

## HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY CHRISTMAS



America has just entered the six-week period called “the holidays.” From Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day our attention moves into hyper-focus and hyper- multi-tasking on presents and preparations, on football and food. It is a magical time that culminates in Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ.

For millions of Americans the joy of the holidays may depend on how often they go to bed without supper.

**Did you know?** 29.2% of Oregon’s children don’t know where their next meal will come from. That’s over a quarter of a million kids. No other state is worse.

For many students, Christmas Break is their favorite part of the school year. In Oregon, where 50.4% of students are eligible for free or reduced price school lunch, Christmas Break just means it’s harder to find breakfast and lunch.

**Did you know?** 64% more Oregonians used SNAP (“food stamps”) in 2011 than in 2006.

“*Feed the hungry* (cf. Mt 25: 35, 37, 42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods. Moreover, the elimination of world hunger has also, in the global era, become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet” *Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 27.*

Whether or not you agree with the approach of the Occupy Movement, it has drawn attention to the top 1% of Americans, whose incomes rose seven times faster in the last three decades than the incomes of the middle 60%, whose average pre-tax income increased by over \$700,000, and whose effective tax rate decreased by 30% in the last two decades.

Wealth, however, is not evil. The evil of wealth lies not that it exists but with the methods with which it is gained, with its purpose, and with its use, especially when hundreds of millions of our global brothers and sisters are starving; when tens of millions of Americans live in poverty.

**Did you know?** 46.2 million citizens were living below the Federal Poverty Level in 2010, the highest number since 1959 when the U.S. Government first began recording data. The official poverty line hasn’t been updated since 1959, either. If you consider the cost of food, shelter, clothing and utilities, and account for government programs that support the poor, programs such as SNAP, unemployment benefits, Medicaid, those free and reduced price school lunches, then there are 49.1 million poor Americans.

**Did you know?** Forty-two percent of women obtaining abortions in 2008 reported family incomes that qualified them as poor, and an additional 27% were low-income (i.e., had family incomes of 100–199% of the federal poverty level) and that economic reasons were a leading reason women gave for having an abortion.

“...*the preferential option for the poor* should be reaffirmed in all its force. This is an option, or a *special form* of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our *social responsibilities* and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods...” *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 182*

Christmas is about faith, family and friendships. Christmas cannot be a time where our brothers and sisters worry about having a job, where their next meal will come from, if they can afford to be sick. Christmas is a time when all men and women of goodwill come to the aid of their fellow man.

