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Catholic Community Services in Fiji Solutions to Poverty Alleviation

Rebecca Richard
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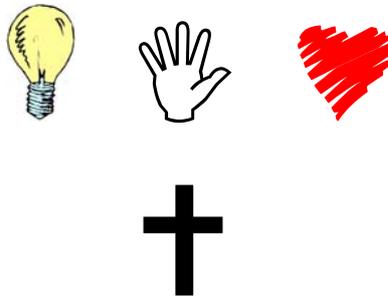
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Catholic Community Services in Fiji

Solutions to Poverty Alleviation



Rebecca Richard

Advisor: Kevin Barr MSC
AD: Taomi Tapu-Qiliho
SIT Fiji: Spring 2006

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to research various Catholic community service programs in and around the Suva area of Fiji. I visited various Churches, religious orders, and Catholic organizations in the hopes to learn about their actions, and how their services affect the community and alleviate poverty. In the beginning of this paper, I stressed the religiosity of Fiji, and how many people are devoted to their faith, but only through ‘individual piety,’ consisting of prayer, reading the bible, and mass attendance. I speak of the role of the Catholic Church and its commitment to service via Catholic Social Teaching, a practice developed after the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II.)

I speak of Community Service and the theories and paradigms within. I applied every service organization into different paradigms and made an attempt to explain why each fit in a particular paradigm.

I wished to and discover the initial problems of poverty, and discovered that there are a number of reasons why people live the way they live. My concluding remarks stress the need for the Catholic citizens of Fiji to become more active, to lend a helping hand and to be aware of the services the Catholic Church provides to the community.

Contacts of Resources:

- St Vincent de Paul Parish, Nausori ----- 340-0217
- Chevalier Hostel, Flagstaff ----- 331-2773
- Home of Compassion, Samabula ----- 337-0644
- Society of Saint Columban, Suva ----- 330-8291
- Daughters of Charity, Nausori ----- 340-0035

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mentor Father Michael Cronogue, SSE for planting the seed of service theory into my head, for allowing me to get upset at the state of the world, for allowing me to pursue my studies in the field of Peace and Justice, and for his guidance in helping me find a place on this earth.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kevin Barr MSC for his knowledge and contacts of the many Catholic run organizations in Fiji, I was given many resources, which put me more at ease regarding the writing of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge Father Mike Cronogue SSE for our many discussions regarding service and service theory, and Catholic Social Teaching, all of which were possible through the Peace and Justice Program at Saint Michael's College.

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Introduction

The Greeks call it *diakonia*, the Jews call it *tsedakah*; regardless of the title ascribed, the concept of service is undoubtedly familiar to cultures all over the world. Many people believe that they were placed on this planet to help and serve those in need and to make the world a better place to live in.

Service is also one of the backbones to many religious denominations and orders. Many, priests, rabbis, nuns, people in lay ministry, and others with strong sense of their faith, make it the basis for their lives, to help and serve others in the name of their God. It is seen as a way to practice what is preached. People wish to live the messages they hear in the Koran, Torah, or Gospel.

Being in Fiji for the past 3 months, among many religious people, I have grown quite used to the religiosity of this island nation. Having lived in a religious homestay, volunteered at a religious kindergarten, and having come from a strong faith background myself, I have become quite attuned to the strong faith in God in this country. I would even go as far to say that I, being quite religious myself, might have noticed certain things and undertones that other students on this trip might not have picked up on.

One would have to be blind not to realize that Fiji is quite a religious country, with over 50% of the population being Christian (not to mention other religions like Hindu and Muslim.) Villages predominantly share the same faith. Based on what I have seen during my experiences in Suva and the areas and villages around, the idea of religion and community go hand in hand. Many people turn to religion to gain a sense of community and sense of belonging. Despite the communal sentiments born from sharing religion, faith does not go much further than going to service, participating in fellowship afterwards, singing hymns, and reading the Bible. The

religiosity of Fiji is very introverted, and much emphasis is placed upon ‘individual piety.’

I took a great notice to this concept when I was volunteering at a local kindergarten. The children had song time everyday, and one of their favourite songs to sing was in English, Fijian, and Hindi. The song went,

‘Read your Bible, pray everyday, pray everyday, pray everyday, read your Bible, pray everyday, and you’ll grow, grow grow...’

Here, forty or so children were singing this song that gave them directions on how to be a good Christian- through prayer and scripture readings alone. There was no instruction to ‘be a good neighbour or to do good for others.’

