

# A global marketplace

Fair trade goes beyond charity by helping people help themselves.

By Daniel P. Smith

**BANANA FARM WITH BENEFITS:** Thanks to fair trade, Fredis Paez, a worker on the El Antojito banana farm in Colombia, and his wife were able to open a store selling groceries and conveniences. This once unimaginable step was made possible by an 80 percent rise in income and a microloan.

As Colleen Shannon ventured around the globe on various faith-based trips—to Africa and Central America, in particular—a grim, unrelenting reality gripped her, time and again: the gap between her American life of comfort and the

*'By helping producers organize and bring their products to market at a fair price, we're helping them gain control of their own lives and communities.'*

—Colleen Shannon

daily struggles for survival endured by so many of her global kin.

"Something was wrong with the picture I was seeing," says Shannon, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

As a result of her experiences, Shannon became involved with Partners for Just Trade, a Presbyterian Hunger Program initiative and fair trade organization that sells unique, handmade gifts from Peru, Cameroon and Nicaragua.

"By helping producers organize and bring their products to market at a fair price, we're helping them gain control of their own lives and communities," Shannon says. "Fair trade seems a way I can respond to this

disparity beyond simple charity."

Though few question the goals of fair trade, many wonder if it can become anything more than a niche market. Many in the Presbyterian world, however, are committed to working for the expansion of fair trade. They see it as one of the most effective ways of fulfilling the biblical call to improve the lives of those in need.

## Economics with altruism

Thanks to fair trade, Fredis Paez, a worker on the El Antojito banana farm in Colombia, and his wife were able to open a local store selling groceries and convenience items. This once unimaginable step was made

possible by an 80 percent rise in income along with a microloan.

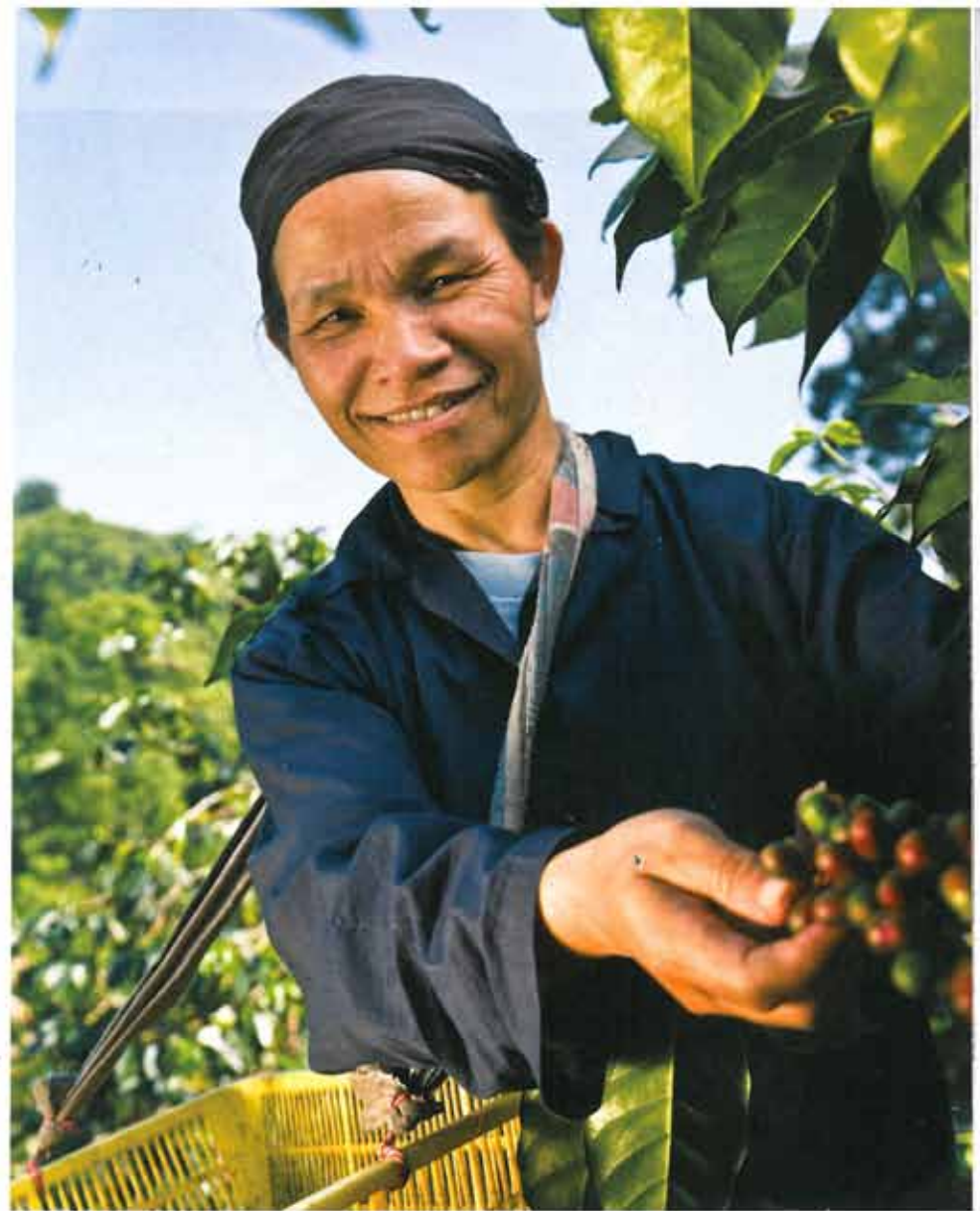
Fair trade organizations approach development as a holistic process. They cultivate direct relationships with workers in developing countries, shortening a product's journey from the producer's hands to the retailer and eliminating the various middlemen found in conventional business. More of a product's purchase price reaches front-line workers, allowing people like Paez to see their incomes rise.

