

# The Well

*We Share Food!*

January 2021

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## YOUR MINISTRY AT WORK!

Once again, our numbers are increasing to upwards from 30 households a **day: that is one household every 8 minutes..** One third are typically single person households, one third are seniors, and half of households have children. Households have a limited choice of canned items and meat and select from a vast array of fresh food: potatoes, onions, cabbage, oranges, lemons, limes, sweet potatoes. The mid-week delivery of baked goods from Market District is popular. Breads donated by Wood Street Bakery and Five Points Bakery are a sustaining and popular choice. We only ran out of food three times in December. In 2019, at least 35 million people faced hunger in the US before Covid-19, including more than 10 million children. According to Feeding America. But in 2020, more than 50 million people struggle with hunger including 17 million children!

Our Christmas bags included ingredients we obtained from the Food Bank, retail & individual donations and food we grew. These ingredients could be used to make:

- Orange glazed chicken or pineapple ham;
- Rice stuffing;
- Lemon garlic rosemary rice;
- Macaroni and cheese;
- Candied sweet potatoes;
- Green beans and rice;
- Corn bread;



Confections by Casey Renee made Christmas treats and Leona's Ice Cream shared apple crisp. We distributed 115 bags and shared approximately 30 Giant Eagle cards donated by several congregations. We want to thank our volunteers who assisted us in putting the bags together: Carla, Amelia, Haylee, and Maddy. Special thanks to Girl Scout Troop 16302 for decorating our store front and sharing craft kits for kids.

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## MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since April 2020, I've read more than 175 books, many about our current crisis, and others of history and mystery. One of the first books I read was John Barry's The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History (2004). Although I read several about the 1918 Influenza, this was the best and most informative one. Barry describes how pandemics occur, what keeps them going, and how they end. Further, he examines the state of medical knowledge in 1918, how scientists learned what they learned about

viruses, germs, and antibodies, the troubles of facing a pandemic in wartime, and the paucity of information about how viruses spread. This was before penicillin, so pneumonia was still “the old people’s friend.” In addition to describing and explaining the 1918 pandemic, he teaches about germ theory, the history of medicine broadly and specifically, and the emergence of public health as a profession. The immense amount of research, most of it funded philanthropically, contributed to identifying the pathogens and to developing ways to deal with it—ineffective ways, given the state of science—but public health experts realized that the few weapons in their arsenal including quarantining, isolation, and masking. Something to think about: the first virus was discovered in 1892: the tobacco mosaic virus. The first *human* virus (one that could infect humans) was discovered in 1901, when Walter Reed identified the Yellow Fever virus. The first time a virus was seen under a microscope in the 1930s, when the electron microscope was invented. All



Philadelphia authorities refused to cancel a massive War Bonds parade in October 1918. The city experienced one of the worst contagions in the country. So many people died that the city could not collect the bodies.

of this was made possible by funding from John D. Rockefeller, Johns Hopkins and many others, gifts that transformed American science and medicine by providing hundreds of thousands of professionals to treat the sick and to guide the public health response. Despite regular warnings, several cities held war bond parades; within days, Philadelphia was gripped by the pandemic and had no one to pick up bodies: more than 12,000 died in a matter of weeks. Cities like St. Louis and Portland, that opted for social distancing, drastic quarantines, and masking, had fewer deaths and a quicker economic recovery. Eventually, even Billy Sunday shut down his Rhode Island tabernacle because parishioners were dying in the aisles.

Barry’s book had a wide impact on the public health preparedness for the United States. George W Bush read it in 2005 and subsequently established a special office within the National Security Council to plan for pandemics. “If we wait for the pandemic to appear” he said, “it will be too late to prepare.” The office had wide ranging powers and authority, including the ability to convene the Cabinet and to secure assistance from several federal offices. The initiative included funding to develop methods to decrease timing on vaccine development to replace the use of chicken eggs with a cell culture technology. The office would stockpile antiviral medications, hospital supplies for personal protection, and insure the development of health care facilities that could handle a flood of patients in

hospitals and health care facilities. It also included support for development of early warning systems throughout the world.

