumers. Yet we get sucked into the food trap. By applying the principles of simple living to food, we can avoid that trap.

Food: A Gift from God

We eat daily, but that doesn’t make food mundane. Food is a gift from God. That makes it sacred; something that should be treated with reverence. God has provided food, but in the last 50 years, food has been dramatically altered through artificial processes. If a food didn’t exist 50 years ago, it likely comes more from a factory rather than from the earth.

To live simply means eating real food—food that will in fact nourish us. That sounds simple enough, but it is often difficult to distinguish real food from artificial food. For instance, milkshakes, hamburgers and French fries existed 50 years ago. One could assume they are real. However, *Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table*, a curriculum developed by the PC(USA) Hunger Program, Advocate Health Care and Church World Service, demonstrates differently. Middle school children compare two strawberry milkshakes; one they make from natural ingredients and the other one from McDonald's.² First they compare the taste and then they compare the ingredients. The one they make contains cream, milk, vanilla, honey, strawberries and ice; McDonald's shake lists 59 ingredients, most of which are chemical names like benzyl isobutyrate. When doing the activity, my son exclaimed, "this isn't junk, this is scary—what are these things?" My son is much more careful now about what he eats.

The same item can be real or artificial and full of additives. Cooking and preparing food are the best ways to get back to living simply. Calling items like prepackaged sliced apples, carrots and salads "convenience" foods diminishes the significance of the additives and leads us to think that the only difference is time. Yet, don't apples naturally turn brown when sliced? Living simply means reclaiming simple pleasures like peeling carrots, slicing apples, washing lettuce and preparing meals with others.

A bumper sticker reads, "Carcinogens Cause Cancer." Many of us know that—so why the bumper sticker? We continually allow carcinogens to be put in our food and justify it by saying the amounts are miniscule. Eating simply may lead to longer, healthier lives.

Food: Connections to Others

Living simply recognizes affects our purchasing has on others. When buying tomatoes at the grocery, I may assume the men and women who pick the tomatoes are paid minimum wage. The PC(USA)'s relationship with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other farm workers says otherwise—tomato pickers are paid below-poverty wages. Farm workers have the lowest annual family incomes of any U.S. wage and salary workers. According to the National Farm Workers Ministry, farm workers earn an average of \$10,000 per year.³

Tracing where food comes from is difficult. We can be part of a much simpler production and distribution system if we buy locally produced food. We then know from where and from whom our food comes. The closer the relationships, the easier it is to ensure fair wages. We can eat real food knowing that we are not unintentionally participating in injustice.

Eating locally produced food means eating in season. Because we like to eat fruits and vegetables all year round, vast amounts of produce are flown to the U.S. from other countries. However, eating imported food does not necessarily help farm workers overseas.

PC(USA) mission coworker Jed Koball works with the PC(USA) Joining Hands network in Peru, helping partners to address the root causes of hunger. In the April 2009 *Global Food Crisis Fast Materials*, Jed highlights asparagus production in Peru. He makes it clear that using water and farmland to produce food for Peruvian consumption might benefit Peruvians more than producing asparagus for the United States. Too often, exported crops only benefit a few families or



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HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Try one of these ten practical ways to start or deepen your commitment to simple living through food.

- Set an extra place to remind yourself of Christ's presence at the table.
- Buy and cook real food from gardens and local sources. Eat as little processed food as possible.
- Share home-cooked meals with a friend or neighbor.
- Join the monthly fast focusing on the Global Food Crisis to learn, pray and take action, visit www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis.
- Eat healthier, which for many of us means less meat and dairy and lots more vegetables and fruits. Give up soft drinks and limit yourself to one dessert a week.
- Put an offering box on your table and add two cents, a nickel or a dime each time you eat. Give it to your church as part of the CentsAbility offering to fight hunger.
- Refrain from eating in front of the television, the computer or in the car to respect the sacredness of food.
- Compost and plant a garden with others.
- Invite someone you do not know well to a simple dinner and prepare, eat and clean up together.
- Many PW members are retired, and many live alone. What can you do to make your mealtime more sacred, simple, social and meaningful?

international businesses. Strengthening the agricultural sector, especially in ways that allow small farmers to stay on their land, is vital to long-term economic development.⁴

When I was a mission worker in Congo, I had a choice when I went to the market. I could either buy rice imported from the U.S. or rice produced by farmers living 50 miles upriver. Despite the 10,000-mile trip, the U.S. rice (heavily subsidized with U.S. taxpayer dollars) was cheaper. So I, along with everyone else, bought U.S. rice. Congolese farmers could not compete so they quit producing rice.

The Congolese are now dependent on imported rice and other imported goods. When fuel prices rise or when “free” handouts dry up, the U.S. rice is more expensive, but there aren’t any other options. The Congolese would be far more “food secure” if they were growing what they need in the Congo. Food relief and imports must be used in ways that do not damage the development of long-term national agricultural programs.

Hospitality: A Hallmark of Christianity and of Many Faiths

Materialism and overconsumption in our society have even impacted hospitality. Making the perfect meal and beautifying our homes for guests is wonderful. But have you ever been so exhausted when the guests arrive that you cannot really enjoy their company? In Congo, I learned that meals were started when guests arrived, so preparations were done together.

Bible passages show the significance of the dining table as a place of ministry, where relationships deepen and reconciliation occurs. Jesus is at Simon’s table when he is anointed with perfume (*Matt. 26:6–7*); at dinner in a Pharisee’s home (*Luke 11*); at a banquet hosted by a leader of the Pharisees (*Luke 14*); at the Last Supper (*John 13:1–30*); and at a table in Emmaus after the resurrection (*Luke 24:41–43*). Being at the table is more than hospitality. The table is symbolic of the community to which God calls us—the place where we all belong, the place where we practice Christianity. The fullness of the table

does not refer to the amount of food but to the people around the table. If simple living includes inviting others to the table to share time together, I believe we would lead less hectic, healthier and more fulfilling lives. 🍴

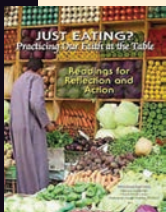
Ruth Farrell is coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program.

Notes

1. “Obesity: Halting the Epidemic by Making Health Easier.” Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control, 2009; www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/publications/AAG/obesity.htm; accessed November 24, 2009.
2. Johnson, Holly and Jennifer Halteman Schrock. *Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table*, middle school version. Louisville, Ky.: Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2005, p. 7.
3. “Below-Poverty Wages, Malnutrition and Hunger.” National Farm Worker Ministry; www.nfwm.org/content/below-poverty-wages-malnutrition-and-hunger; accessed November 24, 2009.
4. Jed Hawkes Koball, “Climate Change and Water in Peru” from *Global Food Crisis: April 2–4, 2010* Fast Materials. Louisville, Ky.: PC(USA), 2009, p. 11; www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis/archive/index.htm; accessed November 24, 2009.



Learn More



Order or download ***Just Eating?*** from www.pcusa.org/food/resources or call Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612. Middle school book, item 25432-09-360, \$10*; adult leader guide, item 7436505362, \$6.50*; adult reflection book, item 7436505361, \$4* or \$3* for 10 or more *plus shipping and handling.

<http://presbyterian.typepad.com/foodandfaith>

Read the PC(USA)’s Food and Faith Blog about how others integrate their faith and food.



www.nongmoshoppingguide.com/documentFiles/I44.pdf

Download a shopping guide to help you choose foods that have not been genetically modified.

www.pcusa.org/hunger/centsability
Find out how your congregation or PW group

can contribute a few cents at every meal to end hunger and poverty.

www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis

Learn more about the global food crisis and download materials for monthly fasts that focus on a specific country and its food-related problems. www.ciw-online.org

Receive timely information from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers as they seek justice for farm workers and promote the Campaign for Fair Food.

www.relufa.org

Learn how nonprofits and churches (and the Presbyterian Hunger Program!) are working with farmers in Cameroon. Go to Videos and watch Communal Grain Banks and Fair Fruit.

www.whatsonmyfood.org/index.jsp

Find out what pesticides are on your food and ways to voice your concerns about pesticides.