



LWF ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY
STUDY MATERIALS

Day Two

To All



The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches



The LWF Eleventh Assembly study material takes into account the regional focus of the meeting's worship life. Each of the six brochures includes a contribution from an LWF region on "Questions worth pondering" (p. 7); a hymn (p. 8), a feature story (p. 10) related to the assembly theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," and information about some of the region's staple foods (p. 16).

This brochure is dedicated to the Asia region.

Parallel edition in French, German and Spanish

Onzième Assemblée de la FLM, Matériel d'étude
– Deuxième jour : À toutes et à tous

Elfte LWB-Vollversammlung, Arbeitsmaterialien
– Tag Zwei: Für Alle

Undécima Asamblea de la FLM, Material de estudio
– Segundo día: Para todas y todos

Published by

The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches
Office for Communication Services
150, route de Ferney,
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
www.lutheranworld.org

Editing, translation, revision, cover design, layout and photo research

LWF Office for Communication and Terry MacArthur.

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Cover images

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(Background) via Morguefile.com

Logo design

Leonhardt & Kern Agency (Germany)

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (ELCW) & LWF

Distribution

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Printed in Switzerland by SRO-Kundig on paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (www.fsc.org)



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Bible Study Two: To All

Give us today our daily bread

What a difference one little pronoun can make! “Give *us* today our daily bread.” The petition does not say “Give *me* today *my* daily bread.” This is not the prayer of an individual. It is the prayer of a group. Whoever prays this petition speaks for a whole community. When you pray these words—alone or in a group in public—whom do you see there with you, surrounding your table? Whom do you hear speaking these words with you?

The setting of the Sermon on the Mount

In the Gospel according to Matthew the Lord’s Prayer is an integral part of the “Sermon on the Mount” (Mt 5:1–7:27). These three chapters in Matthew are a monologue delivered by Jesus, without interruption. The

gospel writer introduces this “sermon” with a brief summary statement that pictures Jesus on the road “throughout Galilee” (4:23). Jesus is on a lengthy journey doing holistic ministry of teaching, proclaiming and “curing every disease and every sickness among the people”—a diaconal ministry, if you will. At this early stage in the gospel, the fame of Jesus has already spread “throughout all Syria.” Jesus has already attracted a large following from the entire region, including the area east of the Jordan and the Decapolis (4:25, the “ten cities”). That whole region was inhabited primarily by Gentiles.

The “sermon” itself, however, is not directly addressed to that large following. In fact, Jesus had moved away from the multitude to go “up the mountain” (5:1) where the disciples joined him. So, at this point in the story the crowd fades somewhat into the background, but it does not

go away. At the end of the uninterrupted speech of Jesus (7:28) Matthew states specifically that the crowd is still there. One imagines that these people were standing there during the entire speech, eager to catch what Jesus was saying.

This means that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel has a twofold audience. There are the disciples who hear it directly, and then there is that large crowd of people who stand in the background and now provide the context within which Jesus "taught them" (5:2).

This setting is no doubt significant for an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. The Lord's Prayer has in view an audience that is much larger than the handful of disciples. At least some of them—those from across the Jordan—were no doubt Gentiles. They are all allowed to "overhear" what Jesus says. The prayer that Jesus taught the disciples is for them, too. They, too, long for the good news hidden in these words.

Teaching and feeding

During the entire Gospel according to Matthew, "the crowd" is never far away and Jesus does more than just tolerate their presence. He is personally concerned for their well-being. Not only does he teach the people, he provides them with food as well.

The Gospel according to Matthew presents two feeding stories in quick succession (Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39). Such "doubling" of incidents—here and elsewhere in this gospel—evidently serves to emphasize the importance of what is being reported. In both these stories the disciples are uncomfortable in the face of so many hungry people. "Send the crowds away," (Mt 14:15) they say to Jesus in the first story. "I do not want to send them away hungry," (Mt 15:32) Jesus says in the second story. In both stories (14:16; 15:32-33) Jesus suggests to the disciples that *they* should respond tangibly to the evident hunger in their midst.

The point seems clear enough: Jesus "hears" the silent prayer of the hungry and expects his disciples to do more than just "refer" the case to Jesus. To advocate for the destitute is more than just to "forward" their request to someone higher up. Prayer (like advocacy) is risky; it commits the one who prays to follow through with corresponding action.

In both cases the disciples point to the insufficiency of their own resources (14:17; 15:33) and they are right in doing so. Their means *really are* insufficient to satisfy the hunger of

so many people. But in both stories, the point is that in the hands of Jesus those meager resources of theirs are enough to help fill the need of the multitude at hand. The disciples then become the distributors (should one say "diaconal ministers?") of the blessings of God. The result: no one was left to starve! All had enough to eat so as to keep them from fainting by the wayside (15:32). Even the marginalized in the community—the *women and children* (14:21; 15:38) were not forgotten. The circle of the "us" who look to God for food has grown far beyond the small number of the disciples whom Jesus taught to pray for their daily bread.

