

## PRIVATE HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES AND INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH

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Warner P. Woodworth, then professor of organizational behavior at Brigham Young University, presented this essay at “Meet the Mormons: Public Perception and the Global Church,” at the International Society’s nineteenth annual conference, April 2008, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

**M**y focus is on private humanitarian initiatives by Latter-day Saints that enhance the international perceptions of the Church as we reach out to others, alleviate human suffering, and fight poverty. Basically, as I see it, there are three ways Latter-day Saints may provide humanitarian service.

First, there are the traditional Church programs for the Saints, such as paying our tithing, making fast offerings, funding LDS welfare efforts for our members, contributing to the Perpetual Education Fund, and so forth. I’ve always believed that this should be our top priority—those offerings, those tithes that we give to build the kingdom of God on earth.

A second area is outreach and humanitarian assistance provided through other Church programs for our non-Latter-day Saint neighbors. These include the Church’s Humanitarian Fund, Latter-day Saint Charities, and the many efforts of the Church to partner with other institutions such

as Catholic Relief, governments in times of crises, the tsunami disaster in Indonesia, and other NGOs beyond our own, such as the Muslim Relief Society.

The third category, the one I'm going to describe, is that of our engaging in individual acts of global consecration and stewardship. These are what we might refer to as personal initiatives, not the Church's programs as an organization. These derive from the inspiration that comes when we pray about how we might help those around us, or when we see devastations that impact a community or a region or a country or our own neighbors next door—those who suffer and struggle in our own community. I might add that I believe it is critically important that we engage in these kinds of activities locally, not just globally, because those suffering in circumstances around us typically affect our lives. We can affect them much easier, much more rapidly, and with smaller costs than those globally.

These are the kinds of acts that President Gordon B. Hinckley referred to when he emphasized his concern that we not simply depend on large organizations or the institutional services of the Church. Rather, he advocated that we also engage in non institutionalized acts of service to the poor.

I'm going to be talking about the third type, individual acts of international humanitarian service. Let me reference President Cecil Samuelson's speech in January 2008 to the students and faculty of BYU, where he discussed the "unsung heroes" of BYU and mentioned several types of individuals he saw on this campus doing wonderful work to bless the lives of others, yet not being recognized for their efforts. He described these individuals as self-starters, people who do not wait to be commanded, and those who act when they see a problem. They tend to be what President Samuelson described as authentic individuals. They are real. They are true to themselves. They are not motivated by external rewards or pressure or recognition. Rather, their service comes from pure and authentic motives.<sup>1</sup>

I want to build off this theme and talk about a few LDS global humanitarian heroes who I have had the great blessing of working with. It seems best to discuss from one's own experience, one's personal witness about how we can impact the world for good. Telling others' stories may be interesting but not necessarily validating.

These groups include founders and leaders of such organizations as HELP International, Eagle Condor Humanitarian, Ouelessebouyou-Utah Alliance, Enterprise Mentors International, MicroBusiness Mentors, Unitus, Empowering Nations, as well as others. In most cases, these are NGOs that I have cofounded and know well, having served on their boards, and so forth. So I know them best and will be talking from my own experience. We may not be trained PR or communication experts. We do not have professional contacts or staff who focus on getting our story to the public. Rather, we operate in the spirit of the great Mahatma Gandhi, who declared, “My life is my message.”

I will mention various sources about our work that have led to positive views regarding the Church. As I describe some of these individuals, cases, and strategies, I want to acknowledge my colleague, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, who has been a mentor and partner with me in a number of these efforts. He has been an advisor to us in the projects we have launched out of the university, as well as among private groups of citizens and Latter-day Saints off campus. Yunus was the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2006 for the work he has done with microcredit and the formation of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

He once made an interesting comment after seeing my students and me doing humanitarian work among the world’s poor in various parts of the world. Regarding the impact Latter-day Saints were having, he said, “Warner, you Mormons are incredible!” Furthermore, a number of times he has said, “Among your BYU students, it looks to me like you are establishing a kind of Mormon Peace Corps which is having a huge impact around the globe.” That comes from a Nobel Laureate, who also happens to be Muslim! To me this is a great illustration of the way in which our good works can strengthen and improve public perceptions about the Church worldwide, as they see us actually practice our religion, our faith, and our beliefs in our lives.

