

The Church's Humanitarian Efforts:

Discipleship in

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The Gospels are filled with accounts of the Savior healing the sick, the blind, and the lame. The Savior's desire to bless and heal is reflected in His own words to the Nephites when He appeared to them

following His Resurrection:

“Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy” (3 Nephi 17:7).

Also abundant are the Lord's invitations in the scriptures to come follow Him, to do His works, to become like Him. (See John 13:34–35 or 3 Nephi 27:27.) Doing so requires that we, too, have compassion, that we seek to bless and to heal, to lift burdens, and to ease pain and suffering. This is the driving principle behind the Church's humanitarian efforts around the world—efforts that are funded

largely by the freewill offerings of Church members.

In recent years, millions of people in more than 100 countries have been blessed by Church humanitarian initiatives that bring clean water to remote villages, provide mobility to those who cannot walk, help prevent or treat blindness, save the lives of struggling newborns, immunize against disease, and help improve crop yields and nutrition.

Clean Water

Walking seven miles to bring water home was once a daily task for 13-year-old Saidi Kigongobero, the eldest child of a large family in Bulyampande, Uganda. When collecting the water, he could wait two or three hours for his turn at the nearest well during the day, or he could leave at 10:00 p.m. and return home at 1:00 a.m. Either way, Saidi was often too tired to attend school or complete his assignments. “I felt like I was wasting my life doing nothing except hauling water,” he says. “I was not in school most of the time, and we still never had enough water to drink.”



LEFT: PHOTO BY MARK PHIBRICK



Action

The Church's efforts to relieve suffering go far beyond responding to natural disasters.

Today, Saidi and his family have a clean, new well only half a mile from their home. Now, Saidi's younger siblings can help carry water home, Saidi does much better in school, and the whole family enjoys better health.

Water for drinking, cooking, hygiene, and irrigation is scarce in many remote parts of the world. Often it is gathered a few gallons at a time from rivers, ponds, or shallow wells contaminated with parasites and diseases. Time spent obtaining water keeps many adults from more productive activities.

The Church's clean water projects not only provide safe water systems but also construct sanitation facilities and teach basic hygiene



practices. Depending on local conditions, the clean water may come from a new borehole well sunk into an aquifer, from a hand-dug well that is then lined and covered, or from spring water that is captured and piped to a community.

Local contractors complete the projects using labor donated by those who will receive the water. Local water committees manage the systems, which are designed to be sustainable for generations. Matt Heaps, manager of the clean water initiative, says, "In reality, our projects are more about people than water systems. We try to strengthen people in the community. Everything is done with an eye toward helping individuals and communities become self-sustaining."

Since 2002, 235 projects in 54 countries have brought clean water to 5,271,607 people.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOWARD COLLETT UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



The Gift of Movement

The group of relief agency workers had come to rural Ukraine to deliver several wheelchairs that had been furnished by Latter-day Saint Charities. Now it was growing late, and one intended recipient had not arrived at the designated location. Reluctantly, the workers were about to leave when they saw a distant figure in the dimming light. It was an elderly woman, trudging down the road, dragging an apple crate attached to a rope. In the crate was a 14-year-old girl with cerebral palsy. Unable to walk, with no car or bus available and no money for a taxi, this was the only way the girl could come for the device that would free her from a lifetime of immobility.

For those unable to move about freely on their own, receiving a wheelchair, a walker, or a prosthetic limb is like being given wings. Getting an education, going to work, attending church, socializing, serving others—all suddenly become possible. For the 14-year-old Ukrainian girl, the wheelchair was a passport to the world outside her apartment.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, even the most basic mobility devices are unavailable or unaffordable. By providing such equipment, Latter-day Saint Charities removes a physical barrier that keeps some people from reaching their potential. Partnering with local organizations and buying from regional manufacturers where possible, the wheelchair initiative can ensure that recipients have the equipment that best meets their needs. It also helps to ensure that follow-up therapy is available to people and that parts and knowledgeable people are available for equipment maintenance. In the past nine years more than 300,000 people have been given greater mobility by this program.



Vision Treatment

The hospital hallways echo from the music of a Buddhist festival across the street. Today is also a celebration of sorts for Dr. Roger Harrie and his wife, Beverly. They have presented their medical colleagues in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, with a special camera and are teaching them how to use it to diagnose and prescribe treatments for certain vision problems, such as diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of blindness in adults with diabetes.



PHOTO BY MARK PHILBRICK

Some of the blindness in the world today can be treated, corrected, or halted with medical procedures. The Church's vision treatment initiative works to improve vision care and prevent eye problems by providing equipment and training through short-term specialists like the Harries. These specialists donate local medical professionals the equipment, supplies, and training they need to care for their people long after the specialists have left the country. In Mongolia, for example, local medical personnel trained through the vision treatment initiative are now performing free diabetic retinopathy screenings.



