

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can you explain what kind of organization this is?

Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All donations/contributions made to this charitable organization are tax deductible.

2. If this organization is faith based, what religion is it?

This organization is faith based in the sense that we follow Christian principles.

3. How do you control how the money is spent?

The Board of Directors makes the decisions on how the money is disbursed based on various factors such as urgency of need, type of need (Does it fit the mission and vision of the organization?), and availability of funds.

4. What part do you (Margie Sweeney) play in this organization?

I am the founding member and president of **Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** Additional board members include: Sandra Bissmeyer, Nkem Okorie, and Michael Sweeney. I started this organization in response to a trip I took to Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia in September, 2001. The disease, poverty, and devastation that I saw were calling to my heart for relief.

5. Please help me understand how you can direct this project in Kenya when you are here in Louisville.

How do you get the money to the right people? Who is your contact and how does your board know that the money is not being squandered by the people there? Do you exchange the money at the bank here and send it to Kenya? Do you have an office set up there? Are Americans running it? Thanks for helping me understand.

You have very good questions! The requests listed here are from personal contacts that I (Margie Sweeney) have made while in East Africa in 2001 and on subsequent trips, so I know where the money is going. I have many pictures of the plight of these peoples from those visits (poor sanitation, TB, HIV/AIDS, protein malnutrition, parasites, etc.) I keep in communication with various churches, clergy and lay persons in those countries that I visited (Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia) on a regular basis. When they request funds, we scrutinize how they will use the money and require proof of how it is being used (receipts, pictures, etc.). We as a board find things manageable because we are careful to only accept requests from persons whom we have gotten to know. We look to assist especially when that assistance leads to improved living conditions and self-sufficiency. Regarding how the money is managed - it depends on the destination. For some, it is most efficient to wire U.S. dollars to a location where they can get the best exchange rate. Each situation is unique. I truly appreciate your interest and concern for how charitable dollars are spent. We feel fortunate that we can help others in need without a burdensome level of overhead because we do not use fund raising companies to obtain the needed funds and we have no paid staff. All work is done on a volunteer basis.

6. What would be the best way people can help your organization?

Prayer is primary. After that, spreading the word about the work that we are doing and supporting that work through your monetary donations which are tax deductible.

7. How important is it to your organization to share the Gospel while helping people with their practical needs?

Sharing the Gospel, is of the utmost importance to **Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." In other words, our actions speak louder than our words. We are showing God's love by our care and concern for the least in His Kingdom. This is how we spread the Gospel. "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:35, NAB)

8. What are some of the projects you have lined up for 2006?

We are currently working on three projects: repairing a primary school in Tawa, Tanzania; sending supplies to an impoverished area in Andhra Pradesh, India; and building a medical clinic at a rehab center in Monrovia, Liberia.

9. If someone wanted to get involved in your organization, how would they go about doing that?

They might first wish to visit our web site at [Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.](http://www.HelpingHandsHealingMinistries.com) to learn more about the work that we are doing. If they feel that our work is worthy of their consideration, then they can contact me, Margie Sweeney, directly at 502-744-2438 or they can [e-mail](mailto:margie@helpinghandshealingministries.com) me to discuss their interests in **Helping Hands**

Healing Ministries, Inc. and how they might be able to assist us.

10. Any advice for young people?

Yes. You can explore your gifts and talents by volunteering for a variety of events, functions, and organizations. If you are prayerful and listen to the desires of your heart, the Holy Spirit will enlighten you and send opportunities your way in which your gifts and talents can be used for the sake of the Kingdom. Do not fear failures. They can be our best teachers. Do not seek glory. Only God deserves the glory. In all things, submit to the will of God and you will be richly rewarded!

11. How about giving me a little background about yourself. In addition to that, what made you decide to go into medicine?

My name is Margie Sweeney. I am first generation Hispanic American of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent. I was born in East Chicago, Indiana and consider myself a Hoosier. While I have lived most of my life in Indiana, I have also lived in Ohio, Kentucky and currently live in Florida. I am married and have two adult children. My husband Michael is a civil engineer who works for a consulting firm.