This impact is growing exponentially. My students, alumni, and I have worked together since the mid-eighties. We now have some forty-three international projects. Twenty-two have become NGOs that now operate in thirty-one nations. In 2007 alone, we trained more than 200,000 microcredit clients. We grew our microentrepreneur base to 3.2 million families,

meaning we now have over three million clients to whom we have given loans with our partners from the funds that we have raised. The fundraising itself is becoming tremendously significant. From just a few hundred thousand dollars ten years ago, last year these projects and NGOs we operate together raised over twenty-eight million dollars. In 2006, it was some ten million dollars, so that amount nearly tripled to twenty-eight million dollars a year later. This suggests there is no limit to what we can do above and beyond the programs of the Church, beyond the funds of the Church or institutions like USAID or the United Nations. There is so much possibility, and so many great LDS individuals out there who want to make a difference, from the most humble of circumstances to the wealthiest and most successful. Among these many cases, one is that of HELP International.

## HELP INTERNATIONAL

This organization emerged after Hurricane Mitch decimated Central America at the end of 1998. There were twenty thousand dead, twenty thousand missing, and a million people homeless. In Honduras, 90 percent of the country's crops were lost, and 70 percent of its infrastructure was damaged. Huge bridges and highways like the Pan-American Highway were destroyed. The experts declared that the country of Honduras was set back fifty years.

The question that occurred to me as I saw that devastation on the nightly news day after day was this: Can business schools address a socio-economic disaster like this? Do we have anything to offer? Are we even relevant to the problems of global suffering?

I started to think about my challenge as a professor to find answers, to determine whether or not we could design some innovative strategies that would transform the Marriott School into a pro-poor institution.

I began to recruit a few students, and we launched an elective course on social entrepreneurship. We decided to prepare a game plan to go to Honduras at the end of the semester because it was the hardest hit country. I call this type of education we developed "action-based learning." It requires students and faculty to collaborate as colleagues in designing new social innovations, which we carry out during and following that semester.

We called the project HELP for Help ELIminate Poverty. The results of our venture were fairly incredible. We ended up with forty-six volunteers in Honduras that summer. They came from BYU, the University of Utah, and Stanford. We raised \$116,000. With those monies, we started forty-seven communal banks consisting of groups of women. We gathered them together and trained them in how to become self-reliant, how to be social entrepreneurs, and how to be microentrepreneurs. Many of them had lost husbands and jobs. Roughly speaking, we helped to create about eight hundred new microenterprises. Those eight hundred jobs benefited an average of five people per family. This means that about four thousand family members were blessed through the loans we provided as we started these communal banks.

In addition to microcredit, our volunteers throughout the summer of 1999 provided about twenty thousand hours of on-the-ground community service. They delivered babies out in rural medical facilities. They shoveled mud out of schools, rebuilt the schools, plastered the walls, disinfected the damaged structures, and sanded and painted the walls. Others rebuilt houses or mentored street children. Still others started small gardens and trained families on how to become square-foot garden experts so they could grow enough produce to feed themselves nutritious vegetables throughout the year. Some BYU volunteers taught in schools after we got them reopened. Others provided computer training skills. We took supplies from LDS members in six states, who gave materials for newborn kits for babies and their mothers, hygiene kits for refugee families who had lost everything, school kit supplies, and basic materials for children's education. These were the days before the Church developed its big program to provide hygiene or humanitarian kits in formal ways. Each volunteer took supplies in his or her second suitcase. The kits were assembled in-country. We bought extra supplies with cash we took to the country, which also benefited the Honduran economy.

As time has progressed, this little organization that we started out as HELP Honduras has become HELP International. It has expanded since 1999 to include Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, Brazil, Uganda, and many others. We have had over seven hundred students from BYU and other universities engage in the work of HELP International:

serving the poor, training microentrepreneurs, aiding farmers, volunteering in orphanages, doing health care in rural and medical clinics, teaching square-foot gardening, building homes, and so forth. These outreach efforts have become a major strategy for doing good and for lifting the have-nots. HELP, as an LDS-related and BYU-initiated program, has served to build the reputation of the Church through individual acts of consecration.

