

## Growing hunger is secret shame of our great city

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Republicans in [Washington](#) - as everybody knows by now - are hellbent on sparing the privileges of the wealthy while vowing to reduce the national debt on the backs of working Americans.

Meanwhile, [Mayor Bloomberg](#), in a move worthy of a Tea Party devotee, vehemently opposes extending the so-called "millionaire's tax", although it would bring another \$1 billion in desperately needed revenue.

At the same time, 400,000 New Yorkers - 118,000 of them children - suffer from severe hunger because they can't afford a meal.

Hunger, of course, is not a new problem in the city. It has been around for so long that the lines of help-seekers outside soup kitchens and food pantries are as much part of the urban landscape as the corner subway station. But longevity in this case is not a saving grace: hunger was and continues to be a great shame of the city.

Bloomberg is fond of saying that [New York](#) is a great city. And it is, of course, if you can afford it. But for the unemployed, the families who survive but for the grace of God on minimum wage, those 400,000 city residents who don't know where their next meal will come from, New York is not so great.

Looking forward, the news is not good. Poverty is increasing and so is the hunger problem.

St. John's Bread & Life, located in [Bedford-Stuyvesant](#), is an exceptional witness to that sad reality. The largest emergency food provider in [Brooklyn](#), over the last year it has seen the demand for food go up by a whopping 30%, especially among young families and children. It serves 1,800 to 2,000 meals a day and served almost half a million meals last year.

"We see many young parents who have lost their jobs. They end up needing the services we provide," said [Anthony Butler](#), the group's executive director.

Most of them, Butler said, do not fit the traditional idea of what poverty-stricken people look like.

"Many of these individuals have been working at good-paying jobs for years, but the state of the economy has caused them to fall on hard times," Butler added.

Welcome to the new demographics of hunger. The most shameful aspect of the poverty and hunger crisis is the fact that children have been hit the hardest. The State of [America's Children 2011](#), a new report by the [Children's Defense Fund](#), makes clear that this is not only a New York problem.

"With rampant unemployment, foreclosures, homelessness, hunger and massive federal and state budget cuts looming, children's well-being is in great jeopardy," the CDF says. "The gap between rich and poor families continued to grow and millions more children fell into poverty."

And here comes the clincher: "One in five children is poor, and children are our nation's poorest age group. Every 32 seconds, another child is born into poverty." In New York, with the widest gap between rich and poor in the country, 9.2% unemployment, 20% poverty rate and 10.5% living in deep poverty - those making less than half the poverty level of \$21,000 for a family of four - the situation is not much better.

According to the CDF, a child is born into poverty every 17 minutes in the city. Yet, the budget adopted in June punishes the poorest New Yorkers by axing \$5.2 billion from anti-poverty programs. In the city with the country's greatest concentration of billionaires, the number of New Yorkers who cannot afford a meal is growing by leaps and bounds.

Thank goodness the recession is over...



St. John's Bread & Life Caring for the Hungry on Lewis Ave. in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn today feeds tens of thousands of hungry mouths each year.