

HISTORY SPEAKS

To Hard Questions Baptists Ask

The year 2009 is the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Baptist tradition. To help celebrate this big year, the Baptist History and Heritage Society has created a new 24-article series, HISTORY SPEAKS.

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Baptists and the Poor

Albert. L. Reyes

Information is power. My goal in this article is to empower you to do something about poverty in the world. Almost 50 percent of the people in the world, more than 3 billion, live on less than \$2.50 per day. At least 80 percent of humanity live on less than \$10 per day. If an individual's only economic concern is food, \$2.50 might be enough to buy breakfast at a fast food restaurant. About \$10 per day would get one through noon. However, this does not account for shelter, clothing, education, transportation, and other life needs. Approximately 25,000 children die each day due to poverty.

About 50 percent of humanity deal with problems related to water shortages. About two-thirds of humanity lack access to clean water. The daily average water use in the United Kingdom per person is 50 liters per day versus 600 liters per day per person in the United States of America. The poor also suffer from a lack of adequate health care. About 2.2 million die each year due to a lack of basic immunizations, and 15 million children are orphaned annually due to HIV/Aids.

About 13 percent of Americans, that is, 36 million people, live below the poverty level of a \$16,600 annual income for a family of four. Children make up 40 percent of the poor in America. Yet, 100 billion pounds of food are wasted each year. Overall, waste each year totals \$43 billion in the United States. Yet, 33 million Americans live in households that do not have an adequate supply of food.

So what is our response?

Since 1879, Buckner International has worked to make life better for vulnerable children, orphans, and families in the post-civil war era. Over 130 years, we have developed a continuum of care optimizing global and local resources that annually impact over 500,000 lives across 93 cities worldwide. We collaborate with the Christian Life Commission www.christianlifecommission.com of the Baptist General Convention of Texas through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger to drill water wells in other countries; and we have worked with individual donors, and South Main Baptist Church in Pasadena, Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, The Church on Rush Creek in Arlington, Greater Mt. Zion Church in Austin, Community Baptist Fellowship in Hickory, Kentucky, and the "E-Team" a group of churches

binding together from East Texas to serve the physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs in Ethiopia. For every well drilled thus far, between 3,000 and 8,000 people now have access to clean water. Because of these efforts, villages such as Busia, Axum, Kitale, Bantu, and Bungoma will have life-giving water

The issue of poverty can be so overwhelming that we can become paralyzed to do anything at all. I would recommend a few things:

First, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts and prompt us to action. Unless the Spirit of God moves us, we will do very little.

Second, take responsibility locally for the poor and plug into ministries that are already tackling the problem in our communities.

Third, consider the difference between living at or below the United States poverty level of \$16,600 per year to living on less than \$2.50 per day. While I do not wish to minimize poverty in our country or our responsibility to folks in our cities with financial needs, the vast majority of the world struggles to survive. We are wise to take on global poverty in the poorest regions of the world with the resources we have at our disposal.

Fourth, we need to inventory our consumer habits and minimize wasted food.

Fifth, connect with organizations like Buckner International www.buckner.org whose mission is to serve vulnerable children, orphans, and families.

Sixth, consider a World Hunger Offering in your church, like the one sponsored by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Seventh, personally consider giving a pair of shoes through Shoes for Orphan Souls at www.shoesfororphansouls.org for children in economically challenged areas of the world.

Finally, consider going, doing, and being on behalf of the Redeemer's kingdom among the least of these. Together, we can make a difference.

Albert L. Reyes is president of Buckner Children and Family Services in Texas.

All Statistics:

Poverty Facts and Stats: Social, Political, and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All. Accessed at www.globalissues.org/print/article/26 on October 8, 2009.

Siddiqi, S. *Statistics on Poverty and Food Wastage in America.* Accessed at www.soundvision.com/Info/poor/statistics.asp on October 8, 2009.