

<b>Title:</b>	<i>We Not Me</i>
<b>For:</b>	Community of Christ Herald
<b>Date:</b>	July 2006 issue

## **We Not Me**

### ***Church Youth focus upon the World's Poor during International Hunger Challenge***

In the midst of a teen's busy, high-tech, wired world of email, cell phones, iPods, text messaging, IMs (instant messages), online games and countless music CDs and DVDs, what could possibly motivate one to set all of that aside for twenty-four hours? And more specifically, to spend those twenty-four hours focused solely upon the needs of others, while having nothing to eat. No fast-food, no microwave popcorn, no pizza delivered to your door. For the average teen, this might just seem their worst nightmare come true.

Surprisingly however, for many teens, twenty-four hours spent in this way has made a major impact upon how they now view their world.

Earlier this spring, young people from across the U.S. enthusiastically participated in Outreach International's *Hunger Challenge* – a 24-hour fast designed to inform youth about the desperate plight of the world's poor and to raise money to help them. Community of Christ sponsored the third annual *International Hunger Challenge* weekend, March 4-5, 2006, in which twenty-two congregations and Mission Centers enrolled to participate. To date, eleven groups have submitted their Hunger Challenge proceeds totaling more than \$11,000 to help the poor through Outreach International's field program.

One of those participating groups was Bountiful Mission Center. Youth leader Brenda Strickland shared that as young people gathered in the local high school gymnasium, they were challenged by youth leaders to focus on 'We Not Me.' Brenda said she was surprised to realize that kids and adults alike were inspired by the event. "I watched and witnessed life changes take place as youth and adults shared in the activities, games, lessons and worship from the Hunger Challenge kit," said Brenda. "I kept thinking, during our time together, about the scripture from the latest counsel to our church."

*"You hold precious lives in your hands. Be gentle and gracious with one another.*

*A community is no stronger than the weakest within it. Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name. There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous response of disciples who share from their bounty that others may know joy.”*

– Doctrine & Covenants 162: 6c & 7a

Brenda feels those who participated went away from the event knowing they are empowered to make a difference in the lives of people less fortunate. “They know they can give *hope* to others from their bounty,” she said. “They know they have been encouraged and, indeed, blessed by the Spirit to do more.”

“I wasn’t too excited at first about coming to something where I didn’t get to eat,” said 16-year-old Stephanie Moore, regarding Bountiful Mission Center’s Hunger Challenge event. “But I found out there are people so worse off than me in the world. I don’t want to take for granted anymore the fact that I have food to eat.”

Fifteen-year-old Lynnsey Blake said it was a unique experience. “It’s hard to explain the feeling. It was a real challenge and gave me lots to think about. But I felt really good about helping others.”

“I thought Hunger Challenge was going to be tough for me, since I’m used to eating about every two hours,” joked Cody Gregory. “It makes me hungry just knowing now what many people have to go through to have one meal a day.”

Sixteen-year-old Jeffrey Moore was so moved by the event, he created a video to document the week-end activity. “I thought everyone was nuts when they first began talking about doing a Hunger Challenge,” he said. “I couldn’t imagine that an event where you didn’t get to eat anything could be fun. But it was more fun than I anticipated! And I learned just how important it is for us to stop wasting so much food.”

Eight-year-old Adi Marshall attended the Bountiful Mission Center Hunger Challenge event with her mom, Tracy, a youth leader. At the concluding service, and by unanimous decision, Adi was presented the SON-Shine Award for being a ray of hope to the world. Adi said, “We need to do more than just feed people. They need clothes and houses, too. WE need to do more so THEY can help themselves.” Adi and mom, Tracy, raised \$153.00 in support of the Hunger Challenge event. Together, the Bountiful Mission Center Youth raised more than \$1,830.

In Dundalk, Maryland, youth leader Patty Ballinger said, “We’d been talking about doing the Hunger Challenge with our youth for some time. The kids in our local congregation were interested, but I felt we needed lots of people to make it successful, so I went searching for a big Christian youth group we could join in this event. With no success, I turned to our own denomination – the Chesapeake Bay Mission Center and the Mid-Atlantic Mission Center. Though small in number, the event was very successful.”