A still more inclusive group?

The circle widens still more. This prayer has in view not only the needs of the disciples and of their immediate company. It reaches out to a still larger group, as becomes evident when the Gospel of Matthew culminates in the command of the risen Lord (Mt 28:19-20; cf. Jn 20:21) to go into all the world, exercising a holistic ministry of preaching and pastoral care. So, by the time we reach the end of the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord's Prayer is offered to all people everywhere. It will be for them a means of expressing their need as well as a reminder to give thanks for God's continuing care.

At the time when Matthew wrote these words, Paul had already begun to see an even larger picture. He insisted that not only humans, but all creatures utter inarticulate groans while eagerly awaiting the redemption of the human race (Rom 8:22). So, as Paul sees it, all of creation—human and animal (vegetable included?)—"speaks" the same word-less hunger-language. Paul is convinced that the spirit understands that language and intercedes for us all "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). Similar convictions are expressed already in the Old Testament, where the Psalm pictures "every living thing" receiving the fulfillment of all its needs from the gracious hand of God (Ps 145:16).

Does it not follow, then, that according to these biblical witnesses, all creation can claim food as a God-given right? Spoken prayer is not a condition for receiving what one prays for. Rather, the prayer reminds those who pray that they owe gratitude for what God gives even without prayer, as Luther so vividly reminds us in his explanation of the Fourth Petition. Such gratitude for God's precious gifts will of course express itself in generous sharing of those gifts with others—at

least, one would expect so. But that is not necessarily what actually happens. Jesus told a story that deals with the perennial tension between those who live in luxury and those whose basic needs go unmet.

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

This well-known parable of Jesus explores the relationship between a “rich” person (16:19) and a “poor” one (16:20). These two are contrasted point by point in a carefully orchestrated drama. The characterization of the two main figures in the parable follows the traditional pattern of a hyperbole (an exaggerated story): the one person is exceedingly wealthy, whereas the other is in desperate straits.

The first one has no name. He is referred to with an adjective: “rich.” The story identifies him in terms of his clothing, house and lifestyle. In the Mediterranean society of the day, “fine linen” was well known as an import from Egypt and “purple garments” identified the wearer as a member of the elite (cf. Mk 15:17). Clothing made of these two fabrics distinguished the wearer as a person of spectacular riches, a person of prominence (e.g. Rev 18:12). The entrance to the mansion of the rich person (Lk 16:20) is no ordinary door (*thyra*) but a *pylon*, a large gate commonly associated with temples and palaces, such as the twelve gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21). The person who owns all these things is clearly well-off. He “feasts” (the Greek word implies exuberant eating and drinking at banquets)—and he does so not just at an occasional celebration, but day after day, and he does it “sumptuously” (Lk 16:19).

The other person in the parable, the poor one, has no material possessions. But he has a name. Lazarus is the Greek form of *Eliezer*, a proper name in Hebrew that may be translated “God (is my) helper.” Unlike the wealthy man, Lazarus is unable to fend for himself and, in this story, he never even says a word. What is more, all the (Greek) verbs referring to him are in the passive voice. Lazarus used to *get deposited* (16:20) at the rich man’s “gateway” and he *was afflicted* with open sores. He was longing to *be fed* with the scraps that used to fall from the banquet table of the “rich one.” To make things worse, the ever-present ownerless street dogs used to lick his sores, no doubt aggravating his discomfort still further.

Up to this point, the story has placed side by side an excessively rich person and a desperately

poor one. The one has everything that the other does not. The one enjoys luxury and the other is destitute. The one lives in a magnificent mansion, the other languishes in the gutter. The one feasts lavishly, the other is so hungry he would feel fortunate to be allowed to consume some of the scraps that others carelessly toss to the dogs under the table. The one wears expensive clothing, the other is covered with sores. The two live worlds apart, although they are neighbors in one and the same community.

Eventually, both Lazarus and the “rich man” died. But the story does not end there. It plays itself out in predictable fashion. From here on in the story Jesus employed imagery which Jewish people easily recognized as a way to express the conviction that between death and the final judgment people experience the opposite of what they had been accustomed to. Lazarus, who was formerly outside on the street, now gets comforted on the lap of Abraham, while the rich man, who used to celebrate regularly in his palatial mansion, now is “tormented” (16:23) in a far away fiery place. Everything seems to have been turned upside down and inside out. The “rich one” who used to enjoy sumptuous meals, now longs for a drop of water, while Lazarus, who once would have been grateful for mere scraps, now shares the banquet table with Abraham and Sarah. Lazarus, who was consistently ignored by the rich man, now receives preferred treatment, while the rich man who regularly ignored him, now desires that somebody—anybody—maybe Lazarus (?) would come to help him. Up to the very end of the story, the “rich one” remains nameless, a “nobody.” He knows that he himself cannot be helped any longer. But he has five brothers who might change their ways if they were warned about what lies ahead. But don’t they already know that?

