



Defending the Right to Healthy, Affordable Food

**“You Give Them
Something
to Eat”**

On the occasion of May 1st, International Workers' Day and the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, the Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops invites Christian communities to pay attention to the current food crisis, to analyze the situation in the light of the Gospel, and to consider various courses of action to ensure that everyone has enough to eat.





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THE FOOD CRISIS

Quebec society is going through a real food crisis, in addition to a housing crisis and inflation.

In 2023, each month,¹

10%
of the population used the Quebec food bank network.

30% increase over 2022

73% increase over 2019

Of these 872,000 people,

37%
are single adults

45%
are families with children.

At the same time,

71%
of aid organizations say they have run out of food from their usual sources.

1. Les Banques alimentaires du Québec, [Bilan-Faim Québec 2023](#), Oct. 25th, 2023. For data across Canada, see Foodbanks Canada, [HungerCount 2023](#), Oct. 2023.

On this May 1st, we remark that, in many cases, having a job is not enough to feed oneself and one's family properly.

Indeed, the *Bilan-Faim* for 2023 reports a

102% increase in the number of workers relying on food aid between 2019 and 2023.

Behind these statistics are suffering people and communities. Do we perceive this suffering around us? Are we sensitive to it? Think, for example, of parents, especially mothers, who struggle to provide for their children's nutritional needs because their income is too low and the exorbitant cost of rent is an incompressible expense. This situation creates a chain of negative consequences, including increased risks of dropping out of school and health problems, as well as anxiety, stress, and even shame, for those responsible for feeding their families². And let's not forget indigenous communities, for whom geographical remoteness and the destruction of hunting and fishing grounds by mining and logging add to the effects of food price inflation³.

The food crisis bears witness to our difficulty in collectively protecting the fundamental right set out in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 75 years ago:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”.

We therefore reiterate our call to combat food insecurity by respecting the dignity of people, who all need healthy food at an affordable price⁴.

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2. Ève Ménard, «[Le visage de l'insécurité alimentaire change au Québec](#)», *Le Devoir*, Jul. 20th 2022; Djazia Bousnina, «[La disponibilité des aliments de différentes cultures dans les banques alimentaires](#)», *La converse*, Dec. 30th 2023.
 3. Ismaël Houdassine, «[L'insécurité alimentaire chez les enfants autochtones, une "crise de santé publique"](#)», *ICI Radio-Canada*, Oct. 6th, 2023.
 4. Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops, "[The Human Person at the Heart of Food Sovereignty](#)", May 1st, 2015.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

Faced with the current food crisis, our Christian communities, which are often already committed to helping the vulnerable, must respond to the call of the hungry.

Why should we do so? Because, in doing so, we will be acting for justice, as Jesus Christ taught us, in continuity with the great biblical tradition of commitment to justice.

This interpellation is found in “the multiplication of the loaves”⁵. It would be more accurate to speak of “the breaking and distribution of the loaves”, i.e. their sharing (*partage*) in both senses of the word⁶. This sharing is fundamental. It prefigures the Eucharist, since the evangelists use the same words as in the Last Supper to describe Jesus’ action of taking the loaves, giving thanks, breaking them, and distributing them to his disciples⁷.

Above all, the sharing of the loaves shows us that the ability to adequately feed the hungry, even today, is within our grasp. Indeed, Jesus shows us how to respond with Him to His call, “You give them something to eat”, when we can be tempted to leave each individual to his or her own means of feeding themselves. Jesus reminds us that every time we give food and drink to those who are hungry and thirsty, we are doing so to Him, bearing witness to our love and faith⁸.

Our Christian ideal is that everyone should have enough to eat. How can we achieve this, or at least come close?

The first step is to take a close look at the resources available.

This is the kind of counting Jesus encourages: “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” Then we need to organize a fair redistribution of resources, that is, a sharing inspired and guided by the God of love and mercy, who has given goods a universal destination and to whom we bring the little we have. This sharing involves the formation of small groups, thanksgiving, the involvement of the disciples, the actual redistribution, and, finally, the gathering of the surplus, which will once again fulfill the Lord’s word quoted by the prophet Elisha: “They shall eat and have some left⁹.”



