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Reaching Out to Those in Need

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◀ *On the first Sunday of each month members fast for two of their regular meals and give the value of what they would have eaten as a “fast offering” to help those in distress. Pictured here, two young men collect fast offerings.*

▼ *Church members are counseled to prepare for adversity by storing a three-month supply of food; saving money for emergencies; eating nutritious foods; growing a garden, where possible; and maintaining good health.*



IT WAS A ONCE-IN-A-CENTURY STORM THAT HIT Louisiana and Mississippi in late August of 2005. And when the winds, rains, and floods of Hurricane Katrina finally calmed, what remained was a scene of destruction and loss that could scarcely be imagined. The storm destroyed some 275,000 homes in Louisiana and Mississippi. It took the lives of more than 1,800 people and impacted more than 15 million others.

Immediately afterwards, people from all over the United States arrived and rolled up their sleeves. Among them were thousands of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who throughout the hurricane season of 2005 contributed some 336,000 hours of labor to anyone in need of a helping hand.¹ This army of Mormons descended upon the hardest hit areas—sometimes driving for more than six hours to get there. And armed with chain saws, shovels, and pruning shears, they worked 14-hour days, giving their help free of charge to any and all who needed it.

One woman, who had been desperately trying to organize a relief effort in her community center, watched as several vans drove up spilling out dozens of men and women dressed in their distinctive yellow shirts.

“Everybody! Everybody!” the woman exclaimed, her cheeks wet with tears, “The Mormons are here!”

Succor the Weak

It is impossible to understand The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without understanding its commitment to reach out, lift, bless, and heal the lives of others.

In the first years after the Church was organized in 1830, new converts left their homes to be with the fledgling Church and be near Joseph Smith, the prophet of this new dispensation. Most arrived with little money and without a place to live. Joseph asked the Lord how the Church and its members could take care of so many hungry and homeless families. What proceeded was a series of remarkable communications that Latter-day Saints believe came from God. Members of the Church were commanded to reach out to those in distress: “Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5).

From the earliest days of the Church, leaders and members have worked diligently to do as Joseph Smith taught: “To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the

widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all wherever he finds them.”²

The spirit of work, sacrifice, and sharing became an identifying characteristic of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During the 1930s, in the dark days of the Great Depression, the people of Utah were hit particularly hard. With so many people out of work, Church members and leaders pulled together to find land to till and orchards to plant. Those who were employed worked alongside those who did not have jobs—they all worked together for a common cause. Soon, the food from these relief efforts began to fill the cupboards and pantries of those who were hungry.

The Modern-day Welfare Program

These early agricultural efforts were the beginning of the Church’s modern-day welfare program—a comprehensive



▲ In 1936, the modern Church welfare program was created as a response to the unemployment and distress created by the Great Depression. Pictured here is the first cannery.



▲ Deseret Industries was established in 1938. Patterned after Goodwill Industries, Deseret Industries employs some 6,000 people who have difficulty finding or keeping a job and works with them to reach their vocational goals that lead to self-reliance. Seen above: one of 43 Deseret Industries stores located in seven western states.

The LDS Church Operates Many Facilities as Part of Its Welfare Program

The Church’s welfare program was born during the days of the Great Depression and continues today as an efficient, dynamic system that includes:

- 54 farms and orchards
- 143 storehouses
- 101 home storage centers
- 29 grain storage centers
- 327 employment service offices
- 43 Deseret Industries retail stores (second-hand store/donation center)
- 85 family service offices

In addition, the Church has built a range of factories and other facilities to produce

food and household necessities for those in need. These include:

- Soap plant
- Pasta processing facility
- Peanut butter cannery
- Bakery
- Flour mill
- Mattress factory
- Furniture factory
- Meat processing plants
- Milk and cheese processing plant

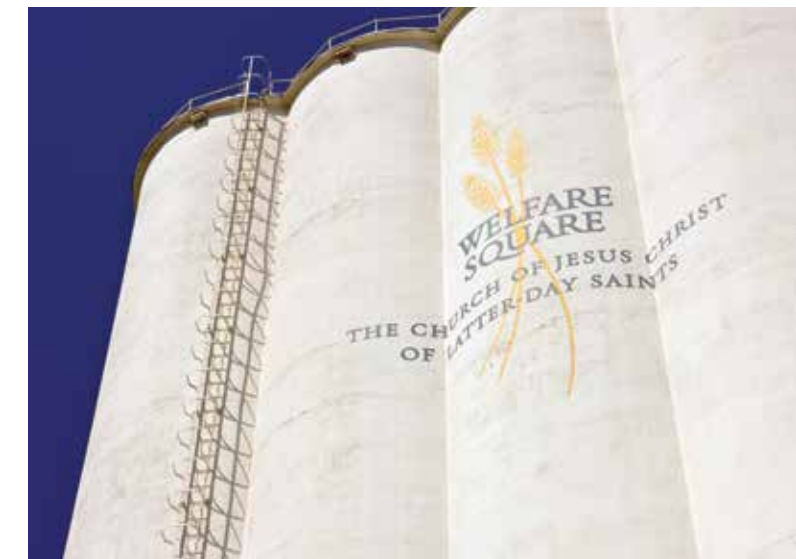
The goods produced in these plants are available in the Church’s many bishops’ storehouses (resource centers for the needy).

