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## Commentary — From the Margins *Hospitality*

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1.

In February 2003, *The Philadelphia Church — Stonefort* held its inaugural services in Stonefort's Community Center. Members of the Marion Sabbatarian Fellowship, which was being dissolved, as well as independent Sabbatarians in Southern Illinois and Western Kentucky were invited. I was teaching English for Paducah Community College, and one of my students asked if he could attend. I said, "Certainly," and didn't think more about the invitation ... my student was a vegan. I didn't know. And when he came and heard a message about typology—what I had been teaching Pastor Bob Farr—he was impressed by what he heard, but he went home hungry. Except for desserts, the hundred or more potluck dishes brought had a meat element. And not many desserts were brought. There weren't any left when my student went through the line.

I was determined that a similar scenario would never be repeated. There needed to be an organizational element added to potluck meals, someone who made sure that a vegetarian dish was included among the offerings.

Scroll forward to Fall Feast 2015: the *Stonefort* fellowship is no longer a part of *The Philadelphia Church*, and the lesson learned in making sure that a vegetarian dish was included at every community get-together has been forgotten.

But not only do *Philadelphian* fellowships need to include one or more vegetarian or vegan [no dairy as well as no meat] dishes at a community potluck, but there also needs to be one or more dishes that a gluten-intolerant person can eat. For it isn't okay to have a get-together at which top-quality beef hotdogs and hamburgers are grilled, but the only buns available are whole wheat, with secondary foods limited to sheet cakes, especially not when one person present and one person who should have been there are known to be gluten-intolerant.

Sure the gluten-intolerant person could have eaten a bare hamburger and not gone hungry, but it is inconsiderate of the whole to place one member in such a position. The right thing to do is to include the person with dietary limitations into the community by the whole accommodating those restrictions.

Should all potluck meals of *Philadelphia* be vegetarian? Not necessarily. But the idea isn't unreasonable. Should all potluck meals include one or more gluten-free hot-dishes (the *hot-dish* term borrowed from Minnesota potluck dinners)? Probably. But what if in rural Michigan *Philadelphians* cannot find gluten-free breads or buns? ... What's wrong with adding a bean dish as well as making buns or a gluten-free flat bread in which a hotdog could be wrapped?

It takes practice using gluten-free flour mixes [either home mixed or commercially mixed] to bake hamburger or hotdog buns, but the task is not impossible in these days of many flat bread recipes ... having love for neighbor and brother means considering

neighbor's and brother's needs, and then accommodating those needs as best as the assembly can, thereby making sure no one goes home hungry.

2.

The food abundance available to Americans is an historical anomaly: I had a Kenyan pastor recently write me and say that he and his family go hungry on the Sabbath for want of food. This pastor and his family go to bed after morning services, spending hours in bed because they are too hungry to do anything else—

It is impractical to send foodstuffs from America to Kenya. Any foodstuff sent would always arrive after the urgency passed, and would always be too little during the period of urgency. And money sent cannot buy what isn't available for purchase. A genuine Christian in Kenya has to trust God to provide, believing that God will provide and then doing whatever the Christian can to feed him or herself, with this statement easier to make than trusting God to provide when truly hungry ... being truly hungry leaves a long-lasting mindset that is focused on food, with the classic example being 18th-Century members of the Russian-American Company stationed in Russian-America [Alaska]. The Company would have warehouses filled with dried salmon—and did have—but members of the Company sincerely believed they were starving if the Company didn't have wheat for bread, with the mindset of Company members actively linking a storage of bread with starvation. This mindset being culturally ingrained by centuries of life in Eurasia, with life sustained through cold winters by their grain harvests.

In the United States of America, we have a true food surplus, and have had since the founding of the nation ... French officers who came to assist the Revolution were surprised by the amount of food available in the Colonies; for even with money, not enough food was then available in France that a person could go to bed feeling "full."

