Inequality in the Global community

When confronted with the enormous economic disparities as experienced in Haiti and Guatemala, students are faced with the question: HOW can we build a more just and humane global community? Challenged by the deplorable conditions of poverty students visualize possibilities for change and hope for the world community through the praxis of service and caritas. This panel will offer student reflections on grappling with inequality through experiences of doing service in Haiti and Guatemala.

INTRODUCTION: by MaDonna Thelen

A trip to Guatemala or Haiti is on experiences of crossing borders. Borders that are marked by a great chasm of inequality.

When we are immersed in these countries we see, feel, taste and know and experience of life that is so difference from what most of North America have known before.

This chasm of inequality hits us in the face when we step off the plane in Haiti and see hundreds of very poor people trying to EEEK out a daily wage of $1.00 or $2.00 by sitting along the roadway and selling their wares.

This chasm of inequality is experienced when we pick coffee in the highlands of Guatemala alongside children and can’t be in school because this is coffee picking season.

How do we North Americans who know physical comfort in our lifestyle, who expect and have lived all our lives with electricity and clean water, roadways and sewers, toilets in our homes and food in our refrigerators -- How are we to respond to this vast chasm of inequality.

How can we not get depressed when we realize that the life of Guatemalans and Haitians is how most of the world lives rather than how we name LIFE.

How should we reflect on Veritas- TRUTH when confronted with inequality. I think the answer is found in CARITAS- compassion -- a deep abiding compassion that opens our hearts to the beauty and relationship. Compassion that does not pity but rather seeks justice.

CARITAS/compassion that looks to the truth of why these inequalities exists and does not accept the falsities of a history interpreted through a colonial imperialism interpretation of other people’s cultures.

Finally when confronted with this inequality in distribution of wealth and resources how should we act? - - What should we, North America do?? All of us?

We should get involved with a spirit of our Caritas.

I found this quotation from:

The Impossible will Take a Little While (Page 170)

That has helped inspire me and answer this question: how should we act?

“Because this is a moment in history that needs us to begin, each of us every day at her or his own pace, slowly and surely rediscovering how to be politically active, how to organize our disparate energies into effective group- and I choose to believe we will do what is required. Act. Organize. Assemble. Oppose. Resist. Find a place a cause a group a friend and start, today, now now now, continue continue continue.
Being politically active is for the citizens of a democracy maybe the best way of speaking to God and hearing Her answer: You exist. If we are active, if we are activists, She replies to us: You specifically exist. Mazel tov. Now get busy, She replies. Maintain the world by changing the world.”

Lisa Keller

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti:
- Population is a little over 2.1 million
- It’s the capital of Haiti and located on the southeastern part of the Gulf of Gonâve.
- Tourism is a huge part of their economy, since the majority of the countries air travel goes through that area.
- Port-Au-Prince is also the hub for the governmental agencies, educational schools and universities and also the main hospitals and medical facilities.
- The business are closer to the water and the residential and slum areas are farther inland in the hills around Port-Au-Prince.

Earthquake:
- Tuesday, 12th of January 2010
- Magnitude of 7.0, multiple aftershocks hitting Haiti and the with the worst being on Jan. 20 with a 6.1-magnitude aftershock
- 330,000: estimated casualties.
  - Which is approx. equivalent to Springfield, Peoria and Rockford’s population combined
- Furthermore an additional 300,000 reported to be injured from the quake.
- For many people there was no source for housing, food, all the necessities were limited. Major displacement then created the tent cities because the earthquake destroyed the country’s infrastructure.
- Hard for others to help because of the lack of transportation measures
  - Roads were not paved
  - Not many load baring vehicles were available
  - Airports was partly destroyed
  - Water ports were not build to sustain massive amounts of relief boats.
- Red Cross, private organizations tried helping, but it was hard due to the country’s lack of infrastructure after the earthquake.

