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Introduction

"A theology which is not a plan of social action is merely a way of preaching and praying. It is a menu without the dinner."

- Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, Random Thoughts, p. 22.

As Mordecai Kaplan stated, Jewish values provide us with recipes for repairing the world. As Jews and fellow travelers, our challenge is to discern how to embody these values in our lives and in our communities. Kaplan also urged us to move beyond self-realization and the ongoing renewal of the Jewish People to see peaceful interdependence and Godly living as our global responsibility.

Every living being requires sustenance to survive. The fact some of us struggle with unhealthy and destructive eating patterns, while others are dying every day from starvation and unchecked disease points to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery. It may be truer to say that we have not found the will or motivation to do away with hunger and poverty.

Often times this task can seem daunting. With so much brokenness in the world, where is one to begin to attempt to return the balance to the world? Before tikkun olam became synonymous with social action in the 1960's, earlier Jewish mystics developed the idea of tikkun as re-balancing the divine energies in the world within one's own soul (tikkun hanefesh) and on a transpersonal and universal level (tikkun olam). The imbalance was not seen as a result of an absence or shattering of mercy, compassion or understanding, but rather the absence of interdependent relationships between all the energies that make up the fabric of the world.

We are not inherently broken and need repair. We are inherently whole, but not always in relationship with our Godly potential, with each other and with the world. Perspective or systems may be broken; their repair happens when we reaffirm our covenant with Life and take our values and beliefs from the prayer book and the study halls into every aspect of our lives.

To this end, we might view the holy task of tikkun in the area of hunger and poverty as expanding Kaplan's view of Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish People. That civilization must be a spiritually, economically, socially, politically and ecologically sustainable religious civilization. Hopefully, this information and the study texts that represent centuries of Jewish wisdom will inspire each of you to discover ways in which your communities can assist in alleviating the shadow of hunger and poverty that hovers in the light of all the abundance in our society.

For comprehensive resources on hunger and poverty, see

- <http://www.jrf.org/hunger>
- <http://omer.jrf.org/>
- <http://www.jrf.org/tikkun-olam-issues>

Kiddush HaShem - Sanctification of God's Name: Can Grace and Hamotzi Co-exist at the Homeless Shelter

http://omer.jrf.org/motzi_and_grace



*By Syd Nestel and Val Hyman
Congregation Darchei Noam, Toronto, Canada*

Holiness is not the exclusive possession of those who engage in detailed ritual observance, nor is it the preserve of those who devote their energies to the pursuit of spirituality. True holiness is found in small actions that make a profound difference to the lives of the people around us and the world in which they live.

Wherever I travel in the Jewish world, I'm struck by the way that ordinary Jews are determined to perform kiddush Hashem—sanctification of God's name—and to avoid a hillul Hashem, the desecration of God's name.

The concept of kiddush Hashem offers a powerful challenge that has particular resonance in our times. Each one of us has to ensure that the word "Jewish" is always associated with the highest levels of ethics and kindness, so that our behavior always brings credit to our heritage and to our God. Rabbi Michael Melchior - at the time - deputy minister in the Israeli government with responsibility for Israeli society and the world Jewish community.

For the past 12 years, the congregants at Darchei Noam have been one of about 30 congregations and churches in Toronto that run a rotating weekly 24-hour shelter for people who are homeless and hungry. Originally, we ran the program in collaboration with a Roman Catholic congregation, who had space for the program that we do not have. While we now have volunteers who are from both denominations, the volunteers are an ecumenical group that is called the First Interfaith Out of the Cold program in Toronto. Darchei Noam contributes about 60 volunteers, about 50% of the total.

Because we operate in a multi-faith environment, and because most of the guests who are poor or homeless are expecting a Christian grace before meals, at our Out of the Cold program we make sure that guests and other volunteers know that most of the Jewish volunteers are present out of sense of fulfilling our Jewish religious obligations. Initially it was uncomfortable for us to put forward our own traditions. Our Catholic co-volunteers had no such compunctions. We, however, did not want to be seen as competing with Christianity, or to make our guests feel that they had to be subjected to a sermon before they were allowed to eat.

