Executive Summary
The U.S. economy has been growing in recent decades, but the benefits of this growth have not been shared equally. Workers at the bottom end of the wage scale have actually been losing ground. Low-wage work pays less today (after inflation) than in the late 1970s.

One in four workers in the United States has a job that does not pay enough to raise a family of four out of poverty. Jobs that pay these low wages may suffice for a single person or for someone with a working spouse and no children. Once children enter the picture, the dearth of good jobs is a far more serious matter, both for a family and society.

Two-thirds of children in poverty have one or more parents who work, and one-third have a parent who works full-time, year-round. Government assistance programs represent a lifeline—yet even with government assistance, such as food stamps, poor families continue to struggle.

Families living in or near poverty are always perched on the brink of a financial disaster. Living this way means choosing to turn off the heat in winter or cutting back on food consumption until spring. One car accident. One medical emergency. One burst pipe. One robbery. One piece of bad luck. This is all it takes sometimes to turn a dicey situation into a desperate one.

What should be done? **Working Harder for Working Families** recommends the following: (1) set a national goal to end hunger and poverty; (2) make every job a good job; (3) strengthen work-support programs; and (4) create incentives to save and build assets.

**Set a National Goal to Reduce Hunger and Poverty**

The United States should make it a national goal to cut hunger and poverty in half by 2015. Setting a deadline is necessary to generate public interest and action for progress toward the goal. Constituent pressure will encourage policymakers to develop flexible approaches and be as creative as necessary.

We need a fresh commitment from all stakeholders to break out of the stale, polarizing debate that has kept the country from moving forward. Reducing hunger and poverty will require the effort of families, communities, business and government. What we want is a deeper commitment on the part of everyone to seek innovative approaches. This entire report is an attempt to encourage innovation on all fronts, but government must lead and serve as the catalyst.

The year 2015 is not an arbitrary choice; this is when the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be achieved. The MDGs set targets to improve basic human development indicators, including reducing hunger and extreme poverty by half. The United States has agreed to the MDGs in principle—along with nearly every country in the world. Obviously, the problems confronting the
poorest countries of the world are on a much larger scale than in the United States. Nevertheless, problems like hunger and poverty persist even though this is completely unnecessary in a country as rich as the United States. U.S. policymakers can demonstrate their commitment to the MDGs by embracing a strategy to achieve them at home.

The national nutrition programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are an effective safety net for families struggling to put food on the table. But ending hunger permanently depends primarily on reducing poverty. While poverty is clearly a complicated problem that no single policy or program can solve, we recommend a set of coordinated and coherent policy decisions that will move us in the right direction.

In this report, Bread for the World Institute is venturing into some areas of policy analysis that are new to us. We recognize this and have sought knowledge and advice from many experts outside our regular circle of partners. We have embarked on this path because of the inextricable link between hunger and poverty. This report seeks to broaden our analysis of hunger in the United States.

**Make Every Job a Good Job**

Low-income families need from work what other families need: wages and benefits that ensure an adequate standard of living. In 1968, full-time work at minimum wage amounted to 120 percent of the poverty level for a family of
three. Today, working full-time for minimum wage does not even come close to a poverty threshold. Without food stamps and other forms of government assistance, a family with one wage earner employed at a minimum-wage job would be living on the absolute edge of desperation.

Raising the minimum wage would help not only those with minimum-wage jobs, but other workers earning near the minimum. Recently, the federal government took an initial step toward improving the well-being of low-income families: raising the national minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. By July 2009, the minimum wage will be $7.25 per hour. This is an important step forward, but it is just the beginning of what is needed.

Most low-wage jobs provide few employer-sponsored benefits, such as affordable health insurance. Forty-seven million Americans lack health insurance, 90 percent of whom earn less than 200 percent of the poverty level. Ineligible for government-supported health care, many families must nevertheless turn down employer-sponsored health insurance when it is offered because they cannot afford to pay the premiums.

Over the past 25 years, the U.S. economy has changed profoundly, and so has the relationship between government, business and workers. The union movement played a vital role for much of the twentieth century. Today, unions continue to help workers negotiate better wages and benefits, but union membership has fallen dramatically. U.S. unions would be strengthened by the passage of legislation that lifts restrictions on workers’ ability to organize, even if the union movement does not fully rebound.