The story is indeed very sobering, but it does not delight in punishment. At this point in the parable the wretched man in Hades (16:23) repeatedly appeals to Abraham as “(my) father” (16:24, 27, 30). Surprisingly, Abraham in turn acknowledges him as one of his offspring, addressing him with an endearment, a term which conveys the warmth of filial relationship within a family context: “(my dear) child” (*teknon*, 16:25). Abraham’s conversation with the man in torment seems to reflect a good deal of empathy with the “rich one.” Loving parents know what it is to agonize with a distraught child who is desperately trying to come to terms with the inevitable consequences of a self-destructive style of life.

For practical purposes, the parable itself ends at 16:26 with the shocking reality that the gulf is now unbridgeable and that there is no possibility



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of going back and try to undo the mistakes of the past. The remaining five verses in this story only serve to make that point with all desirable finality. Abraham confronts the reader with a sobering thought: not even the most spectacular miracle could be more convincing than Moses and the prophets already are (16:31).

And on that tragic note the story ends—with a groan, so to speak.

The reader now has to face a disturbing reality: These two people, although they occupy very different positions on the social scale, belong to one and the same faith community. The “rich person” is clearly identified as a “child of Abraham” and the poor person’s name indicates that he, too, belongs to the community that recognizes that all help comes from God. Both of them belong to a faith community in which every aspect of life is connected with prayers of thanksgiving, of lament and of praise. Basic to that community is the confession of total dependence on the grace of God.

And this brings us to the central point: the community that calls upon God for daily sustenance is made up of all sorts of people, including those who have more than enough to eat—and to waste—and those who, for lack of even the most basic food, can just barely survive. How is it possible for such a discrepancy not only to exist, but to increase in severity as time passes?

A troubling conclusion

The story becomes even more sobering when one considers that the chief figure in it, the “rich one,” is not portrayed as an evil person. Nothing is said of him that would lead one to conclude that he is worse than any well-respected member of the community. He is not a particularly greedy or abusive person. He seems to have many friends and few, if any, enemies. He might even be the person who funded the building of the local synagogue. He might well be a prominent member of city council, or just an ordinary person who

minds his own business and manages the family finances responsibly, in order to secure the welfare of his next of kin. He might desire no more than to ensure that after retirement there will be enough resources available for him to maintain the standard of living to which he has become accustomed. In other words, the “rich man” may be no different from you and me.

The story is coming too close for comfort. It shows us the world as it really is. There is enough wealth in the world for the privileged to live in luxury, while the hungry continue to be ignored. It will not do to blame the facts on “those others” whom we may call “tight-fisted.” The problem is not confined to specifically bad individuals; it is rooted in the socioeconomic system itself of which we all are a part. That system victimizes some (like Lazarus) and privileges others (like the “rich one”). And people let it continue to be so, unchallenged.

The story confronts the reader with an intolerable situation: The sick and physically challenged Lazarus is allowed to die of hunger and no one—not even he himself—protests. The “other one” is allowed to benefit from the same system that marginalized Lazarus—and no one cries foul. Are there none who advocate for the weak and call the strong to take responsible remedial action?

The gap between rich and poor is unbridgeable—or is about to become so. Perfectly “good” people, with perfectly good intentions and good will can be the cause of the starvation of millions of the poor. That can be the frightful result of overlooking that little pronoun in the petition: “Give **us** today our daily bread.”

A promise

The story does not have to end that way. In the community that looks to God for daily sustenance, the one who has no name and the one who has no voice can find both. There is enough for all who hunger.

From the Asia region

Questions worth pondering

Prayer is risky; it commits the one who prays to follow through with corresponding action.

What does that mean for you in quite concrete terms as you pray “Give us today our daily bread”?

Problems of world hunger are so overwhelming that we are tempted to think like the disciples: “send them away” (out of sight, out of mind) or, like the rich man: “send Lazarus from beyond the grave to warn my brothers” (“God, you fix things up in a miraculous way”).

How do you cope with the knowledge that millions are starving?

How do you reconcile it with the biblical concept that God provides enough food for everyone?

The problem of the “haves” and the “have-nots” is “rooted in the socioeconomic system of which we all are a part.”

Has the world ever known a system which doesn’t victimize some and privilege others?

Is it possible for humans to come up with such a system? What would it look like? How can you effectively advocate in your context?

