



Thoughts growing from Haitian lanterns

Recent gas price increases grow from all the unrest in Venezuela – a major supplier of oil for Western Hemisphere countries. My community experienced a nickel per gallon increase because of it, but Haitian fuel oil prices doubled, returning scores of families to the dark ages. The increased fuel cost removed their ability to burn lamps at night.

Congregations frequently send work teams to impoverished places like this. They build churches, dispense medicine and spend a few days at the beach. Those efforts ease suffering and express Christian grace, but they do not address root causes. That is, they don't illuminate Haitian homes by creating social stability further south in Caracas.

This leads me to conclude that we need to rethink "sending" as we seek to reach beyond congregational walls. We cannot just send ministry teams with the hope to do good and learn about ourselves. We must also send with intention to make a lasting difference. This

requires deeper investment than five day work teams usually offer in and of themselves.

Short-term mission projects educate and introduce larger numbers of people to missions. Still, as congregations shift mission dollars from long term, incarnational mission support to short term mission teams, the ability to increase a community's spiritual and material welfare is reduced.

We tend to view this dynamic as a conundrum, but it doesn't have to be. Why not advance both long and short term mission together? Why not admit the long and short term need each other? Doing so creates a more sustainable way of doing mission: long-term relationships and long-term community development coupled with educating the next generation of generous Christians.

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