



# PHP POST

Winter 2014 | Presbyterian Hunger Program | [pcusa.org/hunger](http://pcusa.org/hunger)

Just Advent

## For Which Christmas Are You Preparing?

Rev. Ellie Stock, Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy, St. Louis, MO

Advent is a time of preparing for Christmas. The question is: for which Christmas are you preparing and how? In 1998, The Rev. William Paul, Mission Staff for Pittsburgh Presbytery, concerned with the growing trivialization of Christmas wrote an editorial, "The Three Christmases." The first is the Christmas of Santa and Society: lights, decorations, feasts, shopping, hustle and bustle, Christmas trees, the commercial bottom line—fun but superficial, often numbing us to deeper needs and blinding us to the season's larger meaning. The second is the Christmas of Faith and Family:

*"Vigils... disclosed hard-to-face truths of community members who feel economically exploited, racially profiled, harassed, and hopeless regarding the future."*

tradition, memories, fireplace gatherings with family and friends, candlelight services, carols, and pageants with baby Jesus. Its theme is love, and its gift is hope; but the warm feeling invoked is incomplete unless it leads to a larger truth. The third is the Christmas of Mary and Messiah, the advent of one who provokes Herod and stands up to Pilot and other despots who prefer that

God not meddle in human affairs, which unnerves us as well. This is the Christmas of justice, truth and love in our world, where we frequently find ourselves standing in the way. Mary said: *He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty...* (Luke 1:46-53)

My husband and I are involved in an ecology ministry with our presbytery congregations and in our local area of Ferguson, MO—does that name ring a bell? We live in and served a congregation in Dellwood, a small municipality surrounded on three sides by Ferguson, and we have been members of the Ferguson Ministerial Alliance and the Ferguson Ecology Team. We use businesses and services in Ferguson. Children in our area go to Ferguson schools.

Ferguson began as a train depot center northwest of St. Louis in 1850 and incorporated in 1894. It is now a town of 21,000 mixed-income residents, century homes, parks, an award-winning Farmer's Market, EarthDance organic farm, a community college, library, churches, a new community center, and interracial block meetings. It could be anywhere, U.S.A.

A first ring suburb, Ferguson was an area of a great demographic shift beginning in the 1970s when illegal real estate redlining and later disproportionate numbers of Section 8 housing, "steered" African Americans north from St. Louis City, and sent much

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Out of a deep hunger to participate in the processes that affect them, the protesters and others are proclaiming truth to powers that be. In this season of peace on earth, they chant: NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE. Words on a wooden cross memorial where Michael Brown died read: Love your neighbor as you would love yourself—that is the unconditional Love and Hope of Emmanuel, God With Us, now in this season of Advent.

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## Letter From the Coordinator

By Ruth Farrell, Coordinator, Presbyterian Hunger Program

In the fall of 1986 when Hunter and I lived in France, we got to know three fellow students from Libya. They were devout Muslims who knew a lot about Jesus and had read a lot about Christianity. They were very curious about North American Christians because our country had bombed Tripoli and Benghazi earlier that year and they were trying to understand how a Christian nation could kill so many innocent people. In December at our last meal together, they arrived with a gift. A gift they said they had carefully selected to honor our high Holy Day, Christmas. You can imagine our surprise when we opened a chocolate Santa Claus.

In “For Which Christmas Are You Preparing?” Rev. Ellie Stock writes about three Christmases. I thought of our Libyan friends when I read about the Christmas of Santa and Society. This indeed may be what “outsiders” see when they look at the way we North Americans celebrate Christ’s birth. But we in the church celebrate the Christmas of Faith and Family with includes traditions like Santa as well as religious traditions and meaning and assume “outsiders” see the differences. And yet, Rev. Stock’s article challenges us further. If we celebrated the Christmas

of Mary and Messiah, what then would “outsiders” see?

You can’t have a Christmas of Mary and Messiah without Advent and Epiphany. This PHP Post offers an opportunity to look into the mirror to see what others see. What do children from Central America crossing the border see? And, why are they making that dangerous trek? What do family farmers in Bolivia see? Why are some Presbyterian pastors going to the U.N. Climate Talks during Advent?

As our society begins the holidays (Thanksgiving thru New Year’s Day) our church begins the holidays (Advent through Epiphany). We have one foot in church and one foot in our society and its culture. How do we manage both? This PHP Post offers some practical suggestions for Black Friday, an Advent resource, alternative giving opportunities as well as activities for the 12 days after Christmas leading to Epiphany.