The conclusion to the story of the rich man and Lazarus suggests that what we need most is “Moses and the prophets,” i.e., the scriptures. Amos, the great advocate for social justice, prophesies “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” (Am 8:11)

Is there a risk for some Christians that they are so concerned about the problem of world hunger that they overlook the importance of feeding on the “Bread of Life”?



From the Philippines

Hymn

This land of beauty has been given

♩ = 88

DUMAGUETE, Elena G. Maquiso: Philippines



1. This land of beaut - y has been giv - en by God our Fa - ther, full of
2. The self - ish peo - ple, and not mind - ful, the few, will claim the land to
3. The far - mer longs for whole - some liv - ing with food to eat and e - nough
4. Poor far - mers have a right to this land. Pos - ses - sion ac - cents their well -



mer - cy. Its love - li - ness has been in - tend - ed for eve - ry one and all the
own, de - prive the man - y poor and need - y who live in want and al - ways
cloth - ing, a bet - ter house, to live in com - fort with things to use in - side the
be - ing. For here are hopes for bright - er fu - tures, a bet - ter life, re - ward for



peo - ple, and each one claims the right - ful por - tion, a
suf - fer. And when this hap - pens there is con - flict, for
dwell - ing, his child to have a bright to - mor - row, when
striv - ing. And to the wealth - y, we im - plore you vast



piece of land one proud - ly owns. This her - i - tage so full of
hate and bit - ter - ness pre - vail. Re - la - tion - ships will be found
he can pro - vide ed - u - ca - tion, pa - ren - tal hap - pi - ness his
por - tions of your land to share. The poor have more need for it,



pro - mise, this land was pur - posed for us all.
want - ing, and hap - pi - ness will pass them by.
feel - ing, and kind - ly neigh - bor's love a - round.
tru - ly; the right to land is for us all.

Words and Music © Elena G. Maquiso



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Devotion

“God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.”

Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Fourth Petition (Kolb translation)

“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging

us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints...”

(2 Cor 8:1-4)

Doors can shut people in or out.

They can also facilitate two-way traffic and enhance communication.

Prayer

Gracious God,

Open the gates that imprison.

Fling wide the doors that welcome.

Amen

Feature

Thailand – Australia: Partnership spanning oceans

In a field near the village of Ban Napong, in far northeast Thailand, Brang and Min are harvesting their first crop of green vegetables. They're excited. These young people are doing something that has never been done here before. Their parents or grandparents never grew vegetable crops on a large scale. There was never enough money to buy that much seed.

So Brang, Min and their fellow villagers are literally breaking new ground. They are players in a new project and partnership that is bringing hope for sustainable food production and livelihoods to the people of Ban Napong and neighboring villages.

The Lua' people of the remote Nan Province belong to a minority cultural group originating across the border in Laos. During and following the Vietnam War, many Lua' families sought refuge in Thailand and settled in the mountainous areas of the Nan Province, where they have maintained languages, traditions and practices quite distinct from those of ethnic Thais.



Brang and Min harvest the first crop of green vegetables for their Lua' community at Ban Napong in far north-eastern Thailand. The seed project is supported by a congregation in Australia. © Simon Mackenzie

Traditionally mountain dwellers, they form part of the multicultural, multilingual group known in Thailand and neighboring countries as “hill tribes”. Widely promoted as a tourist attraction, some hill tribes have discovered that the surest way to ensure their economic survival is to open their villages to camera-toting tourists.

Government programs are assisting some hill tribes to develop sustainable and ethical ways of

making a living, predominantly by growing cash crops. In the Nan Province the Lua' people are able to use government land on which to grow crops, but they have no experience growing vegetables or with agricultural practices such as crop rotation. They need to learn, however, and quickly, or they risk starvation. Over the past few years, crop failure rates in their mountain rice fields have been very high. The inability of hill tribe parents to feed their families is a primary reason so many children end up as sex workers in Bangkok and beyond. The Lua' people wanted to help themselves and protect their children's future, but they needed a helping hand.

Some 8,000 kilometers southeast of the Nan Province is the stylish resort town and international tourist mecca, Noosa, home to some of Australia's most pristine beaches. The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) congregation at Noosa supports the local people by providing the funds necessary to purchase vegetable seed. This year, the villagers in four of the neediest communities were able to plant various types of garlic and brassica (mustard) and leafy vegetables such as bok choy and spinach.

Rev. Dr Ulf Metzner, a member at the Noosa congregation and former LCA director of World Mission, said that, although the congregation was already active in local missions, it wanted to be involved with a community overseas. “The personal connection with a community is important in order to build the partnership and relationship over the years,” he said.

Over the last decade or so, partnerships between the LCA and southeast Asian churches, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand, have been strengthening and, in some cases, direct links have been made between Australian congregations and schools and southeast Asian congregations, schools or projects.