Without specialized skills or an adequate education, workers in this country have little chance of securing a job that can support a family. Thirty-five percent of low-income working families include at least one parent who did not finish high school or earn a high school General Equivalency Degree (GED). The United States ranks near the bottom of high-income countries in providing job-related education and training. Greater investment in workforce development is essential if the nation is to remain competitive in a global economy.

Investments in the workforce need to begin early in life. The data show that education—particularly early childhood programs—makes a great deal of difference to later economic success. Investing in low-income children should include expanding preschool opportunities and improving the quality of public schools. More financial assistance needs to be available for college-bound students from lower-income families. The entire country stands to gain from a better-educated workforce.
Strengthen Work-Support Programs

In addition to the millions of families living in poverty, many other low-income people need assistance. Their needs vary, but they include tax relief, an adequate diet, help paying for childcare so that they can work, and access to affordable health care. Programs that provide such benefits reach too few families.

By strengthening the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), we can help lower-income working families keep more of their earnings. The EITC is a refundable tax credit that increases for families who have one or two children. However, families with more than two children are not eligible to receive a larger credit—a serious problem because poverty rates in families with more than two children are higher than in families with two children. The EITC was designed to reward families for working, not punish them for having more than two children, and it needs to increase with family size.

The Food Stamp Program is the nation’s flagship nutrition program, serving approximately 25 million people per month. The program does a good job of reaching people in need, but the benefits do not go far enough. Benefits are issued monthly; nearly all have been used by the second week of the month. The Food Stamp Program could be even more effective in reducing food insecurity if benefits were enough to last the entire month.

Childcare is one of the costliest items in a family’s budget. Without some form of assistance, parents are forced to compromise on the quality of care or how much care they can afford. Affordable childcare makes all the difference in whether parents are able to participate fully in the work force. The quality of childcare is also critical to a child’s safety and well-being and sets the stage for a child’s ability to succeed in school. Government funding reaches only about one in seven families eligible for assistance under federal law. There must be a substantial increase in support for subsidized childcare.

Affordable health insurance should be available to every working family in the United States. If employer-based programs are not available, the best options currently are Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). But in more than half the states, there are adults who have incomes below the poverty line, yet are ineligible for Medicaid. Policymakers cite the need to control the rising costs of the programs, but denying coverage to poor people is not the answer.

Raising the participation rates in work-support programs should be a priority, but participation cannot grow at rates even approaching the need for these services until more resources are added. Lack of new resources should not slow efforts to look for more efficient ways of operating the programs, though, because efficient administration of program resources also allows more people to be served.

Create Incentives to Save and Build Assets

Families need to accumulate financial assets to build their financial security and protect themselves in case of a catastrophic loss of income. Presently one in five U.S. families does not have enough assets to cover twelve weeks of lost income at poverty-level wages. Most of these families do not actually live...
below the poverty line. Using an asset lens, rather than an income lens, we see how many more families have only a tenuous grip on financial security.

A large and supportive extended family and a community of friends and neighbors are assets. So are a stable marriage, good health and specialized job skills. All of these are valuable assets that make families more secure. However, the policies addressed in this report focus on assets that build financial security, primarily for homeownership, retirement accounts, business development and postsecondary education. Financial assets provide another benefit—hope, which motivates low-income families to plan for their future and develop strategies that will move them forward.

Several studies have documented the positive effects of asset ownership on low-income families. Children in low-income families with assets do better in school and stay in school longer than children in low-income families without assets. Teenagers in families with assets are less likely to become parents than teens in families without assets. Other studies show positive correlations between asset ownership and physical and mental health, both for adults and children.

Broad-based asset-development policies are not unprecedented in the United States. The GI Bill is an example of an asset-building program that allowed veterans from World War II and the Korean War to attend college and purchase homes. The GI Bill was an important catalyst for the expansion of the middle class during the 1950s and 1960s. The Homestead Act of 1862 is another example. Even today, one-quarter of all Americans can trace their land ownership back to the Homestead Act.

