

Interfaith Voices Column, February 2019

by Alice H. Rampton (601 words)

During a 2017 trip to Corvallis' sister city in Ukraine, a group of four of us visited a bed-ridden teenager at her home in a Roma neighborhood. As we entered the humble 3-room dwelling, we realized the family had one lightbulb and moved it from room to room, as needed. The poverty was palpable, along with the summer flies making their last hurrah before winter set in. Some may feel compassion for humanity in this type of situation while others may see an opportunity to judge. My friend, Sabra, a member of the small group on this visit, chose a third path, transfiguring her compassion into action. The next day, Sabra returned to the young girl's home with a large box of light bulbs, fly catchers, blankets for the oncoming winter, and hugs for the family. Rather than pity or judge, she chose to act.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the Corvallis Cold Weather Men's Shelter. Life had beaten the joy of existence out of some of the men. Others were talkative and friendly. Through conversations, I learned of difficult childhoods and of adult years ravaged by mental illness or addictions. Some were military veterans and others had attended a university. For many, devastating health issues, accidents, loss of employment or spiraling life events extinguished their hope for a better tomorrow. On my return home that evening, with temperatures in the 30s, I felt a deep gratitude for those who had created this shelter for individuals in need.

Judging one another is easy, especially from the warmth of our homes where we can feel smug in our incomplete analysis of someone's situation. But how can we be part of the solution?

Jesus Christ provided answers to that question in Matthew 25 of the New Testament, *"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. ... Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

In 2014, Jeffery Holland, an Apostle in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, addressed this subject stating, "Down through history, poverty has been one of humankind's greatest and most widespread challenges. Its obvious toll is usually physical, but the spiritual and emotional damage it can bring may be even more debilitating. In any case, the great Redeemer has issued no more persistent call than for us to join Him in lifting this burden from the people."

Christ's call is to act. Instead of rendering judgement on those in need, we can use Sabra's example and share blankets and light bulbs in a metaphorical attempt to bring warmth and light to someone. Right now, the Cold Weather Men's Shelter needs hooded sweatshirts and sweat pants in various sizes. Many community organizations have additional wish lists requesting donated items and volunteer support. Just go to www.justserve.org, type in your zip code, and learn about the needs of Community Outreach Inc., Corvallis Housing First, Stone Soup, the Daytime Drop-In Center, St. Vincent de Paul, Meals on Wheels, FISH, Albany Helping Hands, Albany's First Christian's Community Meals, Linn-Benton Food Share, and other great local resources. Some of the most giving individuals in our communities can be found managing or volunteering in these organizations.

Reaching out to serve is as beneficial to the giver as to the receiver. Sometimes, even more so.

Alice H. Rampton is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She co-directs a nonprofit for Ukrainian children through Corvallis Sister Cities Association, volunteers with the Benton County Historical Museum, and has co-authored a book for grieving parents. She and Mark Rampton are the parents of seven children.