When I was in first grade I wanted to be either a paleontologist, teacher, lawyer, or doctor. By the second grade I was pretty sure that I wanted to be a doctor but even to this day, I still think about the other possibilities and how I might be able to blend those interests with my current profession.

While in elementary school, my decision to become a doctor was shaped. My father had macular degeneration which is progressive disease leading to blindness. His struggles with this condition were one reason why I wanted to be a doctor – to help others. After my fathers’ death, my mother who had never finished high school, decided to go back to school and get her diploma. She then went on to graduate from college with a degree in nursing.

Her courage and fortitude were my inspiration. I had many peers during my childhood years trying to discourage me from becoming a doctor because in those days there weren’t many women physicians, but seeing my mother successfully complete high school and college despite many obstacles (young children at home, widowhood, and poverty) I felt encouraged to pursue my dreams.

12. Tell me a little about Helping Hands Healing Ministries. When did you start it? Why did you start it? What is its purpose?

Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc. is the fruit of much prayer. This nonprofit charity was founded on December 26, 2002.

One of my childhood dreams was the desire to provide free health care in distant lands. Because my education required so much of my time, I put this dream on the ‘back burner’ and even figured that it was not going to be a possibility for me and I was okay with that. As I continued in my training and then getting married and starting a family, that ‘dream’ continued to be tucked away. When I moved to Louisville, I became very active in my parish, even serving on Parish Council. During one of our Parish Council retreats, our pastor, Fr. John Judie began speaking about his trips to Africa. I was so inspired that I told him I wanted to go with him on his next trip. Over the ensuing months, my schedule opened up and I was able to go to East Africa with him in September, 2001. We landed in Nairobi, Kenya on the infamous day of 9/11/01 and my life has forever been changed! This incredible trip to East Africa awakened my childhood dream to provide health care in distant lands.

After I returned, I realized that as an individual person, I would not be able to effect much change in the poverty conditions on this continent. With much prayer, I began to discern what God’s purpose was for my life. As I mentioned, **Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** is the fruit of that prayer. I felt that I could do more for the people of Africa by being their ‘voice’ in our country.

The purpose of this nonprofit charity is to provide healing of body, mind, soul, and spirit of those in need in developing countries and that as they are empowered, that they can, in turn, empower others.

13. Do you feel it has been successful? What are your goals for the future of the ministry?

Yes, we are making a difference. We have raised over \$55,500 in the first four years of this ministry and have helped thousands with education, nutrition, spiritual and health care needs in four countries in Africa – Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa, Zambia in Central Africa, and Liberia in West Africa. Our future goals include continued expansion to other countries and continents on a grassroots level. We are looking to partner with other organizations and corporations to further these goals. We also are looking to start a scholarship fund. Education is very poorly funded in the countries that we have visited. A scholarship fund will be a means for

the recipients to break the cycle of poverty in their lives.

14. Do you have any interesting stories or events that might illustrate why you're doing this? Perhaps something that illustrates the personal side – something that tugs on the heartstrings.

Imagine landing on foreign soil and hearing that your country has just been bombed. You have no way of getting additional information because you don't have access to television or radio. All that you know is hearsay. Your heart sinks for a minute. Then you remember that you are on a mission. You realize that you are here for a purpose and God will take care of the details. This "revelation" is the source of your strength for the duration of the trip.

Such is the setting for the trip that changed my life. I landed in Nairobi, Kenya on 9/11 and my life has forever been changed.

I went to Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa and Zambia in Central Africa in 2001 on a mission trip with Fr. John Judie, the pastor of my church at Mother of Good Counsel. My goal on that first trip was to survey the medical needs of the people in those countries so that I could plan how to provide for those needs on future trips.

Instead, that trip transformed me. What an unexpected blessing! Amid the destitution and disease, I found joy and gratitude. These people were amazing to me. Their "condition" was the source of their strength and deep faith.