But preventing our Christian partners from saying grace, did not seem right, nor did hiding our own Jewish identities and motivations for working with the homeless.

For the volunteers from Darchei Noam, it was important make it known that we are not helping the poor for personal aggrandizement nor are we trying to proselytize. Nor is our presence the result of our individual quirks of personality or own off beat sense of morality. We want to represent our Jewish belief in the necessity and power of doing good. And we want to represent the Jewish community to the general community when we perform these tasks, so that Jewish values and the values of Jews are understood and acknowledged.

To this end, in addition to the Christian grace before meals, we always say the Hamotzi blessing over the bread. Sometimes it is said by a few volunteers, members of the B'nai Mitzvah class, or sometimes it is sung by a family, which to our delight is often followed by a round of applause, as if we had just completed the pre-dinner entertainment.

We also follow a tradition of making a package for each guest at Purim time (thus fulfilling the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor—matanot l'evyonim). We usually make a package of chocolate, fruit, new socks and a streetcar token. Often we add a little note about the meaning of Purim.

At the end of our winter program, which runs from November to April, we invite our fellow volunteers to an "Out of the Cold Shabbat" where the contributions of all volunteers, Jewish and non-Jewish, are celebrated. Our Rabbi usually speaks directly from the bimah to our non-Jewish guests and one year invited them to come closer and view the Torah scrolls.

We are often asked by our fellow volunteers or guests about why we do what we do, and this provides opportunities for us to talk about a Jewish way of being that tries to maximize Godliness in this world. This is not without its dilemmas. Sometimes we wonder, who are we, to be speaking of our Jewish faith and traditions when we may not be the most ritually observant or knowledgeable of Jews? Sometimes, we get strange responses when we tell guests we are Jewish, like the time a clearly down and out and lonely fellow spoke longingly about "best girl friend he ever had" who was Jewish. Apparently she was a good cook and had "other talents" as well. Or another fellow who boasted that he had acquired guns for the Jewish Defense League. It not always clear how to respond.

Nevertheless we hope that by making our Jewishness visible as part of our volunteer work with the poor, we help build, in both our guest and our co-volunteers, understanding and tolerance, and the faith that Godliness is dwelling in all people and all groups, and that a commitment to making that Godliness real can in fact make the world a better place.

Questions for Thought and Discussion:

- Most liberal Jews think that Christian preachiness is—well—too preachy. But are we too timid to admit in public that we do good deeds because we feel compelled to do so by our religion? Does our reticence in this regard distort people's views of Jews and Judaism?
- Is it proper to tell people why you are helping them when you are doing it? Can our underlying motivation provide them with some inspiration or solace? Or is this unlikely to work and simply too intrusive into their lives?
- Much of liberal Judaism is about the need to repair the world, and a non-rational faith that this can in fact be accomplished. Can we leverage our efforts by getting other people to buy into a similar worldview? Or should we just do our "good deeds" and be quite about the context?

Sustenance for the Whole Person

<http://omer.jrf.org/sustenance>

By Robin Yasinow, Congregation Beit Tikvah



Organizers who work with the homeless disagree about the best way to support beggars on the street. Many recommend providing a meal, rather than cash. It may take a few extra minutes to pick up a sandwich, or to bring a beggar a cup of coffee and a donut. But in the end, the person on the receiving end will have a more tangible interaction with a caring human being. Most beneficial would be a contribution to a local shelter and advocacy on behalf of affordable housing, in addition to a one-to-one relationship on the street. Rabbi Barbara Penzner from RRC's Guide to Jewish Practice, Tzedakah

If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor. Sefer Chasidim

Here's a modern variation of that twelfth-century precept: Open a community's houses of worship as temporary shelter to families who are homeless. Assist them in their quest for independence by providing not only meals and professional resources but also companionship and emotional support.

The manifestation of this idea, known as the Interfaith Hospitality Network, is at work right now in more than 105 U.S. communities.

After two years of planning, Congregation Beit Tikvah and 13 other congregations of various faiths launched the Baltimore Interfaith Hospitality Network, or BIHN in January. Every six weeks, members of Beit Tikvah share the responsibility of hosting up to 14 guests at a neighboring congregation, Roland Park Presbyterian Church.