Often, but not always, fair trade products carry an above-market price. Consumers pay more, given the knowledge that proceeds are channeled back into the farmers' or artisans' hands and communities, thereby creating broader social change. Rather than putting money into the coffers of a large multinational company, fair trade gives farmers and craftspeople a fighting chance.

"Fair trade is one of the simplest ways to impact a family other than your own and one of the simplest missions we can do as Christians to better the world," says Jeanne Clapp, a hunger action enabler for Washington Presbytery in southwest Pennsylvania.

In keeping with core principles of fair trade, worker cooperatives receive a guaranteed minimum price for their products, enjoy safe working conditions and living wages and negotiate direct, long-term contracts with international buyers.

Cooperatives also democratically decide how to invest the trade premiums—a sum of money paid on top of the agreed-upon fair trade price to fund academic, social or health development projects. At the El Antojito banana farm, for instance, the premiums funded the microloan



**A CHANCE TO GET AHEAD:** Fair trade organizations eliminate various middlemen and cultivate direct relationships with workers in developing countries, such as this coffee farmer.

program that helped Paez start his own store. Increased income allows families to meet basic needs, keep children in school and remain on their land. Quality of life improves as workers embrace greater control over their future.

The fair trade movement began with the Mennonite Central Committee in the United States after World War II. A decade ago, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, a ministry of the Presbyterian Church

(U.S.A.), got formally involved with fair trade. Its fair trade projects today include selling coffee, crafts, T-shirts and even sustainable palm branches (eco-palms) for churches to use on Palm Sunday.

"At the heart of the Christian faith and mission is concern for all people to live a good, healthy and productive life," Presbyterian Hunger Program associate Melanie Hardison says. "If we can expand fair trade and create demand, then we're fulfilling



**WORK THAT PAYS A LIVING WAGE:** Coffee farmer Don Wilfredo Herrera Mendoza of the CECOCAFEN Cooperative in Nicaragua shows a bag of the fair trade coffee he helped to produce.

an important part of the church's mission."

On trips to Nicaragua, Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador, Hardison has witnessed firsthand the transformational power the emergent Presbyterian focus on fair trade has brokered.

"I've broken bread with these farmers and heard them testify to fair trade's role in helping them feed their families and send their children to school," she says. "I've observed how they lived before, how they live now and the renewed hope they carry with them into the future."