Public perceptions of the Church have been strengthened by the work of HELP International. In Honduras, the UN, the Red Cross, and US government officials were all amazed by the initiative of these young students from BYU, or “The Mormon school,” as they called it. Among the seven countries listed that HELP has labored in, there have been probably fifty news articles in the press, as well as at home in the United States. After the devastating destruction of two huge earthquakes in El Salvador, HELP began to work there with Habitat for Humanity. One of those leaders told me in Spanish something to the effect of, “Dr. Woodworth, I have never seen such dedicated volunteers as these HELP students from BYU. What is it about Mormonism that produces such hardworking, highly committed individuals?” The founder of FINCA International, our microfinance partner in Honduras, told me, “Your church must be amazing to give its young adults such high motivation to help the poor.” In 2003, our volunteers and I were invited to a banquet with prominent government officials of El Salvador, along with the business community, the arts, and other citizens of the so-called upper class. The US ambassador said after meeting our group and hearing why we were present: “You know, I have the title of US ambassador to this country, but you young college students from BYU, you are the real ambassadors of America. It’s wonderful, even amazing, to see the good you are doing, to see how you are building a positive perception of our country among these people.” Similar recognition and appreciation about HELP was given by Guatemalan business and government leaders regarding the good we were doing over the years that followed in that country as well.

## EAGLE CONDOR HUMANITARIAN

Another organization is called Eagle Condor Humanitarian (ECH). The mission of ECH is to enrich family life, to empower people, and to build self-reliance. Its purposes include providing employment opportunities, finding ways of raising the standard of living, offering humanitarian charity, and building an ongoing, perpetuating organization that would improve the lives of the meek and the humble in Peru. Eagle Condor organizes expeditions of LDS North Americans as humanitarian tour groups. Each person pays their own way, taking donated goods such as tools, books, clothing, medicine, and computers to spend ten to fourteen days laboring among the poor. They use their skills in building houses and schools, offering teaching, doing microenterprise training, and stocking libraries. In some cases, US specialists with professional skills such as medical or dental services provide their expertise in free clinics. This organization is an impressive example of Latter-day Saints reaching out to others and building them up. They built a Moroni Community Center in the highest village of the Peruvian Andes, Patacancha, where they taught the descendants of ancient Nephites and Lamanites who their ancestors were, and from where the name “Moroni” is derived.

The support the Church has enjoyed from these kinds of efforts includes the public perceptions, recognition, and gratitude expressed by the mayor of Chiclayo, a large Peruvian city with one million inhabitants. Also, in the Sacred Valley of the Inca near Cusco, local government leaders of small towns and villages have been greatly impressed by the work of Eagle Condor as they saw this LDS-connected NGO providing education to poor children, healthcare to families, literacy training to parents, and US medical equipment to the area. The police chief and the education minister of the state expressed gratitude to the LDS people of Utah for the work of ECH. It has opened doors to missionary work and raised the reputation of the Church as a caring organization. There have been news stories in papers and magazines, both in Peru and the United States, about the *Mormones*, as we are called in Spanish.

## OUELESSEBOUGOU-UTAH ALLIANCE

Another case is Ouelessebouougou-Utah Alliance (OUA). It may be one of the best-known examples of Latter-day Saints engaging in private initiatives, pursuing their own ways to impact the world for good. OUA is a Utah-based nonprofit that works cooperatively with villagers in southern Mali. It was founded in 1985 by a group of Christian believers, political leaders, local LDS Church leaders in Salt Lake City, housewives, students, and humanitarians concerned about the devastating drought in North Africa that was occurring during the 1980s. Ouelessebouougou is a region of some seventy-two villages and about thirty-five thousand people.

Some years ago, I was asked by the OUA to launch a microenterprise economic development strategy. We created what we called a *caisse villageois*, or village bank, and began giving tiny loans out to the poorest of the poor in that region. Ouelessebouougou was a place where government officials and the Peace Corps had told us that people were too poor for microcredit. Allegedly, they did not even possess money because it was a barter economy. They could never start a business. They could never receive a loan or pay it back. But we have been working there for over a decade now. The village became so successful so quickly that even the president of Mali, Alpha Konare, joined the bank and put in one hundred dollars of his own money to invest in providing loans to the villagers of OUA. With a convoy of SUVs, troops, and bodyguards, he attended our microcredit start-up event and delivered a great speech about how the white Mormons from far away in the United States had committed to help his country because of our love for his people.

For us as Latter-day Saints to go to that Islamic country and spend our own time and money during the vacation period of the Christmas season or New Year's or the week of Thanksgiving was always a spiritual experience. Some gave medical service as volunteers while others were professionals who provided dental care. Utah midwives trained pregnant women while public schoolteachers traveled at their own expense to teach literacy.

