

## Threatened: Programs for the Poor, Hungry, and Unemployed

This summer's debates on the federal budget will have a huge impact on helping the needy. The House budget includes big cuts to such programs. To take just one example, every congregation in the U.S. would have to spend \$50,000 a year to make up for the proposed cuts in federal food assistance programs! We need to encourage our congregation members to contact their Representatives and Senators. Here's a creative perspective from Matt Gross, Bread for the World regional organizer:

He asks: What's the Most Expensive Federal Government Social Program? Given cuts proposed in Congress, it seems obvious: Food Stamps (SNAP), unemployment benefits, Low-Income Housing, or perhaps Assistance for Needy Families. But none of these is correct.

In her book, *The Submerged State*, Cornell Prof. Suzanne Mettler highlights the 3 most expensive federal social programs: 1) retirement benefits exemption, 2) health insurance exemption, and 3) home mortgage interest deduction program. She adds, "Neither the costs of food stamps, the most utilized program for low-income people, nor of unemployment insurance, which provides economic security for Americans of all income levels, amounts to half the value of even the least expensive of these programs, the home mortgage interest deduction."

So, when Congress is balancing the budget, why don't they ever make cuts to programs like these? The reason, says Mettler, lies in who benefits from them: over 55% of the retirement benefit exemption and 69% of the home mortgage deduction go to households making over \$100,000. Such programs increase inequality in the U.S. – but they aren't even being considered for cuts.

Balancing the budget and cutting our deficit on the backs of poor and hungry folks by cutting programs like SNAP is not only morally wrong; it won't work! We must ensure it doesn't happen.

links: [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org) [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy) [www.lutheranpeace.org](http://www.lutheranpeace.org)

## Aid Needs to Protect Indigenous Farming

A similar dynamic lies beneath the surface of international aid programs to help the hungry. At the G-8 meeting of world leaders in Chicago President Obama announced a new \$3 billion initiative to end hunger in Africa. It drew commitments from major agribusiness corporations to help – while promoting their products.

**Also urgent:** The U.S. House has passed several disturbing provisions: indefinite extension of the war in Afghanistan; blocking the already ratified START Treaty; reducing help to secure loose nuclear materials in Russia; adding \$8 billion to military spending. Urge the Senate to overturn them; remember in November.



Unfortunately, those products include Genetically Modified Seeds (GMOs) which have in recent years had the effect of making farmers dependent on patented seeds and the expensive pesticides and fertilizers that go with them. This has driven millions of farmers into debt and off their land. Most farming in Africa is done on small plots of land by women raising their own family's food. In contrast, this top-down agribusiness-supported initiative is aimed toward large-scale mechanized farming and chemicals which destroy the soil and ignore local farmers' means, knowledge, and resources.

The world doesn't need a temporary boost in yields that leave farmers in debt and land ruined, but rather a sustainable, affordable solution that focuses on helping local farmers feed people in their community. Biotech Genetically Modified crops just don't deliver on that need.

Our support for increased U.S. aid to developing countries needs to raise these questions and call for implementation of UN safeguards that protect indigenous and agroecological farming.

links: [http://lutheran\\_peace.tripod.com/GM\\_hunger.html](http://lutheran_peace.tripod.com/GM_hunger.html)  
[www.foodfirst.org/en/Challenge+to+Green+Revolution+for+Africa](http://www.foodfirst.org/en/Challenge+to+Green+Revolution+for+Africa)  
[www.foodfirst.org/en/Obama+African+Farmers](http://www.foodfirst.org/en/Obama+African+Farmers) <http://africasplansforg8.org/>  
the larger aid & budget picture: [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org) [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy)



## Youth and the Military

Things are moving in the upper Midwest on issues of military service and conscientious objection. LPF members and friends in three synods are sharing information and resources with parents, youth, confirmands, and clergy on the issues and options. The SW Minnesota and Minneapolis synods passed resolutions last year on the subject; the St Paul synod did so this year.

Folks active in the SW Minnesota Synod have shared over 1200 copies of a booklet they developed based on devotions written by LPF member and former bishop Rev. Lowell Erdahl. They've shared an equal number of the LPF resource entitled "Youth and the Military." The Minneapolis-St. Paul Joint Peace with Justice Committee has been doing similar educational work, emphasizing respect for various options from military service to alternatives like AmeriCorps and conscientious objection. Synod resolutions can be viewed on their respective synod websites. For more information or to connect with LPF members who have been active in one or more of the synods, contact LPF:

For further information, contact **Lutheran Peace Fellowship**, 1710 11th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122-2420, [ggersmehl@hotmail.com](mailto:ggersmehl@hotmail.com) 206-349-2501, see [www.lutheranpeace.org](http://www.lutheranpeace.org) for the above links and many other resources. Ken Butigan has written an outstanding summary of some of the brilliant nonviolence work of **Walter Wink**, who recently died. Here's a link to the article and other materials: [http://lutheran\\_peace.tripod.com/wink\\_vid.htm](http://lutheran_peace.tripod.com/wink_vid.htm)