### Not just church sales

Working with 62 congregations in two Pennsylvania counties, Clapp sells fair trade products out of her office and speaks about fair trade in

*'Fair trade is one of the simplest ways to impact a family other than your own and one of the simplest missions we can do as Christians to better the world.'—Jeanne Clapp*

churches. A handful of Presbyterian churches in her area run regular fair trade sales, while a partnership with the local farmers market introduces fair trade to a wider population.

"When people are searching for a way to do good and you hand them something as simple as fair trade, they will grasp it," Clapp says.

At the two-centuries-old First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville, church officials purchase fair trade coffee, and Shannon and other members are working to open a fair trade retail shop on church grounds.

"This proves even an old church can change habits," Shannon says.

In August 2006, Carol Smith, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Fond du Lac, Wis., heeded a call from her minister to step out in faith. Involved in fair trade efforts for the previous decade, Smith spearheaded the creation of a fair trade shop at the church.

Just Fare Market, now an incorporated business, sells fair trade coffee, tea, chocolate, nuts and a variety of handicrafts. The market will soon move out of its church space and into a full-fledged retail outlet, expanding both its outreach and its inventory.

"I see fair trade as a global farmers market and a just system for

the poor," Smith says. "It's an effective way of showing compassion and allowing people to develop their communities with spirit and dignity."

But church folks aren't the only ones in the fair trade marketplace these days. In recent years, fair trade momentum has accelerated. Fair trade-certified coffee, for instance, constituted about 2 million pounds of U.S. imports in 1999; the United States now imports well over 110 million pounds. Fair trade has since expanded from its coffee origins to encompass a wide range of goods, including fruit, tea, cocoa, sugar, cotton, jewelry, sports balls, wine, flowers and apparel.

Thanks to emerging relationships with leading retailers such as Whole Foods, Costco, Walmart and a host of socially responsible small businesses, U.S. consumers today can choose from more than 6,000 fair trade products from 58 nations. In 2009 alone (the most recent sales data available), goods certified by Fair Trade USA, the nation's leading third-party certifier of fair trade products, generated \$1.2 billion in U.S. sales. This was a 7 percent rise over 2008, distributing more than \$14 million to 865 worker organizations to fund various community development projects, including schools and hospitals.

The movement's momentum shows no signs of slowing, particularly as socially conscious consumers surface as a growing and vocal contingent and corporations jump on board.

Dunkin' Donuts, which had long been using fair trade espresso beans but not marketing its alliance, began sharing its fair trade story on cups, igniting consumer awareness. Ice cream giant Ben & Jerry's, an enthusiastic fair trade advocate, recently announced the goal that 100 percent of its ingredients, from its Cherry Garcia dark chocolate to its Chunky Monkey walnuts, would be certified fair trade by 2013, a decision that

will drive conversations with its producers and suppliers.

Despite positive growth, fair trade products still represent but a fraction of available offerings to U.S. consumers.

Advocates say that fair trade must maintain its push into the mainstream market, attracting ethical consumers and working with companies to educate consumers. It's a reality that takes a blend of time, innovative brands and retailers.

### The way forward

In spite of its benefits, fair trade has its limitations. First, a lack of financing in fair trade communities limits cooperatives' growth in an independent, sustainable manner. Second, the communities possess little practical knowledge of the Western marketing and business process. And finally, communities frequently struggle to increase their productivity to levels at which greater volume could create more competitive pricing.

Furthermore, fair trade's compelling story alone is not enough in America's "bang-for-the-buck" marketplace, which often resists the higher item cost for an unseen benefit half a world away.

"The fair trade movement has hung its marketing plan on the stories of the people that fair trade helps, but price and quality concerns generally win out in the end," says Christopher Kent, a futurist with Foresight Alliance, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm specializing in global consumer issues.

