



MAKE FOOD FAIR

FEBRUARY 2013

Share Your Blessings

What has planting your broccoli and brussel sprouts this month and receiving communion at your local church got to do with feeding the hungry and supporting the dispossessed? Not much, if you eat all the vegetables yourself and make your communion a private affair. Everything, if you share your vege garden and see eucharist as something as physical as it is spiritual.

CWS like all the agencies addressing global poverty and injustice, suffers from the disease of donor fatigue. Supporters can grow tired of not seeing any change from the donations they might make, and become acclimatised to images of poverty and suffering. An increasing refrain on TV news is the warning "viewers may find some of these images disturbing" with the unspoken message "if you don't like them turn them off". If it upsets you, feel free to forget it.

The publicity we get about CWS partners does address this donor fatigue. It's easier to support people whose humanity, resourcefulness and courage we can respect and understand as we learn more about them. The dynamics of global suffering and injustice are structural, but without names and faces we

can relate to, those dynamics soon become someone else's problem.

So it's good to see our partners where and as they are. But it's equally important to build partnership from our end as well. And our gardens are a good place to start.

I'm a relatively recent convert to home gardening. Getting the broccoli into the ground at the right time this month (along with some Chinese cabbage, beetroot, spinach, leeks and lettuce, skip the brussel sprouts) is a major event in my calendar. And the satisfaction of eating the harvest and sharing it around rates up there alongside catching a decent snapper or three.

Unlike the CWS partners I read about in Sri Lanka or Nicaragua, I have the luxury of driving to the supermarket if my crops fail, but there is more going on in my garden than convenience food. I'm learning about the real value of what I grow, not only in terms of the nutrition it gives but all the skills and inherited wisdom it requires to get it to the table.

Behind my simple garden is a whole community of knowledge that I rely on and share with people around the world; from where the seeds come from to preserving the harvest. ►►



CEPAD, Nicaragua

“Every communion table needs a photo of a CWS partner alongside the bread and wine, to remind us who else is invited and entitled to this meal.”



▶ Growing vegetables and fruit for the people around me provides a very personal tie to gardeners and farmers everywhere. And when I struggle to get the crops I want through adverse weather and pests and poor soil, I have a new appreciation of what it must be like to lose a whole harvest as our friends in Samoa and Fiji did with Cyclone Evan.



In his essays on the "The Practice of the Wild" Gary Snyder writes "our distance from the source of our food enables us to be superficially more comfortable and distinctly more ignorant."

The best thing about the craze for food and cooking shows on TV is their new fascination with where food comes from, how it's cultivated, whether it's raised with environmental respect and locally and justly produced. There is a growing public appetite for discovering the source of what we eat and the human and ecological costs of bringing it to the table. This new consciousness for all its trendiness is a good thing. The less ignorant we are about our food, the greater appreciation we have for the struggle of others to eat at all.

The mass produced food that we buy in anonymous packages from supermarkets could come from anywhere. Food with a life history we can trace and have a hand in shaping helps to join us into an interconnected community of

growers and consumers, both rich and poor.

So be careful of what you plant and grow, because we reap what we sow. At our harvest festival and thanksgiving services this year, let's spell out those connections with stories of what we plant and grow and share and how we might do that more generously and boldly. We reap what we sow.

Just as we are what we eat. That's nowhere more dramatically clear than at the meal we share around the communion table or altar. I was hugely drawn to that conviction by the Sara Miles book "Take this bread" that traces the journey of St Gregory's church in San Francisco from fashionable Sunday gathering place to a giant food bank centred on the central altar. Sarah found St Gregory's after shopping around churches and remaining unmoved by communion where "dead white disks of wafers and fussy little shot glasses full of grape juice, were dispensed to parishioners who knelt in line at the altar rail. . . and the body of God was draped decorously in an ironed white napkin."

At St Gregory's she found something different: "the raw physicality of a mystical meal. . . and the suggestion that God could be located in experience, sensed through bodies, tasted in food; that my body was connected literally and mysteriously to other bodies and loved without reason". The link between the sacramental meal and food bank feeding the hungry was immediate and real, a daily obligation that Sarah devoted the next decade of her life to fulfilling.

It's a great story, as dramatic as any thriller. And for us it can trigger and renew every Sunday when the people of God gather to break bread for their nurture and for the nurture of hungry people everywhere. Every



All photos CEPAD, Nicaragua

communion table needs a photo of a CWS partner alongside the bread and wine, to remind us who else is invited and entitled to this meal; a meal to which we all come with empty hands; a meal that will feed us all, if we learn to share it. ●

John Bluck is the retired Anglican bishop of Waiapu and Dean of Christchurch, now living in Pakiri where he continues to write. His website is blucksbooks.com

FOR REFLECTION

1. **Where does your food come from? Has this changed over the years? Why do you think there is hunger in Aotearoa New Zealand? the world?**
2. **How do you see the connection between sharing in the Eucharist communion and your life in your community and the world?**
3. **Identify specific ways that you are already sharing food and other blessings? What more can you do to make sure the prayer "Give us our daily bread" is answered for all people?**