

Hope Is a Hand-up

by Gary L. Bauer

Just before Christmas, Family Research Council hosted an important event in Washington. It was a one-day conference, with distinguished speakers like authors Michael Novak and Dr. Marvin Olasky. The conference was devoted to the tragedy of poverty, with a close look at the tricky question of welfare reform.

I'm more convinced than ever that we must look with new eyes at the scale of this tragedy. It's really not enough to say that certain kinds of welfare reform will cause suffering. We have to come to terms with the degree of suffering that is happening right now — and not just suffering from material want, but from the sense of purposelessness that saps the human spirit.

Those of us who believe most fiercely in the durability of traditional values are precisely the ones to stand up now and say that every individual has qualities that no welfare system should be allowed to destroy. FRC recognizes that the best and most compassionate help comes from private individuals who build personal relationships and offer material support simultaneously. A hand-up not a handout. The premise is that needy individuals are not "clients," but fellow human beings.

America cannot implement neat, clean, top-down policies that will jumpstart a network of caring in every community. Instead, each of us must take direct action to heal the hurt — not at the ballot box, but in our neighborhoods and communities as we minister daily to needy individuals.

One happy byproduct is that our own children, by watching our example, will grow to appreciate what is great and good. Even strong parents depend on the interplay of thoughtful neighbors to help pattern right habits of the heart.

FRC is taking the initiative to encourage a new ethic of caring because, I believe, social conservatives are the very people who have the idealism and initiative to build up a new network of helping institutions. As we have begun to speak out, we have discovered that the scale of the crisis is an unprecedented opportunity for us to demonstrate, in full technicolor action, a fundamental truth: Traditional values are traditional because they are functional.

TRADITIONAL VALUES ARE FUNCTIONAL VALUES

When nothing else moves the needle, God's ways work. His love binds up wounds. Our service to those who are hurting is one of the most obvious means we have at our disposal to let earth know what heaven looks like. God's love looks most beautiful, in fact, against a backdrop of despair.

Dr. Virgil Gulker, founder of Kids Hope USA, tells a story about one small step in a child's journey to God. Kids Hope USA aims to link adult volunteers in one-to-one relationships with at-risk children. This Christmas season, one volunteer took "her child" to see a Christmas pageant at her church that included a living nativity. As Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus took their places, the child Amanda turned to her new friend and asked with wide eyes, "Is this real?" The volunteer replied, "Oh yes, Amanda, it's very real."

That moment almost undoubtedly left a mark on Amanda's soul. In time, I suspect, she will be much more likely to regard that scene as real because one of God's loving servants was sitting by her side.

If you would like to come alongside a child who needs you, but don't know how, please call our office at 1-800-225-4008 for more information. You can also request a copy of new FRC resources on welfare reform. The enclosed card has all the details.

ON THE HORIZON

• **Twisting the Knot.** Hawaiian state commission appointed by governor voted 5-2 in December to endorse same-sex "marriage," setting stage for state court decision on issue in July. Two commissioners issued dissenting report. They have also sued commission, charging majority with suppressing information, holding unauthorized meetings, and other failures. Meanwhile, South Dakota and other states are moving to join Utah in passing legislation protecting integrity of marriage license laws, should Hawaii legalize homosexual nuptials.

FRESH AIR

Freshmen members of the House of Representatives are in the media glare as the budget dispute continues between Congress and the White House. The first-termers have been called both "principled citizen legislators" and "inflexible extremists." What's the reality?

Nearly all of the freshmen have strongly endorsed term limits and committed to do what they think is right, regardless of short-term political consequences. They want a balanced budget and tax relief for America's families. Their insistence on these policies led to stronger agreements with the Senate than first seemed possible. They have been just as tough in negotiations with the White House.

Moreover, despite President Clinton's opposition, the freshmen have helped to restore two abortion limitations that were overturned during the last Congress: limits on abortion funding through federal health insurance programs and a ban on elective abortions in overseas military hospitals.

Freshmen House members also helped sidetrack a bill to fully fund the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Their efforts forced the House leadership to zero out NEA funding within two years.

The principles of this freshman class will be further demonstrated in 1996 as they strive to move parental rights and religious liberties legislation through Congress. They are truly making a difference on issues vital to pro-family Americans.