In the midst of a recession, economic pressures threaten to further thwart fair trade's growth, particularly among low- and middle-class consumers, who are unlikely to embrace fair trade's premium prices. Fair Trade USA acknowledges that ethical buying rises in proportion to discretionary income. As a result, fair trade's momentum relies on those with the means to be premium

**ROAD TO A BETTER LIFE:**  
Ayde Riveros Gutierrez joined several other women in forming the fair trade group El Mercurio. They soon began selling their hand-knit finger puppets for more than five times what they were previously making.

buyers, a minority of the American population.

"In the U.S., where our culture is so consumption oriented, we can be so distant from the realities around the world," Hardison says. "We can't lose sight of the stories and lives behind the products. We can help people lead better lives; fair trade is one avenue to this end.

"How we all walk this walk is of great concern to the church," she adds.

With room to grow in both market penetration and products, the fair trade system can benefit from consistent scrutiny and a holistic outlook rooted in faith.

"Fair trade doesn't solve the world's problems," Smith says, "but it is a way of helping people help themselves and raise their quality of life."

For folks like Hardison, Smith, Shannon and Clapp, however, the only way is forward. Each woman works to convince her Presbyterian colleagues not only that supporting fair trade is necessary, but also that it honors the church's call for the faithful to pursue economic and social justice. The simple choice of a fair trade product can have ramifications around the globe.

"If I am to treat my neighbors



as I want to be treated, then I want fairness and a good life for them," Shannon says. "Fair trade is an avenue to do this in our daily lives."

*Daniel P. Smith, a freelance writer in Chicago, is the author of On the Job: Behind the Stars of the Chicago Police Department (Lake Claremont, 2008). Portions of this article previously appeared in U.S. Catholic magazine.*

*The fair trade movement's momentum shows no signs of slowing, particularly as socially conscious consumers surface as a growing and vocal contingent and corporations jump on board.*

## LEARN MORE about fair trade

- » For a wide-angle view of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) support for fair trade and opportunities to get involved: [www.pcusa.org/fairtrade](http://www.pcusa.org/fairtrade)
- » To learn about the global impact of fair trade from Fair Trade USA, the leading third-party certifier of fair trade products in the United States: [www.fairtradeusa.org](http://www.fairtradeusa.org)



DIVERSITY

# The stories behind the products

From art to jewelry  
to fair trade olive oil,  
handcrafted items from  
around the world offer  
new hope for people  
working toward a  
better life.

**F**or more than 60 years, the nonprofit organization SERRV has worked to eradicate poverty by building direct connections with low-income artisans and farmers in 33 countries.

"We market their crafts and foods, find joint solutions to their challenges and help them grow and embrace the future," says Serena Sato, director of marketing for SERRV.

SERRV originally stood for Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation, but the organization's website says, "Our mission has expanded greatly since our beginning." SERRV is one of a growing number of organizations that Presbyterians support with their involvement and purchasing power in order to break the cycle of poverty and change entire communities.

Here are the inspiring stories of some of the artisans and of some of the people committed to helping them earn a living from their handiwork.

### **CAMEROON: Changing lives**

In a village in northwest Cameroon, 26-year-old Njah Primus Songekwe makes pottery for Prescraft, a SERRV partner project started

**LEARNING A TRADE:** Njah Primus Songekwe, left, makes pottery to sell through Prescraft. The income enables him to pay school fees for other family members.



**A STEADY SOURCE OF INCOME:** Magdalene Ngubui Nkambeh has woven baskets in rural Cameroon for more than 20 years. She depends on the income to educate and feed her children.

in the early 1960s by a Swiss mission society working with the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon. Songekwe learned the trade from his mother, who was one of the first Prescraft potters.

"My income is very important for the whole family, as I'm the only wage earner," says Songekwe. "I pay the school fees for my sister and

niece, and I'm even able to save some money."

Not only does Prescraft give him work on a regular basis, he says, the organization also provides tools, raw materials and the chance to learn new techniques. Prescraft provides an apprenticeship program in which young people can learn from skilled artisans and get access to funds to assist with education, health care and housing.

Magdalene Ngubui Nkambeh, another Prescraft artisan, has woven baskets for more than 20 years. She lost her husband and depends on the income from weaving and selling crops from her small farm to educate and feed her six children.

