

From the factory to the gridiron

 ndsmcobserver.com/2012/09/from-the-factory-to-the-gridiron

January 11, 2030

The Observer is a student-run, daily print & online newspaper serving Notre Dame, Saint Mary's & Holy Cross. [Learn about us.](#)

-

archive

Jacob Palcic | Tuesday, September 25, 2012

In addition to being the first time Notre Dame's team has beaten Michigan since I started as an undergrad three years ago, Saturday's football game marked two other important "firsts" for our University. Amidst the excitement of the evening home game, I looked around me and two things caught my attention: People were wearing union-made, living wage produced t-shirts and Hawaiian leis. I think there is an important connection behind these two apparently distinct adornments. As I looked around me, I saw two visual signs of solidarity that, led by Notre Dame students, were proudly donned throughout the stadium. And I was filled with hope!

Both the leis and the living-wage made t-shirts reflect two time-appropriate, incredibly needed aspects of solidarity on our campus and in our world. Students wore leis to show love and support for our fellow brother, Manti Te'o. This gesture symbolized genuine concern for one of the members of our community; it showed that students were mindful of his sorrow and accompanying him in it. In the case of the shirts, students collaborated with Notre Dame's faculty to order our student shirts from Alta Gracia, the only college apparel factory that pays its workers a living wage, allows them to unionize and thus maintain a dignified quality of life. This intentional decision shows how students can choose to be in solidarity with people far beyond our campus community by recognizing our common humanity and caring for them as we need them to care for us. Having recently visited the factory and spoken with workers, I can attest that student solidarity through buying Alta Gracia apparel is having an incredible impact on the community where Alta Gracia's factory is located in the Dominican Republic.

Solidarity can embody many forms. However, its spirit is always the same. Characterized by accompaniment, it fosters resilience which transforms and unites the community. At the heart is a genuine concern for human well-being that seeks to cultivate not only sympathy, but also empathy toward one another. Sometimes this takes on the form of mobile action such as students pooling resources to send clothes and food to victims of a recent natural

disaster or refusing to buy clothing made in sweatshops until workers' rights are respected. In such cases, this can contribute to economic and social resilience. Yet other times, the action is something quieter, but just as strong, like students supporting a classmate who just lost a loved one. I believe that the psychosocial resilience such a response can contribute can be just as powerful as the former example. In light of this, it seems that the challenge to live in solidarity as a campus-wide community is not separate from living in solidarity with the rest of our world. The more we are unified as a campus, the more we can understand the idea of a universal community.

In a world wide climate of discord and cut-throat competition that instills fear into individuals to survive by "looking out for number one," our solidarity as students and as global citizens is needed here at Notre Dame more than ever. As incredibly privileged young people, this is what we need to intentionally focus the purpose of education on. Solidarity need not remain an abstract theological idea. As a community, we can and must channel all aspects of our education toward making it as tangible as the words of the hymn we sang in the Basilica on Sunday after the game: "Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone, to heal and strengthen, serve and teach and live the word they've known." There is much that we can do as Notre Dame students; the social concerns of our time are many. With the Holy Cross of Notre Dame as our witness, let us focus our education toward development by living in solidarity. Events like that football game give me hope that together we can raise our voices much louder to sing "All are truly welcome in this place!" After all, solidarity at its core is about understanding the relationship of our human family.

Jacob Palcic is a junior. He can be reached at jpalcic@nd.edu

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer.