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English 12 pd. 6
MCC Essay (Final Draft)
15 December 2008

The Global Food Crisis: Feeding the 6,700,000,000

Throughout the New Testament Jesus uses metaphors to describe the purpose of his life on earth. One of the most memorable metaphors can be found in John 6:35. “Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’” Jesus uses bread and water in this metaphor because he acknowledges that food and water are the two most basic needs of humans. But Jesus takes it farther than this, throughout his life he shows his followers that they need to provide food and water for others. In the New Testament story of the feeding of the five thousand, a small boy shares a few pieces of fish and bread which miraculously become enough to feed the large crowd that is gathered to hear Jesus speak. “Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way (Matthew 15:32).’” The importance of the food that is distributed in this passage is often forgotten, because many Christians prefer to focus on the miraculous powers of Jesus. However, Christians need to take another look at this passage as food shortages and rampant food price increases occur throughout the world, giving the followers of Jesus around the world a new multitude to feed.

The global food crisis has hit the developing world hard and fast. Riots have broken out in a number of countries over food price increases and food shortages. There should be little surprise that unrest has reached so many countries because between 2006

and 2008 rice prices rose 217 percent; wheat prices 136 percent; corn prices 125 percent; and soybeans 107 percent (Centre). Unfortunately the crisis has hit those who are already struggling to find food the hardest. The food crisis raises new questions about how Christians living in developed nations should respond to poverty, hunger, and economic injustice around the world.

Christians in the United States have more than just seven loaves and a few fish with which to feed the world. Many Americans complain about the high price of an out of season banana, while a family in Haiti nears starvation because they cannot afford a bowl of rice. Christians in the developed world must support nonprofit agencies who deliver immediate support to starving peoples, as well as petitioning their governments to change unfair trade policies, return land used for biofuels to food production, and promote increases agricultural production.

While the source of the global food crisis lies within the global economic structure, aid organizations and governments must work immediately and effectively to deliver food aid, in order to save as many starving people as possible. However, food aid must not cause more problems in the many already debilitated markets around in undeveloped nations around the world.

As large nations work to develop situations in which their economies can thrive undeveloped nations are often pushed aside. Ideal situations for developed nations, especially those with power on the global scene, often disregard the interests of people living in undeveloped nations and destroy the chances they have of economic development. Small nations, often in debt to other countries, fight to develop capital by

liberalizing their economies, allowing foreign businesses to set up sweat shops, and causing disruptions in trade that result in shortages of food.

In a normal economic structure, where food is produced and sold internally, farmers receive enough profit to continue their agricultural practices. However, when small undeveloped nations have liberal trade policies, put in place to stimulate economic growth, they become susceptible to cheap imports from large foreign economies. Businesses in developed nations take advantage of subsidies from their governments and are able to sell food cheaper than farmers in developing nations can. In turn local farmers are forced to abandon agricultural practices in order to survive, causing their small nations to become completely reliant on foreign imports. While citizens in developed nations can cope with higher food prices the citizens cannot afford the high price of foreign imports.

The economic issues causing the food crisis must be solved on two levels. First, trade policies must be changed so small farmers in developing nations can make profits. This will lower food prices within developing nations and help increase agricultural production to stave off high demand. Second, United States citizens must take action by supporting their local economies. Buying food locally helps reduce carbon emissions, develops local economies, and gives farmers an alternative to selling their product to large companies, who will either ship it overseas, or sell it to biofuel production plants.

A large reason for the increase in food prices around the world, especially amongst cereals, is the production of biofuels. Currently over one-fourth of corn grown in the United States goes to ethanol production. As more farmers choose to grow corn for ethanol production, land previously used to grow agricultural food sources like wheat and

soybeans are diminished (Alexander). Energy and food prices have always been intertwined, but the introduction of biofuel has added a new and volatile factor to the equation. IFPRI predicts, based on actual biofuel investment plans, that corn and oilseed prices will increase 26 and 18 percent respectively, by 2020. These numbers could get even higher if the price of oil rises, which will increase demand for biofuel production as an alternative energy source, and raise food shipping and production costs. It was once thought that ethanol produced 20 percent less carbon emissions than gasoline but this has recently been proved false demonstrating the need for a restructuring of the biofuel industry (Alexander).

The journal *Science* reports, that the production of biofuels, does not reduce carbon emissions, but has actually doubled carbon emissions because many prairies and forests are destroyed in order to create land for biofuels to be grown. Farming equipment used to harvest and grow biofuels also uses fossil fuels that put harmful carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Production of biofuels not only increase carbon emissions but also takes water away from food production resources, and creates fertilizer run-off that is damaging to the environment.

With the constant threat of global warming, United States policy makers must work to reduce the amount of energy used by the United States, as well as working to develop sustainable biofuel resources. Biofuel subsidies currently range from \$11 million to \$13 million (IFPRI). These subsidies should be moved into support of more sustainable biofuel sources such as sugarcane, switchgrass, and agricultural waste

products. Working to slow global warming is important because of the affect that climate change has on farming.

The effects of climate change are a major reason that agricultural production has fallen behind demand. Increased demand for food is a result of population growth and changes in the types of foods that are being consumed. Demand for foods that require large amounts of land and water resources such as fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy have increased, making it even harder for agricultural production to meet demand.

Agricultural production increases are vital in efforts to lower the price of food around the world.

Expanding agricultural production is limited by lack of water and land, especially in relationship to climate change. Little innovation in the agricultural sector over the past decade forces many farmers to use the same methods they did ten years ago, even though the environment around them has changed. While developed nations with stable infrastructure can help their farmers to purchase new land for farming, or increase the productivity of their farming practices, farmers in undeveloped nations have little chance of securing new farmland or increasing their productivity. Small undeveloped nations feel the effects of the food crisis the most, but they will also be helped the most by increased agricultural production on the local scale.

Aid organizations and governments must work in undeveloped nations to create programs that allow farmers to take out loans in order to buy more land. Governments and aid organizations must also help local farmers develop sustainable and productive farming methods so that they are able to produce food in the future. On a larger scale, the

high price of food has already drawn foreign investors to undeveloped nations. This capital is helpful in developing agriculture, and often lowers food prices for farmers. However, foreign investors must be regulated to make sure the rights of farmers are protected.

The small farmers in undeveloped nations follow Jesus' teachings of living simple lives focused on love for one another better than any other group of people on the planet, yet they still struggle to survive because of the complex lives that the citizens of developed nations demand. The citizens in developing nations have been ignored for a long time, but hopefully the attention of the global food crisis will draw the world's eyes to their plight. Christians not only need to react quickly to feed those that are starving, but must also work for change in the global economic structure so that those who are forced to live simply have a sustainable food sources for the future.

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