



# PHP POST

Spring 2021 | Presbyterian Hunger Program | [pcusa.org/hunger](http://pcusa.org/hunger)

PHP and Matthew 25

## Land is the Basis of Freedom

*andrew kang bartlett, associate for National Hunger Concerns for PHP*



Soul Fire Farm

Spring planting in the midst of Covid-19.

I've heard Leah Penniman quote Chris Bolden-Newsome, "while the land was the scene of the crime," and add, "she was never the criminal."

Leah Penniman is a Black Kreyol educator, farmer, food justice activist and the author of the book, *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*. Leah co-founded Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, New York, just 10 years ago "to end racism in the food system and reclaim our ancestral connection to land." PHP has been honored to be able to support the farm over the past five years.

Leah and the dedicated crew at Soul Fire Farm have been immersing young Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in the history of Afro-Indigenous peoples and educating about the major role the African diaspora played in spreading agroecological farming in the Americas. The curriculum of their BIPOC Farming Immersion deepens the connection to the land and provides hands-on agricultural training. Soul Fire Farm grows traditional foods grown from seeds that enslaved African women wove into their hair and brought across the Middle Passage.

"To free ourselves, we must feed ourselves," says Leah Penniman. Her words echo the sentiment of Malcolm X, who in a 1963 "Message to the Grass Roots" speech, said –

"Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice and equality."

PHP's partners in the U.S. and around the world remind us that this is every bit as true now, half a century later. Land is the basis of freedom, and "land is life."

Soul Fire Farm's work is both hyperlocal and global. They are devoted to the farm and to the communities around them, which are facing acute food insecurity made worse by the pandemic. Soul Fire Farm provides

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## Connecting the Presbyterian Hunger Program and Matthew 25

Rebecca Barnes, coordinator for PHP

The PC(USA) has committed itself to a vision of Matthew 25 — eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality. **In the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP), we are excited about this vision because we have long worked to:**

1. **alleviate and eliminate poverty and hunger**
2. **redistribute resources for all people as we fight racism and our colonial history**
3. **enliven congregations through supporting their hunger action, earth care and community organizing efforts.**

One additional key component of the work in the Hunger Program that runs through all three emphases of Matthew 25 is our commitment to the well-being of the earth and all people. Environmental justice is needed to lift communities out of poverty and win the fight for access to clean food, healthy land, sufficient water and protection from climate disasters and toxic pollution. Climate justice is needed to dismantle environmental racism in which Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities are first and foremost impacted by climate change and environmental destruction. Earth care is needed to build

vital congregations because we are not vital in our worship and theology if we do not consider how we use our buildings and grounds, preaching and teaching and our geographical place in the ecosystem for the good of all God's Creation.

Part of the Matthew 25:31–46 passage is the command to see Christ in those who are suffering. So, as we seek to become people and congregations that embody this vision, we want to begin to recognize the people and places around us who can be vessels for God's teaching as they work for economic, racial and environmental justice. That hungry person — they are Christ. That thirsty person — they are Christ. We see God in the communities we walk alongside. We are humbled to learn from them about how to do the work that God has put on our hearts.

In South Dakota, Alabama, New Mexico, North Carolina, New York and California, young people are learning to grow food in safe, environmentally friendly, and culturally appropriate ways through our PHP grant partner organizations. Whether the community is Lakota, Maskokee, Latinx, Immigrant/Refugee, African American, Asian American or of other identities, these young people are learning self-esteem, new skills and care for the earth as they simultaneously combat systemic poverty

and structural racism that have historically harmed their communities. They can teach us what it means to commit ourselves to principles of eradicating systemic poverty and dismantling structural racism while revitalizing congregations. While our Presbyterian enlivening of our congregations may call for different things than what these youth are doing to uplift their own communities, a common thread is that dedicating one's self, pursuing a particular community's need and growth, and being connected to the larger world around us are vital.

In Cameroon, Peru, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Uganda and Yemen, tireless advocates for social and economic justice meet their community needs today while also laying the groundwork for future well-being. They teach us that systemic poverty is exacerbated by climate change, violent conflict, political extremes, famine, and lack of corporate and governmental transparency. They invite us to learn that the roots of European and American colonial, military and economic interests around the world have created gross disparities between groups of people and segregated the "haves" and the "have nots," often along the lines of ethnicity and nationality around the world. Our partner organizations in these countries teach us that we cannot claim to be vital congregations or

to walk alongside these organizational partners, is an honor and privilege. Giving to OGHS is one way to embrace Christ's call in Matthew 25:31–46 to see Christ in all those we meet and to honor God's presence in communities that have been oppressed and are now teaching us how to reclaim life, livelihoods, and hope for the

earth and all people.