This mentality is not practical today, especially in a place like Fiji. How can one grow through prayer and Church attendance alone? It does not seem feasible, especially in a developing nation like Fiji alone. One cannot pray for more food, a better job and living conditions. People simply cannot rely on divine intervention alone, changes must be made! These changes involve: *“...more than prayer, going to Church reading the Bible, singing hymns, collecting money, and attending meetings...the Church must continue to be a sign of God’s love to the world.”*¹

The Catholic Church has had a significant emphasis regarding service to others and poverty alleviation for a number of years. In this paper I will attempt to explain the role the Catholic Church in Fiji has played in terms of service to this island nation. I wish to learn *if* and in *what ways* the Catholic Church is fulfilling its mission. I hope to identify both the strengths and weaknesses with in the structure of the community service systems, and to perhaps discover some of the initial causes to poverty itself.

¹ Barr, Kevin J, *Lets Change the World* (Suva, Fiji 1994), 15

I chose to emphasize Catholic social services and charities for my Independent Study for no other reason than familiarity with the religion itself. I could have easily researched the social services stemming from Methodist or Anglican faiths, however I chose not to do so for two particular reasons. I felt that exploring many different faith backgrounds would be far too large an endeavour for four weeks of research. I also felt that I would not be able to give justice to a faith background I had no prior experience with.

I was raised in a strong Catholic family and am currently attending a Catholic university at home. I attend Mass regularly, and am involved within many of the Campus Ministry programs. My concentration in Peace and Justice Studies has allowed me the chance to take classes where religion is of primary focus. My advisor and mentor at school is an Edmundite Priest, and I am also actively involved within my schools volunteer outreach program, M.O.V.E. (Mobilization Of Volunteer Efforts) that is also a component of the Campus Ministry.

It is not my intention to condescend any faith background whatsoever. I use Catholicism as a base for my research to gain a better understanding of my faith cross-culturally. Despite being a devout Catholic, I do have serious issues with the way the Church is run. However, I feel that the good of the Catholic Church strongly outweighs the faults it has. In addition, I firmly believe that I am no less Catholic for having these issues. This is, for example, no different than someone having 'beef' with America, while still calling themselves an American.

My semester in Fiji has tested my faith in ways very unfamiliar to me. Sharing my semester with five other girls from various faiths, not to mention the many different religions of Fiji has made me aware of my 'religious naïveté' if you will. I

have grown up in a French-Canadian Catholic community, and attend a very progressive- and very liberal- Catholic school. I have never been more aware of my religion than here in Fiji. This is not only because of the because of the great religiosity of this country, but also due to the many discussions I have had with my peers regarding religion leading into the wee hours of the morning. I have had to explain and defend Catholicism often, something I have never had to do before. This semester under my belt, I not only feel more grounded in my faith, but more aware of other religions and beliefs as well.

I, like the five other girls studying with me, chose my research for personal reasons. Service plays a very special part in my life. I wish not only to help others who are less fortunate than myself, but to help people help themselves as well. I feel that I was placed on this planet to help others, and to live a Christ-like life. It is my hope that this research Project will help affirm my faith. I hope to become a better Catholic, and return to the United States with a better and deeper understanding of my faith and what Catholicism does for others, and what it means to people across the globe.

A Brief Look at the History of Catholicism in Fiji

The first attempt to bring Catholicism to Fiji occurred in 1842 by French missionaries who had the mentality to evangelise South Pacific islands like Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa.² When the missionaries arrived on the Fijian island of Lakemba, located in the Lau group, they were almost immediately denied access to land, and left to spread Catholicism to Tonga. Upon the order of a new bishop, a second attempt

² Kelly, Charlotte M, *History of Catholics in Fiji, 1844-1944* (Suva, Fiji, 1944), 3

was made two years later on Namuka, an island forty kilometres south of Lakemba; it was here where Catholicism truly began.

Due to the harsh living conditions Lakemba offered the missionaries, they sent forth to the island of Ovalau where, after twelve years, the Marist Brothers established the first Catholic Church. The missionaries in Levuka, the town where they settled- paved the way for more missionaries who were sent to towns like Rewa and Ba.

Catholicism gradually spread as schools in each station were established. In 1952, religious orders like the Societies of Mary, Society of St Columban, and Sacred Heart started serving the community.³ As of 2004, there were over 87,000 Catholics in Fiji and 35 parishes, comprising 9.1% of the population (see Appendix 1.)

