

Interfaith Voices GT Column: The importance of 'doing good'

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There are five profound words in the Book of Acts, Chapter 10, of the New Testament, describing the activities of Jesus Christ, "who went about doing good." This phrase give us a simple recipe for a life of service and provides inspiration for many in the world. This includes members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who serve in various capacities through our lay ministry.

Research from the Corporation for National and Community Service shows a strong link between volunteering and health: those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer. The corporation also found that 62.6 million Americans (25.4 percent of the adult population) gave 7.7 billion hours of volunteer service worth \$173 billion in 2013.

These statistics establish that service is beneficial not only to communities through donated time and resources, but to the person providing the service. More importantly, these activities result in increased individual contact and understanding between those involved.

President Barack Obama recently commented on the importance of service at the funeral for Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who was murdered while leading a small group of his congregation in Bible study. President Obama described Reverend Pinckney's giving nature: "He embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words; that the 'sweet hour of prayer' actually lasts the whole week, that to put our faith in action is more than individual salvation, it's about our collective salvation; that to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society."

These words are echoed by a benevolent leader in a verse from Mosiah 4:26 of the Book of Mormon, "I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants."

Service brings people together. Rubbing shoulders with another person in an act of service can dissolve stereotypes and create friendships. Working side by side hopefully creates an atmosphere for open communication and dispels misunderstandings.

Most of us appreciate suggestions on where to volunteer. A website to connect nonprofits with individuals who would like an opportunity to serve is being launched in this area. It is a free offering of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to provide awareness of service opportunities in communities. Go to www.justserve.org for information. The site is open to any nonprofit or individual.

Currently, there are dozens of local nonprofits with posted volunteer opportunities. Individuals can sign up at the website and non-profits can submit projects there, also. Guidelines for projects are simple:

1. Preference is given to projects serving the poor and needy or improving the quality of life in a community.
2. Projects will not involve fundraising, proselytizing, political activity, or service at a for-profit organization.

One of the beauties of “doing good” in any community is making a difference. Service can be as simple as weeding a community garden, donating a pair of shoes, stocking shelves in a food pantry, taking a meal to a neighbor, or helping to build a house. There is something for everyone. “Doing good” doesn’t guarantee material goods, professional success, perfect children, or a life without trials and health problems. But it has the potential of bringing a sense of purpose to individuals as they strengthen their communities.