By providing employment for rural artisans like Songekwe and Nkambeh, Prescraft seeks to stem



**CREATIONS OF HOPE:** Dottie Kelley, a Presbyterian from South Carolina, is helping artisans in rural Haiti find a market for their embroidered dresses and other products.

migration from the rural areas to the cities. Other goals include preserving traditional craft skills and cultural heritage and instilling self-confidence in the artisans.—*Serena Sato*

» To learn more about SERRV:  
[www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org); (800) 422-5915 to  
 request a free catalog  
 For information on Prescraft:  
[www.prescraft.com](http://www.prescraft.com)

### **HAITI: Creating a hopeful future**

Artisans in Haiti sell wooden bowls, clothing and colorful metal sculpture made from recycled oil drums through **Creations of Hope**. The organization's president, Dottie Kelley, a member of Palmetto Presbyterian Church in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., travels to Haiti several times a year and fills a 20-foot container with crafts to ship to the United States.

"I used to keep it all in my garage," she says. "I now have a couple of storage units. All the people I work with are trying to develop a market in the United States so they'll have a continuing source of income."

On one trip she met a group of

women in a rural village who were doing embroidery. On her next trip she took these women five sewing machines. "Next time I came back they were sewing these," she says, holding up an embroidered child-size dress.

Being able to sell their products has affected "not just their lives but their self-esteem," Kelley says. "On my first visit, they couldn't even make eye contact." Since then, the women have written a song that says in Creole, "We are the future of Haiti."—*Eva Stimson*

» To learn more:  
[www.haiticreationsofhope.com](http://www.haiticreationsofhope.com)

### **PALESTINE: Importing peace and olive oil**

When Peter Mann and other Presbyterians visited Palestine in 2006, they were deeply moved by the economic hardships of life in the Occupied Territories. They talked with people desperate for jobs and visited with families whose poverty deprived them of nutritious meals.

"We had an elevated sense of pain and frustration for what we had seen, felt and experienced with these people," says Mann, an elder at Crosslake (Minn.) Presbyterian Church. They asked their Palestinian hosts how they could help. The Presbyterians were told of the need

and agricultural development.

In August, Import Peace merged with Toronto-based **Zatoun** (*olive* in Arabic), which began selling fair-trade Palestinian olive oil in 2003. Mann says he is trying "to raise awareness among churches and peacemaking groups about what they could and should be doing to support people in that part of the world."

—*Pat Cole*

» To learn more: [www.zatoun.com](http://www.zatoun.com)

### **INDIA: A way out of prostitution**

Fabric jewelry pouches—great for traveling—and natural stone jewelry are among the items marketed by **Rahab's Rope**, a project that helps women and girls sold into the sex trade in India. The average age for an Indian girl to be sold into prostitution is 11, says Jillian Hensley, director of recruiting and mobilization for the organization, which is a former recipient of the Thank Offering of Presbyterian Women.

"We teach the girls things like stitching and jewelry-making so they'll have a means of support once they leave prostitution."

The project is named for Rahab, the prostitute who confessed belief in God and hid two Israelite spies pursued by the leaders of Jericho (Joshua 2). In turn they agreed to save her and her family when the

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*"We teach the girls things like stitching and jewelry-making so they'll have a means of support once they leave prostitution."*