May the reflections, articles and suggestions strengthen each of us in becoming the church who celebrates the Christmas of Mary and Messiah.

### Staff Spotlight

Jennifer Evans, Administrative Assistant



When I joined the Presbyterian Hunger Program in January 2012, I had no idea of the shift in awareness and the complete lifestyle change I was about to undergo. I went from eating junk food (more than I care to mention) to seeking out local farmers markets, and even to meeting the farmer who grew my food and now buying organic. I’m thankful for the work of PHP personally because there is no doubt that it has changed the trajectory of health and wellness for me and my family.

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## Leaving or Staying: Risking it All

Kristi Van Nostran, Mission Co-worker, Companionship Facilitator, RUMES, JH El Salvador

“Buenas noches,” said the voice on the other end of the phone. It took me a minute to recognize the polite and timid tone. It was Jose (not his real name,) a young man whose family I have become close to at church. “Sorry to bother you this late,” he continued, “but I wanted to talk to you about something important – I’m considering going north.”

My heart sank.

“You know what it’s like in my neighborhood,” he said. “Gracias a Dios I don’t have problems with anyone right now, but *They* know I don’t have work and it’s just a matter of time before *They* start asking me to “do favors”. That’s a business that I don’t want to get into.” Jose paused. “Once you’re in, there’s no way out.”

“Countless obstacles hinder the Central American dream of earning a dignified living and enjoying the company of family and friends in secure and peaceful communities...”

I did know what it was like in Jose’s neighborhood, a marginal community built on the side of a ravine at the San Salvador city limits, and he was right. They – the local clique or cell group of one of the major street gangs – control the area. Despite a large and well-staffed police post in the center of the neighborhood, it is known that drugs, weapons and cash move in and



A partnership delegation from Highland Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, PA spends the day with children and youth from the rural community of Rosario de Mora. This group’s ministry of presence offers support and encouragement for families who struggle to send their children to school and keep them from being recruited into a gang lifestyle.

out of the community with relative ease. Surrounded by this pervasive culture of illicit activity, it’s nothing short of a miracle that Jose and his family have remained reasonably untouched as long as they have.

I wept silently and listened as he shared his fears and frustrations. He told me of the conversation with a coyote who could help him cross the border in a semi-truck for the fee of \$6,000. Jose would have to pay half up front and the other half upon arrival, payment of which had been promised by a cousin living in Houston.

I felt so helpless to respond. He had clearly given this a lot of thought; what could I possibly say that might discourage him from this decision? When your reality includes 16-year-old boys going missing, never to be seen or heard from again, and 13-year-old girls impregnated as a means to claim them as gang “property”, somehow the dangers, expense and lack of guarantee associated with making the journey north seem like the better of bad options.

As heart-wrenching as it is, stories like Jose’s are not uncommon. Still, much

of the discussion is centered on the conditions that cause children, youth and families to migrate, and whether or not the insecurity and violence, economic strife, impoverishment and hunger they face in their countries of origin justifies being received as refugees or asylum-seekers upon arrival at the southern border of the United States. The media has also focused on the ongoing political debate surrounding the surge of young and unaccompanied migrants, and the immigration policies to be reformed or enacted in response to this crisis. But the exodus of tens of thousands of Central American children and families is much more than a border emergency or a humanitarian crisis, and meanwhile politicians on all sides are posturing, the least of these, our sisters and brothers continue to suffer – in the desert, in detention centers, as deportees.

Countless obstacles hinder the Central American dream of earning a dignified living and enjoying the company of family and friends in secure and peaceful communities, compelling many to opt for the Hollywood version of an American

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# Journey with Us: Climate of Conflict trip to Peru

Rebecca Barnes, Associate, PHP

In early December, a number of Presbyterians from across the country will be saying good-bye to family members and friends for a week-long journey in Peru. We will pack flannel pajamas for the low temperatures at night, perhaps a prescription for altitude sickness, and also tuck in attitudes to keep an open heart, mind, and spirit—ready to be transformed by the people and places of God's creation that we are about to experience.

This Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) reflection-action trip hopes to help Presbyterians committed to environmental, energy and climate justice to know more about, and stand in solidarity with, our partners on the ground in Peru who are battling extractive mines, glacier melt, and other social-environmental areas of concern, such as lead poisoning in children. We will look at root causes of hunger, poverty and environmental destruction, all of which are linked one to the other. We will watch as the major leaders of the world gather in Lima for the United Nations' Conference on the Parties (COP-20, and yes, that means they've been at these meetings for 20 years running). We will march for the climate in Lima in December as many Presbyterians marched in New York City in September. We will think and pray and make friends and raise our voices.

We ask for God's guidance and courage and grace to act in our individual and corporate lives for justice for all people and parts of God's creation. And, we invite you to join us, from your own home and congregation.

Will you journey with us?

- Will you pray for us? That we may be healthy, safe, challenged, and



Doe Run smelting facility in La Oroya.

transformed? We will be traveling to mining and glacier sites, attending an Environmental Youth Summit (with Joining Hands Peru and Bolivia network youth) and a conference on climate change as part of the People's Summit outside the UN meeting. We are a group of about 20 PCUSA members traveling to Peru where we will meet up with the Joining Hands network hosts in Peru and the Joining Hands youth summit participants coming from Bolivia.

- Will you read about our journey as we take turns blogging at [www.pcusa.org/blogs/eco-journey](http://www.pcusa.org/blogs/eco-journey)?
- Will you follow the UN conversations in Lima at <http://www.cop20.pe/en?>
- Will you ask the President and the Congress to make faithful climate policies, as we build momentum towards COP 21 (in Paris, in 2015): <http://bit.ly/10loOqO>

- Will you sign a pledge to take climate action in your personal life: [www.faithclimatepetition.org/pledge-to-action.html](http://www.faithclimatepetition.org/pledge-to-action.html)

Thank you for the things you do in your own home and life and church to care for God's creation, to connect the local to the global, and to maintain relationships with people and places different from you. May God bless all our efforts to examine root causes of injustice and to respond as God calls!

## » LEARN MORE

### Reflection-Action Trips

[www.pcusa.org/trips](http://www.pcusa.org/trips)

### Environmental Ministries

[www.pcusa.org/environment](http://www.pcusa.org/environment)

### Joining Hands

[www.pcusa.org/joininghands](http://www.pcusa.org/joininghands)

# Black Friday: Shedding Light in a Dark Place

Bryce Wiebe, Associate, PHP (Article originally appeared in the November 2013 issue. Republished by popular demand.)

It's been called the largest shopping day of the year with flashing lights and stacks of glossy paper demanding your attention promising sales of immense proportions. Retailers, in preparation for the gift-giving season, engage in a "race to the bottom" on the prices of flashy items in the hopes that you and I will spend more money on more stuff without really realizing it, and all the while feeling like we are the beneficiaries in the end, even if those purchases weren't things we actually needed.

It seems like a good deal: Gifts for everyone on your list at rock bottom prices. What's more, the rhetoric of black Friday suggests that it will fuel the entire global economy for the year, pushing retailers and manufacturers from the "red" (debt) to the "Black" (profit). Our efforts on Black Friday will not only benefit us through our savings, but shopping and spending will be a vote for the common welfare so we are told. We're all in this together. Shop 'til you drop!

And every Black Friday people do shop, 89 million last year with more and more stores, and more and more people, creeping their shopping earlier and earlier. Some 35 million people began their shopping on Thanksgiving day, and that number has increased with each passing year. Some families have forgone the meal around the table altogether, opting instead for turkey legs in a tent outside the nearest big box store. Good sense and courtesy are suspended as shoppers engage in their own "race to the bottom" of civility.

There are different paths other than the one with bumper to bumper traffic, leading to loud and aggressive parking lots where mobs of people push and shove their way to the best deal. There are paths that promise a greater connection to the people and places where goods are produced, rather than obscuring the relationship we have with the Earth and

the people all over the world who work for little money in sometimes dangerous conditions to make the things we buy. There are paths that acknowledge our connections, reduce our stress, honor and reward work, and witness to God's economy of abundance and justice.

## Paths for more light on Black Friday:

1. Avoid it altogether. After a day focused on family, food, and gratitude, spend time with family or friends playing games or working on a group project.
2. Make a gift giving plan with a group of people and add a fun or interesting twist. Drawing names within groups can limit the number of gifts and the expense, and giving gifts that are home-made, locally made, or from second hand sources will generate more fulfilling experiences.
3. Try limiting your shopping to fair-trade only goods. There are many places to choose from and fair trade ensures that a living wage is paid to those who do the work of making the gifts you buy. It also introduces you to the people and stories behind those products. You can look for artisans through the Presbyterian Global Marketplace at [www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace).
4. Try one of the options in the Presbyterian Giving Catalog. (See page 8.)

