

God's Kingdom Rules!  
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## CHAPTER 20

# The Ministry of Relief

## FOCUS OF CHAPTER

### Christian love in action during times of disaster

1, 2. (a) What hardship did Christians in Judea face? (b) What act of love did the Judean Christians experience?

IT IS about 46 C.E., and Judea is in the grip of famine. The Jewish disciples of Christ living there lack the means to pay the sky-high prices demanded for the meager supply of grain available. They are hungry, staring starvation in the face. However, they are about to experience the protection of Jehovah's hand in a way that no other disciples of Christ have ever felt it before. What is about to happen?

<sup>2</sup> Moved by the suffering of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, Jewish and Gentile Christians in Antioch, Syria, collect funds for their fellow believers. Then they select two responsible brothers in their midst, Barnabas and Saul, to deliver the relief aid to the congregation elders in Jerusalem. **(Read Acts 11:27-30; 12:25.)** Imagine how touched the needy brothers in Judea must have been by this act of love on the part of their brothers in Antioch!

3. (a) How do God's people in modern times still follow the pattern set by early Christians in Antioch? Give an example. (See also the box "Our First Large-Scale Relief Effort in Modern Times.") (b) What questions will we consider in this chapter?

<sup>3</sup> That event, back in the first century C.E., is the first recorded instance of Christians living in one part of the world sending relief aid to Christians living in another part. Today, we follow the pattern set by our brothers in Antioch. When we learn that fellow believers in another area experience a disaster or a trial, we come to their aid.\* To appreciate how our relief efforts relate to our other ministerial activities, let us consider three questions about the ministry of relief: Why do we view relief work as a ministry? What are the objectives of our relief work? How do we benefit from the ministry of relief?

## Why Relief Work Is "Sacred Service"

4. What did Paul tell the Corinthians about the Christian ministry?

<sup>4</sup> In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul explained that Christians have a twofold ministry. Although Paul's letter was directed to anointed Christians, today

his words apply to Christ's "other sheep" as well. (John 10:16) One part of our ministry is "the ministry of the reconciliation," that is, our preaching and teaching work. (2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Tim. 2:3-6) The other part involves a ministry that we perform in behalf of fellow believers. Specifically, Paul referred to a "relief ministry." (2 Cor. 8:4) As to the expressions "ministry of the reconciliation" and "relief ministry," in both instances the word "ministry" is a translation of a form of the Greek word *di-a-ko-ni'a*. Why is that significant?

5. Why is it significant that Paul called relief work a ministry?

<sup>5</sup> By using the same Greek word for both activities, Paul grouped relief work with other forms of ministry that were carried out in the Christian congregation. He had stated earlier: "There are different ministries, and yet there is the *same* Lord; and there are different activities, . . . But [they] are performed by the very *same* spirit." (1 Cor. 12:4-6, 11) In fact, Paul linked the various congregational ministries with "sacred service."\* (Rom. 12:1, 6-8) No wonder he felt that it was appropriate to give part of his time "to minister to the holy ones"—Rom. 15:25, 26.

6. (a) As Paul explained, why is relief work part of our worship? (b) Describe how our relief work is carried out globally today. (See the box "When Disaster Strikes!")

<sup>6</sup> Paul helped the Corinthians to see why relief work was part of their ministry and worship to Jehovah. Note his reasoning: Christians who provide relief do so because they are "submissive to the good news about the Christ." (2 Cor. 9:13) Hence, moved by their desire to put Christ's teachings into practice, Christians help fellow believers. The kind acts that they perform in behalf of their brothers, stated Paul, are nothing less than expressions of "the surpassing undeserved kindness of God." (2 Cor. 9:14; 1 Pet. 4:10) Thus, in commenting on serving our brothers in need, which includes relief work, *The Watchtower* of December 1, 1975, rightly stated: "We should never doubt that Jehovah God and his Son Jesus Christ give real importance to this kind of service." Yes, relief work is a valuable form of sacred service.—Rom. 12:1, 7; 2 Cor. 8:7; Heb. 13:16.

## Relief Work With Clear Objectives

7, 8. What is the first objective of our relief ministry? Explain.

