

Bishop H. David Burton

Last evening Sister Burton and I were enjoying a little Chinese food. Embedded in my fortune cookie was the message, “The stress you are experiencing will soon be relieved.” True story.

Bearing one another’s burdens

A group of men were talking with the Prophet Joseph Smith one day when news arrived that the house of a poor brother who lived some distance from town was burned down. Everyone expressed sorrow for what had happened. The Prophet listened for a moment, then “put his hand in his pocket, took out five dollars and said, ‘I feel sorry for this brother to the amount of five dollars; how much do you all feel sorry?’”¹ The immediacy of the Prophet’s response is significant. Last year millions of you responded to the sorrow of others with your means, tender hearts, and helping hands. Thank you for your wonderful measure of generosity.

Compassion for others has always been a fundamental characteristic of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The prophet Alma said:

“Ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”²

The Savior asks us to “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”³

I have witnessed firsthand the commitment of Latter-day Saints and others not of our faith who have tender hearts and helping hands, who “bear . . . one another’s burdens.”⁴ I have been deeply sor-

rowed as I have seen massive devastation and visited victims who are without hope.

Relief for tsunami victims

In recent years, Mother Nature has displayed her vengeance and supremacy in unusual and powerful ways. Late December 2004 brought a terrible earthquake off the coast of Indonesia creating a deadly tsunami that killed thousands and shattered the lives of those who remained behind. Under the direction of local priesthood leaders and adult missionary couples, help was mobilized immediately, providing urgent assistance to hospitals, first responders, and communities in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand.

Within a short time, several Church members traveled to one of the hardest-hit areas—Aceh region in northern Sumatra. Sister Bertha Suranto, a district Young Women president from Jakarta, Indonesia, and her associates drove trucks filled with needed items that would save lives and provide comfort to those who had lost so much.

“Every time we came into a village,” Bertha said, “the people surrounded us and offered food to distribute—even when they only had a little rice and some fish they had caught in the ocean. From the mosques, community leaders announced that another donation from the Jesus church had arrived.”

As immediate needs were met, longer-term projects were undertaken. Plans to assist in building well over a thousand permanent houses and restoring hospitals and schools are being implemented. Villagers were assisted in replacing fishing boats and nets. Looms and sewing machines were

distributed to help families return to self-reliance.

Help for earthquake and flood victims

Northern Pakistan and India experienced the strongest earthquake in the region in a hundred years, with thousands of lives lost and many left without homes. Because of the extreme winters in the area, concern was extended not only for the injured but also for those left without shelter.

Four days after the earthquake, the Islamic Relief Agency provided a Boeing 747 cargo plane, which was quickly filled to capacity with blankets, tents, hygiene kits, medical supplies, sleeping bags, coats, and tarps from the bishops' storehouse. Large containers with more supplies and winter tents for over 75,000 people were shipped by air, land, and sea.

When floods hit Central America, meetinghouses were opened to provide temporary shelter for evacuees. In areas where vehicles couldn't go, Church members strapped supplies upon their backs and walked over flooded streams and treacherous terrain to bring relief to those in distress.

Refugee aid and measles vaccinations

Following a period of civil unrest in the Sudan, more than a million people have fled their homes and villages, seeking safety. Many refugees walked hundreds of miles through unfriendly terrain to arrive at refugee camps, seeking to reconnect with their families and regain their health.

Atmit, a vitamin-fortified porridge that has proven effective in saving the lives of starving children and the elderly, was provided. Medical supplies and thousands of hygiene and newborn kits were also supplied.

The Church has joined with other prominent charitable organizations to

help vaccinate millions of African children in a campaign to eradicate measles. Two thousand faithful African Church members volunteered many hours in advertising, gathering children, and providing help as the shots were given.

Relief for areas hit by hurricanes

The 2005 hurricane season in the southern United States and the western Caribbean was the costliest and most devastating on record. Storm after storm lashed at homes and businesses from Honduras to Florida. Thousands of priesthood-directed volunteers were there each time a hurricane struck, providing the necessities to sustain life. Hygiene and cleaning kits, food, water, kitchen sets, bed linen, and other commodities helped clean homes and establish temporary housing.

Brother Michael Kagle took a convoy of trucks loaded with equipment from his own company to Mississippi. Many employees, who are not of our faith, volunteered to go with him every weekend to give assistance in the storm-stricken areas. Walkie-talkies were used for communication along the way. Mike's high priests group leader, while driving along with them in his pickup truck, said he had white knuckles from driving so fast. Trying to slow the convoy down, he got on the walkie-talkie and said, "Gentlemen, do you realize we are going 80 miles per hour?" One of the truck drivers came on and said, "Well, you have to understand that's all these big trucks will do. We can't go any faster."

Gratitude for members' efforts

Hundreds of letters of gratitude have been received. One woman, a nurse from Mississippi, wrote: "I was speechless. Had God answered my prayers so quickly? Tears immediately began to roll down my cheeks as men in hard hats and boots, with chain saws of all shapes and sizes, ap-

peared out of the debris. It was absolutely, unequivocally, one of the most supreme sacrifices that has ever happened to me personally.”

