

## CARING FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY IN THE GROWING INTERNATIONAL CHURCH

BISHOP GÉRALD J. CAUSSÉ

Bishop Gérald J. Caussé, then first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, presented this essay at “The Church and Humanitarian Assistance: In the Lord’s Way,” the International Society’s twenty-fifth annual conference, April 2014, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

For several years now, I have closely followed the work of the LDS International Society. As a General Authority coming from outside the United States, I have a special and passionate interest in the worldwide growth of the Church. My responsibilities in the Europe Area Presidency and now in the Presiding Bishopric have led me to face the modern miracle of this growth and the immense challenges it represents. I thank you for the very useful perspective you bring on this essential aspect of the work of the Church in our day.

I would like to share some thoughts about one of these challenges: providing Church welfare services in the growing international Church. Although my remarks will primarily address helping Church members, it should be noted that the Church also devotes considerable and growing efforts to humanitarian aid across the world, intended to assist those not of our faith who face challenging situations.

I vividly remember my first visit to Welfare Square, which occurred almost six years ago, around the time I was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy. This visit filled me with enthusiasm! It expanded my vision for accomplishing the mandate of the Church to help the poor and needy. Welfare Square is such a unique and extraordinary place. With its bishops' storehouse, bakery, Deseret Industries, cannery, dairy, employment resource center, and gigantic grain silo, this facility supports bishops who assist needy members. The kinds of resources available in this one small area are mostly unknown to members living outside the United States. I began to dream that one day, similar resources would be available to members throughout the world—that welfare operations like those on Welfare Square would cover the entire earth. Today, as a member of the Presiding Bishopric, caring for the poor and needy throughout the world is part of my daily work and responsibility.

In contrast to past ages, the dispensation of the fullness of times in which we live is not limited by geography. It is taking place in a “global” world where countries, cultures, and peoples have become intermingled and interdependent. The worldwide growth of the Church in our lifetime is especially striking. For several years now, we have witnessed an acceleration of the work beyond what most older members of the Church would have imagined fifty years ago. I recently had the privilege of visiting some African nations. I expected to find an emerging and still fragile Church. Instead, I found dozens of well-organized stakes of Zion, leaders with remarkable spiritual maturity, and committed and faithful members. Great nations such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo are experiencing astonishing growth in Church membership and are on the verge of becoming the new Brazil or Mexico of the Church.

The challenge for Church leaders is to establish this growth on a solid and durable foundation—to make sure all new members are welcomed and fellowshipped into the Church and may benefit from all the spiritual and temporal resources that will help them flourish in the gospel. A remarkable fact about our time is that the majority of Church growth is in poor and developing nations. In 1980, about 20 percent of the members of the Church lived in developing nations. Today, that figure is closer to 45 percent and will continue to increase in the future. Many among the

hundreds of thousands of people who enter into the waters of baptism each year live in modest conditions, some even in dire poverty. A great number of them have been unable to receive the education they desire. Not having stable employment, they must plan for their survival on a daily basis. Studies recently showed that 62 percent of Church members living in Ghana or Nigeria are considered to have insufficient income. Even in Brazil, that number is 50 percent. Between 20 and 25 percent of the members living in the Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria, or Samoa do not know how to read a Church magazine.

Unfortunately, often these temporal difficulties are not temporary. Frequently, they are perpetuated from generation to generation because of a chronic lack of infrastructures to support education, transportation, and health. Political disorders and destructive natural calamities also take a toll. In these conditions, the responsibility the Church has to reach out and lift up the poor and needy is more crucial than ever.

