

MCC and FOOD AID POLICY

Our search tonight is for an appropriate Food Aid Policy for MCC. It is important to remind ourselves that MCC is not the United Nations, nor Oxfam, nor a missionary society nor a band of humanists. MCC is the social expression of a particular and somewhat peculiar group of Christians. Let's remember that Christ commanded us to love our neighbor, not someone else's neighbor. The Food Aid policy of MCC must therefore grow out of an understanding of who we are, and who our neighbors are.

Several aspects of our theology and collective experience are relevant in the process of establishing priorities and policies for all MCC programs including Food Aid.

First: Mennonites seem to have a special gift for service—MCC programs should therefore have a strong personnel orientation.

Second: Mennonites have a rural history which lends itself to Food Aid and Food Production programs.

Third: Russian Mennonites in particular have direct experience with famine and refugee status. This results in a unique sense of compassion and understanding of current refugees—many of whom are candidates for Food Aid as well as other assistance.

Fourth: All Mennonites share an anti-war, anti-violence tradition which permits greater objectivity in sensitive situations.

This list is not exhaustive but suggests that there are unique factors which should determine the MCC agenda and result in a Food Aid Policy which is not merely a carbon copy of another agency's policy. There is indeed a danger that one may relate excessively to counterparts in Ottawa, Washington, New York or Geneva and assimilate the agenda of others, rather than formulate MCC policy on the basis of the history, theology and philosophy of its own constituency.

Before moving to the specifics of policy, let's ask ourselves why we give Food Aid or any Aid. Our motive must remain fundamentally Christian. We give of ourselves and our resources because Christ commanded us to give by word and example. Christ met each person at their point of need rather than consider the ultimate impact on Roman rule, the price of wine in Cana, or fishing quotas on the Sea of Galilee. There is a danger that fancy words like development or justice can be used to rationalize that compassion is out of date. Compassion and Love were at the core of the historical Christ and must remain at the core of our own communal expression.

AN OUTLINE OF ISSUES ESSENTIAL TO A FORMULATION OF MCC FOOD AID POLICY

1. Our rural history and our ability to field personnel make MCC uniquely appropriate for a major role in emergency situations requiring food aid.
2. Compassion must remain the paramount criteria in deciding who should receive.
3. Political astuteness is not a demonstrated strength of Mennonites. It is my profound belief that we will win greater respect from all parties if we do not deviate from a commitment to people rather than attempt to divine the greater or lesser evil in impossible situations like South-East Asia.
4. "Process does not necessarily lead to the production of value" – to quote Ivan Illich. In other words, debates, seminars, papers and whatever do not feed people! There are indeed much larger questions beyond emergency relief, let's call them the Justice questions. However, MCC will gain the greatest audience and leverage in the councils of the mighty by demonstrating faithfulness and effectiveness in practical matters. If we cannot feed our hungry neighbor today, our prescriptions to feed a hungry world in the next century will sound hollow.
5. The polarization of relief versus justice or development is both false and dangerous. Using the Food Bank as an example, the understanding, experience, relationships and credibility which result from responding to a variety of emergencies can provide a powerful basis from which structural issues of international Food Aid, development and grain trading policies can be addressed.
6. MCC must become a truly international (or transnational) organization if it wishes to address the larger issues in our world. The inability of MCC to capitalize significantly on its constituency in countries such as Holland, Paraguay, Russia or Indonesia seriously handicaps its programs.
7. How large should MCC's programs be?
The only limiting factors should be the dimensions of the need and the physical, spiritual and managerial resources of the constituency. The present program is much smaller than any of these limitations.

MCC has the experience and supporting constituency to operate Food Aid programs which meet the tests of both compassion and significance. Furthermore, these programs can enhance opportunities to participate in development and to address the structural injustices of our world. Let's get on with it!

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