

“Small World” Article for Brandon Sun, Sunday, December 17/06

Get a Goat, or Have a Cow

By Zack Gross

A friend emailed me the other day, looking for people to contact a local reporter collecting stories on how and why the Holiday Season gets their goat. You know, line-ups in stores are too long, or sale prices are still too high, or mall parking lots have too many dangerous drivers. None of the suggested topics included “We are all too greedy”, or “We buy shallow gifts”, or the age old question “Was He born so that we could all go shopping?”

So, what gets my goat – and the goats of many others – is the rush to shop without considering the many ways that Christmas, and other “holy-days”, can be celebrated, and the many significant gifts that can be given in this world. When the holiday season gets your goat, why not give a goat as a gift – to someone who can really benefit? If goats aren’t your thing, what about a couple of rabbits, some fruit trees, a backpack filled with school supplies, or an immunization?

With a week to go before the big day, at least for some Christians, there is still time to go on-line or grab the phone and make a donation in the name of your loved ones that will change the world for a child or a family, without leaving excess packaging on your floor or an unexpected hole in your wallet. Randomly, I chose two organizations, both of them reputable charities, World Vision and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). They are global organizations, and are members of the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation, so you can find them on the MCIC web site at www.mcic.ca. I accessed their web sites through “Links” at MCIC’s, and this is what I found.

For only \$50, you can give an impoverished Third World family two hens and a rooster, which will become a sustainable sources of eggs and meat. For only \$35, you can give two rabbits and you know what that leads to! Meat forever! Go big-time, with a dairy cow at \$600, which will produce twenty glasses of milk every day, supplying several families. A donkey is only \$300 and can carry, pull, plow and help a family climb out of the cycle of poverty. There’s a “harvest pack” of seeds, tools and training to help hungry families feed themselves for a \$35 donation, while \$500 builds a greenhouse.

If health problems in the world get your goat, for only \$32 you can give two mosquito nets to a family and reduce their risk of contracting malaria, one of the deadliest diseases in today’s world. For only \$100, you can stock a medical clinic with medicines, bandages and more. If you think that education will ensure that today’s poor children are contributing members of global society in the future, for \$25 you can provide a Canadian child with a backpack filled with school supplies or for \$60 you can pay the school fees for a child in China. Our family is supporting a student in Tanzania at an insignificant

cost compared to our income and our general spending. For those with a little extra cash, \$500 furnishes a classroom with chairs, desks, blackboards and tables.

In Pakistan, women work at embroidery to sell at the market to make a living. They sit hunched over a kerosene lamp which ultimately ruins their eyes, while also presenting the danger of hurting their lungs with its smoke or actually burning their home to the ground. For \$60, you can provide electric light to these folks. For \$120, you can provide Nicaraguan farmers with the training to grow sesame and improve their livelihood. For \$20, you can take an Egyptian working child out of this dangerous environment and put him or her in school. For \$130, you can help a young entrepreneur start his or her own business in Mexico City. Compare this to the cost of an i-Pod or designer jeans or a pool table.

This is not a commercial! Or if it is, it is a commercial for a way of life, not a product. The holidays that we celebrate at this time of year are about change and freedom so, amidst the clutter of also getting people the luxuries and conveniences they ask for, we can meet our responsibility to share and empower.

And this is not just charity! While it is important to be altruistic and generous for the sake of others and to fulfill our own beliefs, there is an imperative in today's world to bring the have's and the have-not's closer together, economically and socially, or we ensure that the daily death toll that we witness on the news will continue to mount through poverty, disease and conflict. "9-11" happens every day in our world and this time of year is an appropriate time to say "Let us stop it!" because an unjust world gets my goat!

Zack Gross is program co-ordinator at the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation (MCIC), a coalition of 38 international development organizations active in our province.