Naturally it is harder for low-income people to save money than for wealthier people, but it is a misperception to think that they do not or will not. Low-wage workers save money regularly to pay bills and purchase household items. These savings are not as large an amount, nor as long-term, as saving for a home or college tuition or capital to start a business, but nevertheless, poor people do acquire assets and they can be as disciplined about saving as anyone else.

Roles and Responsibilities

It is not up to government alone to do everything; employers, families and communities share the responsibility. But government must lead by example, setting policies that promote prosperity for all, not just a few. Parents must do their part, holding down jobs if at all possible and raising children to be responsible and productive members of society. For the most part, families are already living up to their end of the deal.

We all have a stake in working harder for working families. Strong families are the best resource the United States has. Work should contribute to the betterment of family life, not detract from it.
## Table of Contents

iv  **Acknowledgments**  
1  **Foreword**  David Beckmann  
2  **Executive Summary**  
8  **Introduction**  Families Living on the Edge  
16  **Chapter 1**  Low-Wage Work: Whose American Dream?  
34  **Article**  The Best Anti-Hunger Program Needs an Overhaul  
Andrew L Stern, Service Employees International Union  
38  **Chapter 2**  Poverty: Mismeasured, Misunderstood  
56  **Chapter 3**  Work Supports: Welfare Reform and Beyond  
74  **Article**  Do “Work Support” Policies Effectively Support Work?  
Nancy K. Cauthen and Kinsey Alden Dinan, National Center for Children in Poverty  
78  **Chapter 4**  Asset Development: Moving Towards Financial Security  
98  **Article**  SEED Accounts  
Barbara Rosen, Corporation for Enterprise Development  
102  **Conclusion**  What Can You Do?  
108  **Endnotes**
Families Living on the Edge

Intro

Rick Reinhard
Families living in or near poverty are always perched on the brink of a financial disaster. One car accident. One medical emergency. One burst pipe. One robbery. One other piece of bad luck. Sometimes this is all it takes to turn a dicey situation into a desperate one.

Living on the edge means choosing whether to turn off the heat in winter or cut food consumption until spring. It means running home from school because the streets are too dangerous to walk. It means longer commutes to work because it is too expensive to keep a car. It means no one to watch your kids because everyone you know—family, friends, neighbors, church—is living on the edge, too.

It takes stamina to live on the edge, to keep going regardless of how exhausting it is.

Opportunities are denied to people on the edge. Opportunities denied because the cost of child care is out of sight. Opportunities denied because few good teachers want to teach at the schools in your neighborhood. Opportunities denied because the neighborhood has been redlined for so long that no one will buy a home or invest there. Opportunities denied because the bus route that used to serve your neighborhood has been eliminated to pay for tax cuts to benefit someone else.

Job opportunities are missed because of inflexible work schedules. Opportunities for training and skill development that are offered to someone else whose “human capital” is a better investment. Opportunities exaggerated by politicians who speak of a growing economy as if everyone were sharing in it equally. Opportunities are weak or illusory when the jobs do not pay enough to live on.

Few images of what it means to live on the edge show the truth like the television images of the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of 2005’s Hurricane Katrina. These images stand alongside Walker Evans’s portraits of Dust Bowl families or breadlines snaking around city blocks during the Great Depression. The television cameras found a family in New Orleans atop the roof of their home, the flood waters rising, holding a sign that reads, “We are Americans too.”

The Scale of the Problem

From year to year, about one in seven families with children under 18 is living in poverty. Official poverty thresholds are based on annual income; income limits vary depending on family size. In 2006, the annual income of a family of three in poverty, with children under 18, was $16,227 or less, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. For a family of four, also with children under 18, the poverty threshold was $21,134.

A family with an annual income of up to 200 percent of the poverty level is considered low-income. When low-income families are added to poor families, the numbers start to balloon. Some 13 million children are poor, but there are nearly 30
million who qualify as low-income—four out of every ten children in the United States. Nearly 90 million Americans, close to a third of the population, are considered low-income.