In Baltimore, homeless parents of dependent children often face the challenge of finding a single shelter that will accept all family members. Typically, families must split up, with men and older boys going to one shelter, and women, young children and older girls going to another. By working together, the 14 BIHN congregations offer what few shelters can: a chance for families to live together in a safe, supportive environment.

Guests of the network, many of whom are homeless for the first time, receive the guidance of BIHN's executive director and only employee, a licensed social worker who helps them develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency.

At the heart of BIHN are its volunteers, who spend evenings and weekends with guests sharing meals, playing games, doing homework, watching television and engaging in common activities of everyday life. Rather than telling guests what should happen, volunteers do their best to listen for and honor guests' needs, whether they be ingredients for meals, extra blankets or some quiet time in the evening. By extending to guests the same kind of hospitality one might receive at the home of a close friend, BIHN volunteers try to provide a sense of normalcy, privacy and autonomy that many other shelters cannot.

Food, family sleeping quarters, showers and laundry facilities - all are provided and certainly appreciated. But it's the personal attention and compassion of the network's volunteers that graduates of IHN frequently say is most essential to their success:

I found patience and understanding... when I had no one else to lean on. My children and I felt safe there, and learned to trust again. Guest, Pennsylvania

When I came to IHN with my children... there were people who really cared. It's a feeling that made me want to get up in the morning and get out there and work hard to accomplish my goals.

When I first learned I would be in a shelter, I pictured a "shelter." But I found caring and concerned people who made the darkest time in my life brighter. Guest, New Jersey
Think about programs provided by municipalities and organizations for the poor and homeless, including programs and projects you're involved in:

- What concerns or needs do these programs aim to address?
- How do they fulfill people's need for emotional support?
- Do any attempt to address the whole person -- a full range of human needs?
- How might existing programs be enhanced, even slightly, to integrate more meaningful human interaction?
- Through our congregations' programs, how can we open our doors, literally and figuratively, to those in need?

Robin Yasinow is co-chair of the Tikkun Olam committee at Congregation Beit Tikvah in Baltimore

Preserving the Dignity of Those in Need

http://omer.jrf.org/preserving_dignity

By Rabbi Shawn Zevit

And if your brother becomes poor and his means fail him with you, then you will strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you. (*Leviticus 25:35*)

In response to this verse from Leviticus, I'd like to share two quotes, the first by Dr. David Teutsch of the RRC:

Jewish Tradition understands human beings to be b'tzelem Elohim, made in the divine image. Humiliating a person denigrates the Divine Presence in the world, so Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of k'vod hab'rioyt, honoring each individual and protecting people's dignity. Judaism has long recognized that dignity depends in part upon sufficient food, clothing and shelter, as well as honorable work. If someone is living in dehumanizing conditions, then immediate tzedaka is needed. The way tzedaka is given should help people to preserve their dignity. (*From A Guide to Jewish Practice: Tzedaka, pp. 16-17, Dr. David A. Teutsch, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 2005, <http://www.rrc.edu>*).

The second is from my recent book:

In the social system of giving in Jewish life and law, both giver and receiver are seen as partners in living out godly action in the world. Circumstances and roles may change in an instant, but the commitment to the mitzvah of tzedaka goes unchanged. Jewish sources tend not to deal with "the poor" but focus on the individual (the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, etc.). The Sages go as far as to state, "Better no giving at all than giving that humiliates" (B.Talmud, Hagigah 5a). In other words, giving that comes with stereotyping, judgment, or condescension towards a group, or that undermines the recipient's sense of self, is seen as equally or more destructive than allowing someone to suffer due to lack of material resources. (*From Offerings of the Heart: Money and Values in Faith Community*, p. 83, Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit, Alban Institute, 2005, <http://www.jrf.org/press/index.html>).