Elder Marion D. Hanks of the Seventy went to Mali on an expedition with several Utah business leaders and visited with the president of Mali. The president said, "You Mormon people of Utah are like a rope coming



down from heaven to help my country, to help my people climb out of poverty.” Since then, OUA has thrived tremendously, and it has been accompanied by positive coverage about the Church. Its reputation has been enhanced by television stories and print media for over two decades.

#### ENTERPRISE MENTORS INTERNATIONAL

Enterprise Mentors International is a microcredit NGO that was launched by Latter-day Saints in 1990. I had the privilege of being a cofounder as we started it in the Philippines. A small group of students and I spent most of the summer of 1989 in metro Manila assessing the temporal challenges and difficulties of Church members. We have been working in the Philippines since we incorporated that organization in 1990—eighteen years of providing microenterprise, providing training, offering development services, providing free consulting, and having an impact in the lives of some 336,000 people. From the Philippines, we then spread it to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Peru. Today, we have twenty offices in these countries, providing training in microenterprise development and consulting services and loans. So far we have channeled a total of twenty-three million dollars to the poor. Annually, EMI and its partners help tens of thousands of families move toward self-reliance with training, loans, and business services.

The perception of this type of work by EMI has helped the Church’s reputation and recognition both in the Philippines as well as in Latin America. We were honored by the president of the Philippines, Fidel Ramos, some years back. I have met with several government ministers who said they had never seen an NGO in the Philippines doing the kind of work this group of Mormons was doing. The same expressions were shared by various ministries in Guatemala, where I met with bankers and government officials. In San Salvador and in the country of El Salvador and in Mexico, we have had considerable news coverage in US national magazines and newspapers as well as stories about this group of Mormons. We have had wonderful opportunities to collaborate with business leaders in some of these countries who have joined our boards and been so impressed with the work of Latter-day Saints. The same is true of their national universities where a number of studies have been done on the

work of the Enterprise Mentors model for economic development. The results have been quite outstanding.

## UNITUS

An impressive case that has resulted in perhaps more PR for the Church than any other is called Unitus, meaning “unite us.” This organization was established by a group of LDS academics, students, and entrepreneurs from coast to coast who had read my book *Working Toward Zion*, coauthored with Jim Lucas, and began to talk to me by phone and by email. Soon they started flying to Utah to meet and discuss how they could make a difference. Ultimately, after a year of debate, strategy-formation, and planning, we incorporated as an NGO.

We decided that rather than just being another NGO, we would do something unique—help small microfinance organizations grow solidly and rapidly. The work of Unitus as an accelerator has had a huge impact. As the first chairman of the board, I proposed we begin in Mexico, so we set up a new organization in Tula called ProMujer. Since then, we have established 489 Mexican communal banks and dispersed 8 million dollars. From there we went to India and found a wonderful little NGO called SKS whose potential for growth looked promising. We provided capital, training, expertise, and new technologies to the NGO, and it has now grown to be a huge success. Later, we expanded to Kenya, where we now have 140,000 borrowers; Argentina, where we have 20,000 or so; Indonesia; and other parts of the globe.

Unitus has now become a global MFI. The perceptions have been logged by the media in *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Business Week*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Financial Times* of London about this group of Mormons and their friends. Accumulating capital and making major loans to small NGOs so they grow rapidly has been a marvelous story and great reflection on the Church. Some thirty news articles in seven different countries have appeared about this group of Mormons who are movers and shakers, fighting poverty around the globe.

At Unitus we have received three awards from *Fast Company* magazine, what is called an annual social capital award. We have also been honored by President Bill Clinton’s Clinton Global Initiative. Our partners

have enjoyed a great deal of international recognition and received awards for management excellence. Some of our staff and board members have been honored in their own right by everybody from Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, to Microsoft's Bill Gates. Even former President Jimmy Carter recognized us several years ago. I was impressed to see this great, even extraordinary, humanitarian express interest in what we were doing and explore potential collaboration with his Carter Center.

### MISCELLANEOUS LDS OUTREACH

So we have this expanding reputation as Latter-day Saints, all of which reflects on and strengthens positive perceptions of the Church. We are building these projects both locally in Utah as well as in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Mormons are changing the world one family at a time, building self-reliance, building sustainability, setting up education systems, establishing economic and microenterprise programs, launching agricultural initiatives, and specifying in some cases how Church donations should be used for humanitarian services, for Latter-day Saint Charities, or for a particular global crisis such as the devastating earthquake in Pakistan in 2006 or the floods from the cyclone in Myanmar. These LDS individuals want to do more than just write checks to the Church. They want to act, to be involved personally. They are designing innovative projects. They are seeking to build awareness. They are creating new projects, new NGOs, and they are partnering with other NGOs around the globe. What follows are several brief synopses.