Gwen Heifner

- Some basic information about Guatemala.
- There are two main natural obstacles that the Guatemalans have to overcome on a regular basis: active volcanoes and Lake Atitlan.
- In this picture, there are two different volcanoes that I was able to capture while they were smoking.
- Guatemala has about 30 volcanoes across the country with 6 of them erupting with the last few years.
- The Fire volcano has erupted as recent as 2012, making Guatemalan officials have to evacuate 62,000 people living in the villages near the volcano.
- The next obstacle the Guatemalans need to overcome is Lake Atitlan.
  - Do everything in the lake:
    - Drinking water
- Water for cooking
- Water to clean dishes/clothes
- And go to the bathroom.

- Lake is so contaminated – if we drink – sick and potentially die
- The mission we went to in San Lucas have built these things called Pilas that women can go to for clean/filtered water.

**HAITI SERVICE at MOTHER TERESA’S HOME FOR BABIES – Kelsey Myers**

Another place that we volunteered at while in Haiti was Mother Teresa’s Home for Babies. This is a facility located in Port-au-Prince where poor mothers are able to gain access to health care for their children, free of cost.

Every day, new women bring in their children for malnutrition and other health concerns. The children’s ages range from infancy to young childhood and are provided cribs to sleep in, clothing to wear, and food to eat. Some of the more critically malnourished kids also receive IV’s during their stay.

The kids who are dropped off at Mother Teresa’s are allowed to stay there for as long as needed; until they are adequately nourished, no longer sick, and their mothers are capable of caring for them again. However, some mothers never return to take their children home because they lack the financial stability in order to do so.

We visited Mother Teresa’s on two separate days for three hours each (due to the visiting hour restrictions). Upon entering the facility, a little girl, maybe around 4 or 5 years old ran into the arms of one of our volunteers.

Combining with her bright smile and cheerful laugh, was a sense of the inequality that these children and mothers face on a daily basis. This young girl knew the struggles of living with dozens of other children and no one to really call their mother.

She knew that as soon as she saw someone who looked the way they we do walked through that door, she was going to get the attention that she wanted, at least for the next few hours. Many of the children were so deprived of the necessary attention that once you picked them up, you were not able to put them down until you were forced to leave.

23% of babies born between 2008 and 2012 in Haiti were born with low birth weight. This illustrates that not only are mothers not getting the nourishment that they need, but children are also starting their lives off at a disadvantage.

Mother Teresa’s Home for Babies allowed us to witness firsthand the kind of inequality that mothers in poverty have to live through. I can only wonder what it would be like to have to drop my child off at a facility in order for them to survive. Then to see them for only 3 hours a days, questioning whether I could provide them with a better life. Imagine: You have to give up your own child because you can’t even feed yourself. That’s the struggle some Haitian women have to face every day.

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**Anastasia Zacour**

If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of the world. If you have money in the bank, and some spare change you are among the top 8% of the worlds wealthy. If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced
the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering. If you can read this message you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read it at all.

With regard to poverty in Haiti . . .

- Gross national income per capita is $660, making Haiti the poorest country in the western hemisphere.
- 78% of Haitians are poor which means they live on less than $2 a day, and more than half (54%) live in extreme poverty less than US$1 a day.

With regard to the health care in Haiti . . .

- Life expectancy is 61 years, compared to 79 years in the US.
- 1/2 of children under 5 are malnourished.
- Over 7% of children die at birth.
- 64% of the population has access to improved water and only 26% with access to improved sanitation resulting in 5,600 deaths from diarrhea per year.

With regard to the education system in Haiti . . .

- 50% of primary school age children are not enrolled in school.
- One-third of girls over six never go to school.
- Approximately 30% of children attending primary school will not make it to third grade; 60% will abandon school before sixth grade.
- Only 15% of teachers at the primary level have basic teacher qualifications (including university degrees), and nearly 25% have never even attended secondary school.
- Less than 20% of schools have electricity; 39% have drinkable water; 15% have a library.
- 40% of the population is unable to read or write, as compared to only 12% illiteracy in the rest of Latin America.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Poverty is the worst form of violence,” and we witnessed this worst form of violence first hand in Haiti. He also said that, “You may never know what results come of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no results.”