<sup>7</sup> What are the objectives of our relief ministry? Paul addressed that question in his second letter to the Corinthians. (**Read 2 Corinthians 9:11-15.**) In these verses, Paul highlights three main objectives, or goals, that we attain by sharing in "the ministry of this public service," that is, relief work. Let us consider them one at a time.

<sup>8</sup> **First, our relief ministry brings glory to Jehovah.** Note how often in the five verses cited above Paul directs his brothers' attention to Jehovah God. The apostle reminds them of "an expression of thanks to God" and of "many expressions of thanks to God." (Verses 11, 12) He mentions how relief efforts cause Christians to "glorify God" and to praise "the surpassing undeserved kindness of God." (Verses 13, 14) And Paul concludes his consideration about the relief ministry by declaring: "Thanks

be to God.”—Verse 15; 1 Pet. 4:11.

9. What change in thinking may relief work cause? Give an example.

<sup>9</sup> Like Paul, God’s servants today view relief efforts as opportunities to bring glory to Jehovah and to adorn his teachings. (1 Cor. 10:31; Titus 2:10) In fact, relief work often plays a considerable part in removing negative notions that some people have about Jehovah and his Witnesses. To illustrate: A woman living in an area struck by a hurricane had a sign on her door that read: “Jehovah’s Witnesses—Do Not Call.” Then one day she saw relief workers restoring a damaged house across the street from her home. For days, she observed the friendly workers, and then she went over to find out who they were. On learning that the volunteers were Jehovah’s Witnesses, she was impressed and said, “I have misjudged you people.” The result? She took down the sign on her door.

10, 11. (a) What examples show that we are reaching the second objective of our relief work? (b) What publication helps relief workers? (See the box “An Added Tool for Relief Workers.”)

<sup>10</sup> **Second, we “provide well for the needs” of fellow believers.** (2 Cor. 9:12a) We are eager to meet the immediate needs and to help alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Why? Because the members of the Christian congregation form “one body,” and “if one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it.” (1 Cor. 12:20, 26) Hence, brotherly affection and compassion move numerous brothers and sisters today to drop what they are doing at a moment’s notice, gather their tools, and head for disaster-stricken areas to bring relief to fellow believers. (Jas. 2:15, 16) For instance, after a tsunami struck Japan in 2011, the United States branch office sent a letter to Regional Building Committees in the United States, asking if “a few qualified brothers” would be available to help with rebuilding Kingdom Halls there. What was the response? Within weeks, nearly 600 volunteers applied to help—and agreed to fly to Japan at their own expense! “We have been overwhelmed with the response,” noted the United States branch office. When a brother in Japan asked a relief worker from abroad why he had come to help, he was told: “Our brothers in Japan are part of ‘our body.’ We feel their pain and suffering.” Moved by self-sacrificing love, relief workers have at times even risked their lives to help fellow believers.\*—1 John 3:16.



Switzerland, 1946

## OUR FIRST LARGE-SCALE RELIEF EFFORT IN MODERN TIMES

IN September 1945, just a few months after World War II ended in Europe, Brother Knorr announced the start of a large-scale campaign to send “material aid to the needy brethren of central Europe.”

Within weeks after that announcement, Witnesses in Canada, the United States, and other lands began sorting and packing clothing and collecting food. From January 1946 onward, goods were sent to fellow believers in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, and Romania.

This aid program was not a onetime effort. Relief shipments continued for two and a half years! During that time some 85,000 brothers and sisters sent more than 700,000 pounds (about 300,000 kg) of food, over 1,000,000 pounds (about 450,000 kg) of clothing, and more than 124,000 pairs of shoes to their brothers and sisters in war-ravaged lands. By August 1948, this huge relief effort was concluded. “This has certainly been an expression of love one toward another,” noted *The Watchtower* in 1949. “We know all the brethren did this as an honor to the Lord, having in mind that this material assistance would help some to carry on their true worship; and so they esteemed it a great privilege to be able to serve their brethren in this manner.” This relief effort brought praise to Jehovah, provided relief to fellow believers, and strengthened the bond of unity among the brothers worldwide.