Glenice Hartwich, LCA Board for Mission project officer, believes these partnerships are mutually beneficial. One party is not the giver and the other the receiver; both are givers and both are receivers. “As followers of Jesus Christ we are connected ... In the body of Christ, we cannot live in isolation from each other.”

The theme of the day

The community that prays

In the first part of the Bible study today it became evident that the Lord's Prayer is for all people—for all of God's creatures in need of nourishment. In the second part of the Bible study, the story of the "rich man" and Lazarus illustrated the sobering fact that among that entire group of praying creatures, there are those who live in luxury as well as those who suffer extreme poverty. We sing God's praises for the love that welcomes all of us—both rich and poor—but we lament before God the wounds that have been inflicted on our communities. So now we gather as brothers and sisters in Christ to share our experiences and to seek guidance as we strive to find better ways to be God's people in the world.

Village Group 1: Good soil – Clean water

Climate Change

Getting our bearings

What did you hear this morning? What spoke to you most meaningfully? What questions arose in your mind as you participated in the life of the community this morning?

➤ Please take a few minutes to summarize your experience.

The community facing climate change

There is little doubt now: we are experiencing weather fluctuations of a magnitude that indicates an alarming trend. According to the calculations of climatologists, it will be getting hotter in some areas of the world, colder in others, and the weather for the foreseeable future will be more turbulent and unpredictable everywhere. The questions before us are these: Can the trend still be reversed or at least slowed down? How long will it last, how quickly will it crest, and how severe will it get? The experts are divided on such questions, but it would be foolish to ignore their warning. Some predict that low-lying

areas on the globe (e.g. Bangladesh) will be flooded out, that some southern countries will become unbearably hot; and that northern areas (e.g. North America and Siberia) will get warmer, with longer growing seasons, making it possible to grow new varieties of crops there. Many people, they say, will be on the move, most likely in a northerly direction. All of us, they say, will be severely affected by the change.

➤ What do you think? What scientific information has reached you? Do you consider it reliable, and what has impressed you most about it? Please share your stories and impressions.

Our common responsibility

We are led to believe that human activity is a significant cause of these upheavals. Although we all bear the consequences for the harm done to the environment, we are obviously not all equally responsible for its causes. Those of us who are the stronger, the wealthier, the more powerful—precisely because they *are* powerful—are likely to do greater harm. In the words of Lord Acton: "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"—a warning for all of us, including those who are sure that they are *not* powerful or "rich."

➤ Please talk together about this: Is it fair that the Dalits should bear such a heavy share of the burden of climate change? How can one justify jeopardizing the health of Peruvians (and others) by inviting the pollution caused by fossil fuel extraction? How can one compensate the Inuit whose way of life is threatened by the soot that is settling on the northern ice cap and causes its rapid thawing?

Some argue that it would be no more than just to require those who caused the pollution to pay a carbon tax to help those who are left to live under unhealthy conditions caused by pollution. The former Leader of the Opposition in Canada actually did propose precisely such a "carbon tax" on the use of fossil fuel—and

lost the election largely (it is said) for that very reason.

The common ground on which we stand

We all belong to that inclusive community of wealthy and destitute people who pray together for daily bread. How can we help one another to translate the solidarity we profess into a willingness to bear one another's burdens, and to do so gladly?

Signs of hope?

Have you seen evidence that farmers and city folk, small producers and ordinary consumers, leaders in business and industry, women and men are beginning to meet together to deliberate how life may be made more humane for all? Are there indications of an emerging political will to action? Do you know of politicians who are willing to stake their political future on just causes? How can one support their efforts?

Village Group 2: Sowing

Advocacy

Getting our bearings

What did you hear this morning? What spoke to you most meaningfully? What questions arose in your mind as you participated in the life of the community this morning?

- Please take a few minutes to summarize your experience.

What is advocacy?

The word advocacy usually carries the connotation of interceding for someone with the intention of bringing about an improvement of conditions and circumstances. Intercessory prayer might well be the best example of advocacy. Advocacy is near to the very heart of discipleship. Actually, it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that discipleship is advocacy: interceding on behalf of

others. Advocacy calls for open eyes and a sensitive spirit to empathize with one's sisters and brothers in their joys and in their pains, and so to engage with them in their struggles and in their celebrations.

- You may wish to share with each other what you understand by the word "advocacy" and how you see it being used in the context of Christian discipleship. Does the word imply that one person is the helper and the other the helped person, or do you think that both parties in advocacy may be both helping and being helped? Could you explain?

