

THE ADVOCATE

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GIVING HOPE AND JUSTICE FOR CHRISTMAS BY SU KRAUS

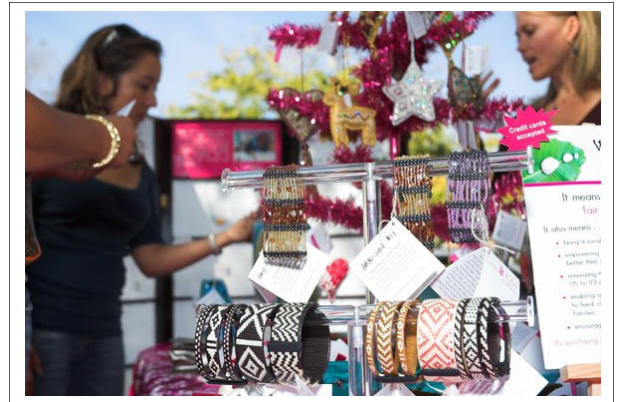
What is an Alternative Gift Market? For [Christians Ending Poverty](#), a diverse coalition of Christians responding to extreme global poverty by promoting advocacy and personal discipleship, the annual Alternative Gift Market is an opportunity to raise awareness about extreme poverty around the world, and to showcase the work of artisans who are working to lift themselves and their community out of poverty.

It also provides a fun event at which the local community can buck the commercialism of Christmas and purchase well made, unique, meaningful fair trade gifts. For those who do not wish to purchase product there is the opportunity to donate items in honor of friends and family through established catalogs such as CRWRC.

This year the market was held at a local community center and attracted over 225 visitors and gathered proceeds of over \$10,000 for artisans around the world.

The focus of this event is to channel all profits back to the artisans, with the exception being a donation to God's Kids International, an orphanage and agricultural project in Liberia which is home to 50 orphans.

The products available ranged from hand carved olive wood nativity scenes from Bethlehem, fair trade coffee and chocolate, jewelry



from Uganda and Kenya, kitchen products and sewn items, to basketry, and glass beading from Asia. The vendors were selected by their ability to ensure that proceeds would be sent directly back to the artisans, without US overheads.

If you would like to organize an Alternative Gift Market we at Christians Ending Poverty would be happy to assist you in contacting fair trade vendors, and providing background support. Contact info@christiansendingpoverty.org.

Su Kraus is a founding member of Christians Ending Poverty and a member of Crossroads CRC in San Marcos, California. To read a visitor's account of her experience at the Alternative Gift Fair, please visit www.crcjustice.org.

ADVOCATE CALENDAR

December 1st is World AIDS Day. Learn more about how AIDS is especially devastating for poor communities, and how you can help support those working to end the spread of this deadly disease: www.embraceaids.org.

December 10 is International Human Rights Day. This would be a good day to dedicate your time in prayer for those who suffer injustice and indignity at the hands of individuals, governments and other systems.

You can also recognize this day by taking action on behalf of the Association for a More

Just Society in Honduras (see the action alert on page 2.)

The January Series is coming up! This year offers a number of speakers and topics for the justice community, covering politics, immigration, global conflict and more. Check out the series calendar here: <http://www.calvin.edu/january/2008/>. Don't live in Grand Rapids? You can listen to all lectures live through the web, or you join up at various locations around the country for live webcasts.

Learn more at: www.calvin.edu/january

NEWS BRIEFS

Give praise to the Prince of Peace!

Though we struggle for peace in our own families, communities and global relationships, we do have reasons to be joyful and hopeful. A number of good steps have been taken in the world community that uphold peace and reconciliation over violence and revenge. Let's give praise and thanks to the Prince of Peace for these items of good news:

-In October, Muslim scholars and leaders from every major Islamic region and school of thought reached out to the Christian community through a letter entitled, "A Common Word Between Us and You." The letter declared common ground between Christianity and Islam and promoted the idea that "the best basis for future dialogue and understanding is the love of God and the love of neighbor."

-Soon after this letter made the rounds, more than 300 Christian scholars and leaders responded with a letter of their own entitled, "Loving God and Neighbor Together."

"We extend our own Christian hand in return," wrote the leaders, "so that together with all human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbor." It is hoped that these exchanges will open the space for loving dialogue. All letters, including additional responses and updates, can be found on www.acommonword.com.