Questions for thought/discussion:

- Both clauses of the Leviticus verse end in "with you" (imakh). What is the meaning and what are the implications for our tzedakah work?
- When giving money, is it incumbent upon us to research how the monies are spent and whether the dignity of the recipients is of concern to those distributing funds and services?
- What are the limits of "better no giving at all than giving that humiliates"? Surely if life and death are at stake "giving that humiliates" should be accepted, yes?
- Do you check the efficiency of the charity to make sure the beneficiaries receive the majority of your tzedaka?

Making a Difference

http://omer.jrf.org/making_a_difference

By Irene Howard-Weitzen

How many times have you heard a young child in a middle-class family beg for a snack, complaining, "I'm starving!" That child has probably never been starving, and, hopefully, never will be. However, this outburst shows a sad truth of our society: that many middle- or upper-class people are uneducated or even indifferent about poverty. Because they have so little experience with it, they tend to underestimate its impact. Pictures and stories can only do so much; they cannot make you stand in their shoes. People pretend to others and to themselves that they understand what the poor are going through, but in actuality they have no idea. As famous author Elie Wiesel once said, "Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present."

There are people, however, that can say truthfully that they are educated about poverty and have seen it through their own eyes. These people are the people that actually spend their own time to volunteer at soup kitchens, homeless shelters, orphanages, and other charitable organizations. Yes, I know, we all say that we could, we would volunteer, if we only had the

time... but alas, our lives are too busy (or so we tell ourselves) to actually put in the effort to help those beneath us. However, there is a group of people for whom charity is not a chore, but a pleasure, and it is on those people that the hope for a caring, educated community lies. These people make it their duty to remember those forgotten by the rest of us and help others to understand the force that drives them to care when others look away.

My hometown, Highland Park, NJ, is only one square-mile in area, yet it has a soup kitchen. My former Hebrew school is very socially active, and the director, Ira Mintz, often would advertise within the school when volunteers or aid was needed in the community, including the soup kitchen. In fact, he felt so strongly for this cause that he celebrated his 50th birthday at a local soup kitchen and organized about 40 volunteers, including my mother, to load boxes with food for distribution.

My family celebrates the High Holidays at a synagogue up in Woodstock, NY, where we also spend our summers. Every year the youth program organizes a massive food drive. These teenagers spend their own time distributing bags and flyers, collecting full bags, loading trucks, and driving them to wherever the food is needed. These kids truly understood what Jack Riemer said in his well-known poem:

We cannot merely pray to God to end starvation;
For we already have the resources
With which to feed the entire world
If only we could use them wisely.

Therefore we pray instead
For strength, determination, and will power,
To do instead of merely to pray
To become instead of merely to wish;
That our world may be safe,
And that our lives may be blessed.

If only every community had a younger generation that was this caring, maybe they could inspire the adults.

As part of the eighth-grade curriculum, there is a class called community service. Each week we do something to help out the community, such as volunteering at a daycare center for underprivileged kids, cleaning up a park, or playing music on the street to raise money for cancer research. One week we walked to the grocery store, bought huge amounts of peanut butter, jelly, ham, cheese, and bread, and made our way to the local homeless shelter. There we made sandwiches and chatted with the people there. Some were sick and worn out, and simply needed a loving touch and a kind word. Others would brighten immediately and enthusiastically chatter on about their youth or life in general.

They had the most amazing stories to tell! These were people that had had the hardest life you can imagine, yet they somehow found the strength to tell about the daughter that had had a child before she was 16, or the kind old storeowner who would always save some bread and fruit for the hungry children that passed by. Needless to say, I was very moved, and began to see these people for what they really were: not poor people, not ignorant, uneducated people,

not desperate people, but simply people. They were simply mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters that were trying to make the best of what they had.

One Wednesday before Thanksgiving, about two years ago, I did something that I will never forget. It was a cold, rainy day, and I was running for a train. I reached the station and waved to Ronnie, a man that owns a small fruit and vegetable shop in the station. I suddenly had a thought. I was going to go home and have a feast with family and friends at my warm dry house, but there were plenty of people that did not have that opportunity. Without a second thought, I loaded up a shopping bag with broccoli, squash, cranberries, potatoes, yams, and other vegetables. I then paid for the food, hid my backpack and coat, grabbed the bag, and ran. I ran, without a coat, in the freezing rain, for eight city blocks to get to the homeless shelter. There I breathlessly handed them the bag, and commenced to racing back to the station. By the time I got back, I was dripping wet, freezing, and exhausted, but exhilarated. I had missed my train, but made a difference.