Catholic Mission and Commitment to Service

Before one understands the Catholic mission and commitment to service, one must understand the shift that occurred within the Catholic Church called Vatican II. The second Vatican was the change in perspective and structure the Church took up between the years of 1962 and 1965. Vatican II more or less brought the Catholic Church into the current century. Before then, Catholics viewed the individual person abstractly, as ‘disembodied spirits’⁴, just another lost soul in need of salvation. After Vatican II, the Catholic Church came to the realization that each human being comes from different social, economic, and political institutions, and one must cater to these different backgrounds. Meaning, the Church is comprised of many different people from many different backgrounds, and rather than treating everyone as if they came from the same background, one needed to embrace the diversity among Catholics, while treating everyone as equals.

³ O’Mahony, Rev. Charles, *Columbans in Fiji* (Columban Education Office, Suva 2002), 8

⁴ Morrissey, John and Richard Keelan, *The Call to be Just* (Society of St Columban, Suva), 44

From here the Church began to recognize and believe in the dignity of the Human Person, an individual's fundamental right to life and respect, regardless of what social, economical, or political state they are in. Given the current state of the world, and the violations of human dignity today- the Catholic Church then became more conscious of the need to take up the cause of those who are being exploited or oppressed. *However, any belief or idea, without the wherewithal and initiative for change, is worthless.* This being said, the Church was forced to take a look at itself and to really question whether it indeed practiced the love and acceptance that it preached.

Catholic Social Teaching

The Church believed that in order to uphold its beliefs in a universal worth of every individual, it needed a form of curriculum to do so. Thus began the implement and instruction of Catholic Social Teaching (CST.) Catholic Social Teaching is a way that the Church can carry out what it believes. CST is the attempt to prove that the Church does not live in isolation from the rest of the world. CST applies the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible to society today, how Christians should incorporate these teachings and mentalities into their daily lives. Christianity is more than just keeping the Sabbath.

Some of the teachings are as follows:

The Dignity of the Human Person.

As stated above, the Dignity of the human person is the belief in the inherent worth of the individual. Human life is sacred and the Dignity of the individual is the initial beginning for the moral vision of a just society. It stems also from the concept

that human beings are made in the likeness and image of God. The human person takes precedence over all ideologies and structures.

The Common Good and Community

The Human Person is not only sacred, but social as well. One realizes the dignity and rights one has through relationships with other human beings. This comes by living in community with others. Humans grow and fulfil themselves within communities. How we organize ourselves within these communities, be it economically or politically, affects human dignity and the ability for human beings to grow within said community. One must be conscientious of this when organizing a community.

In a community, it is also implied that one must 'love thy neighbour'. We must take this concept and take it as a broad social commitment as well. Everyone must contribute to the whole of society, and work towards a Common Good.

Option for the Poor

The moral test of a society is how it treats its poor, those who are denied their sacred fundamental human rights. These people are the vulnerable members of a community. Catholics are called to look at public policy and the decisions of others and how they affect the poor. The Option for the Poor is also the societal effort to achieve the Common Good, as stated above. A just community can be attained if one is aware to the needs of the people who are on the margins of society.

Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy and just community can be achieved only if human rights are protected. However with these human rights come

duties towards one another- within the family, and society as a whole. Every human has a right to participate within a community.⁵

Catholicism and Service

Considering Vatican II's shift of a simple spiritual individualistic religion to a more other-centred, 'put-my-faith-into-action' mentality, it is no surprise for the increase in charitable actions over the course of the century.

Thus, people express their concern for others and work towards a better sense of justice through genuine concern for the poor. Those who are suffering from poverty, lack of access to necessary resources for the means of survival- things that people have a basic human rights to. The people who constantly: *"rely on the Charity and the mercy of others- the powerless, helpless, and defenceless."*⁶