Cecile Pelous of France used to work in the Paris fashion industry, designing dresses for models from around the world—upscale fashionistas. But she began to feel her life as a Latter-day Saint and as a stake Relief Society president in Paris had a more eternal purpose and a more spiritual reason to exist. Out of that, she organized a little orphanage she called First Hope, and for twelve years she has been building that orphanage, expanding its services, and increasing the number of orphans served in Nepal. Cecile has enjoyed wonderful press attention and media recognition for the Church, not only in the United States but in Europe as well as Asia, appearing on multiple television shows, newscasts, documentaries, and so on. Cecile has essentially become recognized as a kind of Mormon

Mother Teresa, serving one of the world's most impoverished countries. She helps some of the world's poorest children have access to education, medicine, health care, security, and safety in an environment of a wonderful orphanage, preparing those children so when they turn eighteen and leave, they will maintain themselves.

Care for Life (CFL) is a small nonprofit organization laboring in southern Africa that was established in 1999. I have been so impressed with the family preservation program in Mozambique that they established, an approach that partners with the poor themselves. One of my former students from Brazil, Joao Bueno, designed the strategy and has been running it since 2005. Most of its members, donors, and board are from the Phoenix area. They are Latter-day Saints who, in addition to many commitments in their families, careers, and Church callings, have sought to reach out. They have raised millions of dollars for the poor country of Mozambique, a nation that emerged in 1992 from fifteen years of civil war.

In the process, CFL has helped them develop an impressive program to strengthen the families. They work with eight villages and about ten thousand people in rural Mozambique to build better lives. The NGO operates an intensive program to improve their lives by setting family goals to build stronger, better constructed homes, obtain loans with which to start small businesses, attend adult literacy classes to learn how to read and write, drink only clean water to avoid diarrhea, send their children to school instead of doing field work, and build and use family latrines for better health.

Care for Life has enjoyed tremendous recognition from the government of Mozambique, where both national and regional government officials have toured these villages and been so impressed to see what these Mormons are doing. A year ago they received a \$750,000 grant to provide AIDS training and other health training services, not only to CFL villages but also throughout the nation. The government concluded this was the best program they had seen in all of Africa to help prevent the spread of AIDS. CFL has had numerous articles in the press in Africa, Arizona, and Utah. Most impressively, a year ago, there was a huge article in the *Christian Science Monitor* that went around the world. It generated enormous interest in the fact that this group of Latter-day Saints from Arizona would

go to the far corners of the world to help one of the poorest countries in Africa.

There are many other LDS-related humanitarian organizations that we do not have time to cover. But I will mention them because, collectively, they have significantly improved the Church's reputation and image in a number of countries: Cause for Hope in Honduras that has established several small factories and a school to train young people; World Joy and Families for Children in Ghana; Ascend Alliance that is working in Latin America and Africa; Nova Geracao in southern Brazil, which helps teenage girls; Human Security in Thailand that focuses on peace-building, working with leading Buddhist monks in that country; Academy for Creating Enterprise that trains Filipino returned missionaries in business skills; Reach the Children, founded by New York LDS members that serves the poor in seven countries, mostly in Africa; Families Helping Families serving poor Church members in Honduras and Mexico; Choice Humanitarian, one of the oldest Mormon-related NGOs in Salt Lake City, which has been working for the past twenty years in a dozen countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; Yehu Microfinance in Kenya; and Rising Star Outreach, working with lepers in India. A number of these private LDS initiatives have led to recognition by senators in Brazil; John Kufuor, who is the president of Ghana; the vice president of El Salvador; dozens of village elders and chiefs in rural regions; local mayors; and other government officials in urban communities. My many student outreach efforts over the years have led to recognition of the Church by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and other world leaders. The collective impact of these programs on the Church's reputation is truly incalculable.

## EMPOWERING NATIONS

I want to end this session with one last case, a little more in-depth exploration of what we call Wave of Hope, or Empowering Nations. It was launched in 2005, which was the two hundredth anniversary of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth. As that year began, many efforts were made by Latter-day Saints and the Church as a whole to honor the Prophet Joseph through conferences, speeches, symposia, musicals, and dramatic

productions. A group of students and I decided that maybe one of the best ways we could really honor the Prophet Joseph was to practice his teaching in a pioneering way. The genesis of this began with the terrible devastation on 26 December 2004, as an underground earthquake launched the Asian tsunami, hitting eleven countries and devastating hundreds of thousands of people.

My first class for the new semester, January 2005, was a course called Social Entrepreneurship. I asked students if what we do at the Marriott School was relevant to global suffering. Did anything we teach at BYU have any relevance to major crises like this in the world? I watched the tragic story on TV each night: twenty thousand dead; the next night, forty thousand dead. The next day, one hundred thousand were dead. Men, women, and children of whole villages were destroyed. Millions became homeless. Hundreds of thousands more were missing. We were seeing the horrific consequences of that tsunami's destruction twenty-four hours a day. I proposed to the class that in addition to our readings, papers, and regular assignments, we launch a project together for tsunami victims. We could not do everything, but we could at least do something.

So we organized teams of students. Team members proposed that we should go to Thailand where about ten thousand had died. Students came up with the idea to call our project Wave of Hope, a direct contrast to Thailand's deadly experience with a wave of destruction.

What were the outcomes? We recruited a hundred Latter-day Saint volunteers from coast-to-coast, we raised some two hundred thousand dollars, and teams spent a month or longer laboring in the coastal area of Khao Lak. We had teams of hardworking young people from BYU helping to build houses in Thap Twan, Bang Sak, and Laem Pom villages. By the end of the summer, we had helped to build 120 new homes. We painted those homes. We plastered those homes. We cemented. We shoveled out the dirt so we could lay pipes and put in sewer and plumbing systems.

Together with other volunteers, we established a furniture-making wood shop with power tools. We taught villagers how to build their own furniture for the new houses we were constructing. We designed tables, chairs, benches, and shelves for these homes. They were simple pine wood furniture that the tsunami survivors, mostly women, learned how to make.

They not only furnished their homes. They gained dignity, rather than dependency. They also developed skills that would enable them to move toward self-sufficiency.

We also engaged in Khao Lak education programs. We refurbished schools and reopened them. Many volunteers from Wave of Hope, including returned missionaries who spoke Thai, taught in those schools. They taught English, computer skills, simple business principles, and world history.

The perceptions of the Church in Thailand and elsewhere were greatly enhanced through Wave of Hope. We had hundreds of volunteers from throughout the world express how impressed they were with this BYU group. One told me: “So many outsiders have come here from Europe and the US to help. But much of their time is spent snorkeling in the beautiful islands away from the tsunami areas, laying on the beach, drinking, having sex, and partying. We have never seen young people like your Mormons who have such a great work ethic. They seldom even rest, to say nothing of partying.”

In July 2005, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice went to see Thailand’s recovery. She toured one of the schools we worked to clean up and reopen. Upon seeing our BYU volunteers, she remarked that she was so impressed with these young BYU Mormons who were dedicating their summer to serve the tsunami victims of Asia. As founder of Wave of Hope, I and several other LDS volunteers were invited to a luncheon with General Lertrat Ratanavanich, the nation’s no. 3 military official who headed up Thailand’s entire rebuilding efforts. He told me he had two degrees from US universities, but in all his college years in America, he had never seen students like ours—laboring nonstop to give relief and support to his people. He expressed deep appreciation for our work and admiration for our Church, a religion he had never heard of previously. When I told him we had missionaries in Bangkok, he and local community leaders assured me that whenever the Mormons would want to begin working along the western coast of Thailand where we were, they would gratefully open the way.

Upon completing that first successful year, Wave of Hope formally became part of Empowering Nations, an NGO growing out of my course

two years earlier. The next summer, we mobilized forty-six volunteers to work in poor communities in northern Ghana, and we have also sent teams back to Thailand, as well as to Brazil, Panama, Kenya, Peru, and Paraguay.

## CONCLUSION

From all the above private initiatives begun by Latter-day Saints as individual acts of stewardship and consecration, much good has accrued to the international reputation of the Church. It will open doors in the future and speed up the expansion of the Lord's kingdom around the globe. Equally important, such dedicated labor among the world's poor facilitates our personal spiritual growth as we seek to, indeed, become the Saints of God on earth. In the words of Joseph Smith, "A man filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race."<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

1. Cecil O. Samuelson, "BYU's Unsung Heroes," in *Brigham Young University 2007–2008 Speeches* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2008), 1–6.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 423–34.