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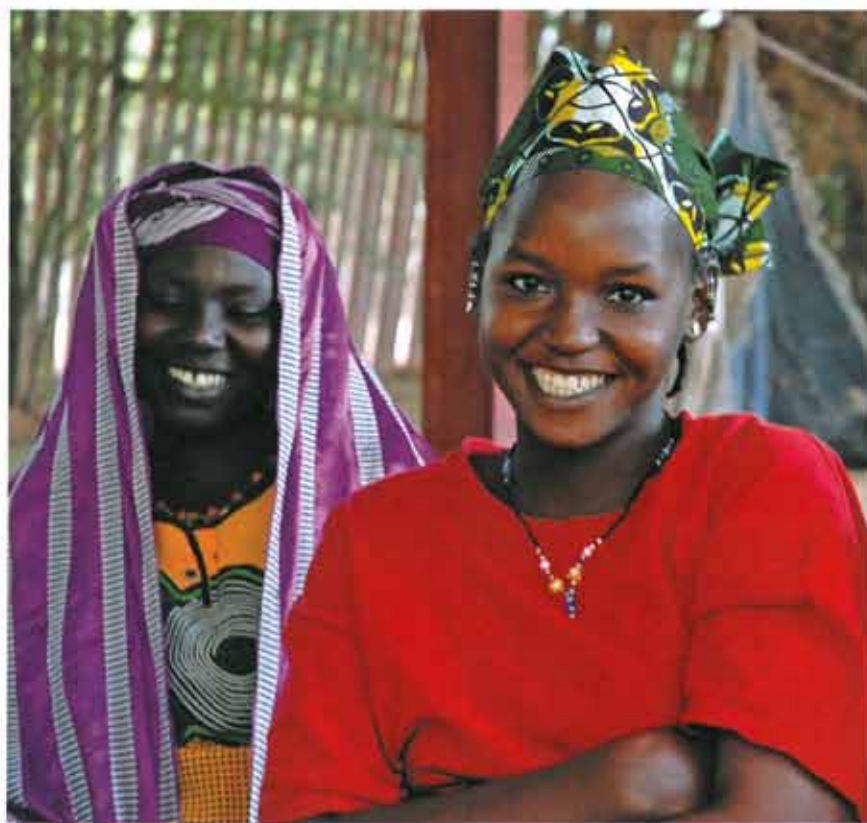
to sell Palestinian products.

That led to the founding of Import Peace, a nonprofit organization formed to sell high-quality, organic olive oil produced in Palestine. More than 20,000 bottles of the fair trade-certified product were sold between 2007 and 2011. The profits from the sales—about \$40,000—were donated to Palestinian organizations involved in health care, education

Israelites attacked Jericho. Rahab marked her window with a scarlet rope so the Israelites could find her.

"The rope Rahab put out the window was one she most likely made," says Hensley. "That symbolizes her rescue physically and also spiritually, because she was saved through her faith."—*Eva Stimson*

» To learn more:  
[www.rahabsrope.com](http://www.rahabsrope.com)



**DEVELOPING A SENSE OF WORTH:** Mariam Dicko (in red) learned to make jewelry while recovering from an obstetric fistula. Women in Mali often don't have access to basic health care.

**MALI: A source of healing**

Her smile is genuine. Mariam Dicko is among friends. She has a place to stay, a supportive community and an income from work she can do while she heals from surgery. Stringing beads into jewelry keeps her mind off her illness. It keeps money in her pocket. And most

care, childbirth at an early age and malnutrition. Women like Dicko who suffer with obstetric fistulas are often shunned by their husbands and communities because of the infertility, incontinence and infections associated with the condition.

As they undergo medical treatment, which often means several

**PAKISTAN: Rescuing girls at risk**

The **SHE Project** (Struggle, Hope, Empowerment) began in 2006 in a boardinghouse for abused women and girls and has expanded to include homes in 21 Pakistani communities.

"The women began making crafts and became empowered," says Veeda

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*Her smile is genuine. Mariam Dicko is among friends. She has a place to stay, a supportive community and an income from work she can do while she heals from surgery.*

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important, it gives her a sense of worth.

**Delta Survie**, a SERRV partner, provides support services to about 200 women a year who are recovering from obstetric fistulas. In Mali, one of the poorest countries of the world, women often don't have access to basic health care. Obstetric fistulas can be caused by prolonged labor, lack of prenatal

surgeries, the women are trained by Delta Survie to produce jewelry, a skill they can use in the future to help support their families. The light work is a perfect occupation for the women, who are at different stages of recovery and need frequent periods of rest.—*Serena Sato*

» To learn more:  
[www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org); (800) 422-5915 to request a free catalog

Javaid, executive director of the Presbyterian Education Board in Pakistan, an umbrella organization that includes this ministry. The SHE Project "is helping mothers put food on the table and educate their girls as well."