Irene Howard-Weitzen is in the eighth grade in is a member of B'nai Keshet in northern New Jersey.

Fighting Hunger: Our Partnerships with Mazon and JCPA

JRF External Affiliations

<http://www.jrf.org/external-affiliations>

MAZON

<http://www.mazon.org/>

Founded in 1985, MAZON ('food' in Hebrew) is a national, nonprofit agency which provides food, help, and hope to hungry people of all faiths and backgrounds. It allocates donations from the Jewish community to the most effective hunger relief organizations in the United States, Israel and in poor countries worldwide. As MAZON 'partners', congregations raise funds for hunger-relief during the High Holy Days and other times. Many Jews also give to MAZON three percent of the cost of weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and other joyous events. There is also a Canadian organization: MAZON Canada <http://www.mazoncanada.ca/>.

JRF Resolution on Mazon, A Jewish Response to Hunger

Resolution Date: Jan 1986

Sponsoring Organization: JRF

Affirming the fundamental traditional Jewish commitment to sustaining the hungry, while recognizing hunger as one of the most tragic and scandalous of ongoing crises in this country and abroad, the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation resolves:

- To recognize as an important part of our social action commitment support for MAZON A Jewish Response to Hunger;
- To recommend participation in MAZON by all of our congregations and havurot and their members;
- To recommend that the guidelines, as set forth by MAZON, be accepted by all congregations and havurot as a plan of action and participation for themselves and their members.

The Hebrew Bible states, "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:20). For us as Jews, the imperative to respond to the devastating impact of hunger in the United States and around the world is not only intensified by the physical deprivation that so many are experiencing, but also a profound moral and spiritual crisis that cannot continue. That one child or adult should lack sustenance would be dayenu (enough) to raise our voices. That millions go hungry and die of starvation is a situation that demands our pursuit of a just and large-scale united response across religious, social and political lines. We join our hearts and hands with all of you to pursue the Divine call to do what is just—to work to end hunger everywhere.

The Difference Between Charity and Justice

<http://omer.jrf.org/text-study/week1/2>

By H. Eric Schockman



There is no word in the Hebrew vocabulary for 'charity' in the modern sense. The word used is tzedakah, which literally means 'righteousness.' Tzedakah is not an act of condescension by the affluent toward the needy; it is the fulfillment of a moral obligation. Injustice to humanity is desecration of God. Refusal to give charity is considered by Jewish tradition to be idolatry. Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice*, UAH Press, New York, NY, p.

93.

Many of us have had the opportunity to volunteer at a food bank, participate in a canned food drive and donate funds to a local feeding program, but our acts of charity only help so much in the big picture. How can we proactively solve the hunger epidemic plaguing 38 million Americans, including 14 million children?

God commands us in the Torah to perform acts of tzedakah, acts of righteousness and justice, 36 times, more times than that of any other commandment. Justice, in this sense, is our

collective pursuit to finding the long-term solutions to ending hunger. We need to help people become self-sufficient and give them the tools necessary to do so.

MAZON, as the organized Jewish community's response to the hunger crisis, is consumed with exploring the difference between charity and justice. As Vorspan and Saperstein noted, there is no word for charity in Hebrew. Taking inspiration from Judaism and its focus on justice we seek to explore the underlying reasons behind the hunger problem. Not just the how's, but the whys. MAZON also believes that food banks and other emergency food providers have an obligation to use their status and visibility to educate their supporters about the role and limits of charities in feeding hungry Americans and encouraging them to advocate for federal nutrition and assistance programs.

Federal food programs, especially food stamps, are our nation's frontline defense against hunger with the ability and capability to reach far more hungry and at-risk families than charitable programs. Food stamps allow individuals to become self-sufficient. Studies state that 40 percent of food stamp recipients leave the program within four months; half within six months. Each dollar spent in food stamp benefits generates about \$1.84 in economic activity. If \$5 billion a year was spent on food stamps and other nutrition programs, we could cut hunger in half within two years.