One of the points we make in this report is how difficult it is to draw a distinction between poor and low-income families. The division does not occur at the official poverty line because the poverty line is not a measure of what it actually takes to support a family. Low-income families on the cusp of poverty may be worse off than those in poverty. For example, a family in Los Angeles faces dramatically higher living expenses than a family in rural Arkansas, but if the Los Angeles family has an income above the poverty line, it does not qualify for the same amount of government assistance as the Arkansas family below the poverty line. Which family is better off? Costs of living vary widely across the country, but the poverty line is set at the same level everywhere.

This report is concerned with all families struggling to get by. They live in every part of the country and include two-parent and single-parent families; they may have one child or many, speak different languages, practice different religions, have different cultural outlooks; they may be native-born U.S. citizens or have arrived in this country only recently. Sometimes their struggles are exacerbated by a combination of factors. In the United States, illness, disability, debt, substance abuse, lack of education, and a dearth of job opportunities are among the most common problems that increase the risk of tumbling into poverty.

The national media still tends to portray poverty as generally confined to the lone homeless people who are the easiest to capture on camera. Less conspicuous, but a much larger group, are the people who cycle in and out of poverty. Families most at risk for becoming poor are those which are already not much better off—for example, the low-income family that loses its financial footing because the main wage earner’s job has suddenly been eliminated. During the 1970s, the chance that U.S. adults would spend a year in poverty during their prime wage-earning years was 18 percent. During the

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**Renee’s story, Part I**

I was on my own before my 18th birthday. No family or friends to turn to for help, and poverty seemed to follow me everywhere. I entered a relationship at age 19, which produced a beautiful baby girl. I was so happy when I held her in my arms. My life had more meaning than ever before.

The relationship I had with her father was troubled almost from the start, but I clung to the belief that we could make it work. There was physical and verbal abuse that continued after our child was born. Separating from him was the safest decision I could make at the time for my daughter and me.

This is where I begin my story, as it sets in motion my life as an adult. I am 33 years old now. In many ways, I feel lucky to be alive. As a child I suffered physical and psychological abuse at the hands of my mother’s boyfriend, and as a teenager on more than one occasion I tried to commit suicide and nearly succeeded. But I will not tell you any more about that period of my life. I have not stopped learning from my past, but my life is about triumph and success over adversity. It is still not easy.

I am proud of all that I have accomplished to get to where I am now. I have chosen to be a stronger person and not allow the past to stop me from moving forward. I hope you can learn something from my story. I appreciate this opportunity to share it with you as part of Working Harder for Working Families.

*This is the first of five entries in Renee’s story. The next entry appears on page 19.*
1990s—several years of which were quite prosperous—the chance of spending a year in poverty jumped to 43 percent. Once all the data are in for this decade, the 2000s may prove to be even more insecure than the 1990s for struggling families.

**Poverty and Hunger**

In the United States, hunger is not caused by a scarcity of food. There is more than enough food to feed everyone. We have the infrastructure to deliver it. There is a network of interstate highways and a trucking industry ready to move mountains of food daily wherever it needs to go. The supermarket store shelves are stocked to the ceiling. But none of this matters if customers have no money in their pockets. Poverty spoils every meal.

Around the world, wherever poverty exists hunger is sure to exist as well. This is not surprising, and for some time, governments around the world have recognized the two as inseparable. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of human development targets, put reducing hunger and poverty together at the top of the list. All the other goals follow from these. The MDGs, introduced at the United Nations (U.N) in 2000, have been accepted by all U.N. member countries, including the United States. The deadline for meeting them is 2015. Besides reducing global hunger and extreme poverty by half, the MDGs include improving maternal and child health, slowing the spread of infectious disease, achieving universal primary education, and providing wider access to basic services such as potable water and sewage treatment. The MDGs apply to all countries, not just the least developed. As a country which has accepted the MDGs, the United States must be committed to achieving them at home.

Poverty in the United States has been measured for decades; measuring hunger, or what the U.S. government is more comfortable calling food insecurity, is a more recent phenomenon. Once annual food insecurity data was collected, beginning in 1995, it became clear that the ups and downs in food insecurity line up closely with the changes in poverty. The United States has done a much better job fighting hunger than it has poverty. Hunger is a simpler issue in some ways. The Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, and 12 other nutrition programs run by the U.S.
Department of Agriculture (USDA) serve millions of U.S. residents every day. All of these resources are needed, and when government programs are not enough, there is also a robust network of emergency food providers to fill the gaps.

