

## TWO NEW RESOURCES!



### A 5th Anniversary Edition of the *Guiding Principles*

Includes a Modern-Day Parable for the Pandemic



### Renewing Relationship Essays as we Evolve and Emerge from Pandemic

Includes essays from Cardinal Peter Kadwo Appiah Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, and many more global health leaders

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# Considering a Modern-Day Parable for the Pandemic

BRUCE COMPTON

**O**ur world seemingly got smaller as isolation, border closings and the need to slow the spread of COVID-19 took hold. For global health partnerships, the impact has yet to be fully realized. With passports packed away and medical mission trips cancelled or postponed, it may seem as though nothing was happening. However, there is good news to report as well as some realities to consider.

Thinking about partnerships during this time led CHA to invite Fr. Michael Rozier, SJ, to write a parable for the pandemic and global health. He had authored the Modern-Day Parable that is a part of CHA's *Guiding Principles for Conducting Global Health Activities*, so with his experience in global and public health, he was a natural fit. You can read his parable on the following pages and watch the video that is available at [www.chausa.org/guiding-principles](http://www.chausa.org/guiding-principles). For my part, I've reflected on the activities that have not been able to happen because of the travel bans, as well as what I've heard about the evolution and/or devolution of partnerships. This led to me reach out to colleagues across the globe — in Haiti, Rwanda, Kenya, Peru and several other countries to hear about their lived experiences. In the hope that it reawakens our desire to partner to build health care capacity and to listen first to what the local community says it needs to recover from the pandemic, I am sharing some of the highlights of what we heard.

A leader in Rwanda's words stay with me: "Local leadership should be at the heart of our 'preparation' for partnerships and unforeseen circumstances just as the parable points out." He watched the video of the parable for pandemic and was surprised we had our partners in mind when the U.S. death tolls were so high. In general, the people with whom we communicated expressed these themes around preparation/preparedness and trust building in relationships:

- Long-lasting partnerships have flexed to do capacity building through technology.
- New partnerships have allowed financial assistance to go to existing local partners versus spending monetary resources on air travel and vacation time for volunteer mission trips.

■ Local partners taking more ownership and being more definitive in priority setting and decision making in their community facilities has resulted from less interaction with international partners.

■ Partnerships that relied on travel and in-person meetings are using technology and trust of local partners to invest in priorities.

■ Partners trying to assist from afar are identifying and sharing culturally appropriate guidance and tools for local partners related to social distancing, masking, clinical protocols, vaccines, etc.

■ Partner clinicians from high-income countries who initially said to themselves "this isn't my partnership!" when referencing the fact that they didn't get to travel, shifted to "we can accomplish a lot using technology."

Every experience is different. Some U.S. partners reached out to the in-country hosts as soon as the pandemic started; others connected only when the in-country host reached out to the U.S. partner.

Global partners need to realize how important it is to stay in touch with one another in challenging times. I hope you find the parable and *Guiding Principles* useful on your journey to assist our brothers and sisters around the globe.

Remember that the same technology that kept our own organizations connected can be utilized to build deeper relationships and trust in the future — especially if we can assist in helping fund virtual capabilities so that education, consultation and open communication lines can become more frequent. Connecting, whether remotely or through mission trips that focus on the requested activities of the host country, will be the lights with oil that will shine as examples for all who do global health work.



# A Modern-Day Parable for Pandemic

*Ten Volunteer Groups*, an Adaptation of Matthew 25:1–13, *Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*  
by Michael Rozier, SJ, PhD



he coronavirus pandemic has forever altered our lives. Pope Francis said it is helping us to see that the good of each person individually is tied up with the common good of society as a whole, and vice versa.

And he insisted, “A virus that does not recognize barriers, borders or cultural or political distinctions must be faced with a love without barriers, borders or distinctions.”

If, on the other hand, solutions to the crisis are tinged with selfishness or egoism, the Pope said, “we may perhaps emerge from the coronavirus crisis, but certainly not from the human and social crisis that the virus has brought to light and accentuated.” Instead, everyone — and Christians in particular — have a duty to work to promote the common good.

Thinking globally, we understand that COVID-19 created or exacerbated social divides. There were literal

divides as communities and many families quarantined and remained socially distanced. There were also divides in resources where goods and services stopped flowing to the places where they would meet crucial needs. In the case of medical mission trips, surplus donations and other global health activities, when planes were grounded and passports tucked away, we must ask: what was happening in the communities where reliance to health mission trips has been built? Did partnerships grind to a halt, or were new means created? Did experiencing scarcity — some foods, toilet paper, PPE — build greater awareness of daily struggles in countries where health systems are nascent?

As we try to imagine life where we have a safe vaccine for COVID-19 and can get back to normal and resume our international medical missions, let us instead engage our imagination in the way that Jesus often challenged his disciples. A simple parable opens us up to both the promise and peril of global health projects and how our activity or

inactivity during the pandemic will define our treatment of neighbor.

*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*



## QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON THE PARABLE

The original parable depends on knowledge of wedding customs in the time of Jesus. That we know relatively little about those customs makes the job of interpretation more challenging. The same is true when building partnerships across cultures. Even without knowing those customs, though, the parable draws our attention to the difficulty of preparing now for a kingdom that is to come some time in the future. Just as the bridesmaids have an experience where they are a part of a group, considering this parable and the questions that follow with others may be of benefit.

- + What does a relationship with international partners look like when travel is not possible? How might it be strengthened?
- + Has the shortage of supplies at home or work during the pandemic altered your appreciation for scarcity? How might this inform your global work going forward?
- + Even as we wait for activity in the future, how can we personally prepare for that moment? What can I build within myself to be a better partner?
- + What are my greatest hopes for global work in the future? What are my biggest concerns?



Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten groups of international volunteers had their projects suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Five groups were foolish, and five of them were wise. When the foolish had their projects suspended, they stopped working on them altogether, assuming they would resume where they left off once the pandemic was over; but the wise focused on what they could do in the meantime. They stayed in touch with their international partners. They sent the resources the partners most needed. They continued formation programs for their volunteers. They learned about how the pandemic was affecting their partners' communities. As the virus continued to circulate the globe, the groups of volunteers got involved with other worthy projects. But one day there was a declaration, 'Look! It is now safe to travel! Come, let us go off at once.' Then all ten groups of volunteers began preparing for their next trip. The foolish said to the wise, 'We have lost touch with our partners

and do not know what we can do. Let us help your partners instead.' But the wise replied, 'No! More is not always better and it is not just about helping, but about relationships. The trust we have built over time is precious and cannot be wasted; it is better that you start from the beginning, both with your volunteers and with your partners, to build the relationships that have been lost.' And while the foolish groups gathered together to figure out their next steps, the pandemic had ended, and the volunteers who were ready resumed their former projects and began new ones. And the planes took off. Later the other groups reached out to their neglected partners, saying, 'Please, let us come and help.' But their partners replied, 'Truly we tell you, we thought we knew you.' Keep engaged in the work that can be done, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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