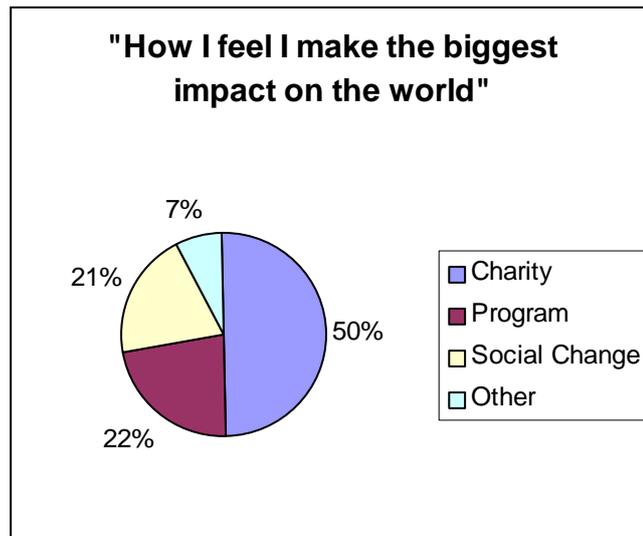
Given all of these beliefs that are engrained within the Church's teaching, it is unmistakable that the idea of service to others compliments the teachings of the Catholic Church, and vice versa.

Service Theory

Before looking at the Catholic services researched, one should look at service itself, and the components therein. In a survey taken regarding volunteerism at a Catholic university in the United States, students were asked how they feel they make the biggest impact on the world (see Appendix 2). The options provided fell under the realms of a) Charity, providing direct service, b) programming, helping set up/support community service organizations, and c) advocating for Social Change. The results are below:

⁵ Society of St Edmunds Mission Statement. www.sse.org

⁶ Morrissey, 150



Here I will explain each paradigm and will give an example of each. First we will start with Charity.

Charity

Charity is seen as direct service, where the control of the service remains with the provider. Charity is often limited in time, and has limited impact on the people served. It is often seen as temporary, confined to a particular affected people, and reaches out no further than to the people directly involved. Charity often provides people with the basic needs that are required for survival. Providing direct simple service to others, there is little attempt to understand and learn about the structural causes of the problem at hand.

One prime example is a soup kitchen; take the Salvation Army for example. It opens its doors every afternoon to serve food to people in the area who are unable to provide a meal for themselves. The servers stand behind the counter with smiles on their faces as they administer coleslaw and goulash to those in line. Conversation is minimal and rarely goes any further than ‘how are you doing today?’ or ‘milk, juice or coffee?’ There is little attempt to get to know the people in line, and to perhaps

learn why these people are there needing assistance in the first place. It can be said that the needy are seen more as objects than as individuals themselves.

Apparent in the graph above, approximately ½ of the students felt that the greatest impact they could make on the world was through direct service. Charity is an open and loving act, based on unconditional giving.⁷ It provides people with fundamental basic needs, and makes people more aware of the inequality existent amongst society.

Charity does have some weaknesses as well. Oftentimes, Charity focuses on the deficits of the people served rather than strengths. Charity also has the capability to create a dependence complex- those being served are developing a reliance on those serving, rather than having the poor help themselves. *“Money, power and learning give a person prestige and status. They make a person relatively independent and enable him or her to do things for others. The really poor person, on the other hand, is always dependent upon others.”*⁸

Project

The second paradigm of service is Project. Project models, address the social problem, and implement solutions to the problem. Project is different from Charity in that relationships are established. For example, those wanting to serve team up with an organization willing to fund the resources needed. Those serving would then use these resources to help others in need.

A prime example of Project would be an education centre, for underprivileged adults who wish to acquire necessary skills to help them have a better lifestyle and earn a steady income. For instance, a woman may notice that many poor men and women are unable to handle their finances. She then may ask a bank or local

⁷ K. Morton, “The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in service-learning.” *Change*, (Fall 1995): 10

⁸ Morrissey, 149

businesses to help her fund a money management workshop, teaching people how to save, balance their checkbook, or attain credit. This type of service is helping people help themselves.

One of the attributes Project has is the intention of developing self-sufficiency. This woman is providing those in need with the skills required to live from day to day. This is more or less a long-term form of service rather than a brief stop for food or bus fare, for example.

On the other hand, Project service does have some downfalls. Oftentimes, the Project established brings other issues into the light, which may or may not be related. This can be called ‘unintended consequences.’⁹ Those doing service might not be prepared for these situations, thus having an effect on the initial Project itself. One is led into other existing problems one didn’t know needed attention. In addition to ‘unintended consequences’, Project service also places peoples in a social hierarchy, much like Charity- the educated and the uneducated, the haves and the have-nots.

