

## Why Send Aid Overseas When We Need It at Home?

This is a question I read in the "Letters to the Editor" recently published in my Sunday newspaper. The writer was asking, "Why, when we have so much debt and problems at home, should we send billions of dollars in aid overseas?"

This question isn't a new one. Even Jesus was asked "Who is my neighbor?" His response was to tell the story of the good Samaritan, who responded to the need of another human even though that person despised Samaritans as heretics. The injured man in the story was ignored by his own countrymen while the Samaritan spent his hard earned money to care for someone he didn't even know.

So how do we respond to the letter-writer's claim that serving the poor is an expense we can't afford?

If we are not moved by ethical or religious reasons, we should at least realize that it serves our national interest. Lawrence O. Gostin, JD, wrote in an article (JAMA 2007) that infectious diseases do not respect national borders. Pathogens migrate great distances to pose health hazards everywhere. Poverty provides the breeding ground for disease and allows infectious disease to mutate and spread across populations and boundaries; no country can insulate itself from their effects. He goes on to say that the world's communities are interdependent and reliant on one another for health security; extreme poverty and poor health in other parts of the world affect the security of the U.S. and its allies since impoverished conditions are a breeding ground for terrorists.

I find it difficult to understand how we **can afford not** to send aid even when we are in "need." The United Nations Development Reports point out the global inequities in consumption: In 2005 the wealthiest 20% of the world accounted for 76.6% of total private consumption, the poorest 20% just 1.5%. Consumption by the wealthy consisted of billions of dollars being spent on alcohol, narcotics, cosmetics, entertainment and pet food, to name a few. The U.S. alone, with less than 5% of the global population, uses approximately one-quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources. Sending aid overseas is not a luxury we can dispense with but serves our own best interest and is ethically the right thing to do.

I think that the responses of our young volunteers in this newsletter's special report answer the question best. I hope you enjoy hearing what they have to say as much as I did.



Sheryl Snyder  
President



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*In kind service:* Web development, marketing, social networking

*Prayer support:* For the success of the June Mission Teams to Esteli, Jinotega and the Children's Hospital in Managua

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October 3, 2010 in Ann Arbor, MI

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## Special Report: Young People Experience the Richness of Serving the Poor by Jennifer Cooper

During HCI's June mission trips students—off school for the summer—frequently join the teams as volunteers, particularly young people interested in health care. We recently contacted some of these students to learn about how the trips have affected their lives.

Before interviewing the volunteers, I asked Sheryl Snyder, HCI's president, about her experience of Nicaragua and its culture in order to better understand what I might hear from young people who have served on a mission. "Americans who serve on our HCI teams love it so much." Sheryl replied, "because Nicaragua's poor relate socially and personally instead of functionally. Most interactions I have in the workplace here in the States are about getting the work done. It's a waste of time to ask someone how they are doing and expect to get a real answer. But to the impoverished, social interaction is not a waste of time. They have lots of time—and they actually care about you."

And the young people I spoke to agreed with Sheryl. For example, Eduardo Icaza said that in his experience, although people were quite poor, they were caring and joyful. He also mentioned that even if a volunteer didn't speak the language, treating others with dignity was just as powerful as being able to give medical help—"small deeds go a long way," he noted. The exchange was mutual for student-volunteer Roberto Icaza, who experienced his own human dignity through the kindness of a poor man who had opened his home to him and cared about him. The realization he came to through his experience is, "Poverty is real, it isn't just numbers, and we have a responsibility to help."

Alyssa Stella, who is currently in high school, told of how rewarding it was for her to help in the pharmacy, use her Spanish to talk to the Nicaraguan parents who brought their children to the clinic, and be immersed in a different culture. After having been on several vacations to various places like the Bahamas, Alyssa felt that serving on the HCI team in Nicaragua was really the best trip she had ever been on. She also gained an appreciation for everything she has through seeing kids who have absolutely nothing.

Many of the young volunteers reported feeling confirmed in their decisions to go into medical careers. Annie Azrak is pursuing a master's degree in Public Health and hopes to go on to medical school. Eduardo—now a second-year medical student—realized through the trip how his talents, opportunities, and gifts could really be used to help others. The trip affected the career decisions of those who were not looking into the medical field as well. Angela Winston is studying Community Health to work internationally, and Roberto, a business student, is currently working with a campus group that looks at ways to reduce poverty through microfinance.

The experiences that these young people have had, and the choices that they are making for their own futures, are answers to the question, "Why spend money and effort overseas when we have so many problems of our own at home?" As Roberto noted, "Anything people can do helps, and everyone can do something." The effects of the HCI trips on the volunteers uncover the truth that we have a responsibility to the poor beyond our borders because of all that we have been given. Roberto's advice to anyone considering a mission trip: "Take the opportunity to volunteer if you can—it's an experience you'll never forget."



Annie Azrak helping child with cerebral palsy.



Left: Young child waiting to be seen had not eaten anything that day. Below: Alyssa, Julia, and Paige teaching children double dutch.



Above: Alyssa Stella distributing crayons to waiting children. Right: Eduardo Icaza with friends in Jinotega.