

Women challenged to invest time in the lives of poor families_80904

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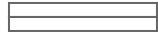
WACO—As a child participating in a mission group, Diana Lewis visited a family living in a chicken house.

“I never forgot that,” she told the Texas Leadership Conference, a training event sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union of Texas.

Lewis serves as missionary in Arkansas with the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board, helping people who live in poverty. She described her ministry as being to “people who live with holes in their walls.”

Lewis prefers the term “people in poverty” to the more tradition “poor people” in describing those with whom she works.

“We're all rich in some ways. We're all poor in some ways,” she said. “Some of the richest people I know haven't had indoor plumbing, but they love the Lord.”



Ministry to people in poverty is “very slow work, is very hard work,” Lewis said. “There isn't any way you can meet every need.” Rather “you must be available to them, be a friend to them,” and a long-term commitment is needed.

Before ministering to people in poverty, “examine your attitudes,” Lewis said. People in need, like others, do not always spend their money wisely. A judgmental attitude must be avoided.

“There are going to be people who are hard to deal with,” she said. But try to imagine what their lives will be like if they come to Christ.

Poverty, of course, is not limited to Arkansas. In a workshop about Project HELP, WMU's effort against poverty, Patty Villareal said one in eight Americans live in poverty, and “around the world poverty has a tight grip on people.”

Texas has the eighth-highest poverty rate in the nation, with about 15.2 percent of Texans falling below the poverty line, she noted.

“Here's what's real, and here's what's going on outside our doors, said Villareal, consultant for the BGCT Missions Equipping Center. “We must address this somehow ... and break the cycle of poverty.”

“It's time to refocus” and remember the importance of ministering to the poor that is reflected in Scripture, she added.

WMU's Project HELP will mark its 10th anniversary with a special “A Bag, a Buck and a Bible” emphasis Feb. 13, 2005.

Baptists will be encouraged to contribute a bag or box of food for local ministries, money for national projects and Bibles for distribution.

But Villareal encouraged participants in her workshop to “not be content with a sack and a tract mentality.”

Relationships are needed. she insisted.

“Pledge a year to invest in the lives of a family,” she said, suggesting family-to-family ministry. “I encourage you not just to think about the immediate.”

Diana Lewis, a Southern Baptist North American Mission Board missionary in Arkansas, speaks about mission work with the poor and hungry in her state during a workshop in Waco.

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