If you must venture out to the stores on black Friday, you can do a few things to help stay connected to the relationships established through shopping as well as the gratitude engendered by Thanksgiving Day.

1. Say a prayer. In it, restate all the things for which you are grateful. Include your fellow shoppers, the people who must work on this day, and those whose time and hard work went into making the products you buy, often at very low wages.
2. Make it a point to make eye contact and smile at fellow shoppers.
3. Do most of your shopping at a locally-owned and operated business.
4. Say "thank you" to the workers at the stores you visit. Most likely their day is stressful and difficult, and many do not have an option of taking the day off to be with their families. Let them know that you appreciate their work.

Each and every time we buy and sell, we participate in a large and complex web of relationships to your time and money, to retailers, their employees and suppliers, to the importers, brokers, manufacturers along the way and, finally, to the workers who make, and the Earth that provides resources. This black Friday and this Christmas, we can shop and spend in a way that enacts justice in those relationships and deepens our connections with the Earth and the workers, our neighbors and ourselves.



# 12 Days of Christmas: Living

*During Advent, you may use a daily calendar or devotional resource (such as PHP's Environmental Ministries Advent calendar at [www.pcusa.org/environment](http://www.pcusa.org/environment)) but once Christmas arrives, you may wish to continue to move intentionally through the days. Beyond Advent preparations, buying gifts, preparing holiday meals, spending time with family, and attending special church services, what might occupy your time during the 12 Days of Christmas? Here are a few suggestions of how to keep a practice of gratitude, mindfulness, and faithful response in this holy season.*

## Dec 25

As you open gifts, take time to connect on a personal level with the gift giver (through eye contact or making a phone call or writing a note). Also, keep in mind those who are grieving over the holidays and remember them in prayer or deed. If you have experienced a recent loss yourself, take time to grieve and care for yourself.

*Prayer: God of new life, we give you thanks today for the gift of Christ and for all the people in our lives who are the real gifts behind any tangible object.*

## Dec 26

When leftovers are gone and you've decided to go out to eat, be mindful of and kind to restaurant workers. They may be working through the holidays without earning much income. Take action on raising the Minimum Wage at [capwiz.com/pcusa](http://capwiz.com/pcusa)

*Prayer: We are mindful of those who work in the fields, the processing plants, the restaurants, and grocery stores that help bring food to our tables, even as they themselves may be hurting financially, or even be hungry.*

## Dec 27

Consider how you might serve someone else during these "days of Christmas." Can you find a local food kitchen for volunteering? Is there a friend or family member who could use a visit or helping hand? Is there a part of nature you could better tend?

*Prayer: God bless all those around us and help us to act as vessels of your grace.*

## Dec 28

The holidays can be a lot of work. Yet, they also are good times to claim some Sabbath. Some people bear more of the burden for cooking, cleaning, hosting, arranging, and organizing. Depending on where you are in the balance, offer to share the work by either letting go of responsibilities and resting, or by taking on some responsibilities so another can rest.

*Prayer: Help us all to trust you and each other, O God, so that all may enjoy work and all may enjoy Sabbath.*

## Dec 29

As a sign of renewed hope and joy, decide to take on a new, easy practice that makes a difference in the world, such as taking reusable bags to the grocery store, installing energy efficiency lighting, or taking a bucket bath instead of a shower on occasion.

*Prayer: In this time of abundance and gifts, O God, help us to continue our efforts to give back to the world.*

## Dec 30

In the wake of holiday celebrating and enjoying great food and drink, how much do people across the country get to partake in festivities of abundance? Take action to pass policies that address root causes of hunger and poverty in our nation and in our world. One needed action surrounds the SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. Go to [www.pcusa.org/snapchallenge](http://www.pcusa.org/snapchallenge) to learn more or to host a SNAP challenge in your own community.

*Prayer: God of the poor and hungry, create justice in our society so that the over-indulged take up less resources and the under-served gain some.*



# Intentionally in Christmas-tide

## Dec 31

Will you prepare any special treats for a New Year's celebration? As you plan traditional or fun foods to share, consider buying local foods, using fair trade products, and choosing organic goods. Learn more at [www.pcusa.org/fairtrade](http://www.pcusa.org/fairtrade).



*Prayer: Help us, God of justice, to make good purchasing and food choices so that the earth and all food workers can taste sweetness and experience fullness.*

## Jan 1

Resolve for the New Year to take on a practice of fasting of some kind. While you may choose to actually fast from food and drink, there are also other kinds of fasting. In this new year, you might fast from unnecessary purchases or accumulating possessions (see Black Friday article) or from mindless energy consumption.

*Prayer: God of sufficiency and of abundance, help us to engage our desires and wants by being mindful and intentional about how much we consume and what we can share.*



## Jan 2

Go outside into God's good earth and look around. Look up, look down, breathe in, notice. Give thanks for the amazing gifts of the natural world and pledge to be in good relationship with it this year. Sign the Faithful Action on Climate Change at <http://bit.ly/10loOqO>

*Prayer: God of all Creation, we give you thanks for the beauty, complexity, and witness of the world around us.*

## Jan 3

Plan ahead to Palm Sunday by asking your church to choose Eco-Palms as a way to wave in the Savior of the cosmos. Get ordering information at [www.pcusa.org/ecopalms](http://www.pcusa.org/ecopalms).

*Prayer: In all we do or say or sing in praise of you, O God, may we be mindful of the witness of justice and joy that we can embody.*

## Jan 4

Invite someone you don't know well to join you in an activity you like. Go to a movie or play, or invite them for a meal or to a sporting event you enjoy. At their best, the holidays reconnect us to family and old friends. Start the new year by fostering new, intentional friendships that grow your circle of friends and may introduce you to new experiences.

*Prayer: We thank you, O God, for the chance to reconnect with friends and family. Open our hearts to new relationships as we welcome this new year.*

## Jan 5

Prepare for Epiphany by sharing with others and simplifying your life. Donate used goods to worthwhile local organizations, clearing your house of unnecessary things and re-gifting things you do not need.

*Prayer: Gracious God, help us to let go of old things and trust in your fullness, now and always.*



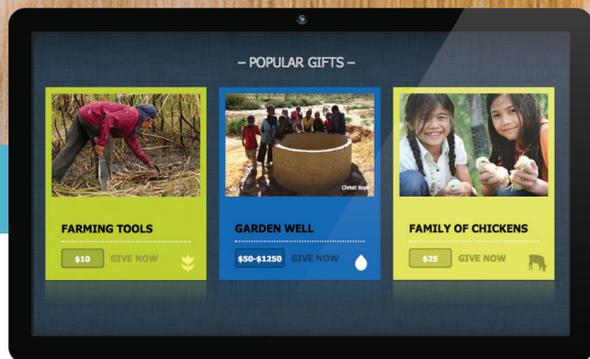
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Christmas, continued from page 1

of the white population fleeing to western suburbs. The 2010 census showed that 67% of the residents are African American, 33% white, percentages not represented in city leadership. The City Manager and Mayor are white, as are all but one Council and one School Board Member. Three of 53 police officers are black.

On August 9, Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teen, was fatally shot by a white Ferguson policeman on a street in his low income Canfield neighborhood, a southeast corner of Ferguson that most people did not know was part of Ferguson. For mixed reasons, his body lay on the street for 4 ½ hours before it was removed. Angry crowds gathered and said his hands were up in surrender when he was shot. Witness reports and rumors mingled. The response of the administration intensified an already present distrust between the African American community and the city of Ferguson. The situation quickly escalated from bad to worse: partial information released, protests, national figures on the scene, riots countered by armored police, non-stop international media coverage, Presidential attention, Department of Justice investigation, and an environment of fear, division and unsettledness.

So, what does this have to do with Advent and Christmas or the “Three Christmases?” The response in Ferguson to the unfolding issues and preparing for the future has been similar to the three levels of Christmas. A first response by some has been denial, anger or the desire to dwell on the superficial: we live in a nice community, a “recreation destination.” Let’s go back to the way things were before August 9 and just enjoy our beautiful, peaceful, inter-racial Rockwellian town—let’s all just get along and be merry.

