

Help in Devastation

Massive response under way to millions in need

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After learning of tsunamis that devastated southern Asia, Latter-day Saints who live not only in affected areas, but also other areas in Asia, responded immediately by giving service.



Photo by Elder Dan Caldwell

Following devastation of Dec. 26 tsunami, literally millions of people are homeless and living in makeshift shelters, such as those near Chennai, India.



Photo courtesy Asia Area public affairs

Members and missionaries in Jakarta package relief supplies for Indonesia's victims in the hardest-hit of the 11 nations affected by the 9.0 earthquake-driven wave.

"It happened almost instantaneously, not just in those countries but in places as far away as Hong Kong," said Bishop Richard C. Edgley, first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, standing in front of a cargo plane that would transport Church aid to the area. "Church members began on their own — without a call from Salt Lake City — putting together clothing groups, doing hygiene kits and assembling what they just knew someone was going to call for."

These goods are now available to help "people of all faiths," said Bishop Edgley, who traveled to southern Asia the first week of January to assess how the Church and its members can continue to help.

"We feel our service was very small indeed compared to the need," said May Sivilai of Bangkok, Thailand, who with her family donated supplies and offered translation and transport to tourists. "Our hearts were broken and humbled to know of the great tragedy many are suffering and must continue to suffer in days ahead."

In Hong Kong, Church members began planning a massive service project to help victims in Sri Lanka Dec. 28, just two days after the disaster devastated the area, said Elder Paul Castleton.

Days later, on Jan. 1, more than 450 Church members and investigators gathered in the Ho Man Tin meetinghouse in Hong Kong to assemble nearly 15,000 hygiene kits.

Missionaries from the Hong Kong Mission met the night before to move 15,000 combs, 20,000 hand towels, 20,000 toothbrushes, 15,000 tubes of toothpaste, 15,000 bars of soap, 20,000 plastic bags, and 20,000 boxes for shipping to the building's fourth floor where the project took place. It took only a few hours for Latter-day Saints to assemble the kits, which were then placed on the first available flight to Sri Lanka.

Members in Indonesia were also quick to respond to help victims in their country, said Elder Thomas Palmer. More than 3,000 personal kits containing hygiene supplies, clothing and food were delivered Jan. 1 to the Command Post at Halim Airport in Jakarta and shipped to Aceh. Others were sent to Nias, one of the islands affected by the earthquake.



Photo by Elder Dan Caldwell

Tsunami victim near Chennai, India, sits amid rubble to open her clothing kit, provided with Church funds and assembled by members of the Chennai 1st and 2nd branches.

Local leaders also sent 50 tarps, rolls of plastic sheets, body bags, large tents, food, water and medical supplies into the affected areas.

"Purchase of supplies, organization and assembly were all done under the direction of local leaders and saints," said Elder Palmer. "A beautiful miracle of service was provided."

President Victor Chin of the Singapore Stake said Church members there collected blankets, clothing and other items to help disaster victims.

In India, members participated in a clothing drive and volunteered with the Indian Red Cross Society to help disaster victims, said Arthur Joseph, first counselor in the Hyderabad India District presidency.

In Thailand, 30 missionaries responded to calls for translators. They met in Bangkok with stranded tourists who were being housed at Thammasat University. More than 50 members of the Bangkok Thailand Stake turned out on short notice to assemble food and hygiene kits. They also joined other religious groups Dec. 30 for a government-requested prayer service.

And the examples on service go on and on.



Photo courtesy Asia Area public affairs

Truck in Indonesia is one of seven with contents soon be put on a plane to tsunami-damaged area.

"The disaster in Southeast Asia has provided many of us living here in the area the opportunity to provide service to others," said Janice S. Tea, who lives in Bangkok, Thailand, and attends the Bangkok Branch. "When I heard that the Thai Red Cross was in need of Rh negative blood, I felt a strong desire to donate. . . . I arrived early in the morning and joined with approximately 75 people who had arrived before me. When I left the building an hour later I was overwhelmed by the response of the Thai people to this disaster.

"The large plaza was filled with hundreds of people waiting their turn to donate blood. I heard that 5,000 people had donated blood the previous day."



Photo by Laura Seitz

Scott Lambros loads pallets with more than 70 tons of medical supplies, hygiene kits, clothing and shoes to be flown to Indonesia.



Photo by Elder Dan Caldwell

Locally purchased items are packaged into personal kits in jute bags for people in India who have lost homes, clothing, hygiene materials. These kits were distributed by members in partnership with the India Red Cross within the week of the tsunami.



Photo by Elder Dan Caldwell

In Chennai, India, Sundarjan, a Church volunteer, stacks jute bags filled with relief supplies for disaster victims.