<sup>11</sup> Non-Witnesses also express appreciation for our relief work. For instance, after a disaster struck the state of Arkansas, U.S.A., in 2013, a newspaper reported on the rapid response of Witness volunteers, stating: “The organizational structure of the Jehovah’s Witnesses has developed the disaster response volunteer service to a fine

art.” Indeed, as the apostle Paul noted, we “provide *well*” for our brothers in need.

12-14. (a) Why is reaching the third objective of our relief work so important? (b) What expressions highlight the importance of continuing with spiritual activities?

**12 Third, we help afflicted ones get back into their spiritual routine.** Why is this important? Paul states that those receiving relief aid will be moved to make “many expressions of thanks to God.” (2 Cor. 9:12b) What better way could there be for afflicted ones to express their thanks to Jehovah than by getting back to their spiritual routine as quickly as possible? (Phil. 1:10) *The Watchtower* stated in 1945: “Paul approved . . . the collecting of the contributions because it was helping . . . needy Christian brethren to enjoy some material relief and to thus be able to engage more freely and energetically in Jehovah’s witness-work.” Our objective is the same today. By getting back in the preaching work, our brothers strengthen not only their distressed neighbors but also themselves.—**Read 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.**

**13** Consider some comments from those who were recipients of much-needed relief aid, resumed sharing in the ministry, and were strengthened by doing so. “It was a blessing for our family to go in field service,” noted a brother. “It gave us a brief respite from anxiety over our own affairs as we tried to comfort others.” A sister said: “Focusing on spiritual activity took my mind off the destruction around me. It gave me a sense of security.” Another sister observed: “While many things were beyond our control, the ministry provided direction for my family. Talking with others about our hope of the new world strengthened our confidence that all things will be made new.”

**14** Attending meetings is another spiritual activity that our afflicted fellow believers need to resume as quickly as possible. Consider what happened to Kiyoko, a sister then in her late 50’s. After she lost everything in a tsunami except the clothes and sandals she was wearing, she was at a loss as to how she would survive. Then an elder told her that they would have their regular Christian meeting in his car. Says Kiyoko: “An elder and his wife and another sister and I sat in the car. The meeting was simple but, like a miracle, the memory of the tsunami just slipped away from me. I felt peace of mind. That meeting showed me the power of Christian association.” Commenting on the meetings she attended after a disaster occurred, another sister stated: “They were my lifeline!”—Rom. 1:11, 12; 12:12.

## The Ministry of Relief Brings Lasting Benefits

15, 16. (a) What benefit would Christians in Corinth and elsewhere receive from supporting relief efforts? (b) How do we similarly benefit from relief work today?

**15** In his consideration of the ministry of relief, Paul also explained to the Corinthians the benefits that they and other Christians would receive from sharing in this work. He stated: “With *supplication for you*, they [the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who received the assistance] express *affection for you* because of the surpassing undeserved kindness of God upon you.” (2 Cor. 9:14) Yes, the generosity of the

Corinthians would move the Jewish Christians to pray in behalf of their brothers in Corinth, including Gentiles, and would deepen their affection for them.

<sup>16</sup> Applying Paul’s words about the benefits of relief work to our day, *The Watchtower* of December 1, 1945, stated: “When one section of God’s consecrated people contributes to the needs of another group of them, think of the unifying effect it has!” That is exactly what relief workers today experience. “Doing relief work made me feel closer to my brothers than ever before,” says an elder who helped in flood relief. One grateful sister who received relief aid put it this way, “Our brotherhood is the closest thing we have to Paradise on earth.”—**Read Proverbs 17:17.**

17. (a) How do the words found at Isaiah 41:13 apply to relief work? (b) Mention some examples of how relief work honors Jehovah and strengthens our bond of union. (See also the box “Volunteers Around the World Bring Relief.”)

<sup>17</sup> When relief workers arrive at the scene of a disaster, our afflicted brothers experience in a special way the truth of God’s promise: “I, Jehovah your God, am grasping your right hand, the One saying to you, ‘Do not be afraid. I will help you.’” (Isa. 41:13) After surviving a disaster, a sister said: “I felt hopeless seeing the damage, but Jehovah extended his hand. The help I received from the brothers is indescribable.” After a disaster devastated their area, two elders wrote in behalf of the congregations where they serve: “The earthquake caused great pain, but we experienced the help that Jehovah provides through our brothers. We had read about relief work, but now we saw it carried out in front of our eyes.”