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5. *Matthew* 14:14-21 and 15:32-38; *Mark* 6:34-44 and 8:1-9; *Luke* 9:12-17; *John* 6:5-14.

[Throughout this text, we are citing the English *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*.]

6. Pope Francis, [Angelus, Sunday, 25 July 2021](#); see also Francis Daoust, «[La rupture des pains](#)», *Échos de la Parole*, Office de catéchèse du Québec, June 19th, 2022.

7. Pope Benedict XVI, [Angelus, Sunday 31 July 2011](#) and [Angelus, Sunday, 29 July 2012](#).

8. *Matthew*, 25:35-40.

9. *2 Kings* 4:43.

TAKING CONCERTED ACTION

In today's Quebec, people of goodwill can take **actions of many kinds** to defend the right to healthy, affordable food.

ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL,

many people donate time or money to support food aid organizations. It is also vital to reduce food waste by avoiding over-buying, and, where appropriate, by donating surplus. This is essential, especially in a time of crisis.

ON A COLLECTIVE LEVEL,

we also need to support **community organizations** such as collective kitchens, which promote popular education and provide concrete technical and social resources to help people exercise their right to food on a daily basis.

ON A SOCIETAL LEVEL,

a number of awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns have already taken place, are underway, or will be launched in the months and years to come.

- In 2023, the [Table de concertation sur la faim et le développement social du Montréal métropolitain](#) launched a national [petition](#) to curb food inflation by taxing the excess profits of food companies and redistributing the proceeds to the population. The document received the support of 7,800 people, including the Catholic bishops¹⁰.
- In 2018, the [Quebec Collective Kitchens Association](#) led an operation to mobilize citizens and demand the adoption of policies, programs and laws capable of genuinely protecting the right to food. Its [declaration on the right to healthy food](#) was signed by 236 organizations and over 5,700 individuals. In 2022 and 2023, the association conducted a series of consultations on the right to food. It will soon begin drafting a Blueprint Act that “aims to ensure that the resolution of food issues is no longer an individual responsibility or a charitable affair, but a collective responsibility borne by the Quebec state¹¹.”
- As many working people are themselves hard hit by rising food costs, and working does not suffice to get out of poverty, it is more than urgent to give serious consideration to a universal basic income covering essential needs, as proposed by the [Front commun des personnes assistées sociales](#) and the [Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté](#), which is also proposing an increased minimum wage.



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10. Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops, “[Demandons l'imposition des surprofits des grandes entreprises alimentaires](#)”, Sept. 21st, 2023.

11. Quebec Collective Kitchens Association, [Rapport d'activités 2022-2023](#), p. 21 [we translate].

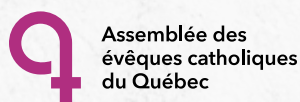
ON A GLOBAL SCALE,

our Christian ideal that everyone should have enough to eat is recognized as a universal right by treaties such as the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR), which came into force in 1976. Article 11.2 of this Covenant specifically concerns “the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”. It enjoins States Parties – including Canada – to adopt the necessary measures to “ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need”. However, at the turn of the 2010s, Canada did not sign the [Optional Protocol to the ICESCR](#), which would enable citizens to report a violation of one of the rights set out in the Covenant, to initiate an investigation, and to work toward the rectification of the situation¹². In addition to encouraging Quebec to adopt a Blueprint Act, we can call on our MPs to urge Canada to ratify this protocol.



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To mark May 1st, we would like to raise awareness, in our Christian communities, of the food crisis and the many practical ways to defend the right to healthy, affordable food. Each community is therefore invited to consider the courses of action it can take, whether or not they are named in this text. By acting in this way, alongside our fellow citizens, in the name of our faith in Jesus Christ and for the benefit of the most vulnerable, we will keep alive the hope of a just society.



Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec

This message was drawn up by the Council on Church and Society of the Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops, in partnership with the Table de pastorale sociale des diocèses du Québec and the Réseau des répondantes diocésaines à la condition des femmes.

Informations

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12. Daniel Pellerin, “[Contrer l’inflation alimentaire](#)”, *Appoint*, Dec. 2023, pp. 21-26.