

Guidelines and Cultural Implications for Giving

As we work in Haiti and other mission sites we are faced with how wealth as Americans we are. How do we share with those who have so little without doing harm? It is a dilemma which needs thorough thought and consideration. We have all been guilty of doing harm in an attempt to help those in financial need. For what is a small amount of money or goods to us is sometimes a month's salary to those we are assisting.

When in mission consider John Wesley's Three Simple Rules in all that you **say and do**:

Do No Harm
Do Good
Stay in Love with God

This bears repeating and repeating: The harm done to the people, both those that don't get food or items vs those that manage to get food or items every time a team visits, is not comprehended by those of us who have so much.

When you have multiple teams visiting a site as we have in Haiti, the after effects of previous teams gifting freely makes the current team look bad if they do not gift freely AND makes it harder to work when everyone is constantly asking for your shoes or gloves or a "dolla" or two. It becomes a burden rather than a joy to work in that situation. In essence **we are creating a climate of/for beggars where there was not this culture before.**

Items left behind must be left with the HAPI staff. They know better than anyone else the needs in the community that they are from.

Remember that indiscriminate giving also highlights the differences between you "the rich one" and the Haitian who "seemingly" must always receive. United Methodist Volunteers In Mission know this is not a truth and strive to make the playing field equal by stressing other gifts/fruits of the spirit rather than just monetary. Faith, hope, love, caring, vision, empathy, kindness, patience, endurance...

Rev. Tony Campolo illustrates this point in a personal story from his book *Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God* to emphasize the point.

"In the missionary work I have helped develop in Haiti, I have found sometimes my own generosity and sacrificial giving of those who have supported our ministries have had a corrupting influence on those we have tried to help. Pastors of churches often plead with visiting work groups from the United States to give them money so they can provide food and medical care for their people. In more cases than I can count, Christians touched by the needs that seem omnipresent in Haiti turn over large sums to indigenous pastors *without also providing any real checks as to how the money will be used.*"¹

The UVMIM Leadership Handbook reminds us of these guidelines for gifting:

Team Gifts (p 16): It is appropriate to bring gifts to the *host families*, but know the taboos for the country. Teams should avoid extravagant gifts. Many churches have memorial plates that would make a good gift to the host church, or the team could make a banner for the host church. Other choices might include but not be limited to things such as necklaces made from hard-case nails in the shape of the Christian fish symbol; an assortment of kitchen towels; or a variety of toiletries that include soap, toothbrush, and toothpaste. If your team plans to give gifts to individuals, make certain you have enough for everyone.

Gifts from Individuals (p.16): Advise team members against indiscriminate giving of clothing and other articles during and at the end of the mission experience. Give them instead to your host or church group for distribution within the community. We must remember to give with integrity. *The best gift is sharing love, joy, and kindness with your new friends.*

¹ **Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God, Rev. Tony Campolo, Page 10 and 11, 1997, ISBN 56865-634-3**

PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (p.27)

Do not give gifts, especially to children, unless you can give to all equally. **If someone should ask for your help; refer them to the HAPI staff for assistance. Resist giving money to individuals.**

Inappropriate activities for UVMIM teams include (p.68):

1. **Activities that encourage dependency or devalue the coping skills developed in a community** (for example, giving money to begging children or providing complicated machinery that replaces locally produced tools).
2. Offering services that replace those already provided by local inhabitants—even if yours (*you think yours*) are better. Consider training rather than service delivery in this situation.
3. Showering beneficiaries with gifts. This is inappropriate and leaves the recipients feeling indebted. Doing activities with rather than to beneficiaries is always preferred.

DOS (p.158) :

If any gift giving is done, do it discreetly and not ostentatiously. Ask your host what to do about giving to beggars, and follow that advice.

HAPI Process: IF you feel strongly compelled to help a particular individual, **please provide the HAPI staff the name of the individual and the full extent of your commitment.** Also provide your email address so that the staff can follow up with you. Be prepared to listen to the recommendations of the staff, i.e., they may be aware that this person asks every team for money and may advise against it. If a decision is made to go forward, the individual will be asked to prepare a proposal to the staff to review the request and provide documentation to support the amount to be donated: an invoice or proforma in advance and receipts after the money is spent. This provides some accountability to the process.

BE AWARE THAT HAPI STAFF IS ADVISING ANYONE HIRED BY HAPI TO NOT REQUEST GIFTS FROM TEAMMEMBERS. VIOLATORS ARE SUBJECT TO DISMISSAL. Fostering a culture of dependency is a violation of HAPI's vision for Mizak and Haiti. In the words of Jesus to the man by the pool in Bethesda, "Get up, pick up your mat, and WALK!" Our desire is to foster empowerment, self-worth, dignity and mutual respect.

The handbook for Individual Volunteers reminds us of these guidelines for gifting:

Giving---Gift-giving can be a source of difficulty and must be done with sensitivity. If you are to be hosted by a family and will be living with them, it is appropriate to give them a small gift. You may also wish to give small gifts of appreciation to colleagues with whom you work.

Gift-giving in other cultures often has a deeper meaning than it has for us. When giving a gift, someone will say, "This is for you to remember me by." Gifts are not just formalities for Christmas and birthdays; they are special ways to remember people we love. We want our gift giving to be helpful and not detrimental, and we simply have to learn from observation and experience what is appropriate in each cultural setting. *Be aware that in some cultures giving even a token gift will obligate people to give you a gift in return.*