

Happy Monday to all,

On this date, May 2, 1928, Kraft rolled out their famous Velveeta cheese. (...and what exactly does Velveeta cheese have to do with charity or justice?)

Now, I love (and have consumed) Velveeta as much as the next person. Velveeta cheese and chili dip has been a standard for our family holiday celebrations for decades. However...at Catholic Charities we are all about good nutrition! In addition to being high in sodium and saturated fat content, Velveeta is a highly processed cheese product, meaning it contains additives like emulsifiers, preservatives, and colorings.

Long-term consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) is associated with an increased risk of stroke and cognitive impairment. The risk is even more elevated in Black patients. Luckily, even modest cutbacks in the consumption of ultra-processed foods are associated with positive health benefits

Poverty is often associated with higher consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). Low-income individuals and families may rely heavily on UPFs for affordability, convenience, and ease of preparation, even though they lack nutritional value.

This is why school provided free or low-cost lunches are critical to student health and well-being, especially for children from low-income households. These lunches ensure that students have nutrition they need throughout the day to learn and develop. Research shows that receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces food insecurity, obesity rates, and poor health. In addition, the new school nutrition standards are having a positive impact on student long-term food selection and consumption, especially for fruits and vegetables.

The current administration's budget bill proposes significant cuts to free or low cost nutrition programs and modifies eligibility criteria. The proposed budget includes cuts to programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which can affect a family's overall ability to afford meals, potentially-- leading to more children needing free or reduced-price lunches at school. It also makes changes to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) that allows schools in low-income areas to provide free meals to all students without individual applications. Proposed changes to this provision could make it harder for schools to qualify, potentially reducing access to free meals for many students. Decreased access to healthy foods will negatively affect children's health, nutrition, and academic performance.

The Catholic Church proclaims the central truth that every human person is sacred. Created in God's image and likeness, every person has fundamental human dignity that comes from God, not from any human attribute or accomplishment. Every person has a right to life and to the material and spiritual support required to live a truly human existence.

The right to a truly human life includes the right to enough food to sustain a life with dignity. The poverty and hunger that diminish the lives of millions are fundamental threats to human life and dignity and demand a response from believers.

Therefore, at Catholic Charities, we respond.

Our Healthy Living program provides food and nutrition education to Cal-Fresh eligible individuals to promote healthy food preparation through demonstration and education. Our Food Bank Program: provides a temporary solution to hunger. With the bountiful food supplies available in the agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley, no one should go hungry. Catholic Charities' Stockton office supplies a box of nutritious food to families each month. The program also provides for assistance with filling out the Cal Fresh Food application for nutritional assistance.

My personal admiration and appreciation goes out to all who work so diligently to provide these services to Catholic Charities clients every day... and to those who support Catholic Charities through their generous gifts... allow us to keep on responding!

Blessings,

Deacon Mike