



WE ARE THE Lord's Hands

*Seeking out the poor and ministering to those who suffer
are indispensable to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.*

By Neil K. Newell

Welfare Services

During the early days of the Great Depression, six stake presidents from the Salt Lake Valley joined together to grapple with the darkening clouds of poverty and hunger that threatened to overwhelm so many members of the Church.¹ Although the economic crisis affected people everywhere, Utah in particular had been devastated.²

At that time, Church leaders had few resources to help those in need. They could use fast offerings, of course, but the chronic need dwarfed anything they had ever experienced. Under the direction of the Presiding Bishopric, a Deseret Employment Bureau had been founded in the early 1900s. But it was not adequately equipped to handle such massive need.

These six priesthood leaders knew that if the people of their stakes were to be helped, they could not wait. They would have to take immediate action. They began by putting people to work. They organized the men and took them to fields where they could harvest crops. In exchange for their labor, grateful farmers generously donated food to the men. The surplus was taken to a storehouse and distributed to others who were hungry. As donations grew, the Saints began canning food to

preserve it. This was the beginning of the modern-day welfare program.

Eight decades later, modern-day Church leaders throughout the world look over their congregations and feel the same determination to reach out to those in need.

In the October 2011 general conference, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “Too often we notice the needs around us, hoping that someone from far away will magically appear to meet those needs. Perhaps we wait for experts with specialized knowledge to solve specific problems. When we do this, we deprive our neighbor of the service we could render, and we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to serve. While there is nothing wrong with experts, let’s face it: there will never be enough of them to solve all the problems. Instead, the Lord has placed His priesthood and its organization at our doorsteps in every nation where the Church is established.”³

This call for local Church leaders and members to take action as inspired by the Holy Ghost has led many throughout the world to, as President Uchtdorf said, “figure it out for [themselves].”⁴ They have rolled up their sleeves and resolved to “remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted” (D&C 52:40).

Ecuador

As Bishop Johnny Morante in Guayaquil, Ecuador, looked out at members of his ward, his heart grew heavy. Too many of the families struggled to have even the barest necessities of life. He wanted to help them, so he consulted with ward leaders and took the matter to the Lord.

Since job opportunities in the area were scarce, he began to work with a group of 11 sisters, encouraging them to pursue the possibility of a small-business opportunity. These sisters noticed that there was a need for quality, low-cost household-cleaning supplies, and they wondered if they could produce and sell them in their community. But how would they learn to make these supplies?

At this time, Bishop Morante became aware of an unemployed sister in his ward who had worked as a pharmaceutical chemist. When the 11 sisters asked her if she would help, she was delighted to teach them how to make safe, quality supplies.

They created a business plan, mapped out areas in the community that each sister would cover, chose the products they would make, and designed the packaging and labels.

In a few months, they had built a customer base and were bringing in sufficient revenues to alleviate their poverty and help provide for the needs of their families.

When managers of a local pharmaceutical company learned about this enterprise, they became intrigued by the story of the unemployed pharmaceutical chemist. They eventually interviewed and hired her to head their own manufacturing.

Russia

In the Rechnoy Ward of Moscow, Russia, Galina Goncharova, who was serving as the ward historian, slipped on some ice and broke both her arms. She was taken to the hospital, where her arms were wrapped in casts. She couldn't feed or clothe herself. She couldn't comb her hair or even answer the phone.

When her fellow ward members learned of what had happened, they immediately responded. Priesthood

holders gave her a blessing and worked with the Relief Society sisters to create a schedule to check on this good sister and attend to her needs.

Vladimir Nechiporov, the ward mission leader, said, "We remembered a talk given in general conference about a statue of Christ that was missing its hands.⁵ Below the statue someone had placed a plaque that read, 'You are my hands.' For the few weeks this good sister was



After Galina Goncharova slipped and broke her arms, her Relief Society sisters served as her hands.

incapacitated, the members of the Rechnoy Ward felt a kinship to that story. We literally became her hands."

Philippines

When Tropical Storm Washi descended on the Philippines in 2011, it flooded the area with a deluge of water and wind. Some 41,000 homes were damaged, and more than 1,200 people lost their lives.

Prior to the flooding, Max Saavedra, president of the Cagayan de Oro Philippines Stake, had felt prompted to create a stake emergency response team. He organized committees to fulfill various assignments—everything from search and rescue to first aid to providing food, water, and clothing.

As the floodwaters receded to a safe level, Church leaders and members mobilized. They accounted for the safety of each member and assessed the damage. One member supplied rubber rafts to bring stranded members to safety. The meetinghouses were opened to provide shelter to all who needed food, clothing, blankets, and a temporary place to stay. Clean water was a critical need, so President Saavedra contacted a local business that owned a fire truck, and they transported clean water to the meetinghouse evacuation centers. Members with professional medical experience responded to those who had been injured.

Once Church members were accounted for, President Saavedra and his team visited other evacuation centers in the city and offered to help. They brought them food and other supplies. Many of the members, though they had lost their own homes, selflessly served others immediately after the storm. As the rains stopped and the ground dried, Mormon Helping Hands volunteers from three stakes went to work distributing supplies as well as helping with cleanup.

Brazil

Within the city of Sete Lagoas, Brazil, is a shelter for women with disabilities whose lives have been affected by drug abuse. Each day they struggled to survive. They had a small oven they used to produce about 30 loaves of bread a day. Though the women had received some aid from a local humanitarian association, they scarcely had enough to feed themselves. When Church leaders from the Sete Lagoas Brazil Stake learned of the needs of these women, they wanted to help.

They spoke with the women about their needs. The women said that if they could produce more bread, they could not only better feed themselves but perhaps could sell a few loaves and earn some desperately needed income.

Church leaders and members worked with the local military police and a local school to improve conditions

for these women. With the help of a Church humanitarian grant and volunteers from the Church and the community, they were able to create a new bakery—one that allowed the women to produce 300 loaves of bread daily.

With the proceeds they have received, the women at the bakery have been able to hire their first employee—one of the women at the shelter.

The Work of Welfare

Like those inspired Church leaders decades ago who saw the great need around them and refused to turn away, Church leaders and members throughout the world today are doing the same in their own areas and in their own way.

When President Uchtdorf spoke to the Church about caring for others, he said: “The Lord’s way is not to sit at the side of the stream and wait for the water to pass before we cross. It is to come together, roll up our sleeves, go to work, and build a bridge or a boat to cross the waters of our challenges.”⁶

Seeking out the poor and ministering to those who suffer is an indispensable part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. It is the work that Jesus Christ Himself did as He ministered to the people of His day. “This work of providing in the Lord’s way is not simply another item in the catalog of programs of the Church,” President Uchtdorf concluded. “It cannot be neglected or set aside. It is central to our doctrine; it is the essence of our religion.”⁷ ■

NOTES

1. Four of these stake presidents—Hugh B. Brown, Harold B. Lee, Henry D. Moyle, and Marion G. Romney—would later be called as Apostles, and all four would later serve in the First Presidency of the Church. Harold B. Lee became the 11th President of the Church.
2. In 1930, Utah had the second-highest unemployment rate in the United States. See Garth L. Mangum and Bruce D. Blumell, *The Mormons’ War on Poverty: A History of LDS Welfare 1830–1990* (1993), 95.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 54.
4. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” 55.
5. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “You Are My Hands,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 68.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” 55.
7. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” 55–56.