

## St. Louis foundation works to battle poverty abroad

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**What does Partners in Sustainable Development International do?** — We formerly were called the Institute of Integrated Rural Development, and the vision of the organization is to eradicate poverty among the rural poor in developing countries. We work in Bangladesh. We are in the process of changing our name because the model that we use is going to be applied in other developing countries around the world.

**What other countries?** — Representatives from India, Malawi, Kenya, Mexico and Togo have studied our model and are adapting it in part or whole in their countries.

**How did you get involved with the organization?** — It was because of Mother Teresa. I was part of a cultural exchange program that went to India in 1985. After that trip, I knew I wanted to work with the poor in India. Shortly after I got back to St. Louis, I was working with the Missionaries of Charity in north St. Louis, and they called me one afternoon to ask me to pick up Mother at the airport. I started working with her in Calcutta in 1987.

**What did you do there?** — Everything. Picked up people in the streets, bathed them. Whatever was needed. I wound up caring for 37 profoundly disabled children in an orphanage, and we did everything for them. We don't know about poverty here. From 1987 to 1997, I spent eight weeks in Calcutta every two to three years.

**After Mother Teresa died in 1997, did you shift your focus?** — Actually, before Mother died, I was asked by the head of a religious order here to go look at the work a priest was doing in Bangladesh. I tried to go there from India but couldn't get there at the time. It was another five years before I got to Bangladesh and saw the work that Father Bill (the Rev. William Christensen) was doing there. He is a Marianist priest who taught at Chaminade and McBride high schools here.

**So, did you get involved then?** — Yes. We started talking about setting up a foundation to support his work in 2004, and we incorporated as a not-for-profit in 2005. This is the group that is becoming Partners in Sustainable Development International.

**How does the model work?** — We are in 1,625 villages in Bangladesh. We take a holistic approach to eradicating poverty so that everything we do has a training component and a savings component. It is all designed to help families become self-sufficient. For example, we help people open small family businesses; Bangladesh has a large silk industry, so we have planted 1.2 million mulberry trees, which are used by silkworms; we have created fisheries; we are participating in the sweet potato plant program from Tuskegee University in an effort to develop more nutritious food for the people in Bangladesh.

**And you're working here to help support all of that?** — Exactly! We have an active board with some local directors, including Peter Desloge and Andrew Wuellner.

**What do you do other than work for the foundation?** — I have started making jewelry, but that's really for the foundation, too, because the proceeds will be used to help build schools in Bangladesh. I love to cook and entertain and, obviously, to travel.

**What was the last best book you read?** — "The Cathedral Within," by Bill Shore. I also loved "Three Cups of Tea," by Greg Mortenson.

**What do you drive?** — Guess. A beige Prius. It's an '07.