After his announcement of the office, the Department of Health and Human Services released a 396-page pandemic flu document focused on federal and state planning. It assumed a hypothetical 90 million Americans would be taken sick, and nearly two million would die, in such an event. According to Barry, the Bush (43) administration was determined to learn the lessons of 1918. Led by an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services named Stewart Simonson, and backed up by the President himself, they created an infrastructure to prepare for a pandemic. The Obama administration strengthened inter agency communication, established various “playbooks” on the kinds of pathogens that could threaten world health, and did in fact respond well both to H1N1 and Ebola. The Obama administration also made pandemic preparedness a key feature of the Obama-Trump transition team.

Barry maintains that the problems with stemming the tide of the pandemic in 1918 was not only the lack of scientific understanding of what a virus was and how it was transmitted, but also outright resistance from public health authorities—many of whom knew better—that countered common sense attempts to limit exposure: war bond drives and parades; outright misleading propaganda from the Wilson administration; the congregation of soldiers in small hut, the integration of new recruits with previously isolated groups of soldiers on the front, and the laxity in enforcing public health measures on base: one base had a 5% mortality rate. A variety of factors, ranging from the basics of understanding a virus, confusing public policy, and outright distortion of the facts that were known, Barry asserts, led to the spread of the disease from population to population.



I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades followed him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. [Revelation 6:8](#)

After reading Barry's work, I also read Katherine Anne Porter's Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939). This is the short story in which she describes her own bout with the flu: the struggle to breathe, the fever; the debilitating aches and pains. Porter was hospitalized for months and when she finally was discharged, she was frail and completely bald. For Porter, or at least Porter's character in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, there was no clear message of how to fight the pandemic. She was a drama critic and expected to go to plays and movies. She was exposed in all kinds of ways. When she started feeling poorly, she didn't know what to do. "They say it is really caused by germs brought by a German ship to Boston... Somebody reported seeing a strange, thick, greasy-looking cloud float up out of Boston Harbor." There are regular funeral processions through the streets. She was in love and wants nothing to disturb the lives of two twenty-four-year olds, alive and on earth at the same moment. Her character made plans; while she was in the hospital her fiancé, a soldier, died. Porter described a generation and an era as taken away by Death (war and influenza). The last line is "Now there would be time for everything." For Porter, for Barry, the strongest weapons against pandemic are truth, leadership, truth, philanthropy and humility.

*Ruth A Kittner*



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## ARE WE WHAT WE EAT?

### Human Trophic Level: What *DOES* it mean?

We've all heard dozens of times, whether to justify our treatment of other species or simply to celebrate a carnivorous lifestyle: humans are the top of the food chain. Ecologists have a statistical way of calculating a species' trophic level—its level, or rank – in the food chain. Interestingly enough, no one ever tried to rigorously apply this method to see exactly where humans fall in the food chain until a group of French researchers decided to use food supply data from the U.N Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to calculate human trophic level (HTL) for the first time.

The team of HTL researchers used FAO data to construct models of peoples' diets in different countries over time and used this to calculate HTL in 176 countries from 1961 to 2009. Calculating HTL is straightforward: If a diet is made up of half plant products and half meat, the trophic level will be 2.5. More meat, and the score increases; more plants, and it decreases.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the score of a primary producer (a plant) and 5 being a pure apex predator (an animal that only eats meat like a tiger, crocodile or boa constrictor), researchers found that humans score a 2.21—roughly equal to an anchovy or pig. Their findings confirm common sense: Humans are omnivores, eating a mix of plants and animals, not top-level predators that only consume meat. The archaeological record supports this: humans, even as scavengers-hunter-gatherers, have always had an eclectic diet of meat and plants.

