

Bread for the World's  
2020 Offering of Letters to Congress

# Better Nutrition, Better Tomorrow

A young mother, only 22 years old, sat on the edge of a hospital bed, her 6-week-old daughter swaddled tightly to her chest. Mother and daughter had been inseparable, bound by this skin-to-skin contact since the birth, when the baby weighed just 900 grams, or slightly less than two pounds. She constantly needed her mom's warmth and milk.

"I'm Gita," the mother announced to a group of visitors. Her daughter didn't have a name yet—Gita said she wanted to wait until she knew her baby would survive. She was playing a board game, Snakes and Ladders, with another mother who also cradled a low birth weight child. Gita was in high spirits. "I've won three out of four games," she said.

But there was a greater reason for her joy. Her daughter had been weighed again that morning, and the news was encouraging. "She is 1,730 grams now," Gita proclaimed with great pride. The baby's birth weight had nearly doubled.

In India's maternity wards, the scales tell the story of the country's—and the world's—battle against malnutrition. Malnutrition remains a leading cause globally of nearly half of all deaths of children under the age of 5.

Last year, Bread for the World focused its annual Offering of Letters on global nutrition so mothers and children could get the foods they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Because of your advocacy, both the House and Senate introduced its own versions of a Global Nutrition Resolution. The bipartisan resolutions passed out of their respective committees unanimously and are now awaiting passage in the House and Senate.



Laura Elizabeth Pohl for Bread for the World

Last year, Congress passed legislation to increase global nutrition funding by \$5 million for a total of \$150 million—demonstrating the substantial support Bread members have fostered on Capitol Hill for global nutrition.

In 2020, Bread will again focus on nutrition. In addition to continuing our advocacy work around global nutrition, we will also turn our attention to those experiencing hunger in the United States.

## Too many children go hungry

Across the U.S. and the world, far too many people, especially children, go without food. More than 820 million people in the world were hungry in 2018. Many of the world's children suffer from

malnutrition or lack of proper nutrition.

Today, 22 percent, or 149 million, of the world's children are not growing as they should. And being dangerously thin continues to threaten the lives of 7 percent—or 49 million children under the age of 5.

After giving birth a month prematurely, Gita and her daughter were rushed to the District Women's Hospital, which is pioneering a new treatment: Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), so named because swaddled newborns resemble joeys (baby kangaroos) in their mothers' pouches.

While they nurse their babies, the new mothers eat a steady diet of nutritious vegetables and fruits—

bananas, apples, mangoes, whatever is in season—so they can gain strength and also pass the nutrients onto their babies through their breast milk.

The KMC treatment is now a centerpiece of the Indian government's National Nutrition Mission.

The government's strategy is aimed at the all important 1,000 days, from the beginning of a woman's pregnancy to her child's second birthday. This timeframe is critical to a child's health and future well-being. Malnutrition before the second birthday can cause irreversible damage to rapidly growing bodies and minds.

### Summertime hungriest for U.S. children

As Gita and her daughter gained strength by eating nutritious food, another mother across the globe in rural Shaw, Mississippi, Kendra Whitehead, dropped off her four daughters at Delta Hands for Hope summer camp—making certain they would receive nutritious food, too.

The nonprofit, housed in a storefront across from a scenic park, is a summer meals site for children facing hunger.

In Shaw, roughly 80 percent of the city's children live below the poverty line. "With them providing breakfast and lunch, that was a big help for my family," Kendra said. "I felt secure knowing they had food."

In 2019, 65 children ranging in age from 3 to 19 were served, including

Kendra's daughters: Kimyah, 11; Imani, 9; J'Lori, 7; and Keanna, 5. Aside from breakfast, the children also ate lunch—ranging from hot dogs and chips to spaghetti with green beans and corn.

Summer is the hungriest time of the year for children living in food-insecure households because they do not have access to school meals. Of the roughly 22 million children who receive meals during the school year, only about 3.7 million benefit from summer nutrition programs—leaving millions of children without adequate nutrition.

Food insecurity affects children of all races and all geographic locations. But summer meal sites are particularly scarce in areas of concentrated poverty.

Due to centuries of inequitable public policies in our nation's history, communities of color reside in these areas at significantly higher rates. One in 2 Indigenous, 1 in 4 African Americans, and 1 in 6 Hispanics live and go to school in areas of concentrated poverty, compared to 1 in 13 whites.

Food programs—such as summer meals and the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program—reduce food insecurity for children of all races.