The disciples as advocates

The disciples in our Bible story this morning interceded for the crowd of listeners that had been with Jesus for a long time already. The people in the crowd were now tired and hungry. Obviously, the disciples were unsure about what to do about all the growling stomachs. That helpless feeling is evidently part and parcel of advocacy. The advocate often feels very inadequate in the face of the need that calls for attention. All she (or he) usually understands is that there are people in pain and someone should speak out about it, even if only with groans too deep for words (cf. Rom 8:22ff.)

- Would you mind sharing with your neighbors around the table how you have sometimes felt an intense desire to help someone in a crisis, but you felt inadequate, unprepared, to do anything that would be helpful? Please describe your experience and what you did about it.

Advocates give people a "boost"

Jesus gave the disciples to understand that, limited as their resources were, with his help they could do something significant to enable the hungry to survive in the desert country until they could find an open store somewhere the next day or so. Similarly, the friends of Lazarus interceded for him, by placing him at a spot where a meaningful encounter

with a potential donor was at least a possibility. Sometimes seemingly little things like that can make all the difference.

An advocate does not necessarily become responsible for the long-term care of the person for whom he or she advocates. Were that the case, then the person in need would become a dependent of the advocate, and that could lead to loss of his or her dignity and self-respect. One could say that the Good Samaritan took on the role of advocate for the person who was beaten up along the way. The advocate offers not a "hand-out" but a "hand-up." What is needed is a boost, so to speak, to help the afflicted back up on their feet (compare Gal 6:1).

- You may wish to spend some time talking together about this. What possibilities for advocacy can you see in your community and in the world? Have you heard about the possibility of giving a pair of goats to a small family in Africa to help them get started on the road to self-sufficiency? Do you know about the opportunity to extend "micro-credit" for instance, to help a woman establish a sewing shop to earn her own living? You may know a lot of stories like that. Please tell us about them.

Advocacy as power to persuade

Advocacy can be a valuable tool for applying group pressure against obstacles that prevent help from reaching the people who are most in need of it. One might say that such advocacy is benevolent power exerted against oppressive powers. Here is an example of the use of such advocacy.

There are well over two hundred million Dalits in the world. They are the so-called "untouchables" or "outcastes" who, because of their birth, are assigned to the status below the lowest caste rank in their social structure. They are assigned the dirtiest work and receive next to no payment for their services. Their marginalization has been called one of the most "brutal and systematic forms of discrimination."

One of the most effective tools for bringing justice to the Dalits is for as many people as possible to speak out as persuasively as possible, crying for justice for the Dalits. Like the trumpets of Jericho, so the non-violent cry of advocacy can bring walls crumbling down.

- Please talk about this. What do you think of advocacy? Where can you see possibilities for advocacy?

A voice of faith and hope:

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . . I was in prison and you visited me.” (Mt 25:35-36).

Village Group 3: Growth – Harvest

Fair trade

Getting our bearings

What did you hear this morning? What spoke to you most meaningfully? What questions arose in your mind as you participated in the life of the community this morning?

- Please take a few minutes to summarize your experience.

Why do we trade?

The matter can be stated succinctly. When some of us have more than enough apples, while others have more than enough oranges, it makes good sense for them to exchange the excess apples for the excess oranges. When this is done between friends and neighbors, money does not usually enter the picture. The bottom line is not to make a profit, but to enhance each others’ enjoyment of life.

- Would you talk about this for a while? Does anyone remember when neighbors used to exchange carrots for tomatoes, eggs for butter, or potatoes for apples? How did

that work? What was good about that arrangement and what was not? Is this pattern of trading still possible today? Is it desirable? Depending on where you live on this earth, this may still be a preferred way of trading. It will be exciting to hear one another’s stories.

Trading today

Today the connection between consumer and producer tends to be quite remote and difficult to trace. The produce travels through the hands of shippers, refiners, wholesalers and merchants before it gets to the consumer. Along the way, the producer and the consumer are often lost sight of. An increase of two cents in the amount of the wheat that is required to produce a loaf of bread may end up raising the cost of the loaf by ten times that much. The producer gets next to no benefit from such a price increase, while for the consumer the price increase may make the difference between buying or not buying bread.

But that is only the beginning. The relationship between producer and consumer tends to become quite impersonal when goods cross international boundaries. At that point protectionist national interests usually come into play, resulting in frequently controversial trade regulations. For the ordinary person such rules can be extremely confusing. Yet if farmers and their customers want to have a voice in the economic and political arena, they must have at least a basic understanding of how the economy works.

- Can you spend a little time discussing these matters? Do the producers and consumers in your country have easy access to the necessary education in economics to enable them to play a significant part when the future of agriculture in their land is at stake? Do they know about trade regulations, subsidies, tariffs, duties and the like, and do they know when any of these measures are to their country’s advantage or disadvantage? Are there some “experts” in this Village Group who can enlighten the rest of us?

Christian principles in the market place?

