

## SHORT TERM MISSIONS RESEARCH PROJECT\*

David Wesley  
Nazarene Theological Seminary

### *Introduction*

It is natural that Christians would have a desire to be a part of God's redemptive activity in the world and it is a sign of good health when a church is finding ways to use a variety of resources to the glory of God in the nations. This study seeks to explore three ways that people use resources in order to participate in missions [1] and it also seeks to explore the relation that new forms of giving may have on traditional giving of money. In many ways, people in churches today are very interested in giving to help others. Giving, however, is not limited to putting money in an offering for others to administer.

Patterns of giving amongst church members are often consistent with giving patterns outside of the church. In recent years, great media attention has been given to individuals who are donating large sums of their wealth to address global humanitarian issues. In the year 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which has been reported to be the largest private funded foundation in the world was established with \$126 million endowed by Bill Gates. In 2006, Warren Buffet "announced that he would donate thirty-one billion dollars over a period of years, to a foundation named not for himself but for two other major donors – Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, and his wife, Melinda." [2] International organizations' validate the foundation's efforts, documenting their effort:

Since the Foundation was created, the Gates, who are considered to be the world's biggest philanthropists, have donated over 10.5 billion dollars towards global development and the fight against diseases such as malaria and AIDS, which are devastating the most deprived areas of the world. [3]

This movement toward global aid has grown as highly visible individuals such as Bono, Oprah Winfrey, Brad Pitt, and Angelina Jolene have donated large sums of money to global, humanitarian projects.

### *Targeted Missions Giving within the Church of the Nazarene*

The same trend of wealthy individuals giving to specific causes (and especially humanitarian causes) is evident in church and mission organizations as well. In the particular denomination of which I am a member (The Church of the Nazarene) two organizations have been formed in the past ten years to focus specifically on this type of giving. One organization is known as "Jesus Film Harvest Partners" which works with donors who focus their giving on "The Jesus Film Partnership" which provides equipment such as Jesus Film equipment, and other items which can be utilized for evangelism [4]. According to the 2007 published report of this organization, the income for that year was \$2.9 million, most of which came from donations [5]. A second organization, the Nazarene Foundation, was explicitly created with the objective to connect giving in the Church of the Nazarene with ministry opportunities through donations of cash contributions; as well as with non-cash assets contributions of real estate, bonds, stocks and life

insurance. This organization works with people who wish to prepare wills and long term financial planning. [6] The focus of the Nazarene Foundation is not toward a specific ministry such as the Jesus Film Harvest Partners, but rather towards people who wish to specify giving to any ministry, including humanitarian efforts administrated by the Church of the Nazarene.

People who have large investments to make, often prefer to channel donations to organizations like these instead of the local church. These sources of giving to Christian and secular related organizations are impressive. To date, within the Church of the Nazarene there has not been any substantial research which would indicate if this type of focused giving has adversely affected traditional giving to the local church as well as denomination, non-specified giving. If we were to use the giving to the World Evangelism Fund –WEF [7] (which is the general fund for supporting the World Mission Department as well as the International offices) as a measure, the total amount that comes into that giving has not substantially increased or decreased in recent years. There is, however, concern within the denomination that trends toward greater designated giving and greater giving towards local compassionate ministries will affect “WEF” giving that supports the infrastructure of the denomination. According to an unpublished report prepared by a commission in the denomination to study the relationship between designated giving and “WEF” support [8], there has been growing discontent in local churches toward the budget formula. The report points out “a new type of philanthropy that is being introduced by a new generation of donors.” The report also points out that the Church of the Nazarene since its beginning has worked to find a balance between unified giving and designated giving. The conclusion of the report was that the church should continue with a combination of unified and designated giving, thus giving multiple giving tracks across socio-economical lines. This report does not take into account the growing capital found in volunteerism. Additional research would benefit the denomination in understanding the real impact that focused volunteer giving could have to specific ministry needs.

### *Generalized Volunteer Efforts as “Voluntourism”*

Besides the impact of designated giving of finances, the impact of volunteer efforts on traditional giving and the impact that volunteerism does or does not have on the mission of the church is also a factor for the church. Although it can only be assumed that trends in society as a whole will also be seen in the church community, it would be a safe assumption to make. According to the Department of Labor, the greatest growth in giving may not be measured in cash and may not come from foundations or individuals such as Bill Gates. The greatest giving in the U.S., however, may come from middle class individuals who serve as volunteers.