**Give online** at [www.pcusa.org/donate/OG999999](http://www.pcusa.org/donate/OG999999) **or send a check**, with OG999999 on the memo line and mail to: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) P.O. Box 643700 Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

to be working on poverty or racism if we do not look outside our own country's borders and consider our global footprint.

For people of faith, and Presbyterians in the pews, being able to help repair some of the historical damage through our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, and



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## Fighting colonialism and poverty globally through the Joining Hands initiative

Eileen Schuhmann, mission specialist for International Hunger Concerns, and Valery Nodem, associate for International Hunger Concerns for PHP

In our international work, the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) is in many ways working with partners to remedy the past injustices that are the legacy of colonialism, as well as to fight the current day injustices of neocolonial policies and practices.

Colonialism was a system based on occupation, domination, and exploitation of people, land and resources. “[T]he impacts of colonialism were similar, regardless of the specific colonizer: disease; destruction of indigenous social, political, and economic structures; repression; exploitation; land displacement; and land degradation.”<sup>1</sup>

Many former colonies are current day extractive economies, where their natural resource wealth in the form of metals, minerals, oil, gas, timber and cash crops is extracted by foreign corporations and exported to wealthy countries. These former colonies, rich in natural resources, tend to have some of the worst development outcomes in terms of poverty, inequality and disadvantage.

Local populations suffer from what is often called the “resource curse,” receiving minimal benefits from the extractive operations while enduring the brunt of its consequences.

Many of our Joining Hands partners are working to defend the rights of frontline communities within extraction zones who have had their environment and health polluted, been forcibly displaced from their lands and fallen into deeper poverty.



Men sift cobalt at an artisanal mine in Lubumbashi, DR Congo

Most of these extractive projects are implemented without respecting international law and the principle of free, prior and informed consent as a basic right for Indigenous people, meant to ensure their self-determination and participation in decision making.

Much of Joining Hands’ work is to ensure that communities understand the decisions that are being made without their consent, how those decisions could impact their futures, and understand what their rights

are and how to amplify their voices.

In the spirit of the Matthew 25 vision, with the focus on healing global systems of oppression, PHP has for years been actively engaged in accompanying our partners’ efforts to dismantle remnants of colonialism in their countries and communities. Joining Hands brings together partner networks

1. Campbell, P. J., MacKinnon, A., & Stevens, C. R. (2010). An introduction to global studies. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell. P.37.

Valery Nodem

in seven countries with congregations and presbyteries in the United States to look together at the immense troubles we all face on a small planet and pull together in prayer, research, repentance, and in a process of mutual transformation that reflects our shared commitment to global peace and justice. Through local, national and international campaigns, Joining Hands networks address issues that cause and maintain people in poverty.

Red Uniendo Manos Peru (Joining Hands Peru) has been organizing mining communities to advocate for specialized health care and environmental remediation in La Oroya, Peru, and throughout the country. La Oroya is one of the 10 most contaminated cities in the world due to contamination from a metallurgical smelter that used to be owned and operated by a U.S. corporation.

The advocacy of POM (Joining Hands Democratic Republic of Congo) and its partners led to a change in the mining laws of the Democratic Republic of Congo that has resulted in millions in mining royalties and profits being invested in communities impacted by mining, with the communities themselves making the decisions on their development priorities and how best to allocate the funds.

RELUFA (Joining Hands Cameroon) was successful in pressuring the Cameroon government to scale back a large land concession made to an American company, Herakles Farms Inc., from 76,000 hectares of rainforest to 19,000 hectares. The company was to set up an expansive palm oil plantation, reducing farmers to indentured servants on their own land, working for minimal pay producing food for export rather than for household consumption.

Changing systems of oppression takes time, effort and persistence. Through Joining Hands, we have learned that issues that our partners face overseas are also very relevant in the United States.



Joining Hands network coordinators met with PHP staff, Mission Coworkers and Regional Liasons in Peru in 2017.

Valery Nodem



Artisanal miner in Lubumbashi transporting bags of cobalt from the mining pits to be processed before transportation. They do very hard work and are exposed to a lot of risks, usually for very little pay.