This responsibility may seem overwhelming as the Church grows in regions with complex and varied circumstances. The welfare programs in the American West were developed in a context of a homogenous and dense Church membership. They cannot be transported identically to countries where Church members are spread out and supporting infrastructures do not exist or are insufficient. Even so, we still have a mandate to care for the poor and needy wherever they live. As President Thomas S. Monson very rightly said, “We are a global Church. . . . There are those throughout the world who are hungry, . . . destitute.”<sup>1</sup> He also said, “I think we should not put an artificial border around need. The Lord didn’t and we shouldn’t.”<sup>2</sup>

How, then, can the Church fully ensure that its welfare services operate effectively throughout the world? How do we bring relief to the poor and needy wherever the Church is being established? The goal of the Church goes well beyond simply making monetary and physical resources available. It contemplates the spiritual progress and eternal salvation of individuals and families. The immense plague of poverty should not turn us away from the true challenges, which always have a spiritual component. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “The Lord’s way of caring for the needy is different from the world’s way. The Lord has said, ‘It must needs

be done in mine own way' (D&C 104:16). He is not only interested in our immediate needs; He is also concerned about our eternal progression."<sup>3</sup>

The Lord's way relies on strong doctrinal principles whose purpose is the spiritual as well as temporal progression of individuals and families. These principles are eternal and universal. These are the principles we must spread and establish throughout the world. However, the application of the principles—the means, resources, and programs developed by the Church—may need to vary from one country or region to another to adapt to each environment. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf continued: "Every family, every congregation, every area of the world is different. There is no one-size-fits-all answer in Church welfare. . . . You're going to have to chart a course that is consistent with the Lord's doctrine and matches the circumstances of your geographic area."<sup>4</sup>

What are these doctrinal principles upon which the worldwide expansion of Church welfare should be based?

## FIRST PRINCIPLE: CARING FOR OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED IS AN ESSENTIAL REQUISITE OF SALVATION

The primary mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to invite all of Heavenly Father's children to come unto Christ, meaning to become the beneficiaries of His atoning sacrifice. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* describes helping the poor and needy as one of the four divinely appointed responsibilities through which the Church accomplishes this redeeming mission.<sup>5</sup>

Christ Himself taught that our personal efforts to help the poor and needy are an important condition of our eternal salvation.<sup>6</sup> Twice during His earthly ministry, Jesus was questioned in these terms: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>7</sup> The first time, He responded to the doctor of the law by recounting the magnificent parable of the good Samaritan, and He concluded with this famous exhortation: "Go, and do thou likewise."<sup>8</sup> The second time, when the rich young man kneeled at His feet, Jesus answered him: "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."<sup>9</sup> In both cases, Jesus answered His questioners

with loving but firm invitations to consecrate their lives to helping their neighbors in need.

Caring for the poor and needy is not optional, nor is it merely an accessory in the Church of Jesus Christ. This responsibility cannot be added to or taken away according to the whims of the situation or local conditions. It is an indispensable element of the mission of the Church. Church members throughout the world, whether they live in developed or developing countries, all have a need to participate in this great welfare work in ways appropriate to their circumstances.

A good place to start is with ourselves as individuals and as families. Providing for our own temporal needs will help us live the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to blossom in the gospel when our thoughts and efforts are consumed with the worries of providing for the basic needs of our families. Temporal concerns—particularly oppressive ones—can often preoccupy our minds to the point that they take precedence over spiritual goals and affect our ability to reach our potential as sons or daughters of God. Brigham Young offered this sage counsel: “Prayer is good, but when baked potatoes and pudding and milk are needed, prayer will not supply their place on this occasion; give every duty its proper time and place.”<sup>10</sup>

## SECOND PRINCIPLE: WELFARE IS BASED ON THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAWS OF TITHING AND OF THE FAST

President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “I know that the people are in difficult circumstances. I know that many of them are unemployed. I know that many of them work for very meager wages. I know that they live in simple and inadequate little houses; the only thing they can afford. I believe they will not walk out of poverty unless they pay their tithing, small and meager as that might be.”<sup>11</sup>

The observance of the laws of tithing and of the fast brings incomparable blessings, such as “closeness to the Lord, increased spiritual strength, temporal well-being, greater compassion, and a stronger desire to serve.”<sup>12</sup> These spiritual blessings have a profound impact on the lives and the temporal self-reliance of Church members.