These people were so welcoming and generous. They were truly a beautiful people. While each place that I visited had its unique customs and cultures, the underlying sentiment was the same. As a visitor, I was a blessing from God. That's just the way Africans see it.

What these people did not realize was that they were a blessing to me! I learned so much from my new friends. I was privileged and blessed, honored and humbled. Each country offered unique and life-changing experiences. Let me begin with Kenya since my first stop was in Nairobi. I already mentioned that I landed in Nairobi on 9/11. The "revelation" that I was there on a mission and that God would take care of the details provided me with a new level of faith. I felt completely safe and care free. While I felt compassion for the plight of my fellow countrymen, I was not consumed with despair and uncertainty. I gained a new level of trust in God's providence.

In Kenya, I got a chance to visit with the sick poor and offer some minimal medical services. There were no fancy hospitals or equipment to do much else. I was truly humbled by what little I could offer in terms of medical help, but I was honored by how much respect and love I received in return. These were a people with an "attitude of gratitude!"

Culturally, the Kenyans are a people of faith, hope, and love. They are generous and very hospitable. Some speak English and there are many tribal languages, Swahili being the predominant language in the areas that I traveled.

I did get a chance to visit a hospital in Machakos, Kenya. It was the hospital for the indigent and while it had laboratory and x-ray services, these were primitive. The surgical suite was also very primitive. The anesthesia machine appeared to be from the 1950's and they only performed a few surgeries per month when the surgeons came to visit.

The next country that I visited while on this trip was Zambia which is in Central Africa. Zambians are an equally beautiful people.

In Zambia, I visited Ndola Diocese where the bishop was very proactive in helping the indigent. He had set up a home-bound program where a nurse and some assistants would visit the sick poor in the compounds to provide medicines and take those who were critically ill to the hospital. They would also bring formula for the infants.

Bishop DiJong also had set up an AIDS program to educate the people on the modes of transmission of AIDS, AIDS prevention through abstinence and chastity, and AIDS treatment, however, there was not much money for many AIDS medicines.

Zambia is where I had the most intense "God experience" and so I nicknamed it "God's country."

One example of God's love for His people that I experienced was in a young girl that I visited in one of the compounds. She sat on a dirty towel on a dirt floor with open sores on her legs that were attracting flies. She was orphaned, malnourished, and in pain. We gave her some ibuprofen tablets for her pain and scheduled to pick her up in the morning to take her to the clinic for an examination. The next day when I saw her at the

clinic, she was beaming, her face radiating joy and gratitude! I realized that even the smallest act done with compassion can be transforming! On that day I learned about compassion on a new level.

The last country that I visited on this 16-day trip was Tanzania. I visited the Diocese of Morogoro which is in a mountainous area. The peoples of this country also showed us what true hospitality entails.

Here again, there was no chance to practice medicine as I am accustomed to providing. We used a room on the parish grounds to serve as a makeshift clinic. There was no pharmacy or nearby hospital so all I did was examine patients and make some minor suggestions. It was quite difficult to get good histories because the translator did not know enough English to help me decipher symptoms yet the people seemed truly grateful for any assistance that they received. Another humbling experience!

All subsequent trips and encounters with the African people have been of similar depth and quality. Words cannot fully describe the depths of the sentiments that these encounters evoked!

15. Anything you might want to add (maybe some of the information you share with potential donors about the ministry).

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity so all donations are tax-deductible.

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** is a volunteer run-organization. There are no paid staff, freeing up donated dollars to be used for their intended projects.

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** is a good steward. We operate on a shoe-string budget and depend on our supporters to be our voice to spread the word about this work, freeing us from the need to spend money on advertising/marketing.

---Whenever possible, **Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** partners with other organizations, corporations, and individuals to maximize the efforts toward successful projects.

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** selects projects that are low cost while producing high impact as well as projects that can become self-sustaining.

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** is a grassroots organization. We have established personal contact with local churches or individuals in the areas being served.

---**Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc.** does not provide ongoing funds to recipients. Specific parameters are placed on each project that is designed to help persons to help themselves.