The ancient Chinese maxim still rings true: Feed a man a fish and he eats for a day—teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime. Families become hunger-free when they can provide for themselves. The solution is simple: jobs that pay enough for a family to live on.

Government Support and Personal Responsibility

We all agree that helping families get out of poverty is a good goal. The controversy comes in sorting through the variety of options that would help accomplish this. The sharpest differences of opinion usually turn on what role the government should play versus how much depends on personal responsibility. The truth is that both are critically important to ending poverty.

Debating strategies for ending poverty is useful—polarization of the issue is not. “Unfortunately, partisan and ideological divisions too often promote one-sided solutions and prevent genuine progress,” observes Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT), a body of churches and national organizations representing virtually every Christian group in the United States, including Bread for the World. “Overcoming poverty,” the CCT Statement on Poverty reads, “requires both more personal responsibility and broader societal responsibility, both better choices by individuals and better policies and investments by government, both renewing wholesome families and strengthening economic incentives.”

For decades, anti-poverty programs have been promoting personal responsibility. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was established in 1975 to reward poor and low-income families for work by refunding a substantial portion of their income taxes. The EITC lifts more children out of poverty than any other government program. In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the most sweeping changes in welfare policy since the Johnson Administration, restructuring welfare policy to make working the major condition for receiving government supports.

Champions of greater personal responsibility in anti-poverty programming are keen to point out the reductions in the numbers of families on welfare since 1996. Caseloads have been cut in half. Unfortunately, most welfare-leavers end up in jobs that pay in the range of $7 to $8 per hour, barely enough to lift a family of three above the poverty line. The success of welfare reform was that it reduced welfare caseloads, but it has not reduced poverty. Between 2000 and 2004, while welfare caseloads were falling, the number of children living below half the poverty line increased by 774,000. For parents...
who are jobless, welfare reform has meant less access to much-needed assistance.

Responsibility is a two-way street, and government has to do its share. Welfare reform promised families much more help with childcare than was delivered. Welfare reform promised to go after noncustodial parents who shirk their responsibility by failing to provide child support, but in 2005 Congress cut funding for child-support enforcement, at an estimated loss of more than $8 billion in support payments. Ultimately, it is government’s responsibility to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society are provided for. Low-income seniors are guaranteed government-supported health care, as are the disabled. But nine million children, most of them from poor and low-income families, lack any form of health insurance. At some point, policymakers may finally come to terms with what is readily acknowledged to be a broken health care system. Until then, government should at a minimum guarantee health care coverage for all U.S. children whose parents cannot afford to provide it for them.

Government does act responsibly in most cases—and so do a majority of parents. When parents are working hard to make ends meet, or are unable to work because of an illness or disability, it is not fair to lay the blame for their financial hardships on a lack of personal responsibility. Economics, not personal responsibility, is the problem: jobs that do not pay enough to provide a decent standard of living; lack of benefits like health care, parental leave and employer savings programs, which are available mainly to the middle class and wealthy; and lack of access to pathways out of poverty like

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Poverty and Racism
- Catholic Charities USA*

Any strategy to reduce poverty in America must also confront the deep connection between racism and poverty. We are convinced that poverty and racism are so intertwined that it is impossible to fully separate them. Racism, in both its individual and institutional forms, is a cause of poverty and at the same time an additional barrier for people of color seeking to escape poverty. We are convinced that without a conscious and proactive struggle against racism, our efforts to reduce the plague of poverty will be in vain. Any effective campaign to reduce poverty must also confront the “unresolved racism” which still permeates our national life. In order to uproot the scandal of poverty, we must also be agents of racial justice.

Any concern with racial justice today must take into account the changing demography of American society, and the seismic shift in the composition of our population. We are becoming more racially and culturally diverse than ever before. At least one out of three Americans are now, in the language of government bureaucracy, “Latino or nonwhite.” Many of our nation’s urban centers are now so-called “majority-minority,” meaning not only that people of color are the majority of the population, but also that no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a numerical majority. Because of immigration patterns and differing birthrates among the various racial groups, it appears likely that by the middle of this century, whites will no longer be the majority race in the United States. Indeed, it is probable that our country will have no single racial majority group.