To be clear, this doesn't imply that humans are eaten by higher-level predators—in modern industrial/postindustrial society, at least, that is not a common problem and generally humans are not hunted by wolves, tigers, crocodiles and boa constrictors (although an resourceful predator will no doubt accept the opportunity when presented). Humans are indeed seriously efficient predators, especially when armed with high velocity weapons. To be truly at the "top of the food chain," in scientific terms, a species must consume the meat of animals that are predators themselves. Obviously, as frequent consumers of rice, salad, bread, broccoli and grape jelly, among other plant products, humans do not fit that description.

The worldwide HTL of 2.21 varies widely depending on wealth, location, and culture: The country with the lowest score (Burundi) was 2.04, representing a diet that was 96.7 percent plant-based, while the country with the highest (Iceland) was 2.54, reflecting a diet that contained slightly more meats than plants. (Although nutritionists encourage people to eat more plant protein, this does not mean that Burundi is a healthy place to live. Burundi has the most severe hunger and malnourishment rates of the 120 countries ranked in the Global Hunger Index: 56% of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition.). What the researchers found was this: since 1961, our species' overall HTL has increased just slightly—from 2.15 to 2.21—but this number obscures several important regional trends.

- A small group of 30 developing nations in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa – including Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nigeria, for example—have had HTLs below 2.1 during the entire period.
- A second group of developing countries that included India and China has slightly higher HTL measures that have consistently risen over time, going from around 2.18 to over 2.2.
- The HTLs of a third group, (including Brazil, Chile, South Africa and several countries in Southern Europe), have risen further, from around 2.28 to 2.33.
- By contrast, HTL in the world's wealthiest countries e—including those in North America, Northern Europe and Australia—was extremely high for most of the study period but decreased slightly starting during the 1990s, going from around 2.42 to 2.4
- A fifth group of small, mostly island, countries with limited access to agricultural products (including Iceland and Mauritania) saw more dramatic declines, from over 2.6 to less than 2.5.

These trends closely correlate with several World Bank development indicators (gross domestic product, urbanization and education level). The basic trend, in other words, is that as people become wealthier, they eat more meat and fewer plant products. The correlation between wealth and diet is evident in the Burundi case: Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world.

We could think of diet as a combination of cultural, environmental, social and economic decisions. A culture predicates a “desirable” diet. In different parts of the US, for example, it may favor rice, beans and fish over potatoes, meat and vegetables. In other parts of the US, the balance is reversed. In some areas, during some seasons, certain items are not available. In other areas, with the right balance of social, economic and environmental options, all items are available—at a cost. The fact that billions of people world-wide are getting wealthier and have more choice over what they eat, on a basic level, *is* a good thing; on the other hand, the fact that many people cannot afford any choice over what they eat is *not* a good thing.

Sources: *Joseph Stromberg*. Where Do Humans Really Rank on the Food Chain? Smithsonian Magazine.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/> 21 December 2020.

Burundi Population Archived 23 December 2004. Institute for Security Studies. Retrieved 30 June 2008.

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## THOUGHTS ON FOOD

Judith Dodd, MS, RDN, LDN

Think about what foods you had as a child, as an adult and what is in your home and work environment now. And think about how important or available these foods or beverages are to you. Now focus on your health profile: what meds are you on? What foods are on the “avoid or reduce” list...and why? Are they not available or not desirable? All these factors are points of discussion that should be considered in a search for health-oriented eating. It is important to consider cultural, environmental, social, and economic factors that define our food patterns. Traditional and social media as well as friends, family, real and not-so-real diet experts are good at



paving the way for a product or diet that might not satisfy our social, economic or health needs. Unfortunately accepting a “diet” aimed at controlling calories, avoiding, limiting, or promoting certain foods or beverages can be damaging to our wallet and our mental and physical health. And going back to what was traditionally available may need some updating to fit current needs.

Remember Mikey? Who hated everything?

