

HNGR News

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"The Hidden Among Us" A Host Interview with Jonathan Nambu of Samaritana Transformation Ministries

Jonathan Nambu is Executive Director of Samaritana Transformation Ministries, a non-profit, non-denominational organization committed to sharing and living out the Gospel among Filipino women caught in prostitution, in partnership with other members of the Body of Christ. To date, Samaritana has hosted 5 HNGR interns, and expects another intern this summer.

HNGR: Tell us how you got involved in the work you do. How long have you worked at Samaritana?

Jonathan: I personally joined Samaritana's work 18 years ago, first as a volunteer going out on night outreaches with my wife Thelma (who was one of the founders a few years prior to that), then later joining staff as a project manager. Currently I serve as executive director. At first I wasn't sure if I could or would be personally involved; I was uncomfortable and insecure as a man in what I perceived was primarily a women's ministry. Later I became convinced that my presence was important, and that as a man I had particular gifts to offer both to the ministry as well as to the women. My specific role has to do primarily with administrative aspects, resource development and networking, but I also play a role in overall leadership. I see all of what I do as critical to the pursuit of and sustainability of our vision and mission.

HNGR: You write in your article "Looking into the Eyes of the Hidden Among Us: Reflections on Seeing the Poor and Vulnerable" that the poor are often hidden in plain sight. Why is it that the poor are "hidden" among us?

Jonathan: I think sometimes the poor are hidden because they try to hide themselves or stay hidden out of their fear and shame. We make the poor



Jonathan Nambu with the women at Samaritana and 2010 HNGR Intern, Sarah Gossman

feel even more out of place and vulnerable, and so they can feel unsafe - even non-human - and try to hide to protect themselves. Sadly, though, more often the problem lies within me and you. We, the "non-poor", block them out of our line of vision, or turn the other way, to avoid looking into their eyes. As trauma specialist Judith Herman has said, "we just don't particularly want to know... who can bear to think for too long...?" We have the fear that if we see them, something will be demanded of us which of course is true. What we forget is that what will be required of us if we allow our eyes to meet will actually be part of our own redemption, a re-gaining of our own humanity.

HNGR: How can we begin to see the poor?

Jonathan: We need the grace and courage to not run away or walk on the other side of the road. We need to nurture the willingness to not only see the poor, but to be among them, linger, let our gazes meet, build relationships of genuine mutual friendship and solidarity. If we see the poor around us in this way, we also begin to see the poor woman/man within us more clearly as well.

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Haiti: A Listener's Account

Our HNGR Assistant Director's Reflections on an advisory visit to Haiti

I read a BBC article before visiting Chris in Haiti in September entitled “Journey through hell.” Needless to say, I was not sure what to expect, so I decided to do a little experiment. I would compare the picture of Haiti presented in the media to the reality that I encountered in the country during my short week. It turns out that, according to the media, Haiti is politically unstable, unsafe, devastated by cholera and an earthquake, a place where people have resorted to eating cow-pies, and just generally hopeless. The medical team I traveled with on a 30-passenger plane from Ft. Lauderdale to Cap Haitian added a few tales of voodoo and tarantulas. So that was my picture as I stepped out onto the tarmac and breathed my first hot and heavy breath on Haitian soil.

It turns out that the media picture is not so much untrue as it is one-sided. The January 2010 earthquake is an enormous challenge, especially for the 500,000 still living in tents in Port-au-Prince. But one story within that story is of a church in the central plateau that, upon receiving reports of children without families living in the mud and rubble, sent a bus to retrieve these newly orphaned children in order to give them a warm bed, regular good meals, and a school where they could finish their academic year. All this within 8 days of the earthquake.

The cholera epidemic, believed to have originated in a UN camp, swept through Haiti and infected

over 250,000, with numbers still rising. But this story misses the reality that in Haut-Limbe, a small town tucked into the mountains of northern Haiti, where Chris lives, the local Baptist church educated its parishioners immediately after receiving the first reports of a cholera outbreak. Be sure to wash hands properly. Do not open dirty water packets with your teeth. The town had no more than 4 or 5 cases of cholera, even though their Ebenezer health clinic became an emergency cholera center to serve those from nearby towns who had been infected.

These stories offer a significantly more complex picture of Haiti, but the story that stands out the most was one that Chris told me one evening while we were sitting on his host family's roof in Haut-Limbe, watching the stars and savoring the evening breeze.

One day, as Chris was well-dressed and on his way to teach a class, a young man approach and engaged Chris in conversation. He wanted Chris to teach him English. This being a regular request, Chris did not pay too much attention. Plus, he was in a hurry to get to class. At that moment, Chris stepped into deep mud and stumbled for a second before his other foot landed right next to it. So there he was with two white shoes in mud up past his ankles. “Great. What am I going to do?,” he asked himself.

The young man immediately invited Chris to his small house. While Chris sat outside the house, the young man retrieved a bucket of water and proceeded to wash not only Chris's shoes, but also his feet. Chris was speechless. When he was cleaned up and ready to go, Chris asked, “Is there anything I can do? Can I leave any money to help you?” “No,” the young man replied, “I just know that if I were in your country you would do the same for me.”

Lest we forget that there is real life behind the world's big issues, we ought to learn to listen to the stories that will never be told on the BBC. We might just hear the voice of God in the most unlikely of places. ♦

*by Ryan Juskus,
HNGR Assistant Director*

Ryan Juskus, HNGR Assistant Director with 2011 HNGR Intern Chris Wilson in Haiti



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HNGR: How do you and your staff at Samaritana relate to the women you meet?