Thus, the major demographic shifts of the present and near future force us to confront the unfinished business of our nation’s struggles for racial justice and inclusion. As one authoritative study notes, “The color question is pervasive in our lives, and it is an explicit tension or at least subtext in countless policy debates.” The ghosts of our legacy of racial inequality continue to haunt us.

*Excerpted with permission from the Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America Issue Brief Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good.
affordable preschool and college tuitions. These are the real problems that make it hard for families who play by the rules to escape poverty.

No Family Left Behind

“Americans have a deeply held belief in opportunity—the ability of anyone who works hard and plays by the rules to get ahead,” says Isabel Sawhill, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and Co-Director of the Center on Families and Children. But hard work alone is not a guarantee that a family can escape poverty. Many Americans take for granted that the United States is a land of opportunity and that anyone who works hard can get ahead. The facts should challenge our faith in this creed. More often than not, people end up where they started or move up only slightly, and several other developed countries have higher rates of economic mobility than the United States.

The United States will always have a need for low-skill workers. Office buildings will always need to be cleaned, fruits and vegetables harvested, food and drink served. The people who perform these jobs contribute to society and, like anybody else, deserve a standard of living that allows them to support their families and create opportunities for their children to achieve a better future. So do the people who cannot work because of illness, disability, the need to care for an ill or disabled family member, lack of childcare, lack of jobs, domestic violence or other reasons. No one should be forced to live in poverty—but perhaps the greatest shame, and one that is emblematic of much larger economic problems, is that people who are working hard may still end up living in poverty.

For a good part of the twentieth century, as the U.S. economy improved, all wage earners reaped the benefits at about the same rate. But during the past 30 years, wages at the top and in the middle of the income scale have been growing faster than wages at the low end. The partnership that exists between government, business and workers must ensure that economic mobility and opportunities exist for all families—including those whose wages put them at the bottom of the income ladder.

Leaving aside the economic issues for now, there are moral considerations that must be addressed. Should working parents have to raise their children in poverty? The answer is “Of course not,” according to the American people when asked what they think—and yet the sad truth is that many working parents do raise children in poverty. Two-thirds of all children growing up in poverty in the United States have one or more working parents, and one-third have a parent working full-time, year round. The chapters ahead will consider what has caused this shift in the U.S. economy, and what can be done to address the needs of people in poverty and those most vulnerable to income drops that would push them into poverty.
Families Are Still Worth Fighting For

In 1964, President Johnson famously declared war on poverty. In 1988, President Reagan famously declared that “Poverty Won”—but this is hardly a true statement. Between 1964 and 1973, poverty in the United States was cut nearly in half, and hunger was also sharply reduced. For a short time, it seemed that poverty in the United States might one day be eliminated, and perhaps that day would come soon.

More than 30 years later, poverty rates continue to be stuck between 10 and 15 percent of the U.S. population. This lack of progress is disappointing, but we should not lose hope or think that poverty is intractable. The United States is the richest country in the world, and it has the resources, if not yet the will, to guarantee a decent standard of living to all of its people.

Eliminating poverty in the United States is well within our grasp. At the beginning of the 1960s, the poverty rate for senior citizens was 35 percent. Presently, senior poverty is holding steady at 10 percent. This is still 10 percent too high, but the dramatic 25-percentage-point reduction in senior poverty shows that huge gains are possible when there is political will to tackle a problem. It was primarily the creation of Social Security and Medicare, along with vast improvements in nutrition assistance programs, that made it possible to make such progress against senior poverty.

Child poverty rates followed similar downward trends in the 1960s and early 70s, before climbing again through the 1980s and early 1990s, dropping in the late 90s, then rising again in the early part of the 2000s and now holding steady at close to double the rate for seniors. In contrast to the increase in spending on seniors, spending on domestic children’s programs declined from 20.1 percent to 15.4 percent of the federal budget between 1960 and 2006. Another reason for the derailment of progress against child poverty is that policies to help poor and low-income families did not adapt to the changing economic conditions these families face.
After reading a report like this, we imagine you may be asking, “Is there anything I can do?” There are a variety of ways to act on what you have learned, and this chapter offers some suggestions.