The U.S. Department of Labor released a report in February, 2008 based on a sampling of 60,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics which estimated that 60.8 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2006 and September 2007[9]. The proportion of the population who volunteered was 26.2 percent. The median for this time period (September 2006- September 2007) was 52 hours that ranged from a high of 96 hours for volunteers age 65 and over to a low of 36 hours for those 25 to 34 years old. At the minimum wage during this time period of \$5.85 for an average of 52 hours of volunteer work per year, that represents \$18.4 billion dollars in labor donated to institutions and causes.

The qualitative affect of volunteerism on organizations as well as individuals is a primordial aspect of these trends. Whether this growing volunteer resource is being used to further the objectives of the organization or it is what some have called a form of “voluntourism” which unites motives of tourism with a desire to contribute or gain social capital is debatable. For any organization that utilizes volunteers, it would be of great benefit to exegete the context of volunteerism as a form of capital that if used correctly could result in a positive situation for the volunteer, the organization as well as the recipients of the service. For the mission agency, theological as well as missiological issues which deal with life transformation and culture are crucial. These aspects are not easily measured, but they have long term implications that make good stewardship of human resources all the more imperative.

What is the profile of those who volunteer? For those who work with donors, it is critical to know them well. It is just as important to know those who give their time. A few observations from the report of the U.S. Department of Labor:

- \* Volunteering was more prevalent among women (29.3 percent) than among men (22.9 percent), a relationship that held across age groups, education levels, and other major characteristics.

- \* Interestingly, persons age 35 to 54 continued to be the most likely to volunteer (30.3 percent), while 26.6 were teenagers, possibly reflecting volunteer activities in schools and churches. Young workers in their early twenties and persons 65 years or older had the lowest rates of volunteerism.

- \* Parents with children under age 18 were substantially more likely to volunteer (33.7 percent) for organizations focused on children than were persons without children of that age (23.2 percent). People without children were more likely to volunteer for organizations related to community service, hospitals, or social organizations. Volunteer rates were higher among married persons (31.9 percent) than among those who had never married (20.9 percent).

Individuals with higher levels of educational attainment volunteered at higher rates than did those with less education. Among persons age 25 and over, more than 4 in 10 college graduates volunteered compared with fewer than 2 in 10 high school graduates and almost 1 in 10 of those with less than a high school diploma.

A growing number of people are donating significant time and resources each year. In relation to mission organizations and especially related to Short Term Missions it is interesting that most volunteers give their time through an established organization or two. The main organization—the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year was most frequently religious (35.6 percent of all volunteers), followed by educational/youth service related (26.2 percent). Another 13.1 percent of volunteers performed activities mainly for social or community service organizations.

*Volunteering in the Church of the Nazarene*

If we were to use the Church of the Nazarene as a case study for comparison, we find some interesting parallels. According to the 2007 database for Nazarene Volunteer Ministries which works with volunteers who channel their volunteer activities through the denominational headquarters [10], a total of 11,359 people participated as volunteers for 21-90 days. With a total church membership of 642,523 U.S. members, this represents 1.7% of the church involved in denominational volunteer ministry. Even with the fact that people volunteer outside of the denominational structure, a substantial percentage of volunteer donation is made to efforts within the denomination which can be traced in these statistics.

The labor hours represented by these volunteers represents a total of 702,290 labor hours that were donated. At the minimum wage rate of \$5.85 an hour, that would total \$4.1 million dollars. The amount of money that came through the Nazarene World Mission headquarters for Work and Witness [11] alone, which is one part of short term mission in the Church of the Nazarene for travel and building supplies of these teams during the same time period, was \$7,215,998. That indicates that a conservative estimate is that donations through volunteer efforts in the Church of the Nazarene in 2007 were at least \$11.3 million dollars. The total amount of money that was raised through offering in local churches for the World Evangelism Fund was \$46,146,000 during the same time period.

