

3rd February 1986

Report on Conference '86 in New Zealand

Conference '86 was three conferences in one. A conference for 'representatives', another for Christian leaders, and another for educators (mostly teachers).

representatives conference

The main purpose of this was to train, motivate and empower a galaxy of volunteers (called 'representatives') for the various tasks in support of World Vision of New Zealand's marketing programs, but specifically the 40 Hour Famine.

World Vision of New Zealand has 31 'regional representatives' who each in turn have 8-10 area representatives reporting to them. The nature of their work is outlined in the brochure "Volunteer Opportunities Within World Vision New Zealand" (photocopy attached).

It seems to me that World Vision of New Zealand have a very good handle on the use of volunteers in activities beyond the 40 Hour Famine. For example, about once a fortnight, certain area representatives receive a list of prospective sponsors who have been sent sponsorship information by World Vision of New Zealand head office. The rep telephones these people (average list is about 10), identifies him/herself as a World Vision volunteer, and talks with the prospective sponsor about World Vision. It seems to me, from the conversations with some of the area reps who do this work, that this contact has even more power and credibility than a head office oriented 'telemarketing' approach. Telemarketing is valid, but this is an additional and very credible way for customers to touch the organization.

The representatives had sessions of planning, instruction, and motivation from Peter and his team. Key to their successful use of volunteers is a commitment to training and motivation. It costs World Vision of New Zealand management commitment, money and time, but they feel it pays off. I was impressed (and John Allwood also noted this) with the degree to which the reps identified with World Vision. They talk like they are part of the organization, just as much as the staff.

main theme

The theme for the conference was "Understanding the World God Loves". Guest speakers were Tom Houston and Ronald Sider. Addresses given by both speakers were audio and video taped. We could get these from World Vision of New Zealand if we wanted to. Tom's Sunday morning address would be good to show at staff devotions.

Both speakers were very well received and appreciated. By me too.

christian leaders conference

This group spent the greater part of their time with Sider in lectures and discussions. From my observation, this was a lively group with more than a passing interest in and awareness of the theological and practical issues raised by Sider. The quality of discussion in small groups that I visited was very high and intense.

educators conference

This group, mainly teachers, split their time between Sider's lectures and workshops on the use of the 40 Hour Famine in schools. One principal prepared handouts which are attached. World Vision of New Zealand have prepared an audio-visual starring the young New Zealander who was selected (like our TAA Scholarship) to go to India. I thought this was a quite effective and credible tool, and the teachers seemed to agree that it would help school kids to identify with the 40 Hour Famine. John Allwood, John Key, and Tom formed a panel for this group, and John commented that 'New Zealand teachers are a pretty docile lot'. Perhaps the ones who came to the conference were the most supportive.

concerts and celebrations

One of the reasons for bringing all these people together in '86 was to launch the second decade of 40 Hour Famines in New Zealand. Normally, World Vision of New Zealand has 3 regional conferences during February, rather than one big one. Ray Columbus (remember Ray Columbus and the Invaders - 'She's a Mod'?) had put together an excellent variety show which was held in a local theatre. Further, as a finale to the conference, many of the artists returned to an open-air worship service in the city square in the centre of Palmerston North (where the conference was held), held with the co-operation and participation of local churches. The standards were high, although the wind and the unrealized threat of rain caused minor problems.

summary

It was refreshing to have no personal agenda during the weekend. The presence of non-NZ World Vision people helped to give the visitors a sense of the breadth of the organization. John Allwood's presence certainly added a qualitative dimension.

World Vision of New Zealand can teach us a good deal about the willingness of supporters to do a lot more than give money and help with the 40 Hour Famine. In future, we shall consider asking other managers to attend such events for the benefit of gaining useful insights into one of our traditionally more creative support offices

c.c. Peter McNee

John Allwood