-Evangelical leaders have also spoken up on the issue of human rights, especially as it regards the use of torture. In An Evangelical Declaration against Torture, Christian scholars and leaders such as Nicholas Wolterstorff, Glen Stassen, David Gushee and David Neff created a teaching document intending to "cement and deepen evangelical commitment to human rights." The document, which can be viewed and downloaded along with teaching tools at www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org, is a useful study for churches and individuals struggling with the issue of torture in a time when we are threatened by terrorism.

-Senior religious leaders in Iraq are signing a "fatwa against violence" in an attempt to reconcile the Sunni and Shia. This agreement was negotiated by the peace organization run by the Anglican vicar of Baghdad. You can read more about this agreement here: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2830563.ece>

-This November, Nigerians and supporters walked in a ten-day peace walk, commemorating the signing of the Takum Peace Agreement, which ended a violent and destructive land dispute in the Takum region of Nigeria. The CRC had been deeply involved in this area and in the peace process. It is hoped that this peace walk will continue the healing and reconciliation process, in addition to raising funds for rebuilding communities. You can learn more at www.crwrc.org.

Every day, steps are taken to heal relationships on small and large scales. Keep these efforts in your prayers, and look for ways that you can be an agent of peace.

Advocacy works! Letters bring relief to Liberia

The proof is in the press release – advocacy does work! After a delay of more than a year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is moving forward with debt relief for the African nation of Liberia.

Liberia, one of the poorest nations in the world, was faced with a crushing debt into the billions of dollars. Despite promises from donor nations to assist a post-conflict Liberia re-build, debt relief was slow in coming.

But thanks to the voices of people like you, the IMF is moving forward with debt relief for Liberia!

News Briefs continued on page 4.

ACTION ALERTS

Justice for Dionisio

One year ago, the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action reported the murder of a human rights lawyer who worked with a project supported by the [Association for a More Just Society](http://www.ajsonline.org) (AJS).

AJS, a Christian justice organization that supports justice efforts in Honduras and has close ties to the Christian Reformed Church, was deeply saddened by loss of Dionisio Díaz García.

Dionisio, who had been working for the labor rights of underpaid and mal-treated security guards, had received a number of threats in the time leading up to his murder.

Though a year has gone by, and more justice workers supported by AJS have received death threats, Dionisio's murderers have not been arrested.



AJS is hoping that the support of Christians in the United States and Canada will help to put pressure on the Honduran government to bring justice in Dionisio's case.

From December 3-7, AJS and its Honduran partner organization, ASJ, are organizing activities to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Dionisio's assassination and to advocate for justice.

ASJ will hold a memorial service, a press conference and rally in Honduras, and hopes that Christians in North America will lend their voices to the cause. AJS is organizing meetings with Honduran consuls in various North American cities, and has also set up online advocacy opportunities.

Here's how you can help:

-Pray: for justice for Dionisio and protection for other justice workers in Honduras.

-Write Letters: to U.S. and Honduran officials, letting them know you care about this case.

-Organize a Gathering: invite friends and family over to talk about Dionisio and justice, pray, and write letters.

-Visit www.ajs-us.org/dionisio: get help and info on how to do all of the above.

Action Alerts continued on page 4.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

What would Jesus buy?

We've asked what would Jesus do, and even what would Jesus drive, but how about what would Jesus buy? A flamboyant performance art group, calling themselves Rev. Billy and The Church of Stop Shopping, have taken on the guise of religion to preach a message of anti-consumerism and commercialization.

Morgan Spurlock, the brain behind the disturbing documentary, *Supersize Me*, has produced a new docu-comedy following "Rev. Billy" and his stop-shopping choir in their quest to exorcise corporate demons. It opens in select theaters this holiday season – check www.wvjbmovie.com for theaters. And if you check out the film we'd love to hear your reviews; send an email to osjha@crcna.org.



Whose Birthday is it, Anyway?

We've got a copy waiting just for you – and one for everyone in your church! These booklets, created by the Christian organization Alternatives for Simple Living, include biblical reflections, ideas for simpler, more Christ-centered celebrations and alternative giving ideas. The aim is to help families to simplify an overly commercialized Christmas and put the focus back on the holy season celebrating the birth of our Savior.

Contact Meghan today to get your copy! kraleym@crcna.org.

MDG Monitor site

Much of our work at the OSJHA is concerned with supporting the Millennium Development Goals, eight poverty-fighting goals that aim to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger in half by 2015. Every member nation of the United Nations agreed to work to meet the MDGs, knowing that a world with fewer people in poverty is a safer, better, more just world.