So where do we start? Much has been written on eating with health in mind. What is interesting is that there is no one “healthy” diet or agreed upon definition for a “healthy” food. Yes, some foods have a better nutrition profile and could be considered health-promoting. But unless there is a medical reason (allergy or medication interaction) many nutrition professionals support that all foods fit in moderation. The question is of course what is moderation for you? Servings sizes may need to change along with preparation. Certainly, plant-centered has appeared in both dietary guidelines and nutrition guidance as being a way to aim for health-oriented eating. But does this mean no meat, fish, poultry or? Or is it a matter of how much, how often and how it is prepared????

Each of us differs because of our ethnic/cultural background, genetic makeup, health, and social background. Our gender, living conditions, and current age are factors to consider. The idea of “healthy for you” is personalized and changes as we age, change lifestyle and with the presence of such issues as heart disease, diabetes, or weight. A focus on going “plant-centered” does not mean going vegetarian or vegan (no animal products) but does focus on putting more fruits, vegetables, grains, and plant proteins like beans on the menu. Add to this volume of food and how it is prepared. Is a serving of 12-ounce steak, half of a fried chicken or fried fish the best choice? Could there be a smaller portion prepared with less saturated fat? Do you need the hot dog with the beans, or could the beans be complimented with some veggies and a salad? Do you feature a meatless meal at least once a week? And what are the snacks and drinks you have available in your home or office space? These thoughts become even more important when we have limited mobility and more time spent staring at a screen or phone. You are what you eat.... **now** but you are who you are **now** which may mean a need for some adaptations. What fits your current needs but satisfies your wants?

This does not have to mean a total change. Yes, there are good and bad choices, but personalization is important. And science-based interpretations and guidelines should be applied or at least considered! There are good reasons to put a focus on plant-centered eating and there may be a reason to talk to a registered dietitian/nutritionist (RDN).

The newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA 2020-2025) 2 puts emphasis on “following a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage”. The new DGA have the slogan **Make Every Bite Count** (that is nutritionally)! There is, of course, an “an app for that”-- Check it out at <https://www.myplate.gov/resources/tools/startsimple-myplate-app>. The new DGA are meant to be adaptable to personal preferences, cultural foodways and budgetary considerations. The recommendations are to food groups not specific foods. And yes.... we are what we eat.... And maybe it is a time to revisit and revise?

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### STILL URGENTLY NEEDED

**CASES OF NEW CANNING JARS AND RINGS/LIDS, OF COURSE. WHEN YOU PASS BY THE CANNING SUPPLIES IN THE STORE, PLEASE HAVE A SPECIAL LOOK TO SEE IF THERE ARE RINGS AND LIDS!**

## WE ARE THANKFUL FOR OUR COMMUNITY FRIENDS AND FOOD SUPPLIERS

### STARBUCKS DONATION BOX

Starbucks at Forbes and Shady Avenue will run a donation box for us from mid-December to the end of the month. They will collect hygiene items to be distributed to our neighbors. As food prices skyrocket, it has become difficult for people to buy soap, shaving gear, shampoo, and other essentials. Thanks to Melissa and Brandan for thinking of Wilkinsburg Community Ministry.



### JOIN THE MINISTRY: BE PART OF THE SOLUTION!

*And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner Leviticus 19:10*

*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Matthew 25:35*

*The best of you are those who feed others. Musnad Ahmad 23408*

**The instruction is clear: we are all enjoined to feed the hungry. We invite you to join our ministry by making a gift for the cause. The easiest way to give is to mail a check to us at 702 Wood Street, Pittsburgh PA 15221**

**Network for Good:** The link also is available on the WCM website.

Network for Good (N4G) is an easy way to send regular support to Wilkinsburg Community Ministry. Please note that N4G deducts a 5% fee for processing your gift. Gifts are sent to us on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month *after* you make your gift.

**Monthly Gifts:** You can set up your bank account to send WCM a monthly gift. It's easy. Most checking accounts offer this service as part of their bill payment option. Add WCM to your automatic payment options, and enter the address: 702 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15221. Select an amount and monthly. Your bank will send us a check every month in the amount you request. This saves *you* postage and the post office will still receive the business.