If you have read this entire report, it’s clear that you value learning. We encourage you to continue to learn about hunger and poverty and to use that knowledge to be an advocate for necessary policy changes such as the ones outlined in this report. Ending hunger and poverty may seem like a monumental task, but in the end, it really comes down to political will. Changing the political dynamics of these issues starts right within our own circles of family and friends and spreads from there to our communities and beyond. By sharing this report with others, you can help mobilize the political will needed to end hunger and poverty in this country and around the world.

Bread for the World Institute can continue to help you to learn about hunger and poverty. The Institute is the research and education partner of Bread for the World, a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. In addition to our annual Hunger Report, the Institute produces other educational resources for Bread for the World members and the public at large. The Institute helps people in the United States tell the story of hunger and poverty in their communities and around the world. You can learn more about the Institute and what we do by visiting our Web site at www.bread.org. You can also learn from other groups who work on the issues discussed in Working Harder for Working Families. We include the Web site information for several at the end of this chapter.

People of faith are often inspired to learn so that they can be better witnesses of Christ’s love for hungry and poor people. As Bread for the World’s president, Rev. David Beckmann, says, “Jesus has taught us we must use both our heart and our head.” We can suggest many books by authors whose work will help to ground your learning in your faith. Larry Hollar, a Bread for the World organizer and Presbyterian elder, has produced a splendid series of books, Hunger for the Word: Lectionary Reflections on Food and Justice (Years A, B, and C). Bread for the World’s founder, Rev. Arthur Simon, is a prolific author whose books include How Much is Enough? and Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God’s World (with David Beckmann). There are many other helpful books, some classic and some new. Ronald Sider’s book Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity was published in 1978 and remains as relevant today as ever.

In addition to learning and sharing knowledge, another way to make a difference is by voting in local, state and national elections for candidates who support programs to end hunger and poverty. 2008 is an election year; congressional candidates and possibly presidential candidates may pass through your community to give a speech or
conduct a town-hall meeting. You could use these opportunities to question candidates about how they intend to address hunger and poverty. We encourage you to get to know your elected officials and talk to them about hunger and poverty on a regular basis. Write a letter, call their offices, and visit them and their staff. View this as an opportunity to help them better understand the policy questions. They are responsible for representing your community on all issues, and it is not possible for them to be specialists on every topic. They may not see the web of connections associated with hunger and poverty as well as you.

We encourage you to join Bread for the World if you are not a member already. When you join Bread for the World, you will be part of an organization with members from across the country who are advocating for hungry and poor people. Bread for the World members focus on using the power we have as citizens in a democracy to influence government policies affecting hungry people. It is the commitment, energy and faith of our members that makes Bread for the World effective.

Bread for the World members often form groups with others from their churches, communities or colleges. Some groups meet a few times a year to take specific action, such as visiting their members of Congress or planning a workshop for local congregations. Others are much more active and work in networks with other activist groups. Bread for the World member Jane Klopfenstein from Edwardsville, Illinois, describes how she works with other Bread for the World members in her church. Here is her report of a visit she made with five others to talk with Rep. John Shimkus, who represents their district, Illinois-19.

“I presented Representative Shimkus with a copy of the 2007 Hunger Report and briefly showed him what it contained. I pointed out that among the sponsors were the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (his denomination) and Lutheran World Relief—as well as the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Catholics, and many others.

“Our group had met at my house the night before and talked through everything we planned to say. We divided up the points we wanted to make, and had prepared a couple of paragraphs on each one, about half a page each. After each person spoke, she handed him the written piece summarizing what she’d said. I think we showed him that we do our homework and are a credible voice.”

Bread for the World members have, in fact, been a credible voice on hunger and poverty since 1974. Bread for the World is 58,000 members strong and growing rapidly. Year after year, Bread for the World wins legislative victories.
for hungry people because of people like you. Bread for the World members make a difference!

