

I was raised in a CBF home that valued being the presence of Christ by serving those in need. I had seen isolated instances of poverty from volunteering in soup kitchens and taking part in short-term mission trips. However, I had not anticipated the magnitude of poverty that I would witness when I participated in a Passport camp trip to Kenya in 2007. When I joined the program, I was more excited about traveling with other kids in my youth group than experiencing the Christ-centered team-building and cultural awareness components of the program. Little did I know that when I returned from Kenya, this experience would begin molding my college and professional aspirations in international affairs.

One particular moment on the trip still motivates me to work diligently on my professional goals. During one of our trip excursions in the Great Rift Valley, we led Bible-school-type activities at a nursery school. At the end of the day, we passed out bags of school supplies to enable the children in that town to attend primary school. Children with supplies not only have the opportunity to receive an education, but they also have the opportunity for a brighter future. When word spread around the village about our gifts, other children ran out of their homes in hope of receiving the supplies as well. After all of the bags had been distributed, most of the children who did not receive anything walked back to their homes except for one little boy. He stood on the other side of the fence, staring at me with a face filled with disappointment and sadness. At that moment, I knew I needed to do something about the causes of global inequality and poverty.

With a new sense of purpose, I decided to study political science and global studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill because I wanted to understand the relationship between power, inequality, and poverty. I also joined and later became President of CBFNC's campus ministry at UNC where I participated in thoughtful theological discussions as well as social-justice-related missions. During my first year of college, my female campus minister empowered me to apply for CBF's Student.Go summer missions program. This program enabled me to intern at National Baptist Memorial Church in Washington, D.C.,

and work at their summer camp for children who may not have any other place to go during their summer break. Through this experience and my subsequent CBF mission trips to Haiti, Belize, Malawi, and Kenya, I learned that addressing issues related to poverty requires thoughtful courses of action that focus on empowering communities rather than providing handouts. In fact, when I interned with CBF field personnel in Kenya two years later, I noticed that the development projects that focused on the actual needs of a community were more successful in poverty

reduction than projects that ushered in their own plans without consultation with the community.

Building on the knowledge I gained during this experience and my passion for politics and religious liberty, I interned for

the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) after college. Working at the BJC gave me insight on CBF's presence in Washington, D.C.,

and the important issues Baptists continue to voice as it pertains to separation of church and state, especially for marginalized communities. A year later, I began graduate school in order to learn how to critically analyze issues concerning marginalized communities on a global scale.

Having recently finished graduate school, I realize I would not be where I am today without the consistent presence of CBF in my life. From youth group mission trips, to CBFNC campus ministry, to Passport Camps, to internships through Student.Go, to the practical experience I gained from BJC, to my current membership at Calvary Baptist Church in D.C., I have been able to think more innovatively about my role as a young Cooperative Baptist in combatting problems of injustice and poverty facing the world.

As I work for ActionAid USA, a secular international development organization, I strive to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world and continue to use my transformational experiences to guide my work in addressing issues related to poverty and economic development. I will always remember the little boy on the other side of the fence who not only represents those who fall victim to an inequitable political and economic system but who also represents the bright possibility of a more just future.



bright possibilities

by Lauren Hovis, Grants Manager, ActionAid USA