Jonathan: We aren't able to do it perfectly or consistently, but our desire is to treat each of the women as a bearer of the image of God, with great honor and respect. We also want to offer compassion, but also invite them to new levels of freedom and empowerment.

HNGR: You have now hosted 5 HNGR interns. What has been your experience hosting HNGR interns and including them in the work you do?

Jonathan: Our experience hosting HNGR interns over the years has been great and enriching! We have appreciated the unique gifts each one has brought to our community, and the impact they have had in the lives of the women they have met and befriended at Samaritana! ♦

Read more about the work Jonathan is doing at Samaritana, as well as his complete article, "Looking into the Eyes of the Hidden Among Us: Reflections on Seeing the Poor and Vulnerable," on Samaritana's website

A Journey Up-River

A unupdate from HNGR's seventh annual HNGR Symposium, "When Did I See You Hungry? Advocacy, Hunger, and Faithful Citizenship"

Christians shouldn't just be pulling people out of the river. We should be going upstream to find out who's pushing them in.

--Desmond Tutu

From the beginning of Arloa's Sutter's ministry to the Chicago homeless community, it's been about feeding the hungry. Having grown up on a farm in Iowa, she moved to Chicago and was taken aback by the homeless on the streets asking for leftovers people carried out of restaurants. She opened a small storefront in downtown Chicago and organized people to bring sandwiches and soups and Crock Pot meals to make available to the needy. Now, years later, Arloa is Executive Director of Breakthrough Urban Ministries in Garfield Park, where they provide an impressive list of services to their poor urban community, including a fresh market food pantry that accepts food stamps.

But feeding the hungry doesn't just mean meeting immediate needs. At our 2012 HNGR Symposium, "When Did I See

You Hungry? Advocacy, Hunger, and Faithful Citizenship" Arloa said, "I'm on a journey to find out if Breakthrough is really helping people. We collected food to make Thanksgiving baskets for many families in Garfield Park, and as I watched them walk away with the baskets, I wondered whether or not we were actually solving their problems." Several other panelists shared this humble sentiment—how do we feed the hungry well?

"I'm on a journey 'up the river', to find the source of the problems for hungry people in my neighborhood," Arloa said, referencing Desmond Tutu's famous quotation.

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*HNGR Symposium
Panel, "Faithful
Citizenship: A Theology
of Advocacy"*



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***HNGR Symposium Plenary Address
with Rev. David Beckmann, President of Bread for
the World***

This year's HNGR Symposium highlighted the importance of advocacy and civic engagement for people of faith to fight poverty and hunger. That is a mission Bread for the World is very familiar with as a "collective Christian voice urging our nations decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad." Bread for the World's President, David Beckmann, brought our chapel and plenary messages.

Through Bread for the World and the Bread for the World Institute, he has lobbied Congress for many years on issues of hunger and poverty, especially to protect programs like SNAP and WIC in America and continue US foreign aid abroad. Beckmann believes strongly that people of faith can "change the politics of hunger."

Our first panel set the foundations for a discussion of advocacy among people of faith. "People of faith in America are holding civic life together, but not advocating for structural change," they discussed, citing Robert Putnam's (author of *Bowling Alone*) new book, *American Grace*.

Why aren't Christians pushing for change? Gary Burge, professor of Bible Theology at Wheaton said that most Christian advocates have had some sort of "conversion experience" that urged them to confront injustice. For him, it was an experience with Palestinian students in Israel that moved him to be involved in conversations about . For those wanting to get involved with advocacy, he set the foundation for our Christian imperative, "Ask yourself, 'What is God's project in this world?' This is the starting point. This question has been answered in a very individual, personalized way in the Evangelical world. But there is a corporate way to answer that—God restoring humanity and the world together. Does God envision a group

of individuals or a new social reality (the Kingdom)?"

The rest of the three symposium panels set to refine our ideas of what this might look like for those trekking "up river."

On our second panel, "Facing the Facts: The Power of Research to Combat Poverty and Hunger," Todd Post, Senior Editor of the Hunger Report at the Bread for the World Institute, said there is a big need to interpret vast amounts of information on hunger and poverty for the public. "Christian academics have an imperative to be public researchers," Professor of Politics and International Relations Larycia Hawkins added, "They need to take information and make it readily digestible for the church... and useable for Christ's Kingdom."

The final two Symposium panels dealt with issues of hunger around the world, examining questions about local and global food security, trade, access, and production. These panels discussed broad issues of food production and distribution—"The rich buy land to produce fuel, in order to reduce the price of gas--for the most part a luxury. The poor use land to farm it and reduce the price of food, which is a necessity," said Todd Post—but also challenged us to know hunger on a more local level. "When is the last time you shared a meal with a poor person? Someone who really didn't know where their next meal is coming from? This is where we meet Jesus," Arloa Sutter exhorted.

In the forward of David Beckmann's latest book, *Exodus from Hunger*, Desmond Tutu writes about the crucial role the church plays in confronting injustice--what Arloa and other Symposium participants are doing in their own contexts. "For most of my life, many people thought that racial oppression was an immutable fact of life in South Africa. As a pastor, I encouraged people who believed in God to get active in pushing for change. In the end, God blessed us with transition to a more just society." The HNGR Program thanks our many speakers and guests who participated in this year's HNGR Symposium, enabling our faith communities to "look up river" to break cycles of hunger, poverty, and injustice at their source. ♦ *by Christy Schweigert, Research and Program Assistant*

Watch or listen to 2012 HNGR Symposium sessions on our website at www.wheaton.edu/hngr under the HNGR Symposium tab.