



Pathways Toward Peace

Auburn native CAREs about refugees

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Paul J. Giannone, who grew up attending Holy Family Church and School in Auburn, acknowledged that working with refugees can fatigue him, but hearing their stories extinguishes any self-pity.

Giannone, 53, is deputy director of Emergency Group for CARE, an international relief and development organization. During a phone interview from his Atlanta, Ga., office, he related the story of a man he met from Sierra Leone, an African nation that has been plagued by civil strife in recent years. Rebel soldiers attacked this man because they identified him as belonging to an ethnic group other than their own, he said.

"They beat him with the butts of their rifles till they thought he was dead," Giannone said, recalling meeting the man in a refugee camp in the neighboring nation of Guinea.

Thinking his tormentors gone, the man began to crawl away, but they saw him move, so they came back to him and poured battery acid into his eyes, permanently blinding him. Despite the horror he had suffered, the man was optimistic and without bitterness.

"The whole day he talked about what he was going to do with his life," Giannone said. "He was clutching a Bible. He was clutching something that he can't even read at this point in time, and it was his center of gravity at the time."

One could fill volumes with such incidents in his life, according to Giannone, whose mother, Theresa Eaton; stepfather, Patsy Eaton, and sister, Elizabeth Stuart, still live in Auburn. Giannone credited



Photo courtesy of CARE

Paul J. Giannone (far left, in sunglasses and hat), a Catholic from Auburn, has worked with the relief and development agency CARE in this community in India.

the Catholic faith his family gave him for sustaining him throughout his adventurous career.

"If you did not believe in God, I don't know how you'd keep going."

Giannone, a 1967 graduate of Mount Carmel High School, found his passion for helping refugees after enlisting in the army in 1969. Sent to Vietnam as a medic, he served as a public health adviser, working with refugees, improving rural health care and overseeing the construction of three dispensaries. He carries memories

of babies who starved to death and soldiers who were maimed by land mines. Yet the war actually turned out to be a positive experience for him, he said.

"Literally, I was ordered into my career," he said. "What I did find out in Vietnam is that I had an enthusiasm for helping others. Even in a place as horrific as a war zone, you can make a difference."

Giannone earned a U.S. Bronze Star for Meritorious Service, as well as a commendation and medal from the South Vietnamese government. In addition to his position with CARE, which he has held since 1996, he has also served stints with the International Catholic Migration Commission, the Monroe County Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Lutheran Services for Refugees in Rochester.

He served the Vietnamese people again from 1979-81 when he was based in Singapore and helped to settle the "boat people" fleeing Vietnam.

Giannone has worked on various development projects and relief efforts in India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sudan and



Giannone, shown here in India, has worked with refugees throughout the world since 1969.

Iran, and assisted in the development of CARE's Land Mine Safety Handbook. Most recently, he spent three weeks in September and October in Pakistan, laboring with other relief workers to bring food and materials into neighboring Afghanistan. He was most recently there three years ago and described Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as a depressing, fearful police state.

"People wouldn't necessarily talk to you," he said of Afghanistan. "You felt like you were being watched. I came out of there feeling miserable."

He noted that Afghans themselves are doing virtually all of CARE's relief work in Afghanistan, risking their lives by bringing needed items to their countrymen and women caught between the various factions fighting the war. Such brave workers are typically found in every population around the world, he said.

"The good guys outnumber the bad guys a thousand to one."

He added that if he's learned one thing about working in war-torn countries like Afghanistan, it's that the best way to build the road to peace is through villages, by improving the daily life of the poor and strengthening village family units. Such grassroots work can encourage the growth of democracy in the Third World by empowering the powerless, he noted.

"It's a lot better to build democracies than to send 19-year-olds off to war."

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