

Opinion Editorial

Now that the political season is behind us, and the boiling partisanship and polarization that it brings can be reduced to a mere simmer, we should look anew at how we can draw together to ease the suffering of so many people in our nation and the world.

Certainly we need not look much farther than the hunger issue right here in Los Angeles County, and the San Fernando Valley, where UCLA studies show that around one million of our fellow citizens are "food insecure" -- either going hungry or making trade-offs between other expenses, like housing or medicines, and food. That number is growing steadily each year, and Valley Interfaith Council (VIC) is working to meet this need through its food distribution programs.

However, there is a new international calamity that is going relatively unnoticed. In the wake of the recent unrest in Lebanon, about a million kids and their families are in immediate crisis. We must put politics and religion aside to see that these are the unintended victims of war -- Jews, Christians and Muslims alike -- and they desperately need the world community to respond with its heart.

Basic needs, like meals and medicines, are still unmet. Many families are forced to live in temporary shelters, in the chilling cold of winter. Some children cannot go to school because their schools have been destroyed. Families along the coast have lost their primary source of income -- fishing -- to oil spills and military blockades.

And tragically, relief teams have identified a high level of trauma impacting the kids. Themes of fear and depression are clearly reflected in interactive activities; preliminary assessments show that children have been deeply affected by the aggressions of war, with 60 percent demonstrating substantial symptoms of depression.

So what can the Valley community do?

CHF International, working through UNICEF, the Lebanese Red Cross and other organizations is working to restore living conditions in Lebanon. Learn more about their work, which has benefited more than 100 countries, and how you can help at www.chfinternational.org

Currently CHF has linked its efforts with the United Lebanon Relief Campaign, which is raising funds through a live benefit concert and telethon from Hollywood on December 5th. More information about this special campaign can be obtained through the CHF website or at www.uniqueimageinc@earthlink.net

(Mark's suggested additions)

Concerned people need to respond with positive acts of compassion, financial support and work, as their resources and time permit.

Finally, join VIC as it **bridges** political and religious **differences** -- right here in our Valley -- to unite all religious faiths, and those with no religious bent, in common bonds of understanding and **humanitarian** cooperation. There's much to do, and we and other similar Valley organizations doing great work need all the help we can get.

By Cambria Smith

(Cambria Smith is President of VIC. For more information about VIC's Preventing Hunger Campaign, and interfaith and social concerns activities, go to www.vic-la.org)