

Make Poverty History

BY GARY COOK

Just nine months ago, the world stopped and watched in horror as the devastating power of nature brought unthinkable suffering into our holiday-decorated living rooms. For a few weeks, we were riveted to our televisions as new video footage of the Asian tsunami was revealed.

Forty years ago, in the infancy of television, pictures of widespread starvation in Africa had the power to mobilize a similar response. For people of faith, these images were a call to organize a response to the world's need. Many ministries, such as the Presbyterian Hunger Program, date from that awakening. Even then, however, we knew that charity would not be enough; we would need to help people take charge of their own development and to consider the ways our consumptive lifestyles contributed to the suffering of others. We knew, too, that we needed to call on our government to take concerted, long-term action to relieve the suffering and enable the self-development of people in the world who are poor.

Global Faith and Family

When nearly 200,000 people lost their lives on December 28, 2004, people around the world responded with

an outpouring of compassion. Governments, nongovernmental organizations and churches mounted recovery and rebuilding responses that will extend years into the future. We should be proud of that.

But right now 170,000 children in Ethiopia are on the verge of starvation. In Niger, 166,000 children will die this year from malnutrition and related diseases, and much of sub-Saharan Africa faces a food crisis brought on in part by the loss of a generation of farmers to AIDS. Yet we hear precious little about these statistics. Images of wasting bodies or desperate faces rarely disturb our comfortable lives.

Because of the global connectedness of the church, we are perhaps less able than others to ignore these realities. Our faith teaches us the importance of caring for those in need. We are linked in a worldwide web of faith, regularly sharing information, people and prayers across rapidly shrinking distances. Our friends and colleagues are among those who die of AIDS in Africa. We hear firsthand accounts of the impact of globalization on workers in India. We see the effects of unfair trade policies in the lives of landless peasants whom we visit in Latin America.

Did You Know?

Presbyterian Women established what is now the Presbyterian Hunger Program. United Presbyterian Women made significant contributions to world famine relief for several years prior to the establishment of a denominational hunger program in 1975 by the UPCUSA. "Presbyterian women have a long history of commitment to being on the front lines in the fight against hunger. In 1973, the PCUS Women's Birthday Offering of \$308,380 funded a hunger action program and created the Hunger Action Enabler network [which] became a model for other denominations" ("Twenty-five Years of Hunger Action," *Church & Society*, March/April 1994).



Photos courtesy of The Image Works

Responding Through Choices

Religious institutions raise hundreds of millions of dollars each year to respond to these needs. But we still know that the needs greatly outweigh our resources—that the suffering of others demands that we examine our own lifestyles and take small but important steps, such as buying fair trade coffee and Sweat-Free T-shirts. We know that the real solutions to hunger and poverty lie in rearranging the priorities of our foreign policy, increasing our foreign aid, making trade policies with developing nations work for, rather than against, people who are poor, relieving the poorest nations from the burden of unpayable debt and getting serious about mounting an offensive against the terror of AIDS that is as strong as our response to the threats we perceive to our security.

This is the message of the ONE Campaign which unites a diverse group of Americans who share a concern for the plight of the world's poor. We in the faith community welcome this new alliance, particularly with a generation of young activists and a growing number of informed citizens who look beyond the mainstream media to discover a deeper truth. They travel around the world, communicate in cyberspace and merge art, spirituality and activism in a powerful new wave of grassroots democracy. This generation refuses to settle for pat answers, refuses to have their worldviews shaped by jingoistic generalities and refuses to buy half-baked policies.

Christians concerned about poverty often refer to a story that Jesus told about the final judgment, when the judge will separate out the “sheep” and the “goats” based on how they responded to the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned. For us, it is a reminder that responding to need is a requirement, not an option. We often

The Group of Eight (G8) refers to Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Formerly known as the G7 before Russia officially joined in June 2002, the G8 is the most influential group of developed countries in terms of its role in the setting of policy in the international financial system. The first summit was held in Rambouillet in France in 1975. Summits have been held every year since, hosted by the country that holds the rotating yearlong G8 presidency.

forget, however, that it is not individuals who are gathered for this judgment, but nations.

