

First Fridays for Food Security: May 6, 2011



What is First Fridays for Food Security?

On every first Friday for a year, eat meals that cost only as much as is allotted for a family of your size by the [USDA Modified Thrifty Food Plan](#). (You will need to divide the weekly cost by seven.) This plan is used as the basis for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly called food stamps).* Many individuals or families may notice a disparity between the cost of their normal meals and the amount allotted in the food plan. The “cutting back” that will likely be required in order to stay “in budget” can be considered a form of fasting.

Why fast?

“Voluntary fasting from food creates in us a greater openness to God's Spirit and deepens our compassion for those who are forced to go without food. The discomfort brought about by fasting unites us to the sufferings of Christ. Fasting should bring to mind the sufferings of all those for whom Christ suffered.” (United States Catholic Bishops, *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*, 2000)

Participating in this fast can help you be open to the Holy Spirit and walk in solidarity with all those for whom access to adequate, nutritious food is difficult.

When should I fast?

Every first Friday between May 6, 2011 and April 6, 2012. If desired, individuals or families can choose to extend the fast for the entire week.

Where will this event take place?

Individuals and families all around the U.S. are invited to participate from their own communities. On each first Friday, those participating can visit the [Facebook event page](#) to discuss their experiences and activities. There, they can also access prayer and educational resources from USCCB.

* Assistance is awarded to make up the difference between a family's personal resources and the amount allotted by the USDA Modified Thrifty Food Plan.

Food Insecurity in the United States

Many people are surprised to learn that 17.4 million U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some point in 2009. This means that 14.7% of households reported “reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet.” In addition, households that experienced “disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake” accounted for 5.7% (or 6.8 million) of households (USDA, 2011).



Guests wait for a meal at Our Daily Bread, a Catholic Charities program in Baltimore.

Many people who were not food insecure in the past can easily become food insecure due to the loss of a job, medical illness, or another unexpected challenge.

For example, John Bell faced food insecurity when he lost his job after being unable to work due to cancer and back problems. Bell's savings were soon depleted and he turned to a program



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called Our Daily Bread, a Catholic Charities program in Baltimore, MD. The program reports a ten percent increase in those using their services over the past year.

What the Church Teaches

In “*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food (Mt. 25:35)*,” the Catholic bishops of the United States proclaimed, “Providing food for all is a Gospel imperative, not just another policy choice.” Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that love for God and neighbor must propel us both to directly serve individuals who are in need, and to work for the common good of all (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 7).

We must see our fellow human beings as members of our human family—as brothers and sisters. When we come to this recognition and act on it, we are practicing solidarity.

We act in solidarity when we prioritize the needs of the “least ones” (Mt. 25:45) in our daily actions. We must also work to ensure that protecting the vulnerable is a central priority of laws and policies.

How You Can Respond

On May 6, join the [Facebook event](#) and follow the instructions in this handout to fast in solidarity with all those who are food insecure.

Consider donating the money you save to your local Catholic Charities agency, or volunteer your time at a program that helps those in need.

Consider how you are called to advocate on behalf of those in need. Check the USCCB [Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development web site](#) to take part in an action alert to ensure that the poor are prioritized in public policy.



John Bell at Our Daily Bread. With the program’s help, Bell was able to get back on his feet. Today, he works as an employee of the program.

Table Prayer

We begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

Please read the following passage from the family Bible: Matthew 25:31-46.

Prayer:

God, you give us all good things.
We thank you for the food here before us
and for the loved ones who are gathered
around the table.

May this simple meal make us more
aware
of those who do not have enough to eat.
May we open our hearts more fully to
help our brothers and sisters
as you have taught us to do.
Amen.

As children of one heavenly Father we
pray:

Our Father.....



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