#### *Olathe College Church of the Nazarene*

Considering these trends in the society as well as trends within the church, it may be surprising to find that Olathe College Church of the Nazarene's (OCCN) giving patterns prove atypical to these studies, and may indicate the profile of a local church remains unchanged by the moving giving trends of similar size churches, and U.S. society. The volunteer efforts at OCCN, perhaps, are also elusive and efforts outside of short term missions' (STM) specific efforts were not measured in this survey. The growing juxtaposition, however, of two dynamics of traditional giving and giving which is designated to specific projects and volunteerism can be seen in the case study research of OCCN. The system of giving to a unified denominational system through cash offering and a trend toward younger members to have a lesser value of that system can be seen in the research. The original intent of this case study was to explore the extent to which changing giving patterns; especially through volunteer efforts in Short Term Mission may have on a local church. The findings in some ways were quite distinct from my original expectations. The finding that short term missions, for example, had such a low profile in the church was quite surprising. The creative tension between general cash giving towards missions, giving to designated missions projects and volunteerism, however, are central to understanding the future of missions support in this church as well as any local church.

#### *Research Findings*

In this brief research project of OCCN I found the leadership of the Church, as well as a large percentage of the membership of the church, appears highly committed to the support of the denomination of efforts of the Church of the Nazarene including its missions program. One does not find, however, homogeneity in the church related to perceptions of missions or money. I found a dissimilarity in perceptions which was clearly defined by age group more than participation in short-term missions or other mission activities. In one interview, the High School

pastor indicated an intentional connection in the High School programs between personal faith and the missional aspect of the church. The students understand their role as Christians to be a part of God's mission. The traditional programs and structure of international missions in the church, however, remain "invisible" to students. [12]

The following is an overview of the primary findings of the surveys and interviews of my research:

1) One of my primary objectives at the beginning of this project was to explore the interrelatedness between short term mission participation and the awareness of long term missions that may lead to giving to mission agencies through denominational faith promise giving. In this particular study I found that there is no explicit connection that can be made between short term mission participation and missions giving. People tend to give the same whether they go on STM trips or not. This finding may be disturbing to some people since it is contrary to anecdotal belief in the Church of the Nazarene as well as other churches that short term missions results in people having a greater appreciation of the missions effort of the denomination which will result in greater understanding and support of long term missions. I cross referenced various parts of the survey to arrive at this conclusion:

a. The control group for this survey was people who had not gone on any short-term mission trips. When asked if long term career missionaries are crucial to the mission of the church and should be generously supported, there was a very slight variation between those who had gone on more than four short-term mission trips and those who had not gone on mission trips. 88.9% of those who went on more than four STM trips agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. 90% of those who had never gone on a trip agreed with this statement.

b. When asked how their personal giving to Faith Promise had changed in the past five years, 33.3% of those who had gone on more than four STM trips had increased their giving compared to five years ago. 41% those who had not gone on any STM trip had increased their giving.

c. When cross referencing the number of STM trips people had taken with whether they were currently participating in Faith Promise, 51% of those who had not gone on a STM trip participated in Faith Promise. The following graph gives the full result of this comparison, with a breakdown of the number of short term trips people had taken. The total number of people who responded that they currently participate in Faith Promise giving was 113 people. 58 of the 113 who participate in Faith Promise giving had not gone on any short term mission trip. 55 of the 113 who participate in Faith Promise giving had gone on at least one STM trip.

d. Amongst those who answered that they did not currently participate in Faith Promise giving, 42 of the 77 people who do not participate in Faith Promise giving had not gone on any STM trip. 35 of the 77 had gone on a STM trip and do not currently participate in Faith Promise giving.

2) Although there is an atypically low emphasis in short a term mission at OCCN, there is a very high desire to be involved in missions through participating in giving offerings, praying, and financially supporting short term missions as well as full time missionaries.

a. When asked if “the local church should give priority to Faith Promise giving, even in the face of financial crisis”, 74% of the 190 people surveyed, responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

b. When asked, “If I had funds for giving to just one mission project, I would...”51% said they would invest in Faith Promise. 34% said they would invest in compassionate ministries. Only 15% said they would invest in Short Term Missions. Although Faith Promise at OCCN includes a large percentage to compassionate ministries, people responded strongly to supporting just compassionate ministries as opposed to “block giving” that included compassionate ministries as well as traditional, global missions.

