

Little

eyes are Watching

Getting Our Priorities Straight

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After a hectic day, I turned on the World Series. In a game billed as "Battle of the Bay" two teams from the San Francisco area were competing for the title. Even on the East Coast, the media coverage had produced a heightened pitch of excitement. What happened next, however, was not in the game plan.

At 5:04 p.m. Pacific Time, buildings swayed and bridges tumbled. Sportscasters immediately became eyes for the nation, shifting attention from a scheduled game to the real-life drama of an earthquake that registered 6.9 on the Richter Scale.

When the ground stopped shaking, one eager reporter, hoping for a scoop, approached an anxious ballplayer and asked, "When do you think the match-up will be rescheduled?"

With a numb, bewildered gaze the

professional shot back, "Who cares? My wife and baby are here somewhere. I want them to be safe."

A Sudden Reordering of Priorities

It took only seconds to reorder the priorities of millions. The "Battle of the Bay" drifted into insignificance as the TV cameramen focused on loved ones pressing close together on the outfield grass. These scenes showed clearly that relationships are more important than possessions, more important than winning and losing games. Is that the picture our younger members see when they tune in to the activities of the church?

Judging from articles in school and union papers, many students at all levels of SDA education are involved in service activities. The photos accompanying this article illustrate some of the service projects in which Southwestern Adventist College students are participating. What benefits can administrators and teachers expect to achieve from these programs?

What Is the Concern?

Growing up as the oldest of five children, many times I was admonished, "Remember, little eyes are watching." That is, actions speak louder than words.

It has become increasingly popular in church circles to hear "Christian service" batted about as the panacea for the problems of the younger generation. The cry goes out "Get the youth involved!" Responsibility falls upon youth leaders and educators to channel the energy and idealism of the youth into the work of the church. I must admit I have seen more happen in a two-week mission trip to challenge the value systems of teenagers than in two semesters of Bible classes. Why does this change occur?

Sleeping on the ground in tents, with no running water or electricity and only one bucket of water a day to wash yourself or your clothes, is a great equalizer.

At first, the novelty of the experience carries a certain thrill of adventure. After several days reality sets in. The

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greatest challenge is not adjusting to hard work, food cooked over an open fire, or culture shock, but living in close proximity to other people. It is surprising how much a group, with no access to hair-dryers or curling irons, all with tired muscles and only bucket baths for 10 days, begins to look, act, talk, and even smell in common.

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Some of the greatest deeds of Christian service performed on mission trips have not been done for the sake of locals but from student to student. Barriers that carry a lot of weight in youth circles such as family socioeconomic status, designer versus discount clothes, straight A's or struggling for C's, clear complexion or Clearasil, are not so rigid.

Mission trips are much like small, controlled disasters. They cause walls to tumble, people to huddle, and priorities to become clear.

Relationships are important! This discovery makes the primary focus of mission projects not merely an isolated experience with bricks and mortar but an ongoing adventure with young people who desperately want to know they are of value and use *now*. Those who have been involved in mission projects know that long after the last block is laid or lawn is raked, the building of the church continues.

I recently received the following testimony from a student as part of a class assignment on Christian witnessing:

My early teenage years were probably the worst times of my life. I was overweight. I didn't dress right and I used to be teased by virtually everyone in high school. I developed a terrible inferiority complex and my self-esteem was shattered. Finally, though, I decided to break out of it. I lost weight. I began changing the things I did. I was going to be accepted by the "in crowd" if it was the last thing I did. But my efforts were in vain.

I was hiding myself behind masks of what I believed everyone else wanted me to be. Worst of all, I was coming to God in those masks, because through it all I never felt accepted by Him either.

When I finally admitted that, I broke down and wept. All my life I've been searching for someone to like me, I mean really like me, and Jesus has been there all along.

Then it finally dawned on me why I've

struggled to witness to others. I have never fully accepted God's acceptance of me. Romans 5:8 says that Jesus died for me even while I was yet a sinner. That really hit home. Jesus does love and accept me. Now by His power I will finally be able to love and accept others! That is what Christian witnessing is, right?

Motivation for Witnessing

It is not necessary to cross vast bodies of land or water to discover the thrill of service, but it is important that our activi-

ties at home or abroad spring from a personal relationship with Jesus. Being involved does not substitute for being in Christ!

In his book *Concentric Circles of Concern*, Oscar Thompson draws seven circles to illustrate the biblical model of witnessing. The center circle is labeled "me." Circles 2-6 are progressively larger. They are labeled, respectively, "Immediate Family," "Relatives," "Neighbors and Friends," "Business Associates," and "Acquaintances." Finally, farthest from

the center, is Circle 7—"Person X." Thompson explains:

I believe that God holds you responsible for everyone whom He brings into your sphere of influence. Many of us come to study evangelism to go from Circle 1 out to Circle 7 to salve our consciences because there are ruptured relationships in Circles 2 through 6 that we would rather skip over. . . . With Person X, our life-styles do not have to be consistent. We can talk and

then be on our way. There is nothing wrong with telling Person X about Jesus. We are supposed to do that. God will bring these people into our lives; but if we cannot tell people in Circles 2 through 6 about the Lord, we are hypocritical. We are play acting. We are unreal people. If we are genuine, we will want to share with those closest to us.¹

A Kosher Outlet for Time and Energy?

Christian service projects are not a form of baby-

sitting for the younger grades or a substitute for entertainment for older students. These programs are not just a kosher outlet for youngsters' time and energies. How quickly young discerning eyes recognize that the church lacks the time, talent, or money to compete with "tinseltown" for their attention. Our best efforts at entertainment are "outclassed" by the work of media professionals. Yet all of Hollywood cannot capture the

imagination or begin to compare with the challenge that the gospel brings to the life of the Christian.

Well-known writer and youth speaker Anthony Campolo writes:

Young people are not attracted so much by a church that tries to entertain as they are attracted to a church that challenges them to do things for others. If your church provided concrete ways for young people to minister to the needs of others and to effect social change in the world, they would find your church very attractive.²

Look again at your school, your church's commitment to outreach. Remember, "little eyes are watching."³

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REFERENCES

1. W. Oscar Thompson, Jr., *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1981), p. 22.
2. Anthony Campolo, *Ideas for Social Action* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 9.