

## Support Child Nutrition Programs

ByCarolynn Race

In 2001, the latest year for which data is available, approximately 32.9 million people (nearly 11% of U.S. households) were food insecure, meaning they did not have adequate access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Of those, 6.18 million were children. What can we, as Presbyterians, do to help to ensure that all people – especially children – have enough nutritious food to eat to lead a healthy, active life?

Presbyterian churches are already doing a great deal to help people who are hungry. According to a survey of Presbyterian congregations released in 2001 by the Presbyterian Research Service, over 90% of congregations provided food to congregants and/or community members – through food pantries, soup kitchens, and/or food donations. In addition, the survey found that 47% of congregations provide, or cooperate in providing, day care, pre-school and before and after-school programs, many of which provide nutritious snacks and meals for children.

But Presbyterian churches and other denominations cannot solve the problem of food insecurity alone – government assistance is essential to ensure that children and adults in need have access to food assistance. The government has played a large role in supporting child nutrition programs, and federal programs, including food stamps, school lunch and breakfast programs, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and others have been instrumental in supporting children in need.

This year, five child nutrition programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are scheduled to be reauthorized by the U.S. Congress. They are:

**The National School Lunch Program**, a federally assisted meal program that was created in 1946 as a “measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation’s children.” The program, which operates in over 99,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential care institutions, provides free and reduced-price lunches for needy children. In 2001, more than 25.4 million children – each day – got their lunch through the Program.

**The School Breakfast Program**, which began as a pilot program in 1966 and was made permanent in 1975, provides free and reduced-priced breakfast to children. The program, which operates like the school lunch program, is located in more than 75,000 schools and institutions. In 2001, an average of 7.8 million children participated in the program each day.

**The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**, established in 1968 to provide federal funds for nutritious meals and snacks to licensed child care centers and family and group child care homes, to after-school programs for school-age children, to children in Head Start programs, and to adult day care centers serving chronically impaired adults and people over the age of 60. In

fiscal year 2002, CACFP served over 2.7 million children daily, provided approximately 1.6 billion meals and snacks, and fed over 80,000 elderly persons.

**The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**, which began in 1968 to provide low-income children with free, nutritious meals during summer months when students have limited or no access to the school lunch program. Over 118 million meals were served through SFSP in 2002. However, less than 15% of children who participate in the National School Lunch Program also participate in the SFSP, and

**The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**, which provides nutritious supplemental foods and nutrition services to 7.64 million low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breast-feeding women and to infants and children up to age 5. Those eligible are provided with vouchers to purchase food items, including Milk, cheese, iron-fortified cereal, eggs, carrots, peanut butter, infant formula, and tuna, at approved retail outlets.

As Congress begins its deliberations on the budget and on the future of these programs, the PC(USA) Washington Office has been working to support these programs and to encourage Congress to reauthorize these programs, provide them with additional funding to expand the programs, and simplify cost accounting and paperwork requirements for who apply to operate and/or participate in the programs.

The PC(USA) Washington Office is a member of the Food Policy Working Group, which is comprised of denominations and faith-related organizations who are concerned about hunger and poverty in the United States. This year, the Food Policy Working Group is focused on pushing for the reauthorization and expansion of these programs – in order to serve more children and families in need. The Food Policy Working Group has begun to share our concerns about these programs with key government officials. The PC(USA) has been represented in meetings with Eric Bost, the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, Juliet McCarthy, the new Director of the Faith-Based Initiatives Office at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and with Congressional staff members who work on budget issues.

As the PC(USA) Washington Office and other denominations continue to work toward the reauthorization of these programs, get involved! See if there is more your congregation can do to provide nutritious meals and snacks for children and others who are hungry. Contact your Members of Congress (Call the Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121) and urge them to support the reauthorization of Child Nutrition Programs, including School Lunch and School Breakfast, WIC, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Tell your Representative and your Senators that at least 32.9 million Americans are food insecure – and that over 6 million of the food insecure are children. Ask them to support expansion of these programs to fight hunger and to support children. Questions? Contact the Washington Office at 202-543-1126.

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