

# A Lenten Invitation: Joining Hands in Prayer



Miyel speaks for the children of his village who- this season- have enough food.

THE JOINING HANDS INITIATIVE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM CONNECTS U.S. PRESBYTERIES AND CONGREGATIONS WITH NETWORKS IN NINE COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, WORKING TOGETHER TO END HUNGER AND TO CHANGE THE ROOT PROBLEMS THAT KEEP PEOPLE POOR. GROUPS OF CHURCHES IN 11 U.S. PRESBYTERIES ARE LINKED TO NETWORKS IN NINE COUNTRIES. RELUFA ([www.relufa.org](http://www.relufa.org)) IS LINKED TO TWO U.S. PRESBYTERIES, THE TWIN CITIES AREA & CHICAGO.

## Keeping Bellies Full

Fourteen-year-old Miyel Sanga beams as he speaks for the children of Metchezleo, a small rural village in Cameroon's Far North Province, where subsistence farmers are now collaborating to bank food and cover the lean months.

"We thank our mothers. This year, they have made us many sorghum balls," he says, referring to a starchy mixture that is a staple food in the region. Miyel knows how to appreciate the better times. Poor rains, depleted soil and locust infestations are a constant threat here in Metchezleo, ruining the already meager harvests of farmers in this Saharan region. Once crops are harvested, some of the yield is sold off to merchants who then store it away. During the lean months of the summer, they'll create food shortages and drive up prices in the cereal markets just as farmers are running out of their own foodstuffs.

Wealth for a few makes the poor go hungry. When the market tightens, mothers have to ration food to bridge the lean months before the next harvest. This means no sorghum balls, only a thin porridge for the children to drink, made with a bit of flour. In most towns like Metchezleo, the porridge is a child's single meal of the day. Some eat only every other day.

RELUFA - the Cameroonian Joining Hands partner network - is educating 18 communities to manage their own food supplies and escape the manipulation of commodity traders. And so, subsistence farmers are now running small village granaries as cooperative grain banks. When the food runs out at home, members of those banks take grain for their families on credit. Loans are reimbursed from the next harvest, with a small interest measured in grain.

These revolving stocks secure the community's food needs for the next year and parents can use leftover money to care for their children's other needs. Jean Srabanai says that the 66 families in Metchezleo had a very different year this year than in the past. "Our children have eaten in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Normally, we sold chickens and goats to buy food. But because we had sorghum this year, we used that money to send more children to school. In our group alone, 30 children, who had to stay home from school a year ago, were able to attend again this year."

Often in the lean season, men leave the village for larger towns, hoping to find work in order to feed their families. "That did not happen," says Srabanai. "Everybody had a bit of grain. So, the men stayed with their children and their wives." Throughout Lent, the children of villages reached by the RELUFA network are asking that you pray with them that God will lift the burden of hunger and give the courage of love for us all:

*Lord, our God, Our Father and Our Mother,*

*We magnify and glorify you! You are Fullness. We adore you.  
Forgive us the deafness of our hearts and our spiritual near-sightedness.  
Invest us with your Spirit to be of your service.  
Open our eyes to the miracles of your infinite love and  
teach us to share with all your children Jesus, God's Son, our Brother and Redeemer.*

*We bring before you all these children who are bowed down by labor, under burdens that are too heavy for them;  
All those who live in a harsh and desolate environment.  
Strengthen their efforts with your arm and multiply the fruit of their hardship  
as you have done on the shore of Lake Tiberias with the bread and fish of the small boy.  
Holy God, may your goodness descend on all of us.*

*Amen.*

*(Material and photo supplied by Christi Boyd, a PC(USA) Mission Personnel and Joining Hands facilitator in Cameroon; Prayer by The Rev. Louise Tappa, RELUFA Network)*

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