Neonatal Resuscitation

A baby's first cry is music to the mother. But too often, in too many places, instead of a cry and the glad voice of a nurse or midwife, there is only silence. It's all the more tragic because the nurse or midwife does not have an inexpensive bulb syringe or the knowledge to perform rescue breathing techniques. By having these two tools doctors, nurses, and midwives can often save struggling newborns who would otherwise die.

The Church's neonatal resuscitation training (NRT) initiative uses short-term specialists to train local doctors, nurses, and midwives in NRT techniques. For example, Dr. George Bennett and his wife, Marcia, along with doctors from the Turkish Ministry of Health, met with medical representatives from Tajikistan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan. They explained how the NRT program can save the lives of infants. In fact, the program requires that each person taught will provide the training to birth attendants in their area.

This train-the-trainer method allows life-saving knowledge and supplies to quickly cross language and cultural boundaries. Medical communities are improved, birth attendants no longer watch helplessly when a newborn struggles to draw breath, and families are blessed. Liz Howell, an international health coordinator with LDS Charities, says, "It truly is a life-changing and a life-saving program."



PHOTOS ABOVE AND BELOW BY JASON SWENSEN WITH DESERET NEWS



THE RESULTS OF REACHING OUT

Initiative	No. of Projects	No. of Countries	Beneficiaries
Clean Water (since 2002)	235	54	5,271,607
Wheelchairs (since 2001)	626	106	302,236
Vision Care (since 2003)	72	41	214,545 (trained or treated)
Neonatal Resuscitation Training (since 2003)	145	70	112,999 (trained or treated)
Food (since 2007)	20	11	343,668

RESCUING, FEEDING, CLOTHING, EDUCATING

- In addition to the welfare assistance provided to Church members through fast offerings, between 1985 and the end of 2008, the Church responded to 1,566 emergencies and disasters in 141 nations.

- During that same period, 375,312,423 pounds of goods were distributed. These include clothing, medical supplies, food, educational supplies, and a variety of "kits," such as hygiene kits and kits to provide basic supplies for schoolchildren.
- Total value of cash and in-kind assistance: \$1.1 billion.
- Latter-day Saint Charities often partners with other reputable, well-established agencies, including those of other faiths. This avoids duplicate local staffs and distribution channels, takes advantage of local expertise and experience, and allows more of every donated dollar to go directly to its intended purpose. Outcomes of the humanitarian initiatives are carefully monitored.



Health and Strength

Diseases that no longer threaten children in developed nations still rage among the poor in many countries. Measles is one of the leading causes of death among young children, according to the World Health Organization.¹

Hunger and malnutrition are also prevalent, stunting the physical and mental development of children and greatly increasing their susceptibility to diseases like measles. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, “Undernourishment and deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals cost more than 5 million children their lives every year.”²

In 2003, the Church joined the international Measles Initiative and Partnership. In addition to making financial contributions, the Church has played a significant role in organizing, promoting, and conducting local vaccination campaigns using Church volunteers. Since 2003, approximately 56,000 Church members have provided more than 600,000 hours of service in 32 nations. Since 2001, the Measles Initiative and Partnership has vaccinated 600 million children and youth. Measles deaths worldwide have decreased from 750,000 in 2000 to 197,000 in 2007.³

The Church’s humanitarian efforts have always included helping to feed the hungry. But now chronic hunger and malnutrition are also being addressed by a food initiative that teaches communities in both rural and urban areas how to grow nutritious vegetables and to raise small animals for protein. Many of the techniques being taught are based on years of research by the Benson Institute, which became part of Latter-day Saint Charities in 2007.

Projects begin with short-term specialists teaching at schools and community centers in an area where malnutrition is a problem. Children, their families, and teachers all learn clean food preparation, the health benefits of eating a varied diet, and effective, sustainable gardening techniques suited to local conditions. The Church and partner organizations provide materials. Initiative manager Wade Sperry says that when people’s physical health improves, they are able to improve their emotional and spiritual health as well.



Following Jesus Christ

Seeing suffering and need in the world, followers of Christ instinctively desire to help. These initiatives of the Church’s humanitarian efforts provide an organized and effective way for Church members to act on their desire to follow the Savior’s admonition:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Nephi 27: 21).

President Thomas S. Monson said, “I am deeply grateful that as a church we continue to extend humanitarian aid where there is great need. We have done much in this regard and have blessed the lives of thousands upon thousands of our Father’s children who are not of our faith as well as those who are. We intend to continue to help wherever such is needed.”⁴ ■

NOTES

1. World Health Organization, Fact Sheet no. 286, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en>.
2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Undernourishment around the World 2004,” http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5650e/y5650e03.htm#P26_3460.
3. See “Members Assist with Measles Initiative,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2010, 77.
4. Thomas S. Monson “Until We Meet Again,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 114.