Project coordinator Sana Paul grew up in Pakistan but now lives in Salt Lake City, where she and her husband, Shurjeel Paul, are members

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SERRV



**EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PAKISTAN:** The SHE Project, a ministry of the Presbyterian Education Board in Pakistan, helps women provide food for their families and send their children, especially the girls, to school. The women make silk scarves, napkins, tablecloths and other products.

of Cottonwood Presbyterian Church. She is happy to show off such products as tie-dyed silk scarves, beaded and embroidered shawls, wallets, cell phone pouches and cushion covers decorated in embroidery or cross-stitch. Among the more unusual products are tablecloths and napkins decorated using vegetable prints and natural inks. They don't fade in the laundry, says Paul. "They get brighter with every wash."

Though this project focuses on girls, Javaid says her organization is recognizing a growing need for ministry with Pakistani boys and is raising money for a new boys' school.

"Education is the light for Pakistan," says Javaid. "We have been educating the girls, but we are losing the boys to the Taliban. We

need to educate the boys as well."

—*Eva Stimson*

» To learn more about the SHE Project and the church's educational ministry in Pakistan:

[www.peb.edu.pk](http://www.peb.edu.pk)

Email [gar@peb.edu.pk](mailto:gar@peb.edu.pk)

### **NEPAL: Paper with a purpose**

At a remarkable artisans' cooperative in Nepal, paper is made by recycling cotton rags and paper waste products and by using natural fibers like banana stems and water hyacinth. The more than 100 members of **Get Paper Industry**, a SERRV partner, earn a living wage and are eligible for benefits, including free lunches, personal loans, basic health insurance and a small pension.

"Artisans are becoming better off,"

says Milan Dev Bhattarai, director of the cooperative. "They can send their children to school and have more access to different types of food."

Get Paper Industry cares for the earth by using recycled materials, drying the paper in natural sunlight





**ECO-FRIENDLY AND BEAUTIFUL:** The products made by Gita Dhamala, above, and other members of the Get Paper Industry co-op in Nepal provide them a living wage and benefits.



and installing a wastewater treatment plant. Workers have planted more than 4,000 trees and conducted programs to teach children to care for the environment.

Through a Send Your Daughter to School campaign, scholarships for girls and the support of five

### **PALESTINE: Compassionate connections**

Southeastern Michigan is home to the largest Arabic community outside of the Middle East and France. Located in the heart of that community, Littlefield Presbyterian Church in Dearborn, Mich., has been

their olivewood sculptures and needlework.

Hylkema, who has traveled to the Middle East numerous times, notes that the nativity sets and other wood items sold by Pal Craftaid are produced in Bethlehem at a business owned by a Christian family. She has met some of the women from a remote Palestinian village who work together to create the ministry's embroidery and cross-stitch products. Every month or so one of the women makes a grueling all-day trip to Jerusalem and back—by foot and public transportation with a wait at checkpoints—to deliver the completed handicrafts and to purchase more thread and fabric.

In addition to boosting the income of these dedicated artisans, Pal Craftaid distributes its profits to a variety of ministries in Palestine, including an elementary school, a Christian women's organization, a vocational training program for women and services for deaf children and older adults.—*Eva Stimson*

» To learn more:  
[www.palcraftaid.org](http://www.palcraftaid.org)

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*The Get Paper Industry touches the lives of countless girls in a country where the education of boys is given priority.*

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schools, the organization touches the lives of countless girls in a country where the education of boys is given priority.

"More people should be educated," Bhattarai says. "It is how the poor can get better lives."—*Serena Sato*

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[www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org); (800) 422-5915 to request a free catalog

involved in ministry with people from the Middle East since 1979.

Getting to know people from Palestine, where most families live on less than \$2 a day, is what led church member Carol Hylkema to get involved with **Pal Craftaid**. Founded by Presbyterian minister Elizabeth Knott, Pal Craftaid helps artisans in Palestine market

Sharing what we have + Creative celebrations + Matches made in heaven

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## Giving for a change

Why fair trade products belong  
on your Christmas list