**United Way.** Most major employers offer a United Way campaign. Again, United Way takes a percentage of the gift; WCM is paid quarterly.

**AmazonSmile** is operated by Amazon with the same products, prices, and shopping features as Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation donates 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charitable organization of your choice. Every item available for purchase on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) is also available on AmazonSmile at the same price. Eligible products are marked "Eligible for AmazonSmile donation" on their product detail pages. Your shopping cart, Wish List, wedding or baby registry, and other account settings are also the same. On your first visit to AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)), you select a charitable organization to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping on the SMILE.AMAZON.COM portion of the site. Amazon remembers your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) will result in a donation. Be sure to remember to go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) when you're ready to shop. Items purchased through the regular [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) website do not qualify.



**WOOD STREET BAKERY**

**RMD Charitable Giving:** If your retirement finances consist of an individual retirement account (IRA), then starting at age 72 you are required to take minimum distributions from your IRA. Because of the coronavirus, the government is allowing people of any age to tap their IRA funds this way; this provision will probably change later in this year, but the increase to 72 will probably remain. You may want to consider making an IRA Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD) to benefit WCM. As always, please consult your financial advisors!

**Bequests.** If you'd like to add Wilkinsburg Community Ministry to your estate, please contact the office. We can send you a simple codicil that you can attach to your plans.

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## **IT'S SUNDAY** **Carlos Gasca-Yanez**

It's Sunday morning. I am going to church at the bus stop. It's empty now, but a tall man sits down at a bench. Steeler hat on and a plastic bag of electrical supplies.

He looks down the busway, same question as I, when is it coming? We hear her voice echoing in the concrete canyon made up of apartment buildings. She sings, "His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven".

I like her voice-- it is soothing. She arrives down the steps and asks if she could get on the bus faster on the other street. I tell her it should only be a minute according to the schedule. The man absorbs the schedule information. We all sit silent for a moment while the birds praise God. She remarks about the bird's range, using words like octaves.

I look past her and see a short young man dressed in black gym suit with red headphones blaring in his ears. He stoops, and fist bumps the tall man. He is a black teen about seventeen and the other is blue-eyed white man with a few more wrinkles on his face than I have. They are happy to see each other. He tells him about the project he is working on and teases the young man he is going to be late. He is showing him snapshots of the project using his phone.

The woman remarks on my satchel how it is hand woven. I want to tell her the story, it was woven by First Peoples and given to my dad for helping their village prosper. But I am swimming in many thoughts and at the same time being gently held by the sacred moment of harmony I am experiencing here at the bus stop.

We are all on our way to the poor part of town but I feel wealthy. Together and different, living side-by-side and working hard to change our future, sharing both who we are and what we have because we want too. We all turn we can hear the bus coming. It was late but none of us are in a hurry, its Sunday. We let a mother and her child board the bus first. Her hands are full of groceries. They made it just in time. We find a place to sit in silence while the bus hums its own hymn to our destination. All of us say thank you to the bus driver as if he was the preacher shaking hands at the church's exit.

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## **COMMUNITY GROUPS HELPING NEIGHBORS**

**Wednesday Evening Knitting Club** usually meets at the C. C. Mellor Library—now Zooming on the second and fourth Wednesdays at 6 p.m. The group is making hats, mittens and scarves for our neighbors. The Zoom meeting is [here](#). You can contact the library at 412-731-0909 or email at [cccmellor@einetwork.net](mailto:cccmellor@einetwork.net) for more information! CC Mellors Memorial Library has an array of online programs. See the event tab at the library website.

The Wilkinsburg Library offers a **Story Time with Ms. Rachel**. This is a play list of recorded readings from Rachel Moore, the Children's librarian and some other guest readers that you can access on at the [Library's Facebook page](#).

### *The Well:*

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