Valery Nodem

### If your congregation/presbytery is ready to engage more deeply. . .

. . . whether by addressing U.S. policies that maintain global systems of oppression, reviewing mission network relationships or expanding your knowledge of systemic poverty in a globalized world, then visit our blog Together for Justice ([www.presbyterianmission.org/together-justice/](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/together-justice/)) and contact Valery Nodem ([valery.nodem@pcusa.org](mailto:valery.nodem@pcusa.org)). The Matthew 25 vision invites global solidarity, which is key to reimagine and create a better world where all have life in fullness.





# THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM AND MATTHEW 25

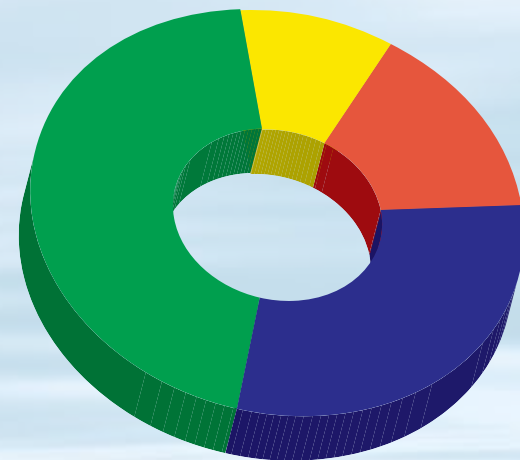


MATTHEW 25

Join PHP's efforts to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle systemic racism and build congregational vitality!

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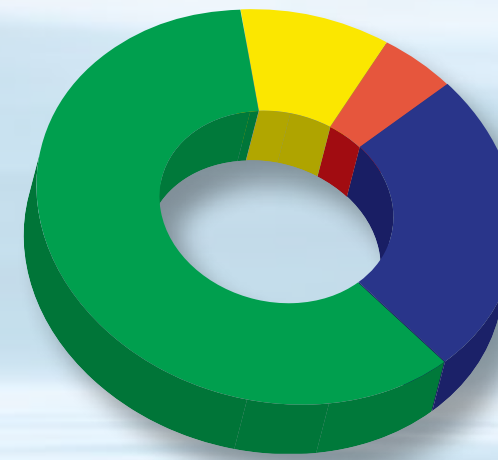
## Eradicating Systemic Poverty



- Grantee and Partner Relationships
- Education
- CBCOs
- Leadership Development

- Education on root causes of hunger and poverty (preaching, teaching, workshops, resources, writing)
- Grant relationships that partner with communities nationally and internationally to fight hunger and poverty
- Leadership Development (Hunger Action Congregations, Hunger Action Advocates, Earth Care Congregations, trainings of community leaders)
- Support for Congregation-Based Community Organizations (CBCOs), who work to improve communities; many focus on affordable housing

## Dismantling Structural Racism



- National Grants
- Education
- PMA Team
- International Grants

- Education on environmental racism, climate justice, racism in the food system, stolen and unequal access to land and natural resources
- National grants to BIPOC communities to return access to ancestral land and increase equitable access to land, training, food, development
- International grants for oppressed communities to achieve peace and prosperity
- PMA staff teams and projects on anti-racism, reparations and other collaborative PC(USA) projects

## Building Congregational Vitality



- Congregational Programs
- Preaching/Teaching
- Resourcing
- HAA's

- Support congregations and Presbyterians who need assistance, resources, connections
- Administer congregational certification programs for Earth Care and Hunger Action Congregations
- Provide preaching and workshops for PC(USA) events, churches and presbyteries
- Support the network of Hunger Action Advocates to serve congregations in their presbyteries.



# A Peaceful Path Rejuvenating and Revitalizing through Earth Care Ministry

Rev. Elizabeth M. Deibert, Peace Presbyterian Church

As is apparent throughout this issue of the PHP Post, the invitation from Matthew 25:31–46 calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities.

We recognize Christ’s urgent call to be vital congregations and worship communities, where God’s love, justice and mercy shine forth and are contagious. And while some folks might think that the vitality of a congregation or worshiping community is based on the number of members, the scope of programs, the size of financial gifts or some other statistics, we know that isn’t the case — at least not entirely.

Faith comes alive when we boldly engage God’s mission and share the hope we have in Christ. The Presbyterian Hunger Program is thankful for the ways we get to walk alongside Earth Care Congregations (ECC) as they turn their commitments to caring for God’s Creation into ministry that rejuvenates, restores and revitalizes their own community.