Some members use the media to bring issues of hunger and poverty before the public. Over the past decade, Bread for the World member Ellen Fisher of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has cultivated relationships with three successive editors at the Cedar Rapids Gazette. Ellen has persuaded the Gazette to write a number of editorials related to hunger and poverty. Some of these caught the attention of her member of Congress, former representative Jim Nussle, who was the chair of the House Budget Committee and represented Ellen along with other residents of Iowa’s first and second districts. In the past few years, Ellen has written op-eds for the Gazette and the Des Moines Register, recruited dozens of people to write letters to the editor, pitched ideas for articles, appeared on a local TV program, Ethical Perspectives on the News, and worked to get hunger issues covered in her presbytery’s newsletter.

We encourage you to contact your local newspaper or television news show and ask them to devote more attention to issues of hunger and poverty. For example, have any of your local media ever discussed asset poverty? Have they investigated or reported on what it costs for a low-income family to get by in your community? “Newspaper editors and radio and television producers love to receive tips from their audience,” says Shawnda Hines, Bread for the World’s Grassroots Media Associate. Shawnda works with Bread for the World members to help them place articles in their local media outlets.

Perhaps you are already an experienced anti-hunger activist, and the question for you rather is, “How can I be more effective at what I am already doing?” Working Harder for Working Families goes beyond what are traditionally considered “hunger issues” to explore the relationships between hunger and a number of other issues you might not have considered. Families at risk of hunger are probably many of those using payday loans and check cashing outlets, for example. Find out what other advocacy groups in your community are doing on these broader issues. For example, hunger may be on the increase in your community because there is not enough affordable housing. Are there groups advocating on housing issues? We are certainly not suggesting that you divert your attention from the work you are already doing. No one can do everything, and you are experienced in working against hunger—but there are ways to support hungry families indirectly as well as directly.

Activists multiply their effectiveness when they are working within networks. Technology is helping activists connect with each other in all sorts of new and creative ways. Mike Batell, a Bread for the World faith outreach
organizer, tells a story about a visit he made to a college campus in North Dakota, where he suggested to a group of students that they create an online One Campaign page on Facebook. A student left the meeting and did just that, inviting 15 of his friends to join—who then invited other friends to join, and so on. Before he left campus the next morning, Mike learned that there were already 150 people participating. Through the page, they are keeping each other up-to-date on events like campaign stops by candidates, sharing information about hunger and poverty, and building stronger networks for advocacy.

New communication tools like Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are just a few of the ways the Internet is changing how activists work together. But less technology-driven forms of advocacy still work well too. It is for you to decide what works best for you. It all makes a difference for hungry people.

Other Organizations Making a Difference

Many nonprofit organizations are working hard to improve public policies in ways that better support working families. The ones below are a sampling rather than a comprehensive listing. All are good sources for further information about the issues covered in Working Harder for Working Families.

ACORN (www.acorn.org) is the nation’s largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families and a leader in the living wage movement.

Center for Community Change (www.communitychange.org) supports and coordinates low-
income community organizing nationwide. A top priority of the Center is to increase the power of groups that are organizing to meet the needs of low-wage workers and their families.

**Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** (www.cbpp.org) conducts research and analysis to inform public debates about proposed budget and tax policies, and to help ensure that the needs of low-income families and individuals are considered in these debates.

**Corporation for Enterprise Development** (www.cfed.org) expands economic opportunity by helping Americans start and grow businesses, go to college, own a home, and save for their children’s and their own economic futures.

**Good Jobs First** (www.goodjobsfirst.org) is a national policy resource center for grassroots groups and public officials, promoting corporate and government accountability in economic development and smart growth for working families.

**Jobs With Justice** (www.jwj.org) is a national network of more than 40 local coalitions of labor, community groups, students, faith communities and individual activists united to fight for workers’ rights and economic justice.

**National Center for Children in Poverty** (www.nccp.org) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children.

**RESULTS** (www.results.org) is a nonprofit grassroots advocacy organization committed to creating the political will to end hunger and the worst aspects of poverty by lobbying elected officials for effective solutions and key policies that affect hunger and poverty.

**Wider Opportunities for Women** (www.wowonline.org) works nationally and in its home community of Washington, D.C., to build pathways to economic independence for U.S. families, women and girls.

**The Working Poor Families Project** (www.workingpoorfamilies.org) was launched in 2002 by national philanthropic leaders who saw the need to strengthen state policies affecting low-income working families. The national initiative is now supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce and Mott foundations.