

# Stirring the Pot

## Hunger Action Enablers Work for Hunger, Justice and the Environment

BY PAT PLANT

**P**ot-stirrer, cheerleader, teacher, leader, hand-holder, motivator, trailblazer—these terms are just part of the job description of a Hunger Action Enabler (affectionately known as an HAE) for the Presbyterian Hunger Program. For the past five years, I've felt blessed to be called an HAE—and I do mean *called*. Although it's a very part-time job, being an HAE has helped define who I am—a hunger fighter. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) currently has 110 HAEs, serving 17 synods and 90 presbyteries.

Besides highlighting various resources for study on hunger and action against hunger, the Presbyterian Hunger Program has expanded its focus to include the justice issues surrounding and causing hunger and poverty. Programs like Enough for Everyone, Water for All, Fair Food, Food and Faith, Fair Trade and Trade Justice expand and inform HAE's concerns for the causes of hunger and poverty, which are sometimes political, economic and environmental. All of these programs were part of the most recent gathering of the Presbyterian Hunger Program and its Hunger Action Enablers, in March 2007. Seventy-seven HAEs and PHP staff and Advisory Committee members gathered in Puerto Rico to train, share, support and rededicate themselves to the goal of mobilizing



**These men and women put the "action" in Hunger Action Enabler.**

Presbyterians to alleviate hunger locally, nationally and globally.

In discussions during the week, many of the HAEs shared examples of how they were working on hunger with an environmental slant.

### Food and Faith

One of my favorite projects is the recent creation of a community garden in my hometown, Sunnyvale, California. In addition to 91 individual garden beds in which residents can grow food and flowers, this garden includes a 1,500-square-foot "Food Forest," growing abundant vegetables, fruits and nuts destined for the five pantries and feeding programs in Sunnyvale.

#### Did You Know?

Hunger Action Enablers got its start thanks to a Birthday Offering grant that established a network of 14 Hunger Action Enablers to serve the synods and the General Assembly's task force on world hunger.

My congregation, Sunnyvale Presbyterian, helped with some of the Food Forest funding, as did other churches, organizations and individuals. They also provided some of the 45 volunteers needed to plant and tend the Food Forest and to deliver the produce to food programs during the first growing season.

Among other things, the garden added a new way to demonstrate how church members can help hungry people in our community. Not only are they collecting an average of 1,500 pounds of canned and packaged food each month and helping to fund local, national and global food programs, they also are helping bring forth healthy produce from the earth to expand the amount of fresh food available to hungry people in our community.

One HAE in the Detroit Presbytery, Arthellia Thompson, also is thinking about the benefits of gardening. She promotes a program to help seniors on low incomes to have

fresh tomatoes on their windowsill or stairway. The program provides large, clean plastic buckets, rocks to put in the bottom for drainage, fertile soil and a couple of healthy tomato plants. Seniors follow the instructions to create their own tomato bucket/bed, then water with care and await the delicious tomatoes, after the sun does its part.

Barbara Howell, HAE from Middle Tennessee Presbytery, is involved with Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee, which endeavors to connect local farmers with agencies serving hungry people in need of fresh food, as well as schools, universities and faith-based groups. "We are encouraging people to eat locally grown foods and connecting local farmers with food providers," she says.

**Food grown on conventional farms travels 1,500 miles on average to get to your dinner plate. Typically there is no label to indicate whether the food was grown locally, across the country or even overseas. This food often is genetically engineered, picked days in advance, treated with preservatives and processed or irradiated. Learn more at [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood).**

## Enough For Everyone

A new aspect of the Enough for Everyone program—joining the Presbyterian Coffee Project, Sweat-Free T-shirts, Electric Stewardship, Oikocredit and the Global Marketplace—is the Eco-Palm Project. Barbara Hipple, HAE from Homestead Presbytery, helped PC(USA) staff launch this new opportunity for our churches, in a joint venture with Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Relief Services and the University of Minnesota. The intent of Eco-Palm is to provide reasonably priced palm fronds for

Palm Sunday celebrations in areas where palm trees are nonexistent.

The palm fronds come from communities in Mexico and Guatemala where agricultural workers are paid fairly and engage in sustainable harvesting in order to protect the local ecosystem. Eco-Palm harvesters and community members sort and package the palm fronds and sell them directly, ensuring that the money paid for the fronds benefits those who labor over them. "Presbyterians also can promote the availability of Eco-Palms to florists in their community who could benefit from this program, since florists use palm fronds throughout the year in floral arrangements,"

Barbara says.

**Learn more about Eco-Palms at [www.pcusa.org/palms](http://www.pcusa.org/palms).**

## Clean Water

Doug Sensabaugh, HAE from Shenandoah Presbytery, is passionate

about his experience installing clean water systems through Living Waters for the World. This successful program—born in the Synod of the Living Waters—offers "Clean Water U," where volunteers come to learn how to install clean water systems in parts of this country and the world that need them.

Doug accompanied other volunteers on an annual trip to build homes in Baja, California. As the homes were built, the water system was installed at the community center. "The pastor of our partner church pointed to the cemetery,"

Doug says, "and said that some of the children buried there were victims of unsafe local water.

It felt great to ensure that no one else would die [of preventable diseases], thanks to this simple water system installed with great love by our church volunteers."

Meanwhile, Schanuel Steinagel, HAE from Philadelphia Presbytery, partnered with his presbytery's Restoring Creation Enabler, Burton Froom, to create a six-session Bible study called *I Thirst*, highlighting issues of water and hunger in the Gospel of *John*. From the baptism of Jesus through the resurrection of Jesus and his meeting the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, the authors trace the importance of

**Author Pat Plant shares her passion for fighting hunger.**