It is our moral and religious mandate to fight for justice and advocate on behalf of hungry families. Together with private charity, the government and our voices as advocates can bring hunger to an end. We have to bring tzedakah to the world.

Eric Schockman is MAZON's president, a position he has held since January 2001. A public policy expert and an authority on hunger and poverty issues, Eric previously served as associate dean/associate professor of political science at the University of Southern California. He was also a top consultant to the California State Assembly and the Los Angeles City Council.

Questions for thought, discussion, by Rabbi Shai Gluskin:

- How does a congregation or a person find the right balance between direct service and advocacy efforts? Eric Schockman's emphasis on the effectiveness of food stamps would suggest a greater emphasis on advocacy. But don't people feel better about engaging in direct service, which would then lead to further commitment?
- It's true and compelling that taking care of the poor and hungry is an obligation (mitzvah), not a choice, according to Jewish tradition. But given that most Reconstructionists as well as other Jews outside orthodoxy don't feel bound by that mitzvah system, doesn't it come down to choice anyway? What are the best ways to move people from inaction to action?
- Does your congregation participate in Mazon's program which encourages families celebrating simchas (celebrations) to donate a certain percentage of the total amount spent to hunger programs? What percent of families participate? Does your congregation require such participation?



From **the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA):**

<http://www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/>

click on the "Poverty" section of their website:

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs serves as the representative voice of the organized American Jewish community in addressing the mandate of the Jewish community relations field. The mandate is expressed in two, interrelated goals:

- To safeguard the rights of Jews here, in Israel, and around the world; and, in order to accomplish that,
- To protect, preserve, and promote a just American society, one that is democratic and pluralistic.

These goals are pursued in a non-partisan manner informed by Jewish values. History teaches us that Jewish security is inexorably linked to the strength of democratic institutions. Thus, our community has a direct stake - along with an ethical imperative—in assuring that America remains a country wedded to the Bill of Rights and committed to the rule of law, whose institutions continue to function as a public trust.

The JCPA reflects a unique and inclusive partnership of national member agencies, local community relations councils and committees, and the federations of which they are a component part or affiliated agency. It convenes the "common table" around which member agencies, through an open, representative, inclusive and consensus-driven process, meet to identify issues, articulate positions, and develop strategies, programs, and approaches designed to advance the public affairs goals and objectives of the organized Jewish community.

The Food Stamp Challenge

On August 6th, 2007, JCPA announced that Executive Director Rabbi Steve Gutow and JCPA Chair Lois Frank will spend the week between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (September 14th – 21st) subsisting on the budget of the average food stamp recipient: **\$1 per meal per day** (\$21 for the week). The challenge is designed to call attention to the inadequacy of the food stamp benefit and to galvanize support around a strong reauthorization of the nutrition title of the farm bill.

Examples of “Food Stamp Challenge” Blogs:

- <http://foodstampchallenge.typepad.com/>
 - http://www.house.gov/apps/blog/oh17_ryan/index.shtml (click on the sidebar for the relevant postings)
 - <http://keyetv.com/foodstampchallenge/>
-

Take Action - The 2008 Farm Bill

the **Farm Bill** is being considered for reauthorization by the US Congress in Spring 2008.

→ see http://www.frac.org/html/news/farmbill_2008.htm for the most up-to-date information

Background on the Farm Bill from JCPA from Fall 2007

<http://tools.isovera.com/organizations.php3?action=printContentItem&orgid=54&typeID=1353&itemID=21324>

What is the Farm Bill?

Although its name indicates that it exclusively impacts rural communities, in reality the Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that affects anyone who cares about food, the environment, sustainable energy policy and international and domestic hunger.

What began as a system of price supports and subsidy payments for farmers during the New Deal has grown to encompass titles that authorize the food stamp and other nutritional safety net programs, regulate land use and conservation efforts, provide funding for research on ethanol-based energy, offer international food aid, and promote farmers’ markets across the country.

