



Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office

*"Our commitment to reconciliation demands
that we promote justice and peace..."*

Good Shepherd Eliminating Effects of Extreme Poverty One Person at a Time

The April edition of 'The Contact' called for readers to send in their answers to how Good Shepherd promotes human rights to eradicate extreme poverty. Good Shepherd initiatives' answers the call of people living in poverty by empowering them to find ways in removing the obstacles prohibiting them from enjoying their fundamental human rights. The Good Shepherd mission is to outreach to individuals living on the margins of society by nurturing their sense of personal empowerment to break down the walls of social and political exclusion. Women and girls rights to education, health care, and economic, political and social opportunities are most often chronically ignored.

The grounding principles of Good Shepherd tradition in upholding dignity expressed in the phrase a 'person is of more value than the world' underlies the motivation of building programs to connect children and their families to a multitude of resources and to uphold the human rights of people they serve.

A total of 5 responses on 'The Contact' from the Good Shepherd programs in the countries and regions of Central America-Guatemala, Egypt, Germany, Sri Lanka and the Philippines illustrated efforts on building bridges for people to access education, employment and health care. According to the Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed and adopted by United Nations General Assembly circa 1948, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself (herself) and of his (her) family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services". The Good Shepherd values extend to reach those whose basic human rights and freedoms are continuously disregarded.

Good Shepherd and Education

In the area of education, across the board, Good Shepherd understands the magnitude of the problem when children are denied access to educational opportunities and the long term effects.

The lack of formal educational services for children perpetuates the cycle of poverty and deepens the societal divide in which children are the victims. Children without a basic education do not develop vital life skills and are thus denied opportunities for better employment and improved standard and quality of living opportunities as adults and for their future families. The Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proclaims “States shall make primary education compulsory and available free to all...make higher education accessible to all and ensure that the child has access to information and material”. The Declaration goes on to state, “the right to education is also aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health”. The approach of Good Shepherd is to create opportunities for children by way of scholarship programs. The resounding outcomes seen by Good Shepherd are youth who have access and complete primary and secondary education, have increased likelihood of finding employment, an increased sense of self worth and better living conditions for herself and her family. The drive to ensure children’s access to education is most critical; another essential area of focus is creating economic opportunities for their parents.

Highlight: Sri Lanka-Friends of Prisoners' Children Program

Good Shepherd in Sri Lanka began a scholarship program in 2005 to provide financial resources to children of incarcerated parents. Sri Lanka maintains an exceptional literacy rate of 91% which illustrates a great emphasis on education. The prisoners who have children expressed a sense of despondency and personal failure in raising their children and guilt for not being available or able to support their children's academic pursuits due to incarceration. Over the past few years, the Good Shepherd educational scholarship program teamed up with a sponsorship program to forge what is now the Friends of Prisoners' Children. Currently, the Friends of Prisoners' Children offers children of incarcerated parents' financial aid to assist them with their academic endeavors. Each child is paired with a sponsor who dedicates financial resources for the child to continue with her education.

The Friends of Prisoners' Children serves 200 children whose parents are in prison for 10 years or longer and are between the grades 6-13. In 2009, the program will expand to provide an additional 50 children educational scholarships. Each individual child will receive \$60 US annually for educational expenses and \$5 US of this money can be used at the child's discretion. Most often, children use this extra money for additional classes. The sponsors will receive correspondence and a photograph from the child with whom they have been paired. The principal of the child's school will also send the sponsor an evaluation of how the child is progressing in school. Each child receives the support to attend school alongside knowing that society and the world continues to find ways to support them.

Highlight: Germany-Schloss Zinneberg and the Leonardo da Vinci Mobility

The Schloss Zinneberg program is a specialized education for teenagers and adolescents. The students of this Good Shepherd program participate in the EU Leonardo da Vinci Mobility project in encouraging cross country and cultural experience. In 2008, four students accepted a three week internship in home economics. While two of the young women worked in the Good Shepherd Generalate in Rome, two other young women completed their internship in the Good Shepherd Motherhouse in Angers, France.

The four young women stretched their personal boundaries while being encouraged to adjust to a

new situation, learn new skills, to work productively and to face new challenges. They gained a deeper sense of themselves by allowing new opportunities to impact their lives in raising their self esteem and their confidence.

Good Shepherd and Employment

Employment opportunities and economic self sufficiency is another key area of concern for Good Shepherd in Egypt, Guatemala, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. In order to maintain the ability to provide for herself and her family, access to adequate employment prospects and humane working conditions are a necessity for each member of society. Women most often find themselves marginalized and facing exploitative practices by employers. They often have no other choice but to continue in their deplorable work environments as a way of earning a nominal income to support their children at home. The Declaration of Human Rights includes anti-discrimination policy for workers.

“Just and favorable working conditions bar any form of discrimination which includes any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation”.