Morton adequately describes another downfall or Project service and how the initial problem is defined:

“...Experts define problems differently than the people living them, primarily by applying analytical tools- theories- to the latter’s solution. As helpful as these tools may be, the illuminate only a part of a given reality, and the danger lies in mistaking this part for the whole.”¹⁰

Social Change

The last paradigm of service is Social Change, also known by the term, Advocacy. Social Change focuses on building rapport and relationships with people who have the ability to initiate change on a larger scale, like tackling laws,

⁹ Morton, 4

¹⁰ Morton, 5

amendments, and questions the policies of large corporations. Social Change strives to ‘peel the onion’ and works on finding the root causes of inequality.

“Advocacy, involves raising awareness of the bigger issues that affect the poor; speaking out, whether in support, or critically about what governments, financial institutions and policy makers are doing and applying pressure through demonstrations and campaigns...”¹¹

An example of Social Change would be the actions of a ‘just wages’ campaign. People involved would show documentaries to the public, attend rallies and protests, and push the government to develop or change new policies.

Social Change is a very emotionally charged form of service, and is often fuelled by hard feelings or hatred. In addition, Social Change possesses an outsider mentality. Those people affected by the change sometimes are not involved in the change itself, thus straying away from the relationship building that is familiar to Charity and Project service. Social Change works from a shift in power, and puts much emphasis on analysis before action. Advocacy is more or less about the “...empowerment of the systematically disenfranchised. This emphasis answers the limitations of Charity and Project approaches to service...”¹²

The story about the compassion of Dom Helder Camara and Mother Teresa adequately puts Charity and Social Change into context (see Appendix 3). Both kinds of service are needed, but have two entirely different approaches. Both, however, addressed inequality and poverty as an issue, but chose different directions on how to eradicate the problem.

¹¹ Taylor, Michael, *Christianity Poverty and Wealth, Findings of Project 21*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), 13

¹² Morton, 6

Heart, Hand and Head

These forms of service can also be identified and distinguished by three symbols, if necessary. Charity can be distinguished by the heart,  the giving oneself to others. It is often seen as selfless and giving. Program can be seen with the symbol of the hand,  depicting the action oriented helping-hand to enable others and to get a closer look into the problem of a community. Social Change could be thought of as a light-bulb,  brain and head oriented, addressing structural problems that lie within governments and other civil agencies. Social Change is also full of bright ideas and concepts on how to change things bigger than itself.

Methodology

I took a close look at five faith based service organizations- St Vincent de Paul, Homes of Compassion, Chevalier Farm Training Centre, and three religious orders- Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Compassion, and the Columbian Fathers. All of these people and organizations provided assistance within their community in various ways. I had interviews with almost every organization and order, and engaged in dialogue regarding poverty and the mission of their organization.

Over the course of my research, I took each faith based outreach program and placed them into the categories such as Charity , Program ,

and Social Change  .

I also wanted to apply and incorporate the heart, hand, and head mentality to my research, having recently becoming aware of this theory at my university. I have

seen this concept applied before, but have yet to apply it to service. I had a few focus questions to ask each person I interviewed, but was sure to leave the dialogue open for conversation to freely flow.

For those who know or have seen my research, know that I find it absolutely necessary to highlight, write and doodle on every paper that comes across my desk. If there were one thing that I could have done differently, it would have been to take advantage of the resources at the Pacific Regional Seminary. However given my learning style, it was not practical or beneficial for me to sit in an area looking at resources that I would not be able to loan, mark, or photocopy.

There also were some problems with some of the interviews I had during my research period. Some interviewees' missing appointments, or arrived later than anticipated- things often expected when doing research. This was also the first time for me to engage in fieldwork.

Another weakness I encountered was the fact that the majority of my resources were by the same author, and, expecting new material, I often ran into the same information more than once. I was also very surprised at where my research took me geographically. I visited various places in parts of Suva I had never seen before, not to mention the religious orders that brought me to the Nausori area.

In addition to this, I was also very surprised at the number of people who were willing to take time out of their busy schedules to talk to me. I was surprised that, of those who did speak to me, the majority of the men and women were part of religious orders. In the United States, one would never find this great a number of religious people in one area; this was something I did not think to expect.

Here I will go through each organization, describe their actions, and why they fall under each category. I will touch upon the interviews within each organization, and how they felt their job helped Fijian citizens.



St Vincent de Paul Society

The first place I visited was the St Vincent de Paul parish in Nausori, where I met with the parish priest who informed me about the St Vincent de Paul Society, a group of parishioners who set out to help the poor and to see Christ within every individual. This society was founded in memory of St Vincent de Paul, the patron Saint of Charity. St Vincent's Society is located in nearly every Catholic Church in the country.