With only seven years to meet the goals, and much work to be done, the push to meet the goals has come from people of faith and others from [white-band](#) groups like the [Micah Challenge](#), [ONE](#), and [Make Poverty History](#), including the Christian Reformed Church.

Now, a cool new website shows MDG supporters exactly where the goals have helped the poor and where more work needs to be done. The MDGMonitor site at www.mdgmonitor.org is a colorful, interactive website that includes, news, interactive maps and links focused on achieving the MDGs.

You can browse each goal separately and access success stories, and play around with the interactive maps that give tons of color-coded facts. It's a great tool for schools, churches, and anyone interested in following the effort to cut extreme poverty and hunger in half.

Re-energize!

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a group with which the CRC Canada works, has launched a new creation care website called Re-Energize: www.re-energize.org. This attractive site features information on how you can change yourself, your community, and the world to reduce your impact on the planet. The site also includes an online action opportunity in addition to the resources. Check it out today!

God and Global Warming

PBS program NOW is streaming its episode entitled "God and Global Warming" on its website here: <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/343/index.html>. Here's the description of the program from its website:

In August, NOW traveled with an unlikely alliance of Evangelical Christians and leading scientists to witness the breathtaking effects of global warming on Alaska's rapidly changing environment. Though many in the evangelical community feel recognition of global warming is in opposition to their mission, the week-long trip inspired new thinking on the relationship between science and religion, and on our moral responsibility to protect the planet. Travel with NOW and the expeditionary group on a breathtaking and surprising journey to find common ground between earth and sky.



The site includes web extras, including more video, slideshows and a transcript of the episode.

Simply Enough DVD

This new release featuring popular Christian leaders Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne explores the challenge and joy of simpler, more just living, from food to celebrations to money. This film is great for groups and individuals, includes a study and action guide, and was even filmed by our own Jason Fileta!

\$17 through Alternatives for Simple Living (go to the e-store to purchase.) For those in the West Michigan area, the OSJHA has a copy that may be borrowed. Contact Meghan at kraleym@crcna.org.

NEWS BRIEFS, CONTINUED

In a November statement, the IMF said:

"We have received a large volume of emails on this topic, so this letter is being posted because it is impossible to respond to each message individually....Their strong support to the cause of debt relief contributed to the broad donor support that made this financing possible."

Groups like ONE and Jubilee USA, both in which CRC members are deeply involved led the advocacy push in the US. The money that will be freed up for Liberia can then go into saving and enriching the lives of its people. To learn more about debt relief, check out www.jubileeusa.org. You can also learn a bit about the Christian Reformed Church's presence in Liberia on the World Missions website here: http://www.crcna.org/pages/crwm_glance_liberia.cfm.



Colorful fundraiser helps Neland Avenue CRC and Ugandan bead-makers

By Dan Hawkins

As our church, Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, has tried to expand its social-justice efforts to global economic development, we have taken baby steps like switching to fair-trade coffee. That transforms our otherwise routine spending into a direct contribution toward rewarding (rather than taking advantage of) the people who do the most work.

And then last year we found out about [Bead For Life](http://www.beadforlife.org), a chance to profit developing nation entrepreneurs simply by buying their cool product.

Here's the deal: Women in Uganda run their own business selling jewelry they make from one-of-a-kind beads. They make the beads, too, by rolling up slices of glossy magazine pages into thin or fat diamond shapes, then shellacking them. The beads are strung into a dozen or so different necklaces and bracelets. I can't even describe the amazing elastic they use for the items that need to stretch. It's all colorful and appealing. In fact, this year's repeat sale drew nearly as many buyers from other churches as from our own.

Most items run from \$12 to \$20. If you that find pricey, consider that your overhead is zero. Your church organizer gets a package of merchandise and material (with free UPS return) that makes setup easy. The only chore left to us was the bookkeeping. And if you enjoy marketing, this is a dream. People ask about my bracelet year-round.

Only 7 percent of the price goes to administrative costs. Check it out for yourself at www.beadforlife.org.

ACTION ALERTS, CONTINUED

Canadians – Make Poverty History!

Make Poverty History, the Canadian campaign to overcome poverty, is asking Canadians to raise their voices for the poor by advocating for the Better Aid Bill. Here's what they say:

"The Canadian Parliament has passed a bill that would dramatically improve the quality of the aid we give to poor nations, but some Senators are stalling its discussion in the Senate. The "Better Aid Bill" - Bill C 293 - needs to pass before the next election, or it will die. Please help to make sure this important opportunity to make poverty history, years in the making, is not lost."