A second-level response has been the growing dialogue between churches, groups, neighbors, and officials to get to know one another better and to help by collecting food

for the hungry in the area, and to reclaim Ferguson’s good name, using fund-raising projects to support businesses affected by the riots that tarnished Ferguson’s image globally. Vigils, peaceful marches, TV programs, concerts, worship services, teach-ins, and civic meetings disclosed hard-to-

“Out of a deep hunger to participate in the processes that affect them, the protesters and others are proclaiming truth to powers that be.”

face truths of community members who feel economically exploited, racially profiled, harassed, and hopeless regarding the future.

A third-level response has been for the community to look in a mirror, to acknowledge the underlying issues of prejudice, racism, and white privilege that affect the economic, political, and cultural institutions and to move through fear and mistrust to commit to short and long-term actions that will bring systemic change, justice, and equity in Ferguson and beyond. Out of a deep hunger to participate in the processes that affect them, the protesters and others are proclaiming truth to powers that be. Many of these are young leaders, forging this generation’s path of civil rights. In this season of peace on earth, they chant: *NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE*. Words on a wooden cross memorial where Michael Brown died read: *Love your neighbor as you would love yourself*—that is the unconditional Love and Hope of Emmanuel, God With Us, now in this season of Advent, in Ferguson, and throughout creation. Advent and

Christmas are ultimately about living and responding to life at this deepest level. For which Christmas are Ferguson, you, and your community preparing and expending your life and how?

## » MEET THE YAVS

Together with the Office of Public Witness, the Presbyterian Hunger Program welcomes two Young Adult Volunteers to Washington, DC. AmyBeth Willis and Jenny Hyde have just begun a year of service in our nation’s capital. Their public witness ministry will give particular attention to root causes of hunger, poverty and economic inequality. The Office of Public Witness give thanks for this shared ministry with PHP and is excited to work with these outstanding advocates for justice. Learn more about the Office of Public Witness at [www.pcusa.org/washington](http://www.pcusa.org/washington)

*With a passion for social justice that I developed at Emory and after spending a year working with Latino and immigrant communities in Tucson, AZ through the YAV program, I wanted to share my voice of faith on the advocacy and policy level through a second year of YAV service in Washington, D.C. I first felt God’s call to build God’s kingdom through loving service and justice work at 16 and continue to discern how the Spirit is moving in me now. -AmyBeth*



*I have been blessed enough in my life to know that there are many opportunities for other’s lives to be bettered through just leadership and a faithfulness to the common good. I want to be a part of that process, and to be around others who desire the same things for their neighbors around the world. -Jenny*



Learn more at [www.pcusa.org/yav](http://www.pcusa.org/yav)

# In Order to Care for the Earth, We Need to Nourish the Spirit

By Oscar Rea Campos, Foundation for Community Action, UMAVIDA partner

In Bolivia, the city of El Alto, inhabited by mostly Aymaras (Bolivian indigenous group) from dispersed areas of the Bolivian altiplano (high plateau), poverty is a part of daily life, as well as malnourishment.

“On the altiplano, the Pacha Mama (“Mother Earth”) has given us what we need, especially the quinoa (indigenous grain high in protein), but we can no longer consume it”, says Mrs. Juanita, with her sad gaze which extends as far as the altiplano itself.

Quinoa is just one of many traditional foods that Bolivians can no longer afford now that it has become a cash crop for export.

In Bolivia, during the past two decades, family and rural agriculture has been rapidly replaced by industrial agriculture. Today, 48% of the arable land is destined for industrial cultivation, and that percentage is expected to increase in the future.

The International Year of Family Agriculture in Bolivia has generated a legal framework with a new focus on development, even though the priority base for generating economic resources continues to follow extractivism, or extracting as many resources and as much as possible.

The race towards development guides the majority of people towards higher poverty and food insecurity, while it generates large sums of money and comfort for a few. Food no longer provides sustenance for life because it is a lucrative business for some. Those who generate riches with food and those who produce it with the hope of generating income have confused the fertility of Mother Earth with productive yield.



Oscar Rea Campos

With a little creativity and imagination, one can take advantage of all of the different spaces and containers around us to produce healthy food.

Our Mother and our weaker sisters and brothers groan in pain, agonizing over the lack of compassion and respect.

Family, urban horticulture and gardening offer great opportunities to cultivate food, to cultivate tenderness and to cultivate life.

In the city of El Alto, with arid land and cold temperatures, poor families are carrying out urban horticulture with our institution, Foundation for Community Action, a partner organization of the UMAVIDA Network, Joining Hands Bolivia. These families produce 30 species of vegetables in a space of 24 meters<sup>2</sup>. They are contributing a ‘green blanket’ to the Pacha Mama, by providing food for their families and neighbors and generating compassion that nourishes their family relationships and their relationship with their environment.