Peace Presbyterian Church in Lakewood Ranch, Florida, which is both an ECC and a Matthew 25 church, shares about the Peaceful Path, a natural space in the wetlands part of their campus that provides opportunity for reflection and contemplation for their entire community.

Having escaped a troubling situation at home, a woman found herself searching for peace and found it on a path in the woods, where the people of a congregation named Peace have developed beautiful “forest art” in a place set aside for connection with God and neighbor via the natural world.



Peace Presbyterian Church

Many families facing hard things have found peace and comfort along the Peace Path.

One family came to the Peaceful Path for temporary relief from the dread of chemotherapy for their preschool child with a malignant brain tumor. They rejoiced in discovering painted rocks along the path with messages of hope, peace and kindness.

It all began when a Presbyterian congregation chartered in 2009 was

uniquely blessed with a 24-acre site, half of which is a natural wooded forest, adjacent to protected wetland area. With a blessing grant from Peace River Presbytery, the church was able to live into their vision for a meditation pathway to benefit the surrounding community, as well as the congregation, in part fulfilling the overall mission to make God known by growing

as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace and caring for the needs of others.

When COVID-19 isolation left members feeling stir-crazy at home, they took advantage of mild Florida temperatures to get outside and create beautiful things in the path with God’s help. Cut palmetto branches with red berries become a Christmas tree. Dried palm tree sheaths form into circular flower shapes. Inner layers of dead tree trunks take on human appearance and are gathered in circles as if at a campfire. Dead tree limbs and trunks pieced together create a sense of mutual support and direction. Staghorn ferns, air plants, rustic pottery, huge wreaths of woven vines and colorfully bright bromeliads add inspiration! Having been certified as an ECC in the PC(USA), this commitment moved beyond discussions of recycling, sustainability and environmentally friendly policies to a vigorous enthusiasm for the natural glory of God’s Creation!

Word gets out in the community, with the help of the local newspaper, and soon there are many guests on the Peaceful Path, including CROP Hunger walkers. A grandmother, new to the area, grieving the loss of two sons, comes to walk with her young grandchildren for whom she is now mother, and the whole family connects with the Peace congregation, having an outdoor dance in the parking lot — a peaceful pathway to significant involvement. Others simply pick up a meditation page to have a quiet time in the woods.

In this year’s Ash Wednesday service, palm branches are burned to ashes in an old clay pot, and most of the service is recorded along the path, as a symbol of the Lenten journey of life in Christ. Years-old protruding palmetto roots sending up shoots looking for light serve as a reminder



Peace Presbyterian Church



Peace Presbyterian Church

Children add painted rocks that are secretly placed in a variety of locations along the path.

that even in the darkness of a pandemic, Christ is our light.

Along the Peaceful path, old vines and dead branches, frustrations and grief are bent and twisted into good forms of art,

healing us with “the peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and reminding us that “in life and in death we belong to God” (A Brief Statement of Faith, PC[USA]).



# Opportunities and Resources from PHP

## Become a Hunger Action Congregation to help end hunger!

Congregations around the nation are working in many ways to follow Christ's example of feeding the hungry, caring for those in need and advocating for justice. Churches who become Hunger Action Congregations are acknowledged for their work, invited to share their stories and celebrated by the Presbyterian Hunger Program each year on World Food Day — Oct. 16. To learn more, please visit [www.pcusa.org/hac](http://www.pcusa.org/hac).



## Earth Care Congregations for 2021

The Presbyterian Hunger Program is pleased to announce the certification of 276 Earth Care Congregations for 2021. This includes 27 churches achieving their first year of certification and 24 churches achieving five years of certification. The Earth Care Congregation certification recognizes in a tangible way the churches that make the commitment to take seriously God's charge to "till and keep" the garden. To learn more about becoming an Earth Care Congregation and see the complete list of churches, please visit [www.pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations](http://www.pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations).

## Take the Climate Care Challenge!

Do you want to make an individual commitment to caring for Creation? Join PHP's Climate Care Challenge and commit to making two intentional steps and join other Presbyterians who take the impacts of our energy consumption seriously. Learn more today at [www.pcusa.org/cc](http://www.pcusa.org/cc).

## Wisdom shared by Hunger Action Congregations:

"Give for the sake of giving. Do outreach for the purpose of helping others. Do not do these to get new members or to promote your church. Be genuine in your mission work. Treat everyone you encounter in your mission work as equals. Show kindness and compassion and empathy because you never know the other person's life situation or struggle."