## IT SHAPED THE COURSE OF HIS LIFE

WHAT impact may taking part in relief work have on young ones? Consider what happened to **Peter Johnson**, who did so for the first time at age 18. He recalls: “Seeing the gratefulness of the brothers and feeling the joy that comes from giving touched me deeply. It reinforced my desire to use my life to serve Jehovah to the fullest extent.” Thereafter, Peter started pioneering. He also worked at Bethel and later began serving as a member of a Regional Building Committee. “Doing relief work that first time back in 1974,” says Peter today, “shaped the course of my life.” Are you young? Could you follow Peter’s example? Who knows how relief work may shape the course of *your* life in Jehovah’s service!

## Can You Have a Part?

18. What can you do if you want to share in relief work? (See also the box “It Shaped the Course of His Life.”)

<sup>18</sup> Would you like to taste the joy that relief work provides? If so, keep in mind that relief workers are often selected from those who work on Kingdom Hall construction projects. So mention to your elders that you would like to fill out an application form. An elder with much experience in relief work gives this reminder: “Travel to a disaster area only after you have received an official invitation from a Disaster Relief Committee to do so.” In that way, our relief work will proceed in an orderly manner.

19. How do relief workers help greatly in demonstrating that we are truly Christ’s disciples?

<sup>19</sup> Relief work is indeed an outstanding way in which we obey Christ’s command to “love one another.” By showing such love, we demonstrate that we are truly Christ’s disciples. (John 13:34, 35) What a blessing it is for us today to have so many willing workers who bring glory to Jehovah as they provide needed relief to those who loyally support God’s Kingdom!

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This chapter considers relief efforts performed in behalf of fellow believers. However, in many instances, our relief work also benefits non-Witnesses.—Gal. 6:10.

Paul used the plural form of *di-a'ko-nos* (minister) to describe “ministerial servants.” —1 Tim. 3:12.

See the article “Aiding Our Family of Believers in Bosnia,” in the November 1, 1994, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 23-27.

### How Real Is the Kingdom to You?

How do we know that relief work is part of our sacred service to Jehovah?

What are three main objectives of our relief efforts?

Relief work brings what lasting benefits?

How does relief work relate to Jesus’ command found at John 13:34?

## VOLUNTEERS AROUND THE WORLD BRING RELIEF

### CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICA

In 1994, some 800,000 or more people in Rwanda were killed in tribal genocide. In the aftermath of that massacre, unrest spread to other lands in Central Africa, resulting in overcrowded refugee camps. To help their afflicted fellow believers, Jehovah's Witnesses in Belgium, France, and Switzerland airlifted some 300 tons of clothing, medicine, tents, food, and other supplies. Within weeks, those supplies reached our needy brothers.

Also in Africa, a team of ten Witness doctors and nurses from France have been providing relief to our brothers to alleviate their suffering caused by civil war, famine, and disease. In the past two years alone, the team handled over 10,000 medical consultations. Their work brings praise to Jehovah and his organization. "When we arrive in an area to help our brothers and sisters," relates one of the nurses, "people say with respect: 'These are Jehovah's Witnesses. They have come to help their brothers.'" After receiving help from a nurse, one Witness exclaimed: "Thank you, my sister. Thank you, Jehovah!"

At times, relief work may also be needed when severe accidents occur. In 2012, a road accident in Nigeria killed 13 Witnesses, all belonging to one small congregation, and left 54 others seriously injured. A relief committee organized around-the-clock personal care for each victim. When a hospital patient observed the outpouring of support that the injured brothers and sisters received, she telephoned her pastor, saying: "No one from our church has visited me. Come to the hospital and see love in action among Jehovah's Witnesses!"

Though our dear brothers in that small congregation suffered a painful loss, they felt comforted by the expressions of love they received from their fellow believers. Furthermore, after observing the loving care that the relief workers showered on the afflicted brothers, several individuals in that congregation were moved to intensify their ministry. Before the accident, the congregation had 35 publishers. Within a year, that number had grown to 60.