Approximately every five years Congress revisits the Farm Bill. The 2007 reauthorization provides anti-hunger advocates a unique opportunity to bolster the nutrition provisions in this important piece of legislation. A title by title summary of the 2002 Farm Bill can be found at <http://harkin.senate.gov/agriculture/farm-bill-summary.cfm#9>.

The Context

Farm bill reauthorization presents an important opportunity to address food insecurity and hunger in a country of plenty. Currently, 10.4 percent of all adults (22.7 million) and 16.9 percent of all children (12.4 million) in the United States live in households considered to be food insecure or hungry. That’s 12.4 children who go to school with pangs in their bellies, 22.7 million adults that cannot function at full productivity at work and 35 million people who must make daily decisions about whether to pay the rent or put food on the table. For a personal account of food insecurity in the United States, see the testimony of Rhonda Stewart at a

hearing of the Senate Committee on Agriculture at:

<http://agriculture.senate.gov/Hearings/hearings.cfm?hearingid=2511&witnessId=6029>.

Because the Food Stamp program represents a vital nutritional safety net for Americans, the Nutrition Title must be a priority in the 2007 Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill nutrition title includes the food stamps program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) , and other important anti-hunger programs. While these programs take important steps towards addressing hunger in America, there are several improvements that could be made to ensure that no one in the United States is food insecure.

To read a summary of the nutrition provisions in HR2129, which is essentially a “wish list” for what anti-hunger advocates would like to see in the nutrition title, please visit:

<http://tools.isovera.com/organizations.php3?action=printContentItem&orgid=54&typeID=743&itemID=20978>.

For more information on these provisions, also visit: <http://www.cbpp.org/7-17-07fa.htm>.

Conclusion

Farm bill reauthorization is one of the most important anti-poverty actions Congress will take this year. By participating in the food stamp challenge while the Senate is considering the farm bill, your JCRC has the opportunity to raise awareness and engage your communities and your elected officials on this important topic, while helping to launch a national campaign that will keep issues like this high on the agenda throughout the year. Please consider joining us in the food stamp challenge and do not hesitate to contact Melissa Boteach at mboteach@thejcpc.org or 202-789-2222 X102 with any questions.

Northwest Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network

<http://www.philashelter.org/index.php>

JRF congregations Dorshei Derekh and Mishkan Shalom are participants

Our Vision

We envision a world in which homelessness is eliminated as we live our lives with a sense of responsibility toward one another. We see a world in which domestic safety, economic security and stability are achievable.

Our Mission

NPIHN's mission is to marshal resources and volunteers among the diverse congregations and communities of Northwest Philadelphia in direct response to the needs of homeless families for temporary shelter, encouragement, and support. By working to increase awareness of the problems of poverty and homelessness, our organization seeks to promote lasting solutions to homelessness and its underlying causes.

"Shelter that's not like a shelter" ... and much more!

On every night of the year, over 1000 children and their families are homeless in Philadelphia. Due to the shortage of affordable housing combined with tough economic times, family shelters are overflowing and often house families dormitory style. In this difficult time of their lives, shelters are unable to provide calm, comfort, safety, and individualized support necessary to help homeless families rebuild their lives.

Our organization provides three to five families with private rooms, quiet safety and caring support in the calm setting of participating area congregations. Because we are small, we accommodate in-tact couples, single father households, and adolescent boys as well as single women with children.

At two to four week intervals, member congregations offer hospitality and provide volunteers for our guest families. Each volunteer accepts a small task once or twice a week during the hosting period at their congregation. All of these small tasks make a huge difference in the lives of our families as they achieve and accomplish their goals on the path to stability.

During the past 15 years, NPIHN has moved 250 families from homelessness to stability. The NPIHN program provides knowledgeable staff assessment, referrals, life skills training; including parenting, financial literacy, career counseling, housing placement, relocation assistance, mentoring, and community building. Equipped with new skills and relationships, 96% of our families never utilize another shelter following their NPIHN experience. Our graduates often stop in to visit us and provide support for our current guest families.