“Outreach International’s DVD, ‘Building Community,’ was monumental in helping each of us comprehend our vital collective role in helping the world’s poor,” said adult participant and Outreach International Board Member Cherry Hartnett, referring to the Dundalk event. “As I looked around at those who had assembled to watch the video, I realized it was not only the kids’ lives that were being impacted, but the adults as well.”

Debi Norton was pleased to report that youth from the Southwest International Mission Center once again participated in the Hunger Challenge. Debi, along with numerous other dedicated youth leaders have made certain that their group continues its legacy of participating in every Hunger Challenges since its inception as the Outreach International *Fast-A-Thon* 27 years ago. In 1979, youth leader Yvonne McClain, an avid supporter of Outreach International and active member of Community of Christ, challenged members of her youth group in the San Diego area to consider participating in the new Fast-A-Thon event to help the world’s poor. Now years later, teens from the same area are raising funds by boldly sharing with people on the street in downtown Chula Vista, California about the work of Outreach International and how people of all ages can together make a difference. The kids told Debi that many folks opened up their wallets and contributed right there on the spot. “I think the members of our youth group found that sharing from the heart really isn’t that hard,” said Debi. “They were amazed at how people responded.” Southwest International Mission Center Youth raised nearly \$1,200.

“Our kids were so attentive when learning about Outreach International and how the organization is helping the poor help themselves,” shared Debi. “They were proud to know that Outreach International is a vital part of their church working among the world’s poor, and are on fire now – determined to help make an even greater difference.”

In spite of their high-tech busyness, many young people who participate in Hunger Challenge are making room in their lives to care about the needs of others much less fortunate than themselves. Many, like the youth of Bountiful and Southwest International Mission Centers, and those who gathered in Dundalk, are realizing that together they can become a powerful voice for change. And for youth leaders, pastors, teachers and even

parents, Hunger Challenge is not just a means of entertaining your teens for a week-end; it is a viable resource for genuine transformation.

Engaging young people in the process of ending hunger, malnutrition and the utter sense of hopelessness that so many of the world's poorest often feel, can be a life-changing experience. It would be difficult to imagine that anything a teen views on the internet or listens to on their iPod could have that kind of powerful, positive impact.

While technology in our world continues to advance at supersonic speed, the work of bringing an end to hunger by world powers proceeds at a tragic snail's pace. Thousands of children in the developing world die each and every day from mostly preventable and treatable causes related to hunger and malnutrition. These are children and young people not so unlike those who participate in Hunger Challenge. They like to laugh and sing. They have hopes and dreams for a happy future. But because of the lack of choices for these poor children, they suffer. Our young people have the means to become powerful advocates for change in the world. Their collective voice carries with it much energy and enthusiastic conviction. With technology as a means, this next generation may possess the resources to accomplish more in a decade on behalf of the poor than all that was achieved in the entire last century. But young people need the initial guidance and direction that only caring, nurturing adults can provide.

Therefore, a vital part of the 'We Not Me' theme becomes YOU. *You* who are youth leaders. *You* who are leaders and caring members within congregations and Mission Centers. *You* who are teachers and coaches. *You* who are parents and grandparents. Each of you can guide our young people. Each of you can help to sponsor a Hunger Challenge. It may seem a small thing, but to a teen searching for greater meaning in their life, and likewise, for a hungry child in a poor village in some distant place, it could mean the world.

If you or your group would like to sponsor a Hunger Challenge, don't delay; contact Mark Tarwater at Outreach International: [hunger@outreachmail.org](mailto:hunger@outreachmail.org); or call toll-free 888.833.1235, ext. 308 for a **free** Hunger Challenge kit. You may also visit Outreach International's website for more information about Hunger Challenge or to sign up at: [www.outreach-international.org/hunger](http://www.outreach-international.org/hunger).