### AUSTRALIA

In 2013, parts of Queensland's coast were hit by a flood that left 70 Witnesses homeless. Mark and Rhonda and their daughter fled their flooded home and ended up in an evacuation center. The place was packed. "It was basically standing room only," relates Rhonda. The deafening noise from the helicopters that were landing and departing close-by added to the tense atmosphere in the center. Worried, she asked her husband, "What are we



going to do?" Mark fervently prayed to Jehovah, asking for help. "About 30 minutes later," says Rhonda, "a car arrived at the center, and three brothers got out. When we met, they said: 'We're taking you with us. You will stay at a brother's house.'" Adds Rhonda: "It's hard to describe the overwhelming emotion we felt at that moment for the loving care of Jehovah's organization."

Over 250 volunteers rushed to that same disaster area to help their brothers. Says an elderly brother: "A group of Witnesses came out of nowhere and toiled like ants to clear up the mess in my home. My wife and I will never forget how they came to our aid."

## BRAZIL

In 2008, mudslides and floods in the state of Santa Catarina forced some 80,000 people out of their homes. It was like a "tsunami of clay, mud and trees," said a resident. Some brothers found shelter in an Assembly Hall. "They escaped with only the clothes they were wearing, all soaked with mud," relates Márcio, the hall's caretaker. Says one sister: "Our house collapsed. It was painful to see it disappear in seconds, but I will never forget how our brothers and sisters comforted us. We received so many expressions of love! The experience taught me how wise it is to treasure spiritual things."



An Assembly Hall in Santa Catarina, Brazil, is turned into a relief center filled with donated supplies, 2009

Mudslides have devastated entire neighborhoods on the mountain slopes near the city of Rio de Janeiro. To respond effectively to such recurring disasters, the brothers formed a permanent Disaster Relief Committee. When there is a threat of imminent mudslides, monitors (assigned brothers living in

When there is a threat of imminent mudslides, monitors (assigned brothers living in the affected area) alert the committee. Quickly, volunteers arrive in trucks

marked with the sign “Jehovah’s Witnesses—Humanitarian Aid.” All members of the well-equipped rescue crews have preassigned tasks. The workers wear vests that clearly identify them as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Together with brothers of the Hospital Liaison Committees, they provide aid to injured brothers and sisters. Relief workers bring in food, water, medical supplies, clothing, and cleaning products. Cleaning mud from houses is a huge task. After one recent mudslide, it took 60 volunteers to remove four truckloads of mud from just one home!

## PREPARATION FOR A DISASTER

The Governing Body has directed that all branches worldwide give guidelines to congregation elders and traveling overseers as to how to prepare for and deal with disasters. For example, even before a disaster occurs, the elders need to make sure that they have up-to-date contact information for each congregation member.

## WHEN DISASTER STRIKES!



1 Local elders contact all publishers

2 Elders report to the coordinator of the body of elders



3 Coordinators report to traveling overseers and other responsible brothers who are in contact with the branch office



4 Food, water, shelter, medical care, and emotional and spiritual support are provided as soon as possible



5 Branch office sends a report about the situation and the needs to the Coordinators' Committee of the Governing Body



6 Disaster Relief Committee organizes relief efforts and helps the brothers and sisters with their long-term recovery



7 Coordinators' Committee assesses the needs and, if needed, approves that volunteers from other countries extend help

## AN ADDED TOOL FOR RELIEF WORKERS

IN June 2013, the brochure *Jehovah's Witnesses and Disaster Relief* became available. It was especially prepared for government officials in the United States who oversee emergency management efforts. The brochure describes some of the relief efforts that we have carried out since the mid-1940's. It also features a map that illustrates the global scale of our relief work. "Brothers serving on Disaster Relief Committees use this brochure to establish contacts with key officials in disaster-prone areas well before disasters strike," explains an elder who is involved in organizing relief efforts. "When such officials are already familiar with our relief activities, it becomes easier for us to obtain from them the permissions needed to enter areas where disasters have occurred."



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