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Topic #5

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

He stole a piece of bread to save his sister's son who was dying. Who was this? Many of you probably know who did this. It was Jean Valjean; he was the main character of Victor Hugo's famous book *Les Misérables*. In short, he stole a piece of bread to save his sister's son and he spends nineteen years in prison because of his action. When he got out he realized that he couldn't do anything. He realized that he was not truly a free man, so he ripped up his parole and began a new life in which he was a God fearing-man. He spent nineteen years in prison because his family was hungry and he was too poor to buy any food. **Poverty** and **Hunger**. They were around in 1832 and they haven't gone away. How can we, as Orthodox Christians, help eliminate those threats to society?

I see two ways to look at these threats. **Physically** and **Spiritually**. First, the physical. Many people in America are physically hungry and poor. We've all seen that person on standing on the side of the road begging for whatever help they can get that you can give. This is just one example of poverty in America and America is one of the richest countries in the world. My church's youth group goes to a food bank to pack food. We do whatever they need us to do to help. The people we are helping can't afford to feed their hungry families. My church also collects food all year round. Last summer, I volunteered at a food bank packing food. Every day when I got done I had the most wonderful feeling knowing that I helped feed hungry people who were in need of a good meal. Matthew tells us in Matthew chapter 25, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink," the people question him, "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" (Matt. 25:35a,40)

Next, the spiritual. Many people all over the world are spiritually hungry for the bread of life. If you have the bread of life you will never be hungry again. John 6:35 says, "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'" We know that Jesus gives us the bread of life through his word and that leads to eternal life in heaven with him. Every week our parish gives an offering to support ministries in other countries or here in America. We are helping feed the spiritually hungry. We as Orthodox Christians can help feed the hungry.

Even though Jean Valjean was a fictional character the threats he faced were 100% real. We can do more than feed physical hunger. We can feed peoples souls. All of us can live lives that honor God and live our lives as examples of how we are supposed to live. We can show by how we live that we are saved and children of God. When others see us they can be lead to Christ. We can feed their physical and spiritual cravings. **Poverty** and **Hunger**. These two threats go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. We should work to eliminate both. We can work at food banks or donate money to

help those in need who are struggling with poverty and hunger. We can work together to eliminate the threats to society and to the spirit. Jesus tells us to feed those who need food and, “you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34) We will inherit the kingdom of God if we help those who are in need of help.