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Topic #5

How might Orthodox Christians contribute and support the efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger in the world?

How can we stop hunger and poverty?

As Orthodox Christians we have the advantage of the teachings of our Church. To stop hunger and poverty we must bring these teachings into our lives and into the world, TODAY. We may be amazed at not only what we can do for others, but what we receive in return.

St. Basil the Great offered a simple solution. He said, “When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor.”

Knowing that hunger and poverty can be both physical and spiritual, we must keep in mind that St. Basil's words, aren't easy to put into action. To help eliminate hunger and poverty, as young people who are dependent on our families, we need a leader, one who will show us how we can make a difference. Our ultimate leader is Christ. Our “earthly” leaders can be our church and our priest. Our church has ministries such as IOCC and OCMC that work to help stop hunger and poverty and minister to spiritual needs.

As young people we may talk about hunger and poverty like its a joke, maybe even making fun of the hobos we see on the way to church and judging them as lazy or druggies. At Camp Emmanuel the clergy emphasized that this is not a joke. In Matthew 25, Christ states that we must feed, clothe, and visit our fellow brothers and sisters in need. He says “truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”.

With all these teachings in mind we now have to take action. Again, you may ask, how can I accomplish this? I would like to offer some suggestions. If we go to the IOCC website, we can act NOW. You can learn how to put together a simple school kit to help a child as close as inner city Houston, or as far away as Kenya. Which of us can't take about \$5 from our savings to help send a child to school. As we get a little older we can consider joining a team of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. By training and sending missionaries around the world, physical needs are met and subsequently the spiritual gift of Orthodoxy is spread. As an OCMC missionary my own mother went to Kenya to help those with medical needs. She shared with me that the Kenyan people actually fed her own spiritual hunger, much more than she could have ever provided for their physical needs.

Our local GOYA has been able to help by giving Christmas gifts to the needy. Last year I had a very special experience while delivering to a family with many kids. After we handed them the gifts, the children came running out and gave us hand-made

Christmas cards, each one conveying a message of love.

I can tell you, this not only filled me spiritually but also motivated me to want to help more. There is no help that is too little to show our love for God. In Luke 21, God praised the abundance of the poor widow above all the wealthy who donated only a small token for show. The widow gave the equivalent of two pennies, all she had as her offering, trusting God's abundant love. I too must trust Him to help me do all I can.

From local missions to international donations, any help is worthwhile. By ministering to physical needs, we gain the ability to minister to spiritual needs. Think about it, when you are hungry, can you focus on reading the Bible or even saying a simple prayer, above the noise of your rumbling stomach? Once a person's physical need is satisfied, it allows him to focus on the spiritual.

Yes, unfortunately the poor and hungry will always be among us. Through our efforts, however, we as Orthodox Christians CAN help eliminate the physical suffering, fulfill the spiritual needs of others and as a benefit grow in our spirituality as well.