Our hospitality network is comprised of 1200 caring volunteers and we are growing. We are congregations, concerned citizens of the community, generous donors, community businesses, and institutions. There is space in our volunteer list for you and your congregation or organization, in this richly rewarding service to our neighbors.

Congregational based Shelter: NPIHN's shelter program operates and delivers services in the Germantown, Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill, Roxborough and East Falls sections of city of Philadelphia. Guest congregations are organized to take responsibility for two weeks to two months in providing private space for each family, food and companionship for 5 families (up to 17 individuals). Hosting services are provided by congregations whose members contribute over 7,500 volunteer hours each year in preparing space for the family and hosting their stay overnight. During 2005, NPIHN sheltered and relocated 20 families comprised of 62 individuals.

CONGREGATION **Darchei Noam**  **A vibrant, egalitarian and inclusive community**

<http://www.darcheinoam.on.ca/whatwedo/social.html>

JRF Kehillat Tzedek Award Goes to Darchei Noam

Darchei Noam was proud to receive the *Kehillat Tzedek (Community of Justice) Award* from the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Tikkun Olam Initiative. The award was presented at the 2002 JRF convention in Montreal.

The announcement read, in part:

In light of their sustained efforts for social justice, building of partnerships with diverse communities, and demonstration of a powerful commitment to address issues of hunger, homelessness, and affordable housing, the JRF Tikkun Olam Committee recognizes Darchei Noam as an outstanding example of congregational tikkun olam work. May their efforts serve as an inspiration to all of us!

The award announcement highlighted some of the social action accomplishments of Darchei Noam over the past ten years:

Moshav Noam

Darchei Noam sponsored a 133-unit affordable housing co-op, Moshav Noam, which opened in 1995. This was the product of five years of work for the Darchei Noam social action committee. Members of Darchei Noam created a board that saw the project through from start to finish, working with developers, architects, and city officials.

Trellis Gardens

Darchei Noam sponsors Trellis Gardens, a 24-unit affordable housing building. In 1999, members of Darchei Noam formed Trellis Housing Initiatives, an independently incorporated board whose mission is to develop affordable housing. In September 2002, the doors of Trellis Gardens opened to the first tenants in the three-story, mixed income building that offers affordable housing to approximately 65 people.

Out of the Cold / Out to the Parks

Darchei Noam (JRF congregation, Toronto) is a lead partner in the First Interfaith Out of the Cold Program along with members of several other faith communities. Each winter, over fifty volunteers from Darchei Noam attend this weekly Thursday night program to provide food, shelter and friendship to hundreds of the most needy residents of Toronto. The program runs on Thursday nights at St. Matthew's United Church on St. Clair Ave. just west of Christie St. In the summer months, we operate the Out to the Parks program at the same location. This program delivers 80 bagged dinners a week to homeless people in Toronto's parks.



Our philosophy is simple: To treat our guests as human beings - with respect and dignity, while trying to meet both their physical and emotional needs. The Darchei Noam Bar and Bat Mitzvah children play a significant role in setting up tables, serving food, distributing clothing and playing cards and games with the guests.

Synagogues call for action on poverty

Letter urges Canadian premier to invest in housing and help poor children

<http://www.thestar.com/comment/columnists/article/339576>

Signing synagogues include Toronto's Congregation Darchei Noam, Peterborough's Beth Israel Synagogue and Kitchener-Waterloo's Beth Jacob Congregation. The four denominations are Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist.

Defining Poverty: What does it mean to be poor today?

<http://www.thestar.com/article/416081>

→ VIDEO: Students define poverty

ZEVIT, RABBI SHAWN ISRAEL: The Hebrew Bible states, "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:20). For us as Jews, the imperative to respond to the devastating impact of hunger around the world is not only intensified by the physical deprivation that so many are experiencing, but also a profound moral and spiritual crisis that cannot continue. That one child or adult should lack sustenance would be *dayenu* (enough) to raise our voices. That millions go hungry and die of starvation is a situation that demands our pursuit of a just and large-scale united response across religious, social and political lines. We join our hearts and hands with all of you to pursue the Divine call to do what is just – to work to end hunger everywhere.