



Living the good life and doing good:

Thinking more deeply about the (PRODUCT) RED campaign

The (PRODUCT) RED campaign

Log onto Yahoo! News, turn on the TV, or open a magazine and chances are you'll find something about a celebrity donating money to a cause, speaking out on a global concern, or generating public interest in relief work. Bono (of U2), Oprah, Penelope Cruz, and rapper Kanye West have been together at the top of the news lately. And for good reason.

Bono and a circle of celebrities have launched an effort called [\(PRODUCT\) RED](#) to raise public awareness and money for [The Global Fund](#), an organization that fights AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria around the world.

The idea is simple, it goes like this... Corporations are recruited to participate in (PRODUCT) RED. If you buy a (RED) product from one of these corporations it will contribute a portion of its profit to The Global Fund to help people affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa. The (RED) products will include specially designed and (RED) branded items or product lines like Converse shoes, an Apple iPod nano, Motorola wireless phones, Gap T-shirts, Giorgio Armani fashions and accessories, and a special American Express credit card. As consumer interest grows and sales increase, it's hoped that other corporations will become (RED) companies and add to a growing list of (RED) products.

What a great idea! It seems like a no-brainer. You may be thinking, "Hey, it's all good. Why mess with it?" Is there a catch? Well, yes and no. (A good Lutheran answer.)

Can we help others and not wonder about our lifestyles and choices?

(PRODUCT) RED will raise millions of dollars to fight AIDS in Africa and contribute to the well-being of countless individuals and families. All of this will be accomplished by partnering with big, high profile corporations like Apple, Motorola, and Armani, and, by asking no more of us than doing what we have come to love in Western society and pop culture—buy stuff. And buy more stuff. As the (RED) Web site puts it, "[What better way to become a good-looking samaritan?!](#)" That's where the rub comes for some of us.

Doing good while working hard to live the 'good life' with the blessings of pop culture, businesses, and celebrities might be shaping a false sense of freedom in us. We are freed from

considering the messy parts of caring for the poor and sick. We are freed from having to change our everyday habits and the discomfort of self-reflection. We are freed from having to work to influence or change certain aspects of pop culture, society, and the corporate world. However, this kind of freedom crashes right into a different understanding of freedom that God is working so hard for us to accept and understand.

Christ has set us free to be different and serve differently

There is a lot of good in what (PRODUCT) RED is doing to relieve the pain and suffering of others through our buying habits and the generosity of big corporations, but as a person who struggles to follow Christ, I'm not set free from thinking and wondering:

- How can I shift and change my way of living and thinking to do even more for others? What other steps can I take?
- Is solving the problems of poverty, disease, injustice, violence and hunger in the world as simple as just doing what I'm already doing and not changing?
- Is God satisfied with me being satisfied with the 'realities' of consumerism, society, and pop culture in the midst of great need? What and who serve as the guides and examples in my life?
- Is consuming and buying more stuff really the way to solve the problem for those who live in poverty and hunger in the world?
- Is consuming and buying less stuff really the way to solve the problem for those who live in poverty and hunger in the world?
- How can I connect my gifts with the gifts of others to ease and solve world problems?

The freedom that Christ grants us is not one that allows us to breathe a long sigh of relief and stay the same without changing. It is not a freedom that encourages us to wash our hands of personal or community responsibility, sacrifice or risk, or wrestling with difficult issues. It is not a freedom that leads us to 'go with the flow' of culture, society, and consumerism. We are recreated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and set free to risk everything in caring for those in need around us as a reflection of the unrestrained love and sacrifice God has for all humanity. We are free to act differently in every aspect of our lives to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." [Micah 6:6-8](#)

Our freedom as children of God moves us to cross over the boundaries of culture, society, business, and politics to do the very things we often fear or resist:

- Let our faith take us where we don't want to go
- Change
- Risk and sacrifice
- Do with less and redirect resources to people in need
- Love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable
- Live simply, for the sake of others and all creation
- Speak out when others would have us remain quiet
- Live boldly when others would have us do only what is comfortable and safe
- Think deeply and creatively when others would have us follow the popular crowd without question
- Assume responsibility for both problems and solutions
- Live with imperfection, trusting in God's grace and ability to use us as we are

God's Word and Spirit transform who we are—inside and out—and how we live each day of our lives. Don't let anyone tell you it's easy or a no-brainer. There are simple steps, joys, and

satisfactions in following Jesus as servants concerned about the lives of others, for sure, but sacrifice and work come with it too.

“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” [Luke 12:48b](#)

Think before you buy: consider your options

If you must buy an iPod or an Armani wristwatch, by all means, buy the (RED) products. But don't stop there! They may be giving \$10 of the \$200 you spend on an iPod or watch to fight AIDS, but if you give the same \$200 to the [ELCA World Hunger Appeal](#), all \$200 of it goes to relief work and finding solutions. And you can't put a price on showing up at a women's shelter and offering your time or spending time online to learn about the causes and solutions for hunger, poverty, or AIDS. Give up two days of shopping and use those two days to organize the youth of your congregation for participating in the annual [Souper Bowl of Caring](#) to fight hunger and poverty (Super Bowl Sunday of every year).

No matter how you decide to share your abundance and pursue life as a servant of Christ, you'll find yourself with a changing understanding of what 'living the good life' means. You won't be the same.

Resources

- **ELCA World Hunger program** <http://www.elca.org/hunger/>
- **ELCA Disaster Response** <http://www.elca.org/disaster>
- **HIV/AIDS education resources** <http://www.elca.org/aids/>
- **Faith Lens** (weekly Bible study for youth that connects every day world issues with scripture and faith) <http://www.elca.org/faithlens/>
- **Souper Bowl of Caring** <http://www.souperbowl.org/>
- **“10-10-80” Empowering young steward leaders (learning to use our money and stuff)** <http://www.scsw-elca.org/101080/>
- **Alternatives for Simple Living** <http://www.simpleliving.org/>
- **Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?** (resource for simplifying the Christmas holidays) <http://www.simpleliving.org/>
- **Buy Nothing Day Campaign (November 24, 2006)** <http://adbusters.org/home/>

(PRODUCT) RED

- **(PRODUCT) RED** <http://www.joinRED.com/>
 - **The Global Fund** <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/>
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