

What's a Dentist to Do? A Call to Alms

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I was chopping carrots for a large salad. My church sends a group monthly to Mary Jo Copeland's Sharing and Caring Hands near downtown Minneapolis. We volunteer to work in the kitchen serving breakfast to those in need. We chopped vegetables and fruit, made sandwiches, scrambled eggs, and poured drinks. We served to people whose faces we will never forget. My wife and I took our two teenaged sons. We want them to know that the real world isn't their classmates driving BMWs to high school.

We were there on the same Saturday morning in February that the Give Kids a Smile program was being held on the first floor, so the place was buzzing with people upstairs and down. While finishing the after-breakfast clean-up, I turned around and there was a familiar face — Bill Hoffmann, who as many of you know is involved with the Give Kids a Smile effort of which we dentists in Minnesota should be proud.

We visited for quite some time. We spoke not only of Give Kids a Smile, but also of Bill's involvement in Guatemala where he goes with general dentists and oral surgeons to deliver dentistry where dentistry is scarce. He pulled up pictures on his cell phone to show me not only how beautiful the countryside was where he served, but also how beautiful the people were ... people with deeply

furrowed, leathery skin and smiles which showed a genuine appreciation for what was being done for them. Bill and I talked about dentistry's ability and duty to serve beyond the walls of our offices. As we talked, I saw Bill's eyes well up with tears. I sensed a passionate commitment to a cause — a cause of reaching out, of giving to others.

I have become involved in a small church group called Alpha which examines the Christian faith. Recently they were looking for someone to lead the group. They called me, but I declined because I was "too busy". I did want to participate, but not as leader. I didn't want the responsibility, I guess. It was out of my comfort zone; out of my box, so to speak. When I got to the group's first gathering, I was pleased to see we did indeed have a leader. When he first spoke I was amazed at not what he said but how he said it. He stuttered. He stuttered badly. What courage!

What generosity! If there was someone who had a good excuse not to lead, it was him. But there he was — leading the discussion. Do you think he was comfortable? Do you think he felt out of his box? As I drove home, I was moved to tears. This young man gave of himself when it would have been a lot easier to just sit in the back row.

During a time of budget constraints, the University of Minnesota plans to give free tuition

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Please e-mail us at kdegrote@mndental.org or fax us at (651) 646-8246. We look forward to hearing from you not only regarding this article, but also if you have any ethical dilemmas you would like to present to the membership. Perhaps we can help you decide what to do.

to 4,500 needy students, a gift which will total in the millions of dollars.

Additionally, Joey Cheek, an American athlete, has recently won a gold medal in the 500-meter speed skating event and a silver medal in the 1,000-meter event in the 2006 Winter Olympics. That netted \$40,000, which he promptly donated to a group called Right to Play, which uses sports to help children and communities in underdeveloped countries.

All four of these examples have one thing in common: giving.

Our profession offers us the perfect opportunities to give to those less fortunate. We have a skill people need. We can improve people's lives with this skill. Dentistry is also a universal need — sought for around the globe. We have resources — time and money — to share.

Dentistry fills its ranks with people who genuinely care about others. But why should an article

Continued on page 77

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Ethics Committee

Continued from page 55

about dental ethics deal with such a subject? Because there is no more ethical action to take than to give ourselves away to those in need.

Why should we give, you ask? Giving can offer us a completely different perspective on not only dentistry but, on a grander scale, life itself. It can make us complete, make us whole. Giving, even in small ways, empowers us to create joy and happiness, and it is always like a boomerang, forever returning to us. Actually, the reason(s) we give may not be important. The fact that we do give is what matters. But if you want a reason, here are two: because we can, and because we should. This is officially your "call to alms".

See you next time. ■