The type of service that we gave in Haiti was different than anything that I had done before, instead of offering something concrete and tangible we offered something that you can’t touch with your hands, or see with the naked eye, what we experienced was something even more real. We spent time with children, adults, and a community offering our love and attention, something that may seem rather pointless, but in actuality it was something much more important and valuable. To a child who has no mother or father or an individual who has been marginalized by society all suffering from, as Gandhi said, “the worst form of violence,” giving them your love and attention is all they could ever want. No amount of money is great enough to ever match the value of giving someone that kind of love with no condition.

Robert F. Kennedy wrote that, “The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better . . . Let no one be discouraged by the belief there is nothing one person can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills, misery, ignorance, and violence. Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events . . . Each time a [person] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, [they] send forth a tiny ripple of hope . . . which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

No matter how small or insignificant it may have seemed our week spent in Haiti was a “small ripple of hope” towards change that we so desperately need. What we left behind was pure and sincere
love and affection. It is in small, humble choices that privilege, oppression, and the movement towards something better can actually happen. If we choose to acknowledge, pay attention, learn to listen, and most importantly act we as individuals can and will make a difference to change and end systems of privilege and oppression, to create that just and humane world.

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**Evelyn Sanchez**

Inequalities within Guatemala

- Guatemala has approximately 13 million inhabitants
- Guatemala is ranked with the **second highest inequality** rate in Latina America because of their unequal distributions of wealth and rapidly growing population.
- 75% of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line
- The population in Guatemala is split up between two distinctive group:
  - Mayans, who are indigenous people
  - Ladinos, who are a mix of Spanish and Native people

**MAYANS:**

- Guatemala has the **largest indigenous population** of any Central American country
- 40% of the people in Guatemala are Mayans
- Mayans are predominantly dark skinned
- There are between 22-28 different Mayan ethnic groups
- Within each ethnic group they speak different dialects, the main one is Quiche
- Each distinctive group can be identified by their “trajes”, which are the traditional clothing they wear

We saw this when: Professor Keberlein who was originally born in Guatemala, on this trip could tell us exactly what region Mayan groups pertained to just by looking at their clothing. Different patterns, styles, and colors on the clothing provide information of where they live and what ethnic group they pertain too.

- Mayans live mainly in poor rural areas
  - Where more than 90% of the indigenous people live on an income that is lower than the poverty line.

**LADINOS:**

- 60% of the people in Guatemala are Ladinos
- Speak Spanish
- Do not wear traditional clothing
- Live mainly in urban areas, most are part of the middle class

**Main conflict** is that Mayans are discriminated for their traditional customs, they are looked down upon. Ladinos living a considerably better life than the Mayans. Mayans live in extreme poverty.

**STOVE PROJECT:**

One of the projects we did in San Lucas Taliman was called the Stove Project, where we had the chance to build stoves in houses that were in poor conditions to help reduce respiratory ailments to the Mayan people.

- Old stoves caused severe smoke which lead to eye infections to the Mayan women, as well as lung diseases to them and their children. These new stoves would be more ecofriendly and would help reduce these diseases and risks.
Our job wasn’t only to build these stoves from scratch, but we also had to promote the benefits of the new stove, and persuade the Mayan women to use their new stoves instead of their old traditional one.

DELIA:
While working on the Stove project, I met Delia who was the home owner of the stove we were building for. She has seven children, and her home was very small and had a dirt floor.
- There were only 3 small rooms in the home, and only two beds made of cardboard for a family of 9.
- I met 4 out of 7 of her children and none of them had any shoes, and all had very poor dental health.

Malnutrition is extremely high in Guatemala and it amongst the worst in the world.
- 44% of all children under 5 suffer malnutrition, and I could see this with Delia’s children because they were all skinny.

After talking for quite some time, Delia invited me to her home in a room where she PROUDLY showed me her older son’s graduation certificate.
- Her son wants to be a pharmacy technician and he travels 3 hours to go to schools, which means it takes him 3 to arrive at school and 3 hours to go home.
- I could tell by the look on Delia’s face that she was proud of her son because he was a sense of hope, even when they lived in such poor conditions.

Therefore we can see the effect on inequality in the Mayan population of Guatemala.

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Andrea Hinojosa

Haiti- Deforestation
- Introduction
  - Relate deforestation to Haiti
  - State the three main questions
    - What is Deforestation?
    - Is it linked to Haiti’s poverty?
    - How can we help?

