

NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Recently, I read the book **Toxic Charity by Robert Lupton**. The theme of the book studies and emphasizes “how churches and charities hurt those they help (and how to reverse it.) This very informative book suggests that we look at how we give to charities to make sure they provide dignity to the receiver and joyful impact from the giver.

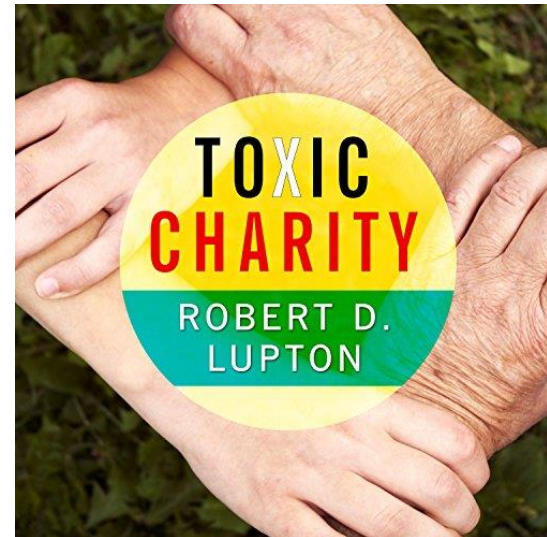
A good example of the author’s message is in regard to support for well drilling by charities in a third world country. His example was from a well drilled in a village in Nicaragua. Well-meaning people both contributed funds and physical labor in drilling and installing a well in a small village. For the first time, women no longer had to travel a long distance to obtain water. The well in their village now provided fresh water. When the volunteers left, the people in the village were happy. Unfortunately, a follow-up visit a year later witnessed that the well was no longer working and the women had resorted back to long hauls to get water.

What had happened? The people of the village had no investment in the well and were never trained in fixing and problem solving. The story demonstrates how entrepreneur’s are cashing in on the “compassion industry.” Hundreds of trips involving thousands of people want to do good by fixing, painting, repairing, and building to help third world communities. Many people have their heart is in the right place and organizations are making millions of dollars off of their desire to help.

What Lupton has discovered and suggests that in order for us to help people, we have to create a fundamental change in charity to not just help people, but create an opportunity for them to invest in improvement for sustainability.

What eventually transpired was that this village was enabled to create a cooperative for well water. Each person made a small investment in the project. People were given tasks and jobs to make the well continue to operate. Gradually new families joined the cooperative and this cooperative actually made money to offer micro loans to farmers for growing and selling produce, etc. The change from assuming responsibility for the well and water was so successful it provided water for the school and selling the water to neighboring village’s.

What does this mean for us? Giving to charity does not always build self-respect and dignity but rather dependence. Feeling good about providing charity relieves us of



responsibility but quells our hearts. **True charity** wants to help people move out of poverty and dependence and become self-sustaining.

While most of our charity from the church flows to emergency aide, some may actually become harmful by creating dependence. Since this book is being studied by our Synod, perhaps we will make some major progress in truly making a difference to help people become self-sustaining instead of dependent. Nevertheless, our church leadership should scrutinize our charitable efforts to insure they are having a positive impact creating integrity to the receiver and true joy to us givers. Here is another opportunity for change to become successful to the community and the world.

By Pastor Ron Gerl, Interim Pastor