The summer EBT program is designed to ensure low-income families who cannot access a summer meals site in their community have a way to purchase food for their children. Families

are given debit cards, which they can use at retail stores.

A handful of states piloted the program several years ago. Over time, the number of states and children served increased. The program has proven effective and should be implemented nationwide.

Kendra, a paralegal, whose husband, Jawara, is an electrician, is forthright about her family's economic situation. "We are a low-income family," she said. "Sometimes it's really hard to get resources like food."

Shaw is a community with limited access to affordable and nutritious

food, which makes putting food on the table even harder for the Whitehead family. "The nearest grocery store is 15 miles

away. We don't have a car right now, so I have to borrow my mother's car just to get access to fresh fruits and vegetables," she said.

In the U.S., 1 in 7 children live in food-insecure homes. Even the relatively moderate malnutrition that is widespread in our country affects the development of children's bodies and brains. Children who suffer food insecurity have more headaches, stomachaches, anemia, ear infections, asthma, and colds than children from equally poor families who never went hungry.

Children with consistently nutritious diets are physically and emotionally healthier, and they do better in school and in life.

Our government is more divided than ever. But access to good nutrition for mothers and children should not be a partisan issue. By investing in domestic and international nutrition programs, we can help children get off to a good start and make the future better for all of us.

*The story of Gita is from "I Am Gita" by Roger Thurow, in The End of Hunger, edited by Jenny Eaton Dyer and Cathleen Falsani. Copyright © 2019 by The Eleanor Crook Foundation. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press. Kendra's story was written by Jennifer Gonzalez, Bread for the World's managing editor.*

In the U.S., 1 in 7 children live in food-insecure homes.



Photo courtesy of Delta Hands for Hope

# WHAT YOU CAN DO: WRITE TO CONGRESS

Join as a collective voice to urge Congress to **pass legislation that provides nutrition for vulnerable people here and abroad.** This sample letter will help you, your church, or community group send handwritten letters or personalized emails to your representatives and senators in Congress.

**Follow these easy, quick steps for an effective letter:**

1. Ask for a specific action, using your own words or this sentence:  
“I urge you to increase funding to reduce global malnutrition” and/or  
“I urge you to fund domestic nutrition programs so children can have the food they need to grow and thrive.”
2. Give reasons for your request and make it personal.
  - Share a personal reason or story that motivated you to write.
  - Show your own organization’s commitment: “My church is helping by [example]. But, I also urge you to pass legislation that provides nutrition for the most vulnerable in the U.S. and abroad, especially mothers and children.”
3. Write your name and address at the end of your letter and on the envelope, so your members of Congress know you are one of their constituents.
4. Send your letters to Congress; **please don’t mail them to Bread for the World.** If you are mailing your letters, put letters to each member of Congress in a separate envelope and address it (see below). To send a personalized email, visit [bread.org/ol](http://bread.org/ol).

Send your handwritten letters to:

Sen. _____	Rep. _____
U.S. Senate	U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510	Washington, DC 20515

5. **Report back** and let us know if you or your church have written letters or sent emails at [bread.org/reportback](http://bread.org/reportback).

## SAMPLE LETTER

[Date] Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_, or Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

I urge you to make strong investments in nutrition programs for the most vulnerable in the U.S. and abroad, especially mothers and children.

Federal nutrition programs help U.S. families lead healthy lives. Congress should increase funding for the Summer EBT program so more children can access nutritious food during the summer months—the hungriest time of the year for children.

I also urge you to support legislation that strengthens U.S. leadership on global nutrition and increases funding for global nutrition programs. Too many children globally are malnourished and suffer from stunting. Stunting affects physical and cognitive development.

My faith calls me to stand alongside women and children around the world. Our government should provide leadership toward a well-nourished world.

Sincerely,  
[your name]  
[your address]  
[city, state, ZIP]

*For the most current version of this sample letter, updated as legislation moves in Congress, visit [bread.org/ol](http://bread.org/ol).*



## PRAYERS FOR YOUR OFFERING OF LETTERS

*“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

### Prayer before the writing of letters:

O God, may these letters be a voice for justice, which repairs the devastations of poverty; for liberty, which extends to the captives of malnutrition; for the healing, which binds up the broken-bodied and the broken-hearted; for the bread that nourishes all who experience hunger; for the good news of love, which is stronger than death, and for the peace that strengthens communities and families. Together, may we speak out as a collective voice for justice. Amen.

