

# Focus On Human Need: The BSU and Domestic Hunger

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“It’s a shock to realize the extent of poverty and hunger so close to where I live.” This was Dawn Gold’s comment after participating in a hunger survey of Memphis, Tennessee sponsored by her Baptist Student Union at Memphis State. Eighteen students participated in a special project to discover the extent of poverty and hunger in their own community. They became acquainted with several local agencies which provide services to the poor. Through this one day focus on local human need, the BSU was able to determine areas where volunteers are needed and what added services are needed to meet the needs of hungry people in the area. They found a total of thirty-six opportunities for volunteer services and ministry.

BSUer Daniel McCrosby learned that many poor families have no money left for food once they pay for rent and utilities. Kevin McDonald learned that children suffer the most because of poverty, and that the families who are hit the hardest are single parent families with the mother as head of household. More than 50 percent of the 106,000 children enrolled in Memphis Public Schools come from families who live in poverty; the only nutritional meals most of these children eat are those provided through their school free lunch program. Ron Brown reported that 2,800 senior citizens participate in the elderly nutrition program (Meals on Wheels). He said, “There are close to 100,000 senior adults in the county and there must be thousands who need nutritional meals who are not being served.”

A BSU committee working with Campus Minister Ron Hawkins evaluated the hunger survey results and developed specific action goals to recommend to their fellow students at Memphis State. They include a “speakers bureau” to share with civic organizations and church groups what they learned about hunger and poverty in Memphis; enlistment of students for

volunteer services to needy persons; ministry projects for local churches; ministry proposal to the local Baptist Association and more.

Accepted American Christian concerns often focus on the spiritual growth needs of individual members of one's own group of believers and it gives special attention primarily to a verbal witness to those outside the community of faith. Why should we broaden our focus to include ministry to human need and a genuine concern for the suffering found in today's world?

1. Poverty, hunger, and human suffering do exist in the U.S.! Six million Americans fell into poverty in 1980-83. 35.3 million Americans live below the government's established poverty level. This is the highest level since 1964 (15.2 percent). One out of five children lives in poverty. It is a problem of economics which easily becomes a political game calling on the public to choose sides. However, to the follower of Jesus, it is a call to respond in commitment of life to ministry to the human need and suffering where one lives.

2. The gospel we share cannot be contained in words alone, but it must be shared in deeds and action which touch the whole of life. Christian social ministry is the response of believers and the church to human need. It is the mission of the church in a world of hunger, of suffering, and of urgent need for the gospel of Christ.

3. All who appropriate salvation in Christ become ministers in a world of great need. No one can hide in their chosen career or busy schedule of the good life. No believer is "just a layman" excusing himself or herself from the responsibility and opportunity of ministry. Baptist Student Union is a band of student men and women ministers, and each local church is a center of ministry to the hungry and poor in the world. The gospel is the hope of the poor and our love "must be true love, which shows itself in action" (1 John 3:18).

4. The believer's ministry is not selected for those who will give a positive response or to those society calls

deserving. It is to all: to those who are powerless, to those who are habitually in trouble, persons who appear to be taking advantage of us, to any and all who may have need.

5. The believer is sensitive to social injustice and the lack of fairness in the world. He determines to speak out, to practice justics in his realm of influence, and to call for social justice in society.

6. The motivation for our life's mission must be the same as Jesus': love for people! John 3:16 proclaims God's motivation for the gift of Jesus to be the love for people. It was not love for Scripture, doctrine, or orthodoxy! One cannot love God whom he has never seen if he doesn't love people whom he does see (1 John 4: 19-21). If we do not focus our mission in life on human need, it is because we do not care, because we do not love people!

I believe that today's college students have a tremendous capacity for loving human beings. We must find ways to bring them face to face with human need. They need the opportunity to respond in love which shows itself in action.

For information on domestic hunger, write the Home Mission Board, 1350 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30367. If your BSU is interested in sponsoring a JERUSALEM PROJECT or in conducting a local hunger survey, contact Nathan Porter, National Consultant for Domestic Hunger, 1007 N. 15th Street, Arkadelphia, AR 71923.