- First Question – What is Deforestation
  - Definition
    - The conversion of forested areas to non-forest land for use such as arable land, pasture, urban use, logged area, or wasteland.
  - Talk about deforestation in general
    - Forest Fact: 30% of the Earth’s land is forested
  - Haiti connection to deforestation
    - Agriculture is the leading cause of deforestation (fact)
    - Agriculture and Haiti – explain connection
  - Transition into question two by…
    - Explain basics of farming
    - How farming is needed to live well in Haiti
    - Fact: 80% of the population in Haiti is under the Poverty line
Second Question – Is it linked to Haiti’s poverty?
  - Question the audience on how much land is forested in Haiti.
  - Compare the then and now
    - Before 70% of the land in Haiti was forested
    - Now less than 1.5% of the land is forested
    - Why?
  - Why? – Explain why Haiti is dependent on the forest
    - Cooking
    - Energy
    - With an electricity sector that only covers 10% of Haiti’s population
    - Connect personal experience of trip
      - How electricity would turn on randomly and the whole town would scream.
      - Explain how this is compared to the United States
    - Remind audience how Haiti lives on less than 1 or 2 dollars a day.
    - Art – They use trash and the remaining woods to make art for the few tourists (usually helpers like us) to make a living
    - Home building
    - No control of tree diseases
    - No funds to help problems in agriculture
    - Main way of living – make money – having a job is connected to trees, agriculture – hence deforestation effects the way people live
  - Answer question – Yes there is a link between deforestation and Haiti’s poverty

Third Question – How can we help?
  - Re-explain the problem
  - Join Ecology Club
    - Explain the future events for Ecology Club
  - Attend the service trip yourself – Haiti
  - Water.org
  - Lambifund
  - Association for the protection of Environment of Gwoman
  - Global giving
    - Plant a tree in Haiti
  - Explain how the donations work
  - Explain how the Social Justice and Civic Engagement Minor can be way to help

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**Suzana Tesla**

As Evelyn mentioned, while we were in Guatemala we had a chance to pick coffee and witness the majority of the coffee making process. Today, coffee is a large component of the lives of the Guatemalan people, but this wasn’t always the case. For most of the twentieth century, coffee production was a highly concentrated industry composed of only a small number of very large producers. These producers exploited the Mayan highland communities by recruiting people for very cheap labor in extremely harsh working conditions.

Fortunately, this has significantly changed over the last twenty years, with at least 50,000 new coffee growers emerging throughout Guatemala; in the Western Highlands, the majority of these producers are indigenous. This shift occurred due to a greater demand for high-quality Strictly Hard Bean
Coffee, which is grown at altitudes of 4,500 feet or above. This altitude happens to be where many of Guatemala’s poor, indigenous populations have been pushed throughout the nation’s history. This in turn has allowed many Guatemalan’s an opportunity to start small coffee plantations that provide a significant source of income that can keep a family out of absolute poverty.

Today, more than 50 percent of Guatemala’s coffee production comes from small, localized producers. The San Lucas mission that we were a part of in Guatemala actually plays a huge role in local coffee production. It has a land distribution program that provides families with land upon which they can grow coffee to help sustain their families. Over the past 35 years, they have provided land to nearly 4,000 families. However, they don’t simply provide land, the mission also buys the coffee that the families produce and offers the farmers fair wages for their coffee regardless of the market value. This allows the families to have some stability even when the markets value for coffee is drastically low. This is extremely important because it allows Guatemalan families to take a step away from the poverty that the generations before them have found themselves stuck in; the coffee doesn’t simply provide money, it goes way beyond that. These small coffee farms bring community and families together because they often rely on one another to grow and pick the coffee because paying for outside labor is expensive and reduces profits. Thus, the coffee industry has had an incredible impact on these communities, not only by reducing poverty, but also by increasing education. Where previously families would often forgo their children’s education because they couldn’t afford it, now they are able to send their children to better schools. To conclude, coffee has transformed Guatemala. This industry has evolved from one driven by conglomerates to one that is focused on helping the individuals and families.