President Harold B. Lee reported that on one occasion, someone presented statistics to President Heber J. Grant that showed a sustained growth in the payments of fast offerings to the Church. He responded that his main concern was not about the number of dollars or cents “but that the Church needs blessings, and the only way we can receive the blessings is by keeping the laws on which those blessings are predicated; and the fundamental law pertaining to the welfare of our people was fast offerings.” He added, “If our people observe the fast and consecrate their fast by paying an offering, we don’t need to worry about the amounts of money.”<sup>13</sup>

One reason the laws of tithing and the fast have such an influence in the lives of Church members is that everyone can participate in them, regardless of their income. Tithing is not a specific sum, which some may not be able to afford, but a percentage of our increase. Everyone can fast. No one is too poor to give something as a fast offering. Our challenge is to teach the members of the Church, wherever they are and whatever their condition may be, the importance of observing the laws of tithing, of the fast, and of consecrating their fast by paying their fast offering. Those with the means to do so are invited to make a generous fast offering donation. In helping their neighbors in this way, they can draw upon the blessings of heaven for themselves and their families.

### THIRD PRINCIPLE: THE BENEFICIARIES OF WELFARE PARTICIPATE THROUGH THEIR WORK AND SERVICE

In his well-known speech, King Benjamin addressed the poor among his people in these terms: “Ye who have not and yet have sufficient, . . . I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.”<sup>14</sup> Everyone, even the most destitute among us, should feel responsible to help their neighbor with what they have, even if it is very little. No one is too poor, too vulnerable, or too marginalized to contribute something of worth. As President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “The lesson we learn generation after generation is that rich and poor are *all* under the same sacred obligation to help their neighbor.”<sup>15</sup>

Truth be told, everyone has need of the blessings attached to service, especially those who benefit from Church welfare. By diligently participating in welfare work, they show gratitude and gain a wonderful feeling of worthiness, responsibility, and self-reliance. In service, they find solutions to their own problems. A sanctifying power strengthens their faith and hope. They emerge with more certainty from financial difficulties by giving in addition to receiving.

President Spencer W. Kimball shared a story at the April 1974 general conference. When he served as stake president in Duncan Valley, Arizona, the stake members were struck by a devastating flood. He promptly sent a telegram to Church headquarters in Salt Lake City that simply said: "Please send us \$10,000 by return mail." He never received the awaited sum. Instead, three men appeared at his doorstep. These three men were President Lee, President Romney, and President Moyle. These brethren took him aside and taught him a memorable lesson. Speaking of welfare in the Church, they said: "This isn't a program of 'give me.' This is a program of 'self-help.'" President Kimball recalled the resulting wave of service that followed; men and women came from all over the valley. They rolled up their sleeves, and they went to work helping their neighbors and fellow Saints. Of that time, President Kimball said, "Now it would have been an easy thing, I think, for the Brethren to have sent us that \$10,000, and it wouldn't have been too hard to sit in my office and distribute it; but what a lot of good came to us as we had hundreds of men go to Duncan and build fences and haul the hay and level the ground and do all the things that needed doing. That is self-help."<sup>16</sup>

Today, the principle of serving through self-help is in force more than ever, especially as the Church is being established in nations afflicted by poverty and buffeted by natural or man-made catastrophes. In November 2013, super-typhoon Haiyan, one of the most violent typhoons ever recorded, struck the central region of the Philippines, with winds reaching two hundred miles per hour. The typhoon sowed destruction, leaving entire regions completely devastated. Around six thousand people were killed in the disaster, and eighteen hundred are still reported missing. As soon as news of the catastrophe became known, the Church began to mobilize. Under the direction of the Philippines Area Presidency, and

with the support of the Welfare Services Department at Church headquarters, the resources of the welfare system were pressed into service.

