There is widespread hunger in the land of plenty. In the United States, nearly 49 million Americans, including 16.2 million children, live in households where it is a struggle to put food on the table each month. Among children, more than one in five children is at risk of hunger; among African-Americans and Latinos, nearly one in three children is at risk of hunger.3

While the nation’s nutrition safety net includes special programs for children and nursing mothers and infants, as well as commodity programs for local food banks and soup kitchens, it is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that provides our “first line of defense against hunger.”4

SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, enables low-income families to buy food, using an electronic debit card in more than 246,000 approved retail stores, and to be able to consume it in their own family home—not in a soup kitchen. In FY2012, SNAP served around 46 million people monthly.1 Among one in seven people in the United States is enrolled in SNAP. Nearly half are children.1 About half of all children will receive SNAP benefits at some point before age 20, and, among African-Americans children, 90 percent will participate in SNAP before age 20.5

The monthly SNAP benefit is based on family size and an estimate of costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for various-sized households. Family eligibility depends on available financial resources and both monthly “gross income” (less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level) and “net income” after certain deductions (less than the federal poverty level).

Because eligibility is based on income and resources, a downturn in the economy causes a growing number of families to become eligible for SNAP; thus it really is the “last resort” for the unemployed and underemployed. For example, between 2007 and 2011, SNAP participation nearly doubled due to the Great Recession, increasing by 18 million people.6 When SNAP benefits are added to a family’s other monthly income, it actually reduces the number of families and children living in poverty (income below the federal poverty line). In 2011, SNAP kept 2.9 percent of nearly 2.2 million children out of poverty.6

—Continued on page 2
Silence and lack of passionate concern for the loss of life in our country tells much about us. The child who is murdered on the streets of New Orleans, the parent who dies of exposure attempting to cross the Mexican border for a better life, and people who die everywhere because of poverty reveal to economically privileged whites our own violence and how our desires daily define the Image of Christ.

When Dr. King spoke of the triple evils of racism, and militarism, he was addressing our deepest desires as Americans and connecting our racist to larger, global realities. Our--North American whites--seemingly unlimited desire for more comfort and pleasure, our insatiable desire to possess the world’s wealth and natural resources as our own, we realize, reveal our deadly combination of privileged ignorance and arrogance. Those who died before their time were poor, and poverty, and U.S. urban violence reveal our loss of humanity.

Fitzgerald’s contemplative practice invites whites to acknowledge the way our living is idolatrous, as we set our self-reliant human person. SNAP is one of the most effective and important federal programs to combat hunger in the nation by helping to feed hungry poor, elders, and working-poor families. On the third week of the month, 3.9 million people in 2014 and an additional $19 billion dollar set would see their benefits reduced.

Bishop Blaire reminded us that Catholic tradition is strong on the need for government involvement in confronting hunger: "Adequate and nutritious food is a basic need of the human person. SNAP is one of the most effective and important federal programs to combat hunger in the nation by helping to feed hungry poor, elders, and working-poor families." 3

ENDNOTES

3 Francis Cardinal George, S.J., “Dwell in Contemplation and Protest for Racial Justice,” in Light Burdens Heavy (1964), reprinted as a "new training" that must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood [and sisterhood] between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view to their progress and development.

Now is the time to attend and listen, to hear the cry of new life and a new creation. When we hear these cries for freedom and life, then we must respond. Congressional Labor’s prophetic call to reaffirm Dr. King’s dream and become “good trouble-makers” calls us to be those who fight for the rights of those who are suffering. John Lewis learned how nonviolence invites—and demands—ascetic practices of prayer, fasting, contemplation, and active nonviolence. Or, as Pope Paul VI wrote on the first World Day of Peace on January 1, 1969, racial injustice demands a new "training" that must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood [and sisterhood] between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view to their progress and development. Now is the time to attend and listen, to hear the cry of new life and a new creation. When we hear these cries for freedom and life, then we must respond. Congressional Labor’s prophetic call to reaffirm Dr. King’s dream and become “good trouble-makers” calls us to be those who fight for the rights of those who are suffering. John Lewis learned how nonviolence invites—and demands—ascetic practices of prayer, fasting, contemplation, and active nonviolence. Or, as Pope Paul VI wrote on the first World Day of Peace on January 1, 1969, racial injustice demands a new "training" that must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood [and sisterhood] between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view to their progress and development.

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The Relentless Assault on America’s Hungry

BY FRED KAMMER, S.J.

There is widespread hunger in the land of plenty. In the United States, nearly 49 million Americans, including 16.2 million children, live in households where it is a struggle to put food on the table each month. Among children, more than one in five children is at risk of hunger; among African-Americans and Latinos, nearly one in three children is at risk of hunger.

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Because eligibility is based on income and resources, a downturn in the economy causes a growing number of families to become eligible for SNAP; thus it really is the “last resort” for the unemployed or underemployed. For example, between 2007 and 2011, SNAP participation nearly doubled due to the Great Recession, increasing by 18 million people. When SNAP benefits are added to a family’s other monthly income, it actually reduces the number of families and children living in poverty (income below the federal poverty line). In 2011, SNAP kept 2.9 percent of nearly 2.2 million children out of poverty.

...Continued on page 2

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12. See Catholic Social Thought and Hunger in this issue for background.