In July 2005, the G8 met to practice for that final judgment day. They were being watched by this growing movement of concerned people, by the world, and by God. What attention and resources would they choose to focus on the needs of a suffering world? Though everyone's attention was diverted by a senseless act of terrorism in London, G8 leaders made a start, agreeing to boost aid to developing countries by \$50 billion, canceling the debt of the 18 poorest nations in Africa and promising to meet again in November for further discussions. As this date approaches, let us once again raise our voices and call the world's leaders to a new commitment to concerted, long-term action.

Gary Cook is a board member of Bread for the World and former coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. He currently serves as associate director for Global Service and Witness, Worldwide Ministries Division, PC(USA).

This article was adapted from a speech Gary Cook gave in Louisville, Kentucky, to a gathering of supporters for ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History. To learn more, visit www.one.org.

The ONE Campaign

BY KIM SMITH

ONE is a new effort by Americans to rally Americans—one by one—to fight the emergency of global AIDS and extreme poverty. ONE believes that allocating an additional 1 percent of the U.S. budget toward providing basic needs like health, education, clean water and food would transform the futures and hopes of an entire generation in the world's poorest countries. ONE also calls for debt cancellation, trade reform and anticorruption measures in a comprehensive package to help Africa and the poorest nations beat AIDS and extreme poverty.

On July 8, 2005, the G8 agreed to increase aid to Africa by \$25 billion, more than doubling 2004 levels; increase global assistance by around \$50 billion per year by 2010; provide near-universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment drugs; cancel the debt of some of the world's poorest nations; and address trade reforms in the near future. These pledges are a positive step forward in a comprehensive debt/aid/trade deal to reduce extreme poverty in the poorest countries but, much more work is needed. The first step is to join the campaign at www.one.org.

Welcome to ONE. Together, we can make poverty history.

Kim Smith is the mid-Atlantic field organizer for ONE.



Editor's note: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), through its partnership with Bread for the World, encourages Presbyterians to support the goals of the ONE campaign. It is anticipated that a recommendation for the PC(USA) to become a sponsor of the ONE campaign will be considered at the September 2005 meeting of the General Assembly Council.

AIDS in Africa

“It’s a Matter of Faith”

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has launched an effort called “It’s a Matter of Faith” to combat the worldwide spread of AIDS. “It’s a Matter of Faith” is the result of a 2004 General Assembly action that directed the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) to “make a concerted effort to lift up and publicize” giving opportunities that address the HIV/AIDS crisis around the world.

“For our church partners in Africa and in other places, the AIDS crisis is a matter of faith and a call to action,” says Joy Raatz, international HIV/AIDS initiative facilitator for the PC(USA). “Our church partners are confronting the crisis with courage, compassion and faith. They deserve our prayers and our support.”

In phase one of the effort, WMD is emphasizing AIDS ministry in sub-Saharan Africa, where the crisis is the greatest. “Sub-Saharan Africa is at risk of losing an entire generation,” Raatz says. “More than 25 million people there are infected with the HIV virus and AIDS killed 2.3 million in the region last year.”

But she sees hope in the faithful ministry of African churches. “Churches are educating their members and others about AIDS prevention and they are leading efforts to establish community-based orphan care,” Raatz says. Thousands of African Christians are caring for AIDS patients as home-based care volunteers. In these efforts they are bearing witness to the hope rooted in Jesus Christ.

“It’s important that we match advocacy and action,” says Gary Cook, WMD’s associate director for Global Service and Witness. “Both the government and the church have a role in combating AIDS, and our role as the church is to support partners on the ground in Africa who are taking the lead in the fight against AIDS.”

To contribute to “It’s a Matter of Faith,” write ECO #862706 on your check and mail to Individual Remittance Processing, P.O. Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700. For more information or to donate online, visit www.pcusa.org/aids-international.

Order a free booklet and congregational resource packet about international AIDS ministries through Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612 or www.pcusa.org/marketplace; item 74330-05-002.

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