The St Vincent's logo depicts the hand of Christ that blesses the Cup of Life, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup. The St Vincent de Paul Society expresses this action above through their direct assistance with the poor. People from the community (from the parish as well as from outside the parish) often come looking for a boost. The St Vincent Society then visits the people in need at their homes, determines whether or not they are in need of assistance, and will then administer aid either in the form of food, bus fare, or the allotment of a child's school fees; wherever the assistance is needed. The society avoids giving money to families for the reason that one cannot determine whether the money is spent wisely. The funds needed to operate the society are provided by street appeal- Church members shaking cans on the street, or by the donation boxes at the airports.

The St Vincent Society also pays weekly visits to area prisons, providing newspapers, cigarettes, and conversation to the inmates. It is said that the inmates look forward to these visits, not for the material gain, but for the camaraderie that the inmates and the visitors have. Oftentimes what people need is a listening ear.

In an interview with the head priest of the Nausori parish, Interviewee #1 stated that the poverty in Fiji is due to the mismanagement of funds, and the accumulation of unnecessary things. Interviewee #1 also commented on education:

“The lack of education has a lot to do with the poverty of Fiji, that’s why we are so keen on providing for school tuition and uniforms. With education we will be able to alleviate the poverty we see.”¹³

Placing St Vincent de Paul in the proper service category, one would have to say that it would go under the  paradigm, applying it to Charity. The society is providing immediate assistance to the needy. It is seen as a one-stop need that requires no further follow-through.

Homes of Compassion

Another  centred organization I visited was the Home of Compassion, located in Samabula. Home of Compassion is a home for the elderly and physically disabled from various faith and ethnic backgrounds. It was started by the Sisters of Compassion, an order of nuns from New Zealand who “...respond to the needs of [their] time with courage, hope and joy so as to realize the compassion of God.”¹⁴ The Home of Compassion was established in 1952, and has been functioning ever since. There are currently twenty-two residents at the home, and the staff works endlessly to provide three meals a day, entertainment and hygiene care to all of the residents. Many of the nuns are registered nurses as well, which helps them serve the

¹³ Interviewee #1. Personal Communication. 1 May 2006

¹⁴ Daughters of Compassion, *Celebrating 50 Years in Fiji*

residents to an even better extent. The home is able to sustain itself by the donations of food from neighbours and local markets, and medical supplies from non-profit NGO's like OXFAM and the Loloma foundation. The Sisters of Compassion also receive governmental grants four times a year to pay for utilities. The small fee for the room and board of the elderly and disabled goes directly to the staff that is not a part of the religious order.

During my visit at Home of Compassion, I asked Interviewee #2, one of the nuns who helps run the home, what the biggest struggle of operating the establishment was. Interviewee #2 replied that the lack of assistance from Church members was very frustrating, along with the little-to-no visitations from family members:

“We'll have the family members come in when their relative is sick or dying, and express their sorrow. They'll say, 'This hurts so much, I am so sad' then I get upset and say 'Who are you to say that? You did not visit them when they needed you the most, you only come now, when they are gone.'”¹⁵

Home of Compassion is a  centred facility in that they are providing direct need to the elderly and disabled at the present time. They provide the immediate needs like food, shelter and health care.

Daughters of Charity

My trip to St Vincent's in Nausori also gave me the opportunity to visit the Daughters of Charity, a small order of nuns serving the community. Here I met with Interviewee #3 who explained that the Daughters of Charity first originated in France and gradually developed stations all over the world.

The Daughters of Charity predominately work with Nausori's youth- working in schools, and establishing after school programs and children community centres. Sister Patricia explained that she first felt called to serve the community, especially

¹⁵ Interviewee #2. Personal Communication. 4 May 06

the youth, when she saw the unsanitary conditions at a local park. *“Rebecca, children were peeing right next to the open faucet that they drank out of. The smell was atrocious; I’ll never forget it. Children could not live like this, something needed to be done....”*¹⁶

While Interview #3 told me of the many things her order was doing to help the community, I chose to pay particular attention to the computer classes the sisters were helping to run. Purchasing around twenty computers, the Daughters of Charity help teach basic computer skills to the community. People pay a small fee that covers two levels of training, which can take up to two years to complete. These classes cater to those who have not completed secondary school, and lack the sufficient skills needed for the job world. These skills are applicable to the business world today, and increase the chances of employment.

