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## Ignorance is the enemy

By Ron Kitchens

As I write this column, I am reminded that it will hit your desks and mail boxes shortly after August 29th. I cannot help but be reminded that it was just two years ago in the early morning light of Aug. 29, 2005, one of the worst days unfolded in our nation's history. Hurricane Katrina.

As we reflect on that tragic day and the death of over 1,500 Americans, we still struggle with the questions of what went wrong? Who is to blame?

What we know is that there is plenty of blame to go around, from bad infrastructure, to slow response, to just plain bad behavior. But none of that explains why the majority of our fellow Americans died on that day and the days of hell that followed.

The truth is the majority of those Americans died because they were poor.

Now I know that this is not a surprise to many of you: that opportunity is directly tied to wealth. But to live in the greatest, wealthiest nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth and to accept that people would be sentenced to death because they did not have the ability to flee danger is just wrong.

At this point some of you reading this will be thinking, "Yeah, that was awful, but it is behind us." But it is not. Every day in West Michigan we have children going to bed hungry, abused spouses who have no way of fleeing their abusers, men and women stuck in low-paying jobs because they cannot read, and the sick who do not get treated because they have no health insurance.

You can make a difference in not just the lives of those who have been struck by hurricanes or tornados, bridge collapses or terrorisms. You can change the lives of your neighbors, your friends, the people you see every day and the people you pretend not to see.

Over the next few months you are going to be asked to contribute to YOUR local United Way campaign. The dollars collected in these campaigns all over West Michigan not only address the immediate problems of our poorest brothers and sisters but also build their capacity through educational opportunities that create a path forward to prosperity.

So my challenge to you, as we consider the tragedy that was and is Katrina, is the opportunity to change the lives of those around you. To insulate them from the sentence of poverty is to ... Give Your Fair Share. Whatever your heart tells you your fair share is.

Now I know that what I am saying is not new to you, it has been said for thousands of years, in many different tongues:

- **Christianity** - *Do in everything to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.* Jesus, Matthew 7:12
- **Islam** - *Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.* The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith
- **Judaism** - *What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.* Hillel, Talmud, Shabbath 31A
- **Hinduism** - *This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.* Mahabharata 5:1517
- **Buddhism** - *Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.* The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5:18
- **Baha'i** - *Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.* Baha'u'llah, Gleanings

Do not let ignorance be your enemy, join the campaign for change by supporting the United Way in your community.

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