



The Human Face of Servanthood

Linda L. D'Antonio, Ph.D., is a Professor of Surgery at Loma Linda University Medical Center, in the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, and Director of International Outreach for the Division's program "Operation Good Samaritan." She is a Speech-Language Pathologist specializing in speech disorders associated with cleft lip and palate. Dr. D'Antonio has established a variety of services for individuals with cleft lip and palate in countries across the globe, including India, China and most recently across Africa. Dr. D'Antonio is also on the Medical Advisory Board for "The Smile Train," a non-profit organization that promotes cleft care for children around the world, and was the organizer of the Pan African Congress on Cleft Lip and Palate in 2006 and 2007, and the Pan African Consensus Conference on Increasing Cleft Care in Africa.

We caught up with Dr. Linda to discuss her recent travels to Africa on behalf of individuals with cleft lip and palate, and on the personal challenges inherent in fulfilling one's mission in life:

- What makes us human is the ability to use speech and language. This is my motivation to work with people with cleft lip or cleft palate. You can't just repair their anatomy; if you don't help restore their speech you've robbed them of a huge amount of their humanity
- This is hard work; it can be like pushing a boulder uphill. It's often not glamorous.
- My biggest struggle is balance. Sometimes I feel like a candle that's about to be blown out. I'm helping people around the world but can't remember to call my brother on his birthday! I'm having to learn to balance giving with taking care of myself.
- I heard about mothers bringing their babies to the hospitals and begging for surgery so that they could take their new baby with a cleft home and not fear that the father or other relative would kill the child. I was told that most cleft babies are allowed to starve in the first weeks of life.
- Sometimes it is hard to remember why I do this work. It is especially hard when the circumstances are so difficult. But now we are in position to impact cleft care in Nigeria and potentially all of Africa.

