

Greenville Journal

A N D F I N A L L Y

WITH LYN RIDDLE

On having your eyes open, leaving judgment behind

BETH TEMPLETON has a new book out.

Her second. The new book follows a five-part DVD collection.

She's done hundreds of workshops and events, reaching thousands of people.

That's what she's done in the past four years.

The four years since she resigned as executive director of United Ministries.

Templeton was once a high school math teacher, then went to seminary at Erskine. United Ministries hired her as a part-timer, but soon she became executive director. Twenty-four years later, she stepped down and her desire to teach, preach and write has become a United Ministries outreach program called *Our Eyes Were Opened*.

Where as a leader of United Ministries she worked with people who were poor, now her work centers on helping those with means help people who are poor.

It's all about education. Setting aside judgment in favor of compassion.

Templeton has developed poverty simulation programs that, even though it is pretend, cause people to do some of the very things they had judged before – lie, steal.

The outreach includes taking people on tours of poverty-stricken areas, those places hidden by bamboo groves or railroad beds. Those places we really don't want to think about.



Beth Templeton held 121 workshops and other events on poverty in a year, attracting 2,600 participants.

She's given workshops for businesses, organizations and even an entire community in Kansas.

In her first book *"Loving Our Neighbor, A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty,"* Templeton taught us we need not feel guilty about refusing to give that dollar to a person on the street. What we do need to feel guilty about is looking past him as if he doesn't exist.

"You don't know if the money you give is the money that buys the hit that kills them," she said. If the person is hungry, get food.

Her response is to say, "My name's Beth. What's yours?" And to encourage the person to contact an agency that can actually help – like United Ministries.

The DVD series *"Servant or Sucker,"* released in 2008, has a similar theme. How to help constructively, realistically, without judgment, with life-changing opportunity.

Now comes her newest book *"Understanding Poverty in the Classroom."* It's meant, obviously, for teachers and school administrators, but it is a truly book for us all. For opening our eyes.

The book is about understanding differences. Actions and reactions may be different, but one is not better than the other.

The child who is loud and interrupts could be perceived as rude, lacking respect of authority or even having ADHD. But it is more likely he lives in an overcrowded family and that is how he gets attention.

"If you have lived in poverty, every day is a struggle – a roof over your head, healthcare for kids – and what's most important are relationships. Relationships become a bottom-line value," she said. "For the middle class, work and achievement is the bottom-line value. We assume our way of thinking is universal and we'll tell someone how to fix their lives."

Earlier this year when the Japanese were reeling under earthquakes and tidal waves, Templeton was conducting a workshop. She told the middle- and upper-middle income folks gathered they would not be her choice of pals if she were in Japan.

"I want to be with the people in Place of Hope (homeless shelter)," she said. "You can appreciate their fund of knowledge then."

People in poverty know how to live without electricity. They live without banks. And cars.

Once Templeton was working with a group of women. To be in the group they had to be homeless, pregnant, a prostitute or an addict. She asked about their hopes and dreams. Dead silence. Finally someone said she wanted a little house with a white picket fence, and she wanted to work in an office.

Templeton couldn't understand. The entry office job was not going to get that lady the picket-fence house.

But then it became clear. An office job has set hours, a title, air conditioning and heat. You get to sit part of the day and go to the bathroom when you want. You dress nice.

"It made a whole lot of sense," Templeton said. "I take those things for granted."

If you get a copy of the new book, I encourage you to read the section about double standards.

My eyes were opened.

Got a story to inspire, amuse, or entertain?



Contact Lyn Riddle at 679-1250 or lriddle@greenvillejournal.com.