



Summer Plans: "Water U Doing?"

Graduations and schools letting out always seem to bring out the question of summer plans. Here at Central we are asking the question a little differently this summer. It all began with our Vacation Bible School project: Watering Malawi. Our curriculum is asking us to question the way we look at water and not to take it for granted. We've been looking at populations in the country of Malawi who do not have access to clean, running water.

Sometimes our difficulties and crises need perspective. We get bogged down in the mire of our own problems when we ignore the pressing issues facing millions upon millions of others. Four years ago, Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, giving us a fresh perspective on the needs of our countrymen and women living in hurricane ravaged territory. It was a call to arms, so to speak. We set aside so many of our issues that until that storm had seemed so important and drove down to the coast en masse to aid in feeding, offering shelter, performing mud-out operations, helping to restore power, patching roofs, and taking clothing, bedding and demonstrations of love for our ravaged neighbors.

I was at a meeting when one Virginia town was making plans to send a police car as a support to a Mississippi town overwhelmed with a flood of refugees from the Gulf Coast. That is not the way we normally operate. Our own needs appear so pressing that we cannot see the needs of others that might offer perspective to our lives. It has doubtless been a while since one town adopted the needs of another, sending a police cruiser, bought with local tax monies, out of state to help others.

Our national context is different from that of four years ago. Though they were pushing \$4.00 a gallon last summer, gas prices have fallen from the period of crisis after Katrina, yet so have the incomes of many. The price of grain-based products has risen across the board. Retirement account values have fallen sharply. Businesses are hurting for a lack of consumers for durable goods. Housing prices have fallen; loan defaults are at a high; foreclosures continue to force families out of the homes they had hoped to retain; recent graduates compete with seasoned workers for hard to find employment.

The house I live in was built without electricity or running water. I don't know when bathrooms and electric outlets were added to the house, but in 1906 those would have been luxuries. Today we take them for granted. Students at our Vacation Bible School were counting the number of faucets in their homes. It took some effort to remember that a shower head, a tub, a sink, and a toilet are all separate sources of water in our homes. Could we survive going back to that day when water came from a well or a mile walk to the nearest lake or stream?

In Malawi, the girls and women are tasked with getting water to their families. For many it means walking as much as five miles to get water. Water the goats can drink is not always fit for human consumption. Worms, bacteria, and animal waste infect many water sources that might otherwise be useful for washing hands, preparing meals, and drinking. Malawians are accustomed to the hardships. They assume them as part of life as did our grandparents and great-grandparents in our own country. Yet because of the unavailability of surface water for so many, it poses other hardships. When the rains come, the crops can grow. Without the rain, they wither. For crops to survive without the rains, water must be hauled by hand from miles away. Some people are making a difference.

Back in 2005, our national attention was focused on the Asian Tsunami relief and Katrina recovery efforts. Lost in the shuffle for many was a 30-second spot on the news. In Malawi, a series of droughts were leaving five million people on the brink of starvation. Having grown up in Malawi as the daughter of missionaries, Colleen Burroughs heard the news and began asking the question, “What is anyone doing for Malawi?” After calls to various authorities including the Ambassador, the question that echoed back was, “What are you doing?”

Since that day in 2005, Colleen met with children and youth to ask them for their input in responding to the needs of the water-starved population in Malawi. They began raising awareness with various projects, raising monies for wells and treadle pumps for villages throughout the nations, and launching micro-enterprises like Crosswater. Crosswater is matching villages in Malawi with markets for small businesses like producing clay crosses and establishing startup funds for fish ponds.

It is not just children and youth in the US, however, who are helping the people of Malawi. It is also youth like John. John’s village was fortunate enough to receive a well through a partnership between Watering Malawi and World Vision. Water from the well was being used to water the gardens throughout the village—all except one. John saw his neighbor’s garden and wondered how water could be taken uphill to share with this excluded family. To meet his neighbor’s need, he designed a water bridge of sticks and heavy black plastic to make sure that his whole village could receive the benefit of the donated well. It didn’t stop there. John built another fourteen bridges for other villages with the same problem of a garden on the other side of a dip in the land.

John is only 16. In a land ravaged by drought and disease from poor sanitation and drought, he must bear the burden of an adult. Until water can be made readily available, young girls must walk miles to carry water to their families, instead of going to school. Children and youth must take the responsibility of adults in helping provide for their families. When so much of their time must be given to securing water, there is little left for play, learning, and enjoying a leisurely summer vacation. When we can’t afford to do all we would like to do, perhaps a little perspective might come in handy—a reminder of just how good life is.

So, what are your plans for this summer? Along with plans for recreation, work, and going to see the latest movie, maybe you’d like to risk a little perspective and provide clean water to thirsty gardens and families half-way across the globe. We’d love to have you join us in making a real difference this summer. We’re going to be watering Malawi. Perhaps you hear the echo from Colleen’s question in 2005: “Water U Doing?”

For information on how you can water gardens in Malawi, contact Central Baptist Church – Lowesville or go to www.wateringmalawi.com. Tell them what you learned from kids in rural Virginia.

—Christopher B. Harbin

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