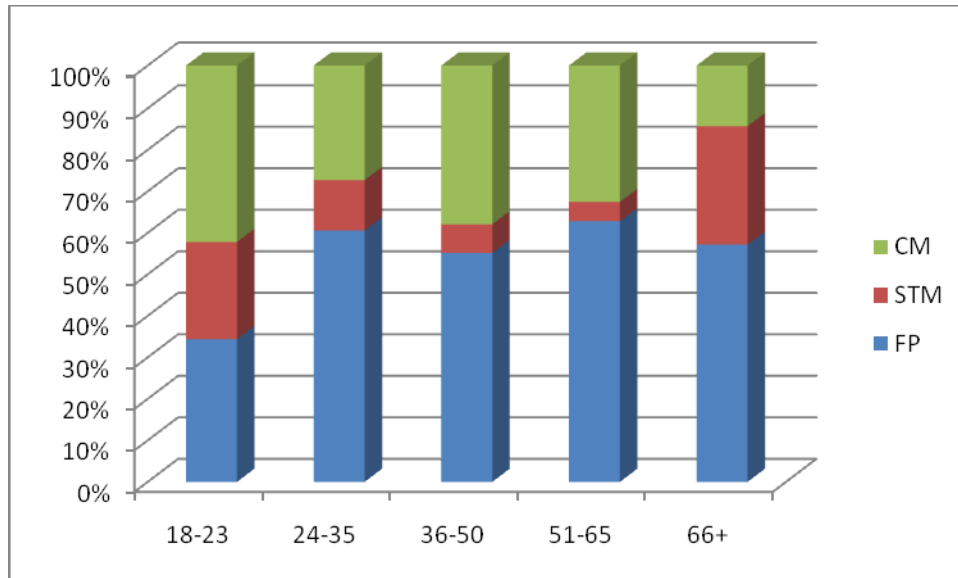
c. An interesting finding was that although as many as 74% of those interviewed stated that Faith Promise should be supported, even in times of financial crisis, only 59% self reported that they currently participate in Faith Promise giving. 27% percent of those surveyed, self reported that they did not participate in giving to Faith Promise or STM.

3) Age was the greatest indicator of missions giving and participation.

a. There was a balanced representation of age groups surveyed which allowed for a good comparison of tendencies according to age. The following graph shows the breakdown of the 190 people who were surveyed according to age:

b. 100% of those surveyed over the age of 66 self reported that they currently participate in Faith Promise giving. In contrast 23.4% of those between 18 and 23 self reported that they currently participate in Faith Promise giving. In the 24-35 age range, 45% of those surveyed self reported that they currently participate in Faith Promise giving, in the 36-50 age range, 93% participate and in the 51-65 age range, 81%.

c. When asked, “If I had funds for giving to just one mission project...” 57% of those in the 66+ age group answered that they would invest in Faith Promise, 28% of this age group said that they would invest in STM and 14% said compassionate ministries. The following chart shows the results of these questions, cross referenced with age group: (CM represents Compassionate ministries, STM is short term missions and FT is Faith Promise.)



a.

Although this chart does not represent actual giving, it does represent perceived values that people have regarding mission giving. Further research which followed these values to real giving would be helpful.

4) The survey indicated that when it comes to global ministry, there is a greater value for participating in giving of finances more than personal involvement through STM. This survey measured primarily mission activity outside of the U.S. The survey did take into account that some people would include giving to compassionate ministries through volunteering time as well as resources to be interpreted as local involvement in mission. The survey, however, did not take into account the very large participation of members of OCCN in local outreach ministries. Through the interviews with the pastors as well as an overview of investments that OCCN has made in ministries in their own community and throughout the U.S., it is evident that this local church is highly invested in many ministries which were beyond the scope of this study.

5) Although there continues to be a strong tie to denominational missions, I found in the leadership interviews signs of the church considering having additional ministries which partner with specific international congregations and non-Nazarene ministries. These partnerships and ties to other ministries do not seem to have an adverse affect on denominational giving, but they do indicate a tendency that is found in other large, Nazarene churches to have a greater role in their missions giving and be to move to collaboration in the greater evangelical, Christian community.