In America, we can eat something other than meatless beans, which are a dish both vegans and gluten-intolerant persons can eat.

But America flaunts its food-wealth, with Americans purchasing cookies and chips as snack foods for after Sabbath services snacks ... what happened to making cookies, and why aren't *Philadelphians* making some cookies without using wheat flour?

It would be better to have no snacks than to flaunt—before Christ—our food wealth. It would be better to learn to cook simple foods now, while food is plentiful in America, than to purchase manufactured snacks produced by *Food, Inc.* Perhaps then, when the snacks are gone, American Sabbatharians can begin to appreciate [not fully appreciate, which really isn't possible for an American] the want of fellow Sabbatharians in East Africa and elsewhere.

Someone will say, *There's hunger in America ... really? Where?* And what is the hungry person doing about his or her hunger? Is the person eating the weeds that grow between the cracks in city sidewalks? Or is the hungry person waiting for next month's Food Stamps, going hungry because he or she trusts the Federal and State governing agencies to provide the person with food? What happens when the Second Passover occurs? What happens when the United States goes bankrupt and defaults on its social contract with its citizens? *Won't happen*, you say. Again, really?

There are hungry people in America, but there is no “hungry” in America—not the kind seen in Africa when American Food Aid aggravated a bad situation two decades ago by bringing taxpayer-subsidized American grains into that market at a low enough price local farmers couldn’t compete and didn’t plant, thereby extending mass hunger into a second and a third year ... instead of the United States buying local grains stored in on-sight warehouses and distributing these grains, the United States brought in Palouse Country grains and legumes and sabotaged local markets and local farmers: America’s good intentions harmed a great many East Africans.

Meddling in the affairs of other nations—regardless of whether the meddling party is America or Russian or Chinese—almost always harms the citizens of the nation. It is only by people working with people in a manner such as the work done by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that positive changes occur in impoverished regions; for what East African farmers needed was not America grains and legumes, but a small futures market such as developed mid 19<sup>th</sup>-Century in the United States. For with a futures market, a farmer doesn’t have to wait until after the crop is harvested to be paid., with payment then being low while next year’s seed and fertilizer prices are high.

Isn’t harm what our good intentions caused in Libya, in Syria, in Iraq, in a different way?

Even I think it seems pretty callous to say that there is no “hunger” in America when there are citizens going to bed hungry ... but there’s too much food, too many grass lawns, too many ketchup packets in America for there to be real hunger in this nation. Plus, politically, there has been a need to create *pseudo hunger* in America to advance social agendas—and Sabbatarians have bought into these agendas, with Sabbatarians too often lining up for *Bridge Cards* because the Sabbatarian is eligible for social benefits. And it is not wrong for a Sabbatarian to accept Public Assistance when eligible, but what happens when these benefits no longer exit and the Sabbatarian is as some presently are in Kenya, hungry and with nothing to eat.

There is historical certainty that a day will come when the Federal Government is forced to break its social contract with its citizens; for the nation’s spending habits are unsustainable. So every citizen, and certainly every *Philadelphian* should be moving toward self-sufficiency, becoming able to both feed and to provide shelter for him or herself. And if this means figuratively “going Amish,” then this is how it will be.

Back to where I started: today in the United States of America we have the luxury of a food abundance—and we need to use this abundance for good, both in preparing to feed the hungry when they come, and in accommodating the person who for ideological reasons chooses not to eat meat or dairy, or the person who for health reasons cannot eat the diet of most Americans. We have the ability to do so. We need to have the consideration of others to do so.

So, what are *Philadelphians* doing to prepare for when supermarket shelves are empty? Are they using this present period to prepare to feed themselves—and their neighbors—when *Food, Inc* fails? They need to be so doing. They need to be thinking about how they can feed hungry brothers and neighbors when they themselves are truly hungry. And this doesn’t mean storing enough MREs [Meals Ready to Eat] for themselves for a limited period of time.

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