*Derek Hudson, Bream Memorial Presbyterian Church – Charleston, WV*

"We learned that we need to figure out ways to improve and coordinate existing agencies who have challenges in their efficiencies and goal. The pandemic has caused greater scrutiny and made areas needing improvement more obvious. We will continue to work to share fresh produce in the community, to help low income families learn to garden, and also work to make our food bank a more approachable organization."

*Bruce Kelsh, First Presbyterian Church - Cottage Grove, OR*

## Green Good News Webinar

The Gospels hold visions and practices that empower followers of Jesus Christ to cultivate economic and ecological justice. Yet, we often don't recognize this. Join PHP for a webinar on May 12 at 3 p.m. EDT featuring the Rev. Dr. Wilson Dickinson introducing an environmental justice perspective on the stories of Christ, drawing upon his recent book, *The Green Good News: Christ's Path to Sustainable and Joyful Life*. In this webinar, we will explore this path by chewing on Scripture and thinking about how to find our place in the work of justice and social change. Contact Jessica Maudlin Phelps at [jessica.maudlin@pcusa.org](mailto:jessica.maudlin@pcusa.org) for registration information.



## Faith in Action

PHP partner Blessed Tomorrow has great resources and opportunities to put faith in action for creation care. Learn about their communication guides, climate Ambassadors training, church financing for eco-projects, a carbon offset tool, and MomentUs statement. <https://blessedtomorrow.org/>

## Growing Hope Globally

Are you a Presbyterian farmer, a church in a farming/rural community, or a church with connections to a farm market? Through Growing Hope Globally and PHP, Presbyterians can connect some of the proceeds from crop or farmer market sales to help feed communities wrestling with hunger overseas. Contact us to learn more! [php@pcusa.org](mailto:php@pcusa.org)

*Land is the Basis of Freedom, continued from p. 1*

affordable and free food and helps families grow their own food. Nationally, Soul Fire Farm created a Reparations Map, which is now run by the Northeast Farmers of Color network ([www.bit.ly/reparmap](http://www.bit.ly/reparmap)), which enables contributions to BIPOC-led projects related to land, farming and/or food justice. Soul Fire Farm also works in solidarity with farmers in Ghana, Haiti and Mexico and contributes to the movement building that will help realize large-scale land reclamation and end racism.

Accompanying our partners in their efforts to protect, reclaim and steward land using Indigenous principles and practices of care, reciprocity and collective good, is a core part of eradicating systemic poverty and dismantling structural racism – two of the three pillars of Matthew 25.

*"If the church is serious about living out Matthew 25, then we need to challenge the status quo"*

If the church is serious about living out Matthew 25, then we need to challenge the status quo of who owns land (currently 98% of U.S. farmland is owned by white people), who controls food systems (primarily giant corporations), and how can we act in solidarity and co-conspire ("breathe together") with people who have historically been exploited and excluded.

Here are some ways PHP is joining with partners on land struggles, and we welcome your participation!

- PHP is active with an international coalition of community, nonprofit, university and labor groups to Stop Land Grabs ([www.stoplandgrabs.org](http://www.stoplandgrabs.org)), with a focus on pension funds such as TIAA, which is the largest farmland investor in the world.

- Locally, PHP works with the Louisville-based community coalition, Food in Neighborhoods (FIN), which has created a Community Land Ownership Fund to provide small grants for BIPOC to purchase vacant lots for food production. FIN also advocates to improve land policies and make it easier for people and communities to acquire land.

- Nationally, we are helping to survey BIPOC farmers and community groups working to assess the need for land, policy changes and capital, and to use our privilege and connections to begin to meet that need.

- PHP helped create FaithLands, an initiative encouraging faith groups to give, share or affordably sell their land to food producers. Find the FaithLands Toolkit at [agrariantrust.org/faithlands](http://agrariantrust.org/faithlands).

Finally, through your contributions to PHP, we are providing financial support to Indigenous groups like Owe Aku Bring Back the Way on Lakota land (South Dakota) and Ekvv-Yefolecv Ecovillage on recently reclaimed Maskoke land (Alabama). These inspiring groups are reviving their languages, foodways and culture and are lovingly stewarding the land.

At this critical moment, called Reconstruction III by some, Presbyterians can join this liberation movement by doing their part to advance land reclamation, to offer individual and church land and capital to farmers of color, to end food apartheid in BIPOC communities, and to advocate for public policies that uplift small- and medium-sized family farms and compensate for centuries of racism.



Soul Fire Farm



## PHP POST

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