### *Conclusion and Suggestions*

Because of various limitations, this research is tentative at best and is not meant to be conclusive in its findings. This case study research, however, indicates a need for further research within the Church of the Nazarene related to Short Term Missions. It also indicates a local church with a love for missions and a willingness to invest itself in others. The pastors of the church were open and anxious to participate in a study which would lead them to make decisions based on

research. The findings and conclusions of this brief study come out of respect and admiration for a church that has a history of investing in long term mission efforts which have in turn impacted many lives.

1) One could conclude that this case study and this particular local church are unique in showing that short term missions (STM) did not result in increased support of missions. In a more comprehensive research project, it would have been beneficial to develop research tools which measured the affect of STM on the participant before as well as after the trip. It would also have strengthened the study to measure giving beyond Faith Promise and STM. A further element to strengthen this research would be to follow up on the survey in order to clarify various findings. The findings in this study, however, are consistent with findings of several qualitative studies related to STM which have been conducted in the past ten years and which utilized various research tools that I did not include in this brief study which give validity to their findings. Kurt Ver Beek, conducted a qualitative case study research of nearly 200 North Americans who went to Honduras after Hurricane Mitch to build houses. Ver Beek found that these STMs trips results in very little lasting positive change in either the lives of the North American or the Hondurans [13]. Within Ver Beek's report he cross references his work with various other STM research projects and notes that of the 44 quantitative studies he reviewed, 13 followed research procedures that included a pre and post-test of standardized questions, a post-test with a control group, or triangulation of the respondent's answers with secondary data sources. In 11 of these 13 studies, Ver Beek found "little or no change in short term mission participants. "This is not to say that all findings are that STM makes no impact whatsoever on participants or "recipients." Undoubtedly there are many anecdotal examples of lives transformed and great impact being made. The findings of the Ver Beek research project was that greater impact was made when there were longer periods of time that there were joint work projects. For the purposes of this study, however, the findings were that 73% of the people at OCCN who participated in STM trips had been on trips of two weeks or less and that these experiences did not lead to measurable change in financial support of missions.

The unique aspect of this case study is that OCCN has very little emphasis on STM. In a comparison with a survey conducted by Robert Priest related to Mega Churches and missions [14], OCCN is consistent with the average of other mega churches in giving to global missions. The projected spending to global efforts through OCCN for 2009 is \$485,400 [15] which is within the median range for annual expenditure to ministries abroad in Priest's survey. The per capita giving of membership to missions for OCCN is \$150.88 which is also consistent with the median of mega churches researched by Priest. The comparison of OCCN and the mega churches researched by Priest are parallel at nearly every point, with the exception of short-term mission involvement. In the study that Priest conducted of 1230 mega churches, the average church had more than 100 people each year that went on international short term mission trips through the local church. In this survey, 18 of the 190 people surveyed had been on a STM trip in the past 12 months. The growing trend outside church work for individuals to be involved in volunteerism may be consistent with the involvement of members of OCCN in local ministries, although this study did not research that aspect. Every indication, however, would be that the low participation in STM through OCCN is atypical and that there may be reasons within the



leadership of STM efforts at OCCN that diminish the scope that volunteer efforts through international STM has and the number of people who choose to be involved in these efforts.

2) The findings of age being an indicator of mission giving and participation is somewhat difficult to measure at OCCN. Since the church is located on the campus of Mid America Nazarene University, many of the people interviewed who were 18-23 may have been college students who came from a variety of churches and were not consistent members of OCCN. The results of their responses, however, are not completely consistent with what would be expected from a university which has a very large emphasis in short-term missions. Although one could argue that giving correlates with expendable income, it would be helpful to conduct follow up interviews with those in the 18-23 age range as well as those in the 66+ age range to find why there is such a difference in mission giving as well as attitudes toward global missions.

3) The profile of the volunteer at OCCN is somewhat elusive since many of them take in on their own initiative to find avenues to minister. This is a healthy sign that attendees of OCCN have desire to live their faith in their community. One suggestion, however, would be to form a stronger emphasis on intentional volunteer efforts (especially for short-term mission efforts) which flow from the central mission of the congregation instead of a marginal emphasis that is dependent on personalities of individuals in the church.