The world of finance and trade can be disorienting. People in a well-off country might expect that by selling their surplus grain cheaply on the export market, bread would become more available and affordable in the place of hunger. However, the availability of cheaper produce from abroad would inevitably create competition with the local farming population. To stay competitive, these local farmers would then be compelled to lower their already meager prices to the point where farming would cease to be a viable occupation. The farmers would have no option but to leave the land altogether, thus leading to rural depopulation and still greater unemployment. In the end, the country one had hoped to help will actually be the loser. It would lose its agricultural base and become still more dependent on cheap foreign imports.

- Can you add some stories of your own to the above?

The consumer’s dilemma

You have no doubt heard comments like the following. A university student in a Canadian city: “I don’t want to buy the cheapest imports at the [trademark] store, but I am a student, and I must live on a tight budget.” A father of five in the Amazon: “I don’t want to plant my vegetables in soil that has just been cleared of rain forest trees, but I have to feed my growing family.”

- Will you talk about this? How can we ensure that in matters of trade the Lazarus at the gate will not always be ignored? Would you be willing to pay a somewhat higher price for your food if you could be sure that the difference would enable the producer to continue to make a living?

Signs of hope?

Can you report experiences of people engaged in fair trade? Do you know of politicians who are willing to stake their political future on fair trade principles?

Testimony of faith

“But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.”

Lk 22:26

Village Group 4: Processing what is harvested

Agricultural practices

Getting our bearings

What did you hear this morning?
What spoke to you most meaningfully?
What questions arose in your mind
as you participated in the life of the
community this morning?

- Please take a few minutes to summarize your experience.

Sustainability of agricultural practices

The sustainability of human life on this planet has many facets, having to do with food, health, social relationships, psychological make-up, and (not by any means least) spiritual foundations. In this session we will need to restrict ourselves to discussing the sustainability only of agricultural practices.

Can we survive for long on this earth, given our present way of sowing, growing, harvesting, processing and distributing agricultural products? This is not an idle question. We have only been using these practices for less than a century, and already there is evidence of serious repercussions.

- What does your collective wisdom “predict?” Can you give us some samples?

What do we mean by “sustainable?”

We hope that humanity will be around for thousands of years and can learn to manage its resources indefinitely. All parents, one assumes, intend to leave the world a better place than what they themselves inherited.

They dream of their children and grandchildren enjoying a better life than what they themselves have had. To accomplish that end, humanity would need to do better than to spend its resources gradually. We would even have to do better than just replenishing or restoring every ounce of resource that has been spent. We would be called upon to augment the reserves that presently exist. This would be an enormous challenge to accomplish.

- Would you like to talk about this together? When it comes to the sustainability of agricultural practices, what goals are reasonably realistic for us to aim for?

Imminent threats

What practices need to be reduced or eliminated if we want to achieve sustainability? The list is very long, by now. Arable land is being lost due to leeching of nutrients, pulverization of the soil and desertification due to overcropping and overworking the land. Forests are being lost due to clear cutting and the conversion of forests to arable land. The water level is sinking due to overuse by industry (particularly mining) and agriculture (irrigation and raising of livestock). Much of agricultural land is being poisoned by the use and overuse of herbicides and pesticides.

Much of the natural biodiversity of the environment gets lost by the increase of monoculture farming and the draining of wetlands. The natural biodiversity of the land is in danger of disappearing due to the preference for restricting oneself to raising monocultures. The ocean’s fish stock is endangered by commercial overfishing.

All of these potential losses will have direct impact on human life and society.

- Would you like to add anything to the list or subtract from it?
- How do you assess the level of threat and the possibility of recovery? If we humans are part of the problem, can we also be part of the solution? If so, how?

Possibilities for recovering

This list is much shorter than the preceding one. Water can be recycled, the air can be “scrubbed.”

Fish can be restocked, but it will be a huge and laborious task to do so. Instead of fossil fuel, there is the possibility of renewable energy to be gained from wind, sun, and hydro (although most of the rivers have already been dammed). Forests can be replanted, but it takes many years to achieve any lasting effect.

- Can you add to this list? Do you see the need for deleting items from this list, or questioning their potential?

Signs of hope?

A lot of progress has been made in the area of conservation. For example, farmers are switching to the use of air seeders that place the seed directly into the soil without additional plowing (and consequent loss of moisture). Particularly near-desert countries (like Israel, Egypt) have developed elaborate ways of covering vegetables with foil that reduces evaporation. Similarly, the use of “trickle watering” by supplying slow drip-water directly to the roots of plants is in widespread use in Africa and elsewhere.

- What would you like to add to this list, and what needs to be deleted or questioned?

A forgotten item?