To take action, go to Make Poverty History (www.makepovertyhistory.ca). There you'll find links to a petition, information on why they are pushing for this bill and more ideas for how you can help.

JUSTICE AND WORSHIP

Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

Your world awaits you.

In the longing of the persecuted for justice;

In the longing of the poor for prosperity;
In the longing of the privileged for riches greater than wealth;

In the longing of our hearts for a better life;

And in the song of your Church, expectation is ever present.

O come, Lord, desire behind our greatest needs.

O come, Lord, liberator of humanity.

O come, Lord, O come, Immanuel.

Amen

-From Sing! A New Creation (99), available from [Faith Alive Christian Resources](http://www.faithalive.org)

Advent and AIDS Resources

Though World AIDS Day (December 1st) may have passed by the time you read this, the need for awareness and action has not.

Millions of men, women and children, most of whom are poor, live with this preventable and treatable disease. The church has an opportunity to step into this tragedy to bring light, love and healing.

The folks at Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance have compiled a number of resources for this Advent season that also focus on HIV/AIDS. Take a look for sermon ideas, prayers, and action ideas:

<http://www.e-alliance.ch/wad.jsp>.

Peace resources for Sunday worship

Though Peace Sunday in Canada has passed, you can still access worship resources compiled by the Mennonite Central Committee Canada here: <http://mcc.org/canada/peace/resources/other/peacesunday2007.html>.

The downloadable "peace packet" may provide you with sermon ideas, songs, prayers, verses, and much more. Definitely worth a look for worship planners in the US and Canada!

The Advocate

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Christian Reformed
Church

OSJHA GIFT GUIDE

Resist the pressures of a commercialized, consumerist and secularized Christmas celebration and start some new giving traditions and family rituals focused on Christ, and authentic, just living. Here are a few giving options that you can feel good about:

- The **Whose Birthday is it, Anyway?** booklet from [Alternatives for Simple Living](#) is a gift for the whole family. This annual guide provides biblical meditations, alternative giving suggestions, ideas for meaningful celebrations and more. If you've been concerned about how Christ is being squeezed out of your Christmas observation, then this booklet is for you.

We've got plenty of FREE copies here at the Office of Social Justice, so just contact Meghan at kraleym@crcna.org to receive your copy. We'd love to send a bunch of copies to your church as well, so pastors, deacons and small groups – contact us!

- Give the gift of the gospel, of education, of food and shelter through CRC ministries. Check out the **CRC Ministries Canada gift guide** here: http://crcna.org/pages/crcna_giftguide.cfm, or browse the **gift guide for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee** (US and Canadian versions) at www.crwrc.org. For other giving ideas related to the CRC, check out this page: <http://www.crcna.org/news.cfm?newsid=350>.
- Give a greater gift: hope and justice! You can purchase **unique fair trade items** from SERRV International's online store: www.agreatergift.org. Buy Christmas ornaments and decorations, items for the kitchen, or hand-crafted jewelry for that special someone. In addition to the quality items you're purchasing, you'll also be supporting artisans in struggling parts of the world.

You can also visit a brick and mortar fair trade store if you have a **Ten Thousand Villages** shop near you. Check for locations at: www.tenthousandvillages.org.

- Why not **give the earth a gift** this year? Locate some tools for "greening" your home or office at the online hub: www.ecomall.com. The links to companies and organizations here will help you care for creation and give you more responsible choices that reduce your impact on the planet and people.

You can also check out the environmental and social impact of companies at www.responsibleshopper.org before you use their services or buy their products.

- CRC member Doug Tjapkes' organization, INNOCENT!, is a Christian-based non-profit that refers prison inmates and their families to a national network of Innocence organizations following receipt and review of claims of wrongful conviction.

Doug would be happy to send his excellent book, *Sweet Freedom*, his personal account with the wrongly convicted Maurice Carter – for free. In exchange? A donation to INNOCENT. Doug adds that INNOCENT can ship the books to inmates as well. All books are signed. Contact Doug at thedouger@chartermi.net.

- And don't forget that you can always **give the gift of advocacy** – any time of the year. Consider choosing an issue close to your heart, whether it be refugees, economic injustice, or global HIV/AIDS, and make an effort to donate some of your time to pray and learn about the issue and follow related legislation. Write, call or visit your lawmakers. Standing up for someone without a voice – what a gift!