A major response to the call for greater employment possibilities and employee-oriented business and labor practices is through micro-credit schemes. The basic concept of micro-credit or micro-enterprise programs is to offer women and their families no interest small loans in order to buy the materials such as sewing and weaving machines with the expectation that the goods being produced would reimburse the cost of the loan and the small business would become self sufficient over time. The micro-credit programs offer financial opportunities for women and their families to begin to develop means for sustainable self-employment and create a sense of empowerment as a tool to promote their individual human rights.

Highlight: Philippines and Sri Lanka-Micro-Credit Programs

Good Shepherd in the Philippines along with other Good Shepherd programs in Sri Lanka highlighted the effectiveness of micro-credit programs to assist women and their families to start and build a sustainable small business in the community. This fosters an increased sense of self sufficiency and pride for the women and their families. They maintain ownership of their business while building mutually trusting relationships with Good Shepherd as the financier of the small business loan. The micro-credit program partnership fosters a wider cooperative community approach in creating locally sustainable development.

Many examples exist to showcase the innovative approaches to micro-credit businesses. Here are a few:

- A family who began a sewing cooperative with the funding available through the micro-credit program
- A woman who started a small poultry farm and sold eggs in the community
- Another woman and her family who started a fruit stall as a family venture and now have built up a shop with a variety of merchandise to sell.

Good Shepherd and Health Care

The area of health care and access to medical services both preventive and emergency care is an issue plaguing communities around the world. The ill effects of living in poverty extend beyond the low standard of living; it also contributes to children and families facing unremitting malnutrition and its related effects along with living in unsanitary conditions and becoming vulnerable to communicable diseases without the capacity to obtain appropriate medical care. Many of the responses indicated their affiliation with community based medical clinics or the implementation of a wellness financial assistance program which served people who were unable to afford basic medical care.

Highlight: Philippines-Health Care Program

Good Shepherd in the Philippines focusing on health and well-being, initiated in collaboration with other congregations a medical mission which trained the people in the local community to develop herbal medicine. The attention given to individual's health care is extremely important to the overall well being of the community. In addition to these specific Good Shepherd programs aimed at bridging the gap in the areas of education, employment and health care for women and children, there are many other innovative programs promoting the individual human rights of people.

Good Shepherd and Youth Services Programs:

Many services exist which contribute to the effort to eradicate poverty from the local communities and upholding human dignity along the way. The programs discussed additional service delivery schemes which primarily centered on the well-being of children. In general, children living in poverty are especially vulnerable to sickness and disease living in poverty creates. Without adequate food and water, children are more susceptible to developmental delays and chronic illnesses related to malnutrition. This way of life detrimentally impacts the quality of life and infringes on the child's right to a life free of social exclusion and degradation. The Good Shepherd vision seeks to ameliorate the effects of these social ills for the children while addressing systemic issues to eradicate the causes of such poverty and deprivation.

Highlight: Guatemala-Comedor Infantil

In Guatemala, Good Shepherd developed a lunch program for children called Comedor Infantil in the community of Aldea Buena Vista, Chimaltenango. Comedor Infantil provides lunch to children from the ages of 1 to 10 years old Monday through Friday and for many children, this is the only meal of the day. The program currently serves 197 children and their families.

The majority of children, in particular girls in Aldea Buena Vista, do not attend school as the identified role for girls is to care for and serve men. Children are also seen as able bodied people contributing to the family's overall income from an early age. This program encourages the mothers to learn about the developmental needs of their children and to educate them about the importance of children attending school and helping them make healthy choices.

Highlight: Egypt-Street Children Initiative

A new collaborative program began early this year in Egypt. Good Shepherd forged a new partnership with CARITAS. The focus of this project is to target street children and offer boys and girls healthier opportunities and a refuge from exploitation and a life of uncertainty. The program is an outreach to children separated and unaccompanied by parents living life in the streets. Upon entry into the program, each child's needs are assessed and based on the results they are assigned appropriate educational resources. Throughout the children's participation in this program, they are offered cultural education services, life skill development opportunities, data processing, literacy training and school work. Children also have access to social workers and psychologists to assist with their transition and integration into a structured and nurturing environment.

Conclusion

This report is a limited sampling illustrating some of the extraordinary work that Good Shepherd is engaged in addressing and exemplifying the call to action by the United Nations. The human worth of each person is central to the focus of Good Shepherd. The implementation of the ideals of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is central to the ministries undertaken. Good Shepherd ministries respond with health care, education and employment service delivery mechanisms for women and children. These are a central focus due to the ever-growing disparities and dichotomies in standards of living. Good Shepherd bridges the divide by bringing resources and working with people in poverty to create new opportunities for personal growth and development, increased family income, educational opportunities, health care, inclusion and spiritual development. This idea of integrating human rights while recognizing the inherent dignity of the person continues to be a controversial topic within governments of different countries at the United Nations, in the heart of Good Shepherd people around the world, this is a fundamental and action-oriented belief and value.