### Prayer for the dedication of letters:

God of Shalom, we offer these letters as tokens of our love and stewardship. May each letter be a voice speaking up for all who suffer the ravages of malnutrition, hunger, and war. We speak out for mothers and children—families that experience hunger in the U.S. and globally. We ask that you multiply these letters until our voices swell into one great chorus echoing through the halls of government and throughout the land, calling forth a reordering of priorities in our nation and our world, and moving us closer to your reign of justice and peace. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*These prayers are adapted from the *Banquet of Praise*, a book of worship resources, hymns, and songs by Bread for the World.*

*Additional resources for your 2020 Offering of Letters are available at [bread.org/ol](http://bread.org/ol).*

# OFFERING OF LETTERS: ACROSS THE COUNTRY

## University Students in Illinois Lift Their Collective Voice

An Offering of Letters can happen anywhere—even outside a cafeteria on a college campus. At the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois, four student leaders set up a table outside the cafeteria—a high traffic area—that included a video slideshow showing hunger facts. Over three days, the students talked about Bread’s mission to end hunger with those who stopped at the table.

Jessica Peek, director of university ministry, said it wasn’t always easy to convince students that the letters would lead to change. “Many have been jaded by society and believe that there isn’t hope in the system,” Peek said. To counter that, she shared with students the impact letter-writing campaigns have made over the years.

Students, faculty, and staff all contributed letters. Some simply signed their names, others included personal testimonies, and some even wrote their own letters. Overall, 288 letters were collected, mostly from students, but many from others on campus as well.



Jessica Peek for Bread for the World

## A Florida Congregation Joins the Movement

After returning from a workshop in Washington, D.C., about maternal and child nutrition, Rev. Margaret Baleh Kartwe knew she wanted her Norland United Methodist Church congregation to learn more about the issue. “Coming from Liberia, I know what it means for a mother to have proper nutrition when she is pregnant so that her child can have a good start in life,” she said.

As a result, Bread for the World was invited to conduct the church’s first-ever Offering of Letters. About 50 parishioners gathered in the church’s welcome center to participate. As newcomers to the process, parishioners had many questions: What facts are important to include in my letter? Where do I mail my letter? How do I follow up?

Parishioners wrote letters to their Florida lawmakers, asking them to fund global nutrition. The church plans to participate in another Offering of Letters this year, Kartwe said.



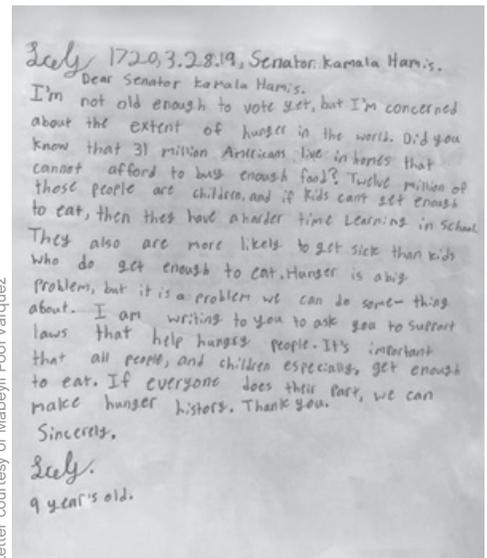
Eustus Fagan for Bread for the World

## West Coast Kids Speak Up for Others

At Maranatha Covenant Church in Richmond, California, young voices took center stage in the church’s Offering of Letters. Kids ages 6 to 15 participated in a two-hour workshop to learn about malnutrition and how to write a letter to their member of Congress. The youngest drew pictures and wrote small words.

Mabeyli Pool Varquez, the church’s children ministry leader, used the story of God calling Moses to help the Israelites to guide the workshop. “I wanted to encourage kids and teach them that regardless of their young age they matter, they are chosen and are empowered to use their voice to help those in need,” she said.

Varquez hand-delivered the letters to the office of U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris and read some aloud at last year’s Advocacy Summit. As a child growing up in Mexico, she witnessed malnutrition. She never imagined that years later, as an adult, she would deliver letters written by children about malnutrition to a lawmaker.



Letter courtesy of Mabeyli Pool Varquez

**Bread for the World** is a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Moved by God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we reach out to our neighbors—whether they are next door, in the next state, or on the next continent. Each year, thousands of churches from many faith traditions take part in Bread for the World’s Offering of Letters.



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