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Commentary
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Enough is Enough

It's well past time to end hunger

BIG ISLAND, VA – Enough is enough. Now that's a phrase you've heard many times. When your mother said it to you it meant "I've had all I can take, stop it NOW". To me it still means that and much, much more as I reflect on nearly twenty-eight years in the anti-hunger movement in this country.

We Americans are rich beyond imagining in most things. The list of what there is enough of in this country is impressive.

► There is enough food thrown away every year in our country to feed every man, woman, and child that ever goes hungry. According to studies conducted by the USDA, we throw away well over ninety billion pounds of food each year in our country. Most of that food is edible but unmarketable for cosmetic, size or other reasons. We have over thirty-five million hungry people in our country, one third of them children. No self-respecting people should ever allow that to happen while food is going to waste.

► There is enough surplus wealth in our country to deliver that food to those who hunger. We are the richest nation in the history of mankind. We can afford to fight wars in several countries simultaneously. We can afford disposable diapers for our children, disposable cameras to take pictures of our children, and disposable packaging for virtually everything we use. A country as rich as this lets its children go hungry because it wants to, not because it has to.

► There is enough know-how in our country to devise ways to distribute that food to those in need. It should be obvious to even the dimmest among us that a nation that can put a man on the moon, invent the internet and manipulate human genetics can find a way to put three square meals a day on the plates of all its children.

► There is enough compassion in our people to want all of our hungry neighbors fed adequately. As so often happens in our democracy, the people are way out in front of the leaders on the whole question of hunger. A recent poll taken for the Alliance to End Hunger shows that the vast majority of people – Republican, Democrat, liberal and conservative alike – all place elimination of hunger in the USA among their highest priorities.

Then why do we still have more than thirty-five million hungry people in our country? What is there not enough of?

► There's not enough leadership. Our priorities at the national level simply do not include eliminating hunger. Our tax dollars are not spent in a way that reflects the people's wishes where the hungry are concerned. Unless and until we insist that our elected representatives act so as to insure that all hungry children are fed, they won't be. Elected "leaders" who don't lead in this area should be unelected as soon as possible.

► There's not enough vision. Far too many of our religious institutions spend far too much time squabbling about the hot button issues of the day and neglect the fundamental command "when you see your neighbor hungry, feed him." Instead of allowing issues of theology and philosophy to divide us, America's religious bodies should band together and show our leaders and our people a vision of what "one nation under God" could look like if we let that God guide our priorities. Religious institutions that can't muster that level of commitment should be abandoned.

► There's not enough outrage. Hunger has been with us for so long we have grown numb. The temptation, even in the anti-hunger community, is to go about our tasks as if hunger will always be with us. We need to step back a little until we can see clearly again. To see a child go hungry is a shame and a pity when the hunger is caused by lack of food. It is a sin and a crime when food is plentiful and the people around that child will not trouble themselves to feed him.

It's time for us to declare "enough's enough".

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