I remember the first coordination meetings held over the telephone with the Area Presidency. It became clear that providing shelters for the affected families would be one of the major challenges of the rebuilding effort. A census of members revealed that at least twenty-nine hundred families no longer had a home. In the Philippines, like in Duncan Valley, Arizona, it would have been easy to provide a one-stop solution. The Church could have purchased and shipped thousands of shelter kits and mobilized hundreds of workers, many of whom would have come from America. But it was not just a matter of efficiency and speed. Our first objective was that the Filipino Saints be given the opportunity to take charge, serve each other, and build their self-reliance. In the end, each family was invited to participate in the reconstruction of their own homes. Additionally, a training program was put in place, leading to the certification of about five thousand Church members in the main skills of construction—carpentry, roofing, electricity, and plumbing. All trainees were equipped with a tool bag provided by the Church, and they went to work. First, they helped build their own houses, and then they were required to help build nine other houses in the neighborhood. Once they had completed their apprenticeship by building ten houses, they were given a certificate that allowed them to work in construction earning money for their families.

As of today, almost two thousand of the planned three thousand houses have been rebuilt. But what fills us with joy is to know that hundreds of heads of families have found employment and are now actively participating in the reconstruction efforts of their own country. We recently received the good news that Catholic Relief Services is planning to hire hundreds of our members thus certified to work on their reconstruction sites.

I believe this is one of the most remarkable successes in the history of Church welfare. In serving each other to rebuild their communities, these valiant Filipino members also increased their self-reliance and that of their families. Even more importantly, they strengthened their faith and personal conversion.



#### FOURTH PRINCIPLE: THE GOAL OF WELFARE IS TO HELP INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES BECOME SELF-RELIANT

As was the case in the Philippines, one of the greatest blessings that can result from Church welfare is to help people become self-reliant. Speaking on the principle of self-reliance, President Brigham Young said: “My experience has taught me, and it has become a principle with me, that it is never any benefit to give, out and out, to man or woman, money, food, clothing, or anything else, if they are able-bodied, and can work and earn what they need, when there is anything on the earth for them to do. This is my principle, and I try to act upon it. To pursue a contrary course would ruin any community in the world and make them idlers.”<sup>17</sup>

An appropriate question to ask of any welfare program is “How much self-reliance is it going to generate?” A good project is one that allows people to increase their personal talents and abilities and to learn through action and experience. A few months ago, my wife and I were assigned to visit the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a fast-growing country with Church membership doubling every five years. We were particularly touched by the beauty of the children and youth in that country. Their eyes sparkled with faith and enthusiasm.

Unfortunately for them, the future is often bleak and uncertain. More than 80 percent of the Congolese citizens do not have stable employment and must survive day-to-day by whatever means they can. For many youth, the prospects of establishing a family and fully living the gospel seem tied to the hope of receiving an education and finding a job.

One of the most memorable moments of our trip was a beautiful ceremony held in Lubumbashi. During the meeting, Elder Dale G. Renlund and I awarded professional diplomas, presented by the LDS Business College, to about fifty young adults of the Church. The faces of those wonderful young people radiated with joy. This wonderful occasion was the result of a training program in construction skills launched by the Church for young people just returning from their missions. The program includes three successive phases. The selected students first spend several months completing a theory course that is taught in a Church meetinghouse by local members and missionary couples. After successfully completing this

first cycle, students move on to the practical phase by working as interns at chapel construction sites. At the end of a successful internship, they receive an official diploma delivered by LDS Business College and are ready to be hired by construction contractors. As of today, two years after the program started, the Church has signed training contracts with several construction businesses in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Two hundred seventy-five young adults have received their diplomas, of which one hundred have now found permanent employment. Twenty-five others are pursuing more training or setting up their own businesses. The promising results of this program remind me of these words from President Henry B. Eyring: “Students who think they have limited possibilities can find hope, . . . they can now dream of what they thought was impossible.”<sup>18</sup>

With this same objective, the Church is currently accelerating its efforts to develop the Perpetual Education Fund. In the twelve years of its existence, this inspired program has provided loans and support to more than fifty-seven thousand young adults seeking professional training and better employment. The Church is currently expanding this initiative by developing a network of self-reliance centers throughout the world. Those centers are providing personal coaching and assistance to those seeking employment. Beyond the financial and professional aspects, the program emphasizes the eternal principles of education, integrity, work, and self-reliance.