The computer centre is a prime example of the  analogy. The Daughters are helping others help themselves through the education of practical skills. This form of service is long term, in that these skills will stay with the individual. It is up to the students to use these skills, and help themselves.

Chevalier Farm Training Centre

My research also led me to the Chevalier Farm Training Centre, located outside of Suva in an area called Wainadoi. While I was not able to take a trip out to visit the farm, I was able to procure some reading material about the farm and hear about its actions.

¹⁶ Interviewee #3. Personal Communication. 2 May 2006

Chevalier Farm is a home to twenty-four boys from broken or poverty stricken homes. The young men range from the ages of sixteen to twenty-four. These young men have been unable to complete secondary schooling for various reasons, and wish to acquire practical skills to help them have a brighter future.

Chevalier Farm Training Centre offers courses that introduce the boys to basic skills of agriculture and farm management, welding, woodworking and other vocational abilities that need to be taught and do not come naturally to the human being. Courses in English composition are also offered. This training centre is very hands-on, and the students learn by performing certain tasks rather than sitting behind a desk, being grilled with theories and hypotheses. Students grow their own food, as well as food to sell commercially. Upon completion of the program, students return to their homes possessing the necessary skills to operate or help operate a functioning farm.

Chevalier centre is a perfect example of program service- the centre helps these young men help themselves. Adequately worded in the resource obtained on Chevalier Farm:

“...Society has given these young men a poor start in life, but if we are willing to help them, they can grow in self esteem and achieve a lot of satisfaction in life. Chevalier Farm Training Centre at Waindoi aims to hold out a hand to those in need and to help them stand on their own feet and feel better equipped to face life...”¹⁷

Church and Politics

Before we go any further, the concept of Church and Politics must be addressed. While the importance of both dichotomies exist, Church and state, to an extent, remain separate. Both play a significant role in the lives of many individuals. However, politicians may change, and inequalities may develop as

¹⁷ Chevalier Farm Training Centre, 3

a result of governmental presence. While this may happen, the Church remains constant and steadfast in their beliefs. The Catholic Church adheres to the mentality that:

“It is incumbent upon the Church to hold up the scrutiny of the Gospel and the values of the Kingdom any government or regime in which she finds herself under which her children must live and to evaluate and, if necessary, criticize the actions and policies of the government.”¹⁸



Society of Saint Columban

The last organization I chose to take a look at was the Columban Fathers, an order of priests stationed in Suva. The Columbans first arrived in Fiji in 1951 by request of the Catholic bishop at the time, to establish secondary schools throughout the country.¹⁹ The schools are still in operation to this day. In addition to the attention the Columbans devote to the education of Fiji’s children, the Society of St Columban actively partakes in service that falls under the realm of Social Change.

The Columban Fathers sponsor a missionary program, educating and preparing women and men to go overseas and do service work to help other countries. The training last two years, which consists of classes in Theology, Sociology and Anthropology, language instruction, and clinical pastoral education, taken places in a hospital setting. The missionary students life in host families of a different culture as well (ex. A Fijian will live with an Indo-Fijian and vice-versa.) The students are then sent out to countries where other Columbans are located, like the Philippines, Pakistan, Chile, Taiwan and Peru. Within those countries, the missionaries take on roles that help the community

¹⁸ Barr, 100.

¹⁹ O’Mahony, 8.

like teachers, social workers, or catechists. The missionaries stay in the country for three years with the option for renewing their contract, which they agree to in the beginning.

Another component of the Society of Saint Columban is the Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation office (JPIC.) The JPIC strives to make people conscious of justice issues, and be more aware of the poor, and the initial causes of poverty itself. The JPIC has also recently begun to publish a newsletter called *Concerns* that discusses current social issues affecting the country. It invites various lay people and parishioners to engage in dialogue concerning social issues. It also attempts to bring attention to global problems and how they concern and relate to Fiji. Recently in the past two issues, *Concerns* has tackled the subject of governmental reconciliation regarding race, and racial harmony. The JPIC has also been commissioned by the Fijian government to hold seminars that will help change the attitudes regarding reconciliation, and help work towards a multi-cultural, multi-faith society.

It is necessary that the Church make itself opinions known in order to indicate change.

