

A Drama about Food Sovereignty and Justice

by Margaret Tusz-King

This drama goes with the worship “Seeds of Sovereignty” found in Mandate November 2014.

Set-up: a table with three chairs. The script can be held like a menu, so that actors don’t have to worry about memorizing lines.

Two people walk to the table, each carrying a take-out cup of fair trade coffee and a doughnut, and then sit at centre back.

One: I’m so glad they serve fair trade coffee here now.

Two: Yes. It’s good to know that our caffeine addiction is at least helping people in other parts of the world earn a decent living.

One: Right. Now they just have to come up with a fair trade doughnut, and we’ll be set!

Both laugh, as a third person wearing simple Asian or African clothing (e.g., sari, dhoti, or colourful wrap) stops and stands at their table, also carrying a cup of coffee).

Three: Did I hear you say “fair trade doughnut”? What would that be?

One: Well, it’s not really anything really. We were just joking around.

Three: Oh. Where I live, we don’t talk about fair trade. We grow most of our food ourselves, and what we don’t grow we buy locally from others.

Two: Wow. That’s hard to imagine. It takes a lot of big farms and a lot of transportation to put a whole meal on my dining table.

One: Our local farmers’ market is becoming really popular, and you can get many different foods from local family farms, especially during the summer. So not everything comes from far away.

Two: Yes, but we still buy and eat a wide variety of foods in every season of the year. I guess that isn’t the reality elsewhere. Why don’t you join us? *(Three sits down. The three of them will sip as they talk together.)* Tell us about yourself.

Three: I am a member of La Via Campesina—a global movement that brings together peasants, small-scale farmers, and agricultural workers from around the world. We are 200 million farmers in 73 countries. We promote social justice and

dignity through small-scale sustainable agriculture and food production. Judging by your coffee choice, it looks like you care about social justice and dignity too.

One: Absolutely. But I don't really know much about where most of my food comes from or who grows it.

Two: There must be some serious issues if 200 million of you have a global movement. Would I know any members?

Three: We represent the half of the world's population that produces 56 percent of the world's food. We farm using sustainable methods that not only feed people but also nourish the planet. In Canada, the National Farmers Union is a member of La Via Campesina.

One: I've heard of the National Farmers Union. What brings you together with them?

Three: We are all working together for something we call "food sovereignty." This includes things like the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food, to define their own food and agriculture systems, and to preserve local small-scale food systems and the environment.

For us, the well-being of the people who produce and eat the food should be at the heart of food systems, rather than the interests of markets and corporations. We recognize food as being sacred.

Two: Those food sovereignty principles and values sound a bit like the things we talk about at church. I can see that they may not fit with big industrial farms. However, they should be easily doable for small farmers, shouldn't they?

Three: Yes, they should. However, we are constantly challenged by cheap imports. And control of our lands, territories, water, seeds, and livestock is being taken over by the corporate sector. We see food sovereignty as our best response to our current struggles with food, poverty, and climate crises.

One: My grandparents farmed. It was a hard and busy life. I can't imagine how you find time to work on these issues, when the basic work of farming is hard enough!

Three: It is hard work. And it is the work that people have done for thousands of years. But we have no choice. If we, the poorest people in the world, who feed most of the world, are to survive and prevent starvation in our communities, we need to be able to locally control our land, water, seeds, and finances. We need to ensure that women and men farmers have equal rights. We need to support and build new local food systems and markets. And we need to protect our communities and our future by using ecological farming methods.

Two: That's a lot to take on. I care about those issues too, and I'd like to help.

One: Is there something specific that we could do? What would you say should be

our priority here in Canada?

Three: Food sovereignty is important. But it's hard for some people to understand and even harder to implement. Food Secure Canada is an organization you might connect with that can help you with both. The United Church is a member of Food Secure Canada, which is one of the church's M&S partners.

Did you know that the United Church is already involved in food sovereignty work through Mission and Service?

Two: Really? How?

Three: Well, there's something called conservation agriculture. This is the type of farming that is most likely to protect and improve the soil and also improve the success of crops in times of extremes like drought or flooding. Weather extremes are more common now with climate change. In poor parts of the world, crop success is a matter of life and death. We know that conservation farming is the most reliable method for crop success, especially for small farmers like me. However, most agricultural subsidies from wealthy countries push us toward technical methods, with chemicals we have to purchase and seeds we can't own. That's not conservation agriculture.

Two: But where does the United Church come into this?

Three: The United Church of Canada and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank support conservation agriculture projects in Zimbabwe in partnership with Christian Care Zimbabwe. These projects help improve soils, save lives by providing more food, and can even help lift people out of poverty by giving them a surplus to sell at local markets.

One: Wow! I'll bet my Mission and Service contributions are supporting that!

Three: Yes, they are. Your Mission and Service contributions are like seeds planted on good soil, just like the parable.

One: Jesus liked to use seeds as metaphors to teach about many things, like the kingdom of God, the power of small things, the sowing of seeds on good soil and bad soil...

Two: And other parts of the Bible talk about food too. I'm thinking of that time when the people were lost in the wilderness, and God sent something called manna for them so that they wouldn't starve.

One: Yes, I remember. I think the thing that stayed with me from that story was the idea that every day they would have enough to eat—not too much and not too little. It required faith that there would be food every morning. And food was recognized as a gift from God that would be there for everyone.

Two: I find it interesting that you said that one of the principles of food sovereignty is that food is sacred. In our Christian tradition, we regularly sit together and share food.

One: You mean at our church potluck suppers?

Two: No! I mean, yes, we do that. But no, I was referring to the act of communion, when we share bread and wine. It's a sacred practice, something that we share with Christians around the world. Everyone is welcome and equal when we break bread together.

Three: Maybe the next time you share bread and wine together, you will also think about the farmers who grew the food and the millions of people in the world who also share your sacred sense about food. *(Gets up.)*

Two: Before you go, can you tell us what you are doing here? I mean, we've enjoyed talking with you. We don't usually run into farmers like you at the coffee shop.

Three: Farmers are everywhere. We are behind that doughnut you are eating; behind the coffee you are drinking; we may even be behind the fuel you put into your car. If you want to learn more, talk with a local farmer and discover what issues are concerns for her or him in your area. Or, if you can't find a farmer, have a conversation with your food instead. Ask it where it's from, what its experiences have been in getting to your table. Grandma Google *[wink]* may have to help you fill in the details. Then think about some of the principles of food sovereignty—things like localized food systems, ecological balance, putting people first, local decision-making, sacred aspects of food. Think about where your food fits within these principles. And think about God's promises to us.

One: That's a lot to think about.

Two: Yes. And look the amount of food we waste every day. Wow. It gets pretty complicated when you start thinking about food and our relationships around it.

Three: Here *(handing a packet of seeds to each of them)*. This packet contains many little miracles—seeds. Why don't you carry one in your pocket? It's simple, yet complicated, just like our conversation. And remember this seed. It has the potential to grow and do great things, just like you.

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