#### **FIFTH PRINCIPLE: LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS ACT WITH THEIR KEYS**

The Lord gave to the bishops of the Church the sacred charge of taking care of the poor and needy. From the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “And the bishop . . . should travel round about . . . searching after the poor to administer to their wants by humbling the rich and the proud.”<sup>19</sup> I remember the meeting when the Presiding Bishopric presented to the First Presidency the response plan for Typhoon Haiyan. At the conclusion of the presentation, President Henry B. Eyring commented, “The most important thing is to allow the bishops to exercise their keys!”

I often note this great truth during my travels. Everywhere I have been, I have met impressive bishops full of wisdom and inspiration. No one at

Church headquarters could ever conceive of the local welfare solutions they are implementing. As Elder Robert D. Hales explained, “How does a bishop decide who to help when it appears all are poor? Poverty is relative. The Lord, in his infinite wisdom, calls bishops from the people whom he will serve. The bishop knows the people of his ward and understands local culture and economic conditions. When a bishop is ordained, he receives the mantle which enables him to discern the difference between wants and needs.” Elder Hales added, “The farther away from the local bishop you get, the less able you are to make intelligent judgments, let alone inspired ones, because it is to the bishop the mantle is given.”<sup>20</sup>

As recent natural disasters have shown, such as the tsunami in Japan or the typhoon in the Philippines, it is always more efficient to administer relief at the local level. Local solutions allow for rapid delivery of resources, are less costly, allow the local members to participate, and are better adapted to the local culture to meet real needs.

## CONCLUSION

To the lame man who implored him for alms, Peter responded, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”<sup>21</sup>

In the face of the daunting worldwide challenges of poverty and underdevelopment, how do we give the poor and needy among us the ability to “rise up and walk”? The best and most lasting solution is found in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. This solution knows how to adapt to every horizon, every culture, and every political and economic system. The welfare resources of the Church are limitless because they rest on true and eternal principles, are administered through priesthood keys exercised by tens of thousands of local leaders, and are supported by the consecrated service of millions of Latter-day Saints.

I testify that miracles pertaining to helping those in need are as real today as they were in Peter’s time. They take place every day, whenever the righteous approach the Lord and choose to follow Him.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Until We Meet Again,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 106.
2. Thomas S. Monson, quoted in “‘Helping Hand’ Should Reach Out,” *Church News*, 6 February 2010.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 54.
4. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” 55.
5. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 2.2.
6. See Matthew 25:31–46.
7. Luke 10:25; Mark 10:17.
8. Luke 10:37.
9. Mark 10:21.
10. Brigham Young, in *Deseret News*, 10 December 1856, 320.
11. Gordon B. Hinckley, General Authority Training, 2 October 2001.
12. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 6.1.2.
13. Harold B. Lee, “Listen and Obey” (address given at the Welfare Agricultural meeting, 3 April 1971), Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
14. Mosiah 4:24.
15. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” 54; emphasis in original.
16. Spencer W. Kimball (address given at the Welfare Services meeting, 6 April 1974), Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
17. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (1941), 274.
18. Henry B. Eyring (inaugural address, LDS Business College, 13 October 2009).
19. Doctrine and Covenants 84:112.
20. Robert D. Hales, “Providing in the Lord’s Way” (address given at the regional representatives’ seminar, 5 April 1991), 3–4, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
21. Acts 3:6–8.