May I express thanks to the nimble fingers that have produced thousands of beautiful blankets and a special thanks to the not-so-nimble fingers of our more senior sisters who have also crafted the much-needed quilts. One 92-year-old great-grandmother has produced several hundred blankets. In her case, both the creator and receiver have been blessed. As her son admired her handiwork, she asked, “Do you think anyone will ever use one of my blankets?” A letter from a young mother in Louisiana answers that question:

“I live in Louisiana, and I go to a local health unit for my children. While I was there, they gave me some outfits, diapers, wipes, and two beautiful baby blankets. One blanket has a yellow backing with footprints and handprints on the front, and the other blanket is tan with zebras. They are beautiful. My four-year-old loves the zebra one, and of course my seven-month-old can’t say much. I just wanted to say thank you to you and your Church members for your generosity. God bless you and your family.”

In response to the recent mud slides in the Philippines, the Saints in the area assembled hygiene kits and food boxes and distributed these with blankets to those in need.

Work and self-reliance taught

Welfare principles of work and self-reliance are maintained and taught as relief is given throughout the world. During 2005 many villages received clean water through new wells. Villagers were taught how to dig wells, install pumps, and make repairs when needed.

Training and equipment provided by local volunteers and ever-so-devoted missionary couples allow families to sup-

plement their diets with homegrown, nutritious food.

Many wheelchairs have been supplied that allow the disabled to become self-reliant. Thousands of medical personnel have been trained to save the lives of newborns. Medical professionals have performed cataract surgery, restoring the vision of many. Tender counseling has been provided worldwide by LDS Family Services.

Church reaches out to all people

Bridges of understanding and respect have been built in many nations as we collaborate with other established and trusted agencies.

Dr. Simbi Mubako, former African ambassador to the United States, has said, “The work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is all the more impressive because it is not limited to just the members of the Church, but it spreads to all human beings of different cultures and different religions because [they] see in every person the image of Jesus Christ.”

Our beloved President Gordon B. Hinckley has been instrumental in the development of this great humanitarian work. “We must reach out to all mankind,” he has said. “They are all sons and daughters of God our Eternal Father, and He will hold us accountable for what we do concerning them. . . . May we bless humanity with an outreach to all, lifting those who are downtrodden and oppressed, feeding and clothing the hungry and the needy, extending love and neighborliness to those about us who may not be part of this Church.”⁵

This modern-day humanitarian effort is a wonderful manifestation of the charity that burns within the souls of those whose hearts are tender and whose hands are ready to help. This selfless service truly demonstrates the pure love of Christ.

The Savior promises great blessings to those who give of themselves: “Give,

and it shall be given unto you. . . . For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”⁶

Church leaders express appreciation

The things I have spoken of today are not even a hundredth part of what is happening in villages and nations throughout the world. Everywhere I travel, expressions of profound gratitude are received. On behalf of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and the Church Welfare Executive Committee, whose assignment it is to guide this work, may I express our deepest appreciation and admiration.

It is impossible for me to find the words to adequately express the sacred feelings burning within my soul. The simple word *thanks* seems almost trite. To each of you whose tender hearts and help-

ing hands have eased the burdens of so many, please accept my heartfelt gratitude. I invoke the Lord’s choicest blessings to be with you and your families as you continue to remember those with heavy hearts and hands that hang down, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Andrew Workman, in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Oct. 15, 1892, 641.
2. Mosiah 18:8–9.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
4. Galatians 6:2.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 4–5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 6.
6. Luke 6:38.

The choir and congregation sang
“Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Sister Julie B. Beck

The priesthood is woven into our lives

In Kirtland, when the remaining priesthood keys were restored, the Lord said, “This is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people.”¹ I am grateful for the outpouring of blessings that has come to each of us through the priesthood of God. By the power of the priesthood, this world and everything in it, including each of us, were created. The priesthood is intricately woven into who we are and have ever been.² As sons and daughters of God, we each have unique responsibilities and roles, and through the blessings of the priesthood, we are all given equal partnership, gifts, and blessings.

Last fall our oldest granddaughter was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church. After she received the Holy Ghost, her newest sister was blessed and given a name. The following month, an-

other new granddaughter was named and blessed. Since then I have reflected often on the privileges those little girls enjoy because the priesthood of God has been restored.

I hope our granddaughters and grandsons grow up knowing that they are not and have never been third-party observers of the priesthood. The blessings of the priesthood, which “are available to men and women alike,”³ are woven in and through and around their lives. Each of them is blessed by sacred ordinances, and each of them can enjoy the blessings of spiritual gifts by virtue of the priesthood.

Priesthood ordinances bless members

All faithful members of the Lord’s Church are equally blessed by priesthood ordinances. The first ordinance⁴ in a child’s life usually takes place when he or she is a baby and is given a name and a blessing.