The question needs to be asked. What happens if the population of the world should increase at the rate at which it has been growing during the past century? Some of us can recall when the world housed only one sixth of the present number of inhabitants.

- What are your thoughts on such matters? Tells us your stories, please.

The voice of faith

“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains

covenant loyalty . . . to a thousand generations . . .” Deut 7:9

Village Group 5: **Breaking the bread – Sharing solidarity**

Justice in gender relationships

Getting our bearings

➤ Let us take a few minutes to reflect on what we have heard and seen this morning as we worshipped, prayed, sang and studied the word. What thoughts went through your mind? What (if anything) struck you as new and exciting and worthy of further reflection?

Women’s voices and experiences

This is a good opportunity for women to tell and for all of us to hear their stories. What are some of the greatest joys women have experienced in their daily life, their places of work, their professions, their roles in church and society? But we also need to hear about the pain of women and women’s ongoing disappointments. Only so can we come to a more adequate understanding of where the Holy Spirit is leading us as sisters and brothers in Christ. What do women encounter as ordained pastors in the church? Have women achieved greater gender justice in society? Are there doors opening for women in the various levels of social and economic power structures? Can one claim that violence against women is on the decline?

The changing and challenging scene

It is (or should be) a matter of great joy to learn that the fortune of women in society has changed for the

better in many places throughout the world. It has been for far too long that women have been taken for granted and even regarded as second-class citizens. We doubtlessly agree that we will all be the better off if and when women and men regard each other as equals and work together in true partnership. The LWF has committed itself to keep working toward that goal. The implementation of a 50/50 gender balance at all levels of the organization is but one example of an ongoing commitment.

In many countries the role of women is still quite traditional. Women are valued for their fertility, as mothers, as growers of food, preparers of meals, domestic workers and as carriers of water. They tend to be judged on the basis of their physical appearance. But is this situation beginning to change? Can women frequently and successfully reject such stereotypes and assert their basic human rights? What proportion of women, can one say, are becoming educated, train in a profession (such as doctors and lawyers), take jobs, drive cars, wear comfortable clothes, move into cities and own property. It is no doubt fair to say that in far too many countries there is still a long way to go, but are there hopeful signs of improvement?

Interpreting biblical stories

Much of our life is governed by convention, by tradition. This gives stability to society, but it can also prove to be a hindrance, preventing the adoption of more humane, more gospel-centered ways of dealing with one another. The church is a great protector of tradition and that is not always helpful. Often the church simply adopted and entrenched the rules of secular society which regarded women as submissive to their husbands. The church often even insisted that the Bible supports not only the submission of women to men, but also the practice of slavery. We need

to be careful to distinguish between such baggage and the freedom of the gospel. A responsible reading of the Bible must be sensitive to what roles women play there as defenders of justice, as sources of wisdom and as leaders and reformers of society. The Bible has many women’s stories that have not been central in the church’s proclamation. How can one read these stories so that women are no longer marginalized but are freed to move forward with courage and dignity?

➤ Can we talk about how we can learn to distinguish between the voice of the gospel and the noise of secular society?

The need for mutual encouragement and support—seeking gender justice

For the betterment of the status of women it is essential that the ways in which women and men traditionally related to one another undergo significant transformation. How can we ensure that oppressive or demeaning models of relating to one another as women and men give way to models in which the male and female share responsibilities as equals in the home, the church, and in society?

Such thoughts can make some men uncomfortable. Might they regard such developments as a threat to their masculinity, as a sign of their failure to earn an adequate living? We need to hear from the men, too. What are their concerns in these matters?

➤ Would you like to talk about this, now asking the men to help us better understand their perspectives?

➤ What do you think? What can help women and men become equal partners who support each other’s development and in doing so, discover a new level of freedom for all?



A staple food

Rice

“Know you that your bowl of rice each grain from hardship comes?” (Chinese saying)

Rice is the grain with the second highest worldwide production after corn/maize, and probably the most important cereal for human nutrition and caloric intake. It provides more than one fifth of the calories that human beings consume worldwide.

Rice cultivation is very labor-intensive and is well suited to regions with high rainfall, as it requires plenty of water. The traditional method of cultivation is flooding during or after setting the young seedlings.

Mature rice seeds are milled to remove the chaff and the resulting brown rice can be processed further to eliminate the remaining husk and germ, thereby creating white rice. Raw rice can be ground into flour; processed rice seeds must be boiled or steamed before eating. Cooked rice may be further fried in oil or butter.

Rice cultivation is said to date as far back as 10,000 years, when growing techniques spread throughout south and southeast Asia. Today, more than 1 billion men and women spend most of their lives doing little more than growing enough rice to keep alive.

That history has nurtured a special consciousness about rice in many Asian societies. In some parts of the continent, the word for rice is the same as that for food, agriculture or even life itself.