4) The finding of OCCN even considering congregation to congregation partnerships with international congregations and youth projects which work with Christian organizations beyond the Church of the Nazarene is significant. This may indicate a larger tendency within other Nazarene Churches to work more collaboratively with the greater evangelical community, and a tendency for large congregations to have a more active role in missions in ways that have until now been considered the role of Nazarene World Mission. The impact of this on the local church as well as the denomination which has historically tied WEF giving with missions giving should be explored.

\*Adapted from David Wesley's online blog-site [actsoneight](http://actsoneight.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2008-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&updated-max=2009-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=6) (accessed April 12 2008):  
<http://actsoneight.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2008-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&updated-max=2009-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=6>

#### *Notes:*

[1] Resources include financial resources which are focused on traditional faith promise giving, designated giving to specific ministries, and volunteer resources which are primarily donated through short-term missions.

[2] Fleishman, Joel L. *The Foundation: A Great American Secret*. New York, Public Affairs, 2007

[3] "Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation." The Prince of Asturias Foundation available online (accessed July, 2008)  
<http://www.fundacionprincipedeasturias.org/ing/04/premiados/trayectorias/trayectoria807.html> (accessed July, 2008).

[4] “The JESUS Film Changes Lives” Jesus Film Harvest Partners available online (accessed July, 2008) <http://www.jfhp.org/>. This website states that every \$3 donated will result in a person making a faith commitment.

[5] “Celebrating Ten Years of Harvest: Jesus Film Harvest Partners 2007 Annual Report.” Jesus Films Harvest Partners available online (accessed September 2008) [http://www.jfhp.org/pdf/2007\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.jfhp.org/pdf/2007_Annual_Report.pdf)

[6] “Nazarene Foundation Annual Report 2007 Video.” Nazarene Foundation, 2009, available online (accessed September 2008) <http://www.nazarenefoundation.org/annualReport2007.php>.

This information comes from the 2007 report in a video format which does not provide specific income and expense reporting.

[7] WEF is the World Evangelism Fund to which Nazarene Churches contribute voluntarily. This fund is primarily understood to support the World Mission Division of the Church of the Nazarene, but it also funds the international administrative infrastructure of the Church including the international headquarters and higher education. The primary means of collecting WEF funds is through Faith Promise giving.

[8] Unpublished document prepared by a committee of the General Board of the church of the Nazarene to study how the church can most effectively respond to the growth of the designated giving in our church. This committee was formed by the action of the 78th General Assembly of the General Board, February 2001.

[9] “Volunteering in the United States,” News release, Bureau of Labor Statistics. United States Department of Labor (Washington DC) available online (accessed September 2008) <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/volun.pdf>

[10] Note that these statistics do not include those who volunteer through their local church, independent organizations or through a University unless those activities are channeled through the Church of the Nazarene International Headquarters..

[11] Work and Witness is a short-term mission program in the Church of the Nazarene which began in the mid 1970’s which focuses primarily on construction project.

[12] Wardlaw, Brian, personal interview. December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Mr. Wardlaw serves as the High School Pastor at Olathe College Church of the Nazarene.

[13] Ver Beek, Kurt Alan. 2006. The Impact of Short-Term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras. *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIV, no. 4, October: 477-99.

[14] Robert Priest unpublished report of research, 2008. Robert Priest surveyed responses from 395 Megachurches, defined as averaging 2000 or more for weekend worship.

[15] Hendrix, Ray. “How Faith Promise Monies Will be Appropriated: December 1 2008- November 30 2009. *Olathe College Church of the Nazarene*, available online (accessed April 12 2008) [http://ccnmissions.org/pdf/mission\\_faithprom/faithprom\\_stats.pdf](http://ccnmissions.org/pdf/mission_faithprom/faithprom_stats.pdf). Information taken from brochure used to promote Faith Promise giving printed by the church. This amount includes \$365,000 toward Nazarene World Evangelism Fund, \$30,000 to two Jesus Film teams, \$15,000 towards initiating new work in Sierra Leone, \$18,000 to global hunger relief, and various other designated projects.