The principle challenge on this land is to return the fertility to the Mother Earth with vigor, through communal work with the family, and with a lot of love, affection and

respect for this small piece of land. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to recuperate joy and hope. For example, when out of nowhere, the smallest green bud appears, it creates indescribable amazement and happiness for its enormous significance: the birth of new life.

The abundance of vegetables has a direct relationship with the care that is offered to them. The same applies for the Mother Earth.

We have seen that through our work, these families no longer buy vegetables, nor do they consume all that they produce. Their level of savings has increased and they sell some of the surplus; some exchange them, while others donate or share them with even poorer families.

The family garden, this small piece of Pacha Mama, has returned their health to them. Smiles appear on the faces of daughters and sons. “For what else could we ask? We have the most important of all: our food. Food that nourishes our bodies and our spirit.”

*Leaving or Staying, continued from page 3*

dream that is not their own. Not the least of these obstacles are the international policies and trade agreements adopted over the last decade that have proven to stifle holistic and lasting development in countries like El Salvador rather than promote it.

Case in point: the country of El Salvador has spent the better part of the last 5 years, and more than \$7 million, defending its decision to protect water and valuable natural resources from toxic contamination by not extending extraction permits to the transnational company Pacific Rim Mining, recently acquired by Australian company, Oceana Gold. The final hearing in this case was presented last month before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a tribunal of the World Bank in Washington, established under the Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR). Should the tribunal rule against El Salvador's sovereignty over its natural resources, in favor of the rights of the corporation to exploit the environment and extract gold for profit, the Salvadoran state will be obliged to pay the company more than \$300 million for potential lost profits for which the country is being sued.

As it is, the Salvadoran government struggles to budget for healthcare services, education, public security and programs for social welfare. Imagine what would happen if \$300 million of its annual budget disappeared: that's half the annual budget for the Ministry of Health, one-third of the budget for Education, 85% of the budget for the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and more than three times the budget for Agriculture! With Free Trade Agreements significantly limiting the ability of El Salvador to govern responsibly for its citizens, children, families and young people like Jose will have little choice but to leave and seek opportunities elsewhere.



Joining Hands El Salvador Network Coordinator, Doris Evangelista, sharing a message of hope and transformation in an interview on National Day of Action for Food Sovereignty.

But there is hope.

The realization that the national government may have its hands tied with commitments to trade agreements has compelled communities, congregations, grassroots organizations and social justice groups in El Salvador to organize, advocate and act to defend their territories from the bottom up. Just one day before final arguments were presented at the ICSID, the people of San Jose Las Flores, in the Province of Chalatenango, voted overwhelmingly to ban mining at the local level to become the first municipality in El Salvador free from mining, sustained by their municipal code.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program's Joining Hands network in El Salvador, RUMES, utilizes this model of organization, advocacy and action in its work toward guaranteeing food sovereignty and the Human Right to adequate food and water, currently threatened by metallic mining, dependence on non-native seeds, and the indiscriminate use of toxic agrochemicals. Our Salvadoran partners are inviting us to join our hands, hearts and voices with theirs so that, together, we might work at the local, national and global levels to transform the broken system that drives young people, children and families from their homes.

It is with heartfelt gratitude and appreciation

that we acknowledge the many congregations and Presbyteries, with help from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, that have opened their doors to provide assistance to immigrant children and families. As people of faith, we are called to advocate for and offer a compassionate response to those pushed to choose between risking it all by leaving and risking it all by staying, and who have opted for the former. However, we must also commit as Christians to address the injustice – the structural sin – that is at the root of this issue, because even if it were possible to provide sanctuary to every child, youth and family forcibly displaced by the culture of violence and impoverishment of Central America's Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, it will no more resolve this crisis than will stricter immigration laws, expedited deportations, a bigger wall and a militarized border. The only way to stay this wave of migration is to work together to guarantee children, youth and families opportunities for a life with dignity and purpose in their home countries.

*You're invited to learn more about the transformative work of the Joining Hands Network in El Salvador and to prayerfully consider a financial gift to help sustain this ministry and the Mission Co-Worker, Kristi Van Nostran, who accompanies our partners in El Salvador. Please visit [www.pcusa.org/joininghands](http://www.pcusa.org/joininghands).*



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