

# COOPERATING IN THE FIGHT AGAINST

# WORLD HUNGER

by Mark Orr



## Networks Show the Power of Synergy

Much of our news is about economic downturns and partisan wrangling in Washington. But in cities across America, people have been coming together to do more than wring their hands:

- In Kansas City, churches have come together for ten years each spring to do "Serve Day." Over 500 students participate annually in this city-wide day of service in the Greater Kansas City Area, ranging from home rehabbing, to caring for the elderly, to organizing and stocking local food pantries and more.
- "First Priority" clubs pick up trash to beautify their high schools, giving up time to hang out with at lunch their friends to instead serve overworked and oft-unappreciated custodial staff.

When the body of Christ gets outside itself like this, their neighbors take note, often surprised by the practical witness of churches serving side by side instead of fighting. What follows is a more in-depth account of one area, southwest Connecticut, where churches have had remarkable success serving their community.

What might God want you to do in *your* town?



**M**ore than a decade has passed since a group of churches in Fairfield County, Connecticut were first encouraged to work together to participate in the World Vision "30 Hour Famine."<sup>1</sup>

It started with a local businessman, whose heart was gripped by the statistic that 35,000 children were dying each day due to hunger-related causes. He knew he had to do something about it.

He began to call churches and organize planning meetings. His efforts resulted in a very successful 30 Hour Famine event that raised over \$70,000 – more money than had

been raised at any single World Vision event to that date.

The success of the combined Famine event opened the eyes of many youth workers and churches to the reality that something of immense value can be achieved when youth groups work together and collaborate on events – a concept not widely accepted or practiced in New England.

The truth was undeniable: the energy surrounding the combined Famine and the amazing results were far greater than what any individual youth group would have achieved. We all learned a valuable lesson, and the success we experienced was the result of God

honoring and blessing our efforts to build unity in the body and cooperate rather than complete or just “do our own thing.”

Over the course of the next few years, a smaller group of churches continued to do the Famine together but, due to the lack of a local “champion” and overall coordinator, the success of the first Famine was not repeated. That is, until a few years later!

In February 2005, a handful of Fairfield County youth leaders gathered at a local church to pray for teenagers and encourage each other. Out of the energy and commitment of those at this first small meeting, a thriving local network emerged. They met regularly and grew in membership. Soon the network signed on with NNYM, began exploring the possibilities of jointly sponsored events, and

Then in April of 2007, twenty-four churches and 500 students and leaders participated. The numbers were getting a bit out of hand, and it was quite a challenge to find a church in the area that could seat 500 for dinner. But they squeezed everyone in—just barely! The evening ended with a concert from *Leeland* and we had completed another great Famine!

When the mayor of Bridgeport found out that a group of 500 teenagers were descending on his city to do service projects on Saturday morning, he insisted on personally addressing the crowd before they began their work. The mayor commented that he had never witnessed such an ethnically diverse and multi-denominational group working together.

This example of cooperation between diverse churches was truly an example of the hope

We continue to be engaged with hunger and poverty-related issues throughout the year. Some of our churches have also expanded their participation by engaging in other World Vision programs and projects.

In addition, a local school principal promoted student involvement in the Famine because it related to an issue he cared about: world hunger. Students were allowed to raise support during school hours, and were encouraged to wear their Famine tee shirts on campus.

A further benefit has been the energy that has flowed back into our networks. We have found that this event is one of the quickest and easiest ways to connect new youth groups and churches to our local networks. Because of the status and reputation of World Vision and the wide acceptance of the 30 Hour Famine

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built relationships with the staff at the local World Vision office.

It wasn't long before the network decided to revive the concept of the combined 30 Hour Famine – and the rest is history! In April of 2006, 200 students and leaders representing thirteen churches gathered together for the Famine. After an evening of great worship, mixers, and hunger related videos, they hit the local YMCA for a couple of hours of free use of the entire facility. The group had a blast!

An overnight at the church followed. The next morning, after hearing the testimony from a speaker from Kenya, they piled everyone in their cars, vans, and buses and set out for a series of work projects in the nearby city of Bridgeport, Conn.


The Famine event closed with a “third-world banquet” and a Celebration Concert with *Bethany Dillon*. Everyone had an awesome time and \$35,000 was raised. They were on a roll!

expressed in John 17:21, where Jesus prayed, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You have sent Me.”

In 2008, the event was split into four different locations in order to accommodate more churches and encourage greater participation. In total, over the past three years more than 1,300 students and leaders from over thirty ethnically diverse denominations and churches have worked together to raise over \$200,000 for world hunger. *These results have placed us into the top five Famine groups in the country.* And they say, “It can't be done in New England!”

The ripple affect goes far beyond raising money, however. Not only have our networks raised substantial funds to help fight world hunger, but we have completed numerous community service projects, exposed our students to the worldwide plight of the poor, and inspired students to develop their own justice causes.

across denominational boundaries, we have found the Famine to be a “non-threatening” way to get new churches involved.

The benefits go both ways and, in the end, the hungry are fed, unity is built, and Christ receives the glory. What could be better? 



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<sup>1</sup> World Vision is a cooperating ministry with NNYM. More information about the 30 Hour Famine and be found at [www.30hourfamine.org](http://www.30hourfamine.org).