“Many of the injustices, much of the poverty and exploitation in the world today are casually connected with political decisions, policies and structures [thus] ...the Church has to become involved in the socio-political sphere if she is to have these decisions, policies, and structures changed or refused.”²⁰

The actions of the Columban Fathers are very  oriented, geared toward Social Change. They address larger issues in society and work at conveying them to the public. The missionary program also educated those who will help advocate and make changes in other countries.

²⁰ Morrissey, 132.

Findings- Speculations on the Root Causes of Poverty

Throughout all of my research, the interviews, and visits with various religious orders, Churches and organizations, I kept wanting to learn the reasons why these people were doing what they were doing- not from a religious standpoint, I already knew that these people wished to perform small acts that gradually make the world a better place. I knew that these people had devoted their life to Christ and were trying to live a selfless, loving life.

But I wanted to know what caused these organizations and various forms of service. I wanted to dig deep and try to unveil the initial causes of the poverty prevalent in Fiji today. When broaching the subject in interviews, I received various responses, some of which wouldn't have even crossed my mind. I was able to find a sociological cycle regarding initial causes (see Appendix 4), however I found that too universal for my liking. I was looking for real, direct reasons applicable to the country.

One idea could be the giving nature of Fijian culture itself. Based on my experience, I have noticed that Fijian people never hoard what they have. There is little incentive for wealth, and despite what little income one may earn, people are willing to give what they have nonetheless. There is little talk about saving money for security. This giving nature also fosters dependence as well. Those who are working may support someone with no wealth or employment. This is closely related to the relaxed and happy-go-lucky state of mind that many Fijians have. There is little desire to move up for material or social gain.

Another reason would be the shift of those who live in the villages to more urban areas like Suva. One Columban Father gave a plethora of reasons, one of which

being the isolation of Fiji itself, its distance from other countries proves a hardship for providing resources to those in need, not to mention the fact the those who come to Fiji often come to sit on sandy beaches at upscale resorts.

Regarding my research, I have noticed that those who are taking action with faith-based service are those who are a part of a religious order. The parishioners who were helping with the service organizations were either employed or training to enter the religious order. I found it very disheartening that parishioners and families were not lending hands to help others.

Conclusion

I came into this Project without a particular thesis in mind, I had no initial point to prove, but however, over time I was able to come to some conclusions.

Community Service is more complicated than it seems; there are many different paradigms and approaches to solving problems, regardless if the service is backed by faith or not. The Catholic Church is very aware of the needs of the public, and does whatever it can to help the public and those in need. It is active among the paradigms of Charity, Project, and Social Change; however, the Catholic Church does have a ways to go regarding their outreach to the community. Perhaps the Catholic population lacks a rudimentary knowledge and understanding of their faith. Because Fiji is a very Christian country, people are not called in to question their beliefs regarding a higher power.²¹

Regardless, more pressure needs to be put on parishioners to help serve their parish and the community. People need to step outside of the pew and become aware of their presence in the community and how they can help to make it a better place. The Catholic people of Fiji must realize that the times have changed, and there is

²¹ Ernst, Manfred. *The Winds of Change* (Suva, 1994), 265

more to religion than individualized piety and ‘reading your bible and praying everyday.’

“Christianity is not just a matter of accepting Jesus as our personal Saviour, reading the Bible, praying, going to Church, and singing hymns. Christianity is a call to conversion, which affects every aspect of our personal and social lives... We are called into a community to become involved in a communal struggle to transform our world into the Kingdom of God.²²

²² Barr, Kevin J. *Making Poverty History*. (Suva 2005), 122.

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- Personal Communication #3 Daughters of Charity, Nausori 2/5/2006
- Personal Communication #4 Society of St Columban 11/5/2006

Appendix 2- Service Learning Survey

Right now I feel I make the biggest impact on the world (choose only one):

- *Providing direct service to another person*
- *Helping to set up and support community service organizations that are addressing immediate community needs*
- *Advocating for Social Change*
- *Other*

Taken From:

Morton, K. "The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in service-learning." *Change*, (Fall 1995): 19-32

Appendix #3- *Dom Helder Camara and Mother Teresa*

Taken From:

Barr, Kevin J. *Making Poverty History- Different Approaches to Addressing Issues of Poverty and Development*. (Suva, 2005), 108.

Appendix #4- Cycle of Poverty

Taken From:

Barr, Kevin J. *Poverty in Fiji*. Fiji. (Suva, 1990), Back Cover