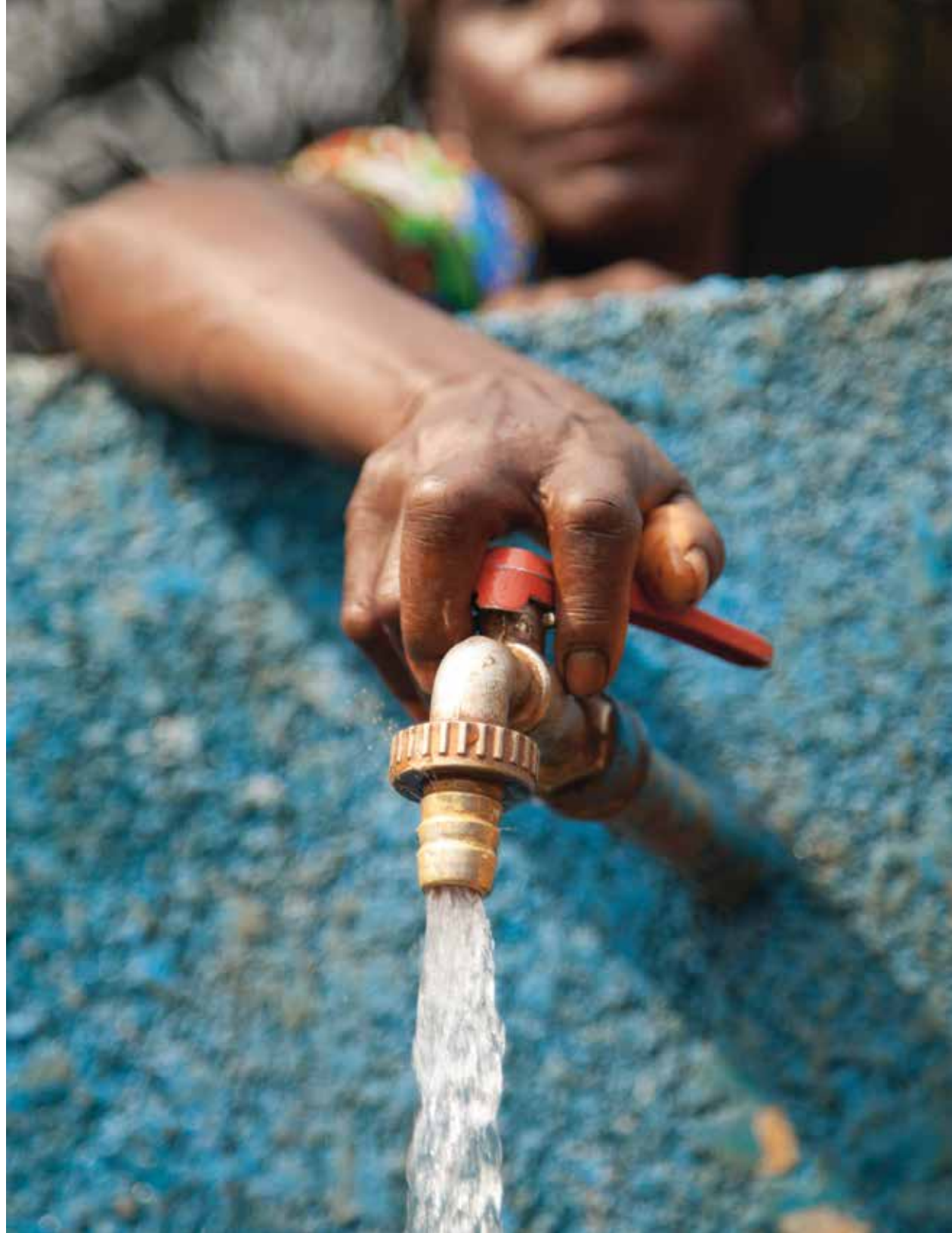


▲ Each year, the Deseret Bakery on Welfare Square in Salt Lake City distributes hundreds of thousands of loaves of bread to those in need.

► State-of-the-art, Church-owned canneries across the US preserve everything from peanut butter to peaches to salsa.

►► Erected in 1940, massive grain silos at Welfare Square provide one of the Church’s most enduring landmarks.





system of caring for those in need. Canneries were established so that surplus produce could be preserved rather than going to waste, and so that food would be available during the cold winter months. Dairies and grain silos were built. Employment offices were set up to find jobs for the unemployed. Family Services offices were established to provide counseling and adoption services. By increasing the resources available over the years, the Church expanded the program enormously.

Most of the work performed in the welfare program is done by volunteers. Each year, some seven million hours are donated by Latter-day Saints who give up their evenings and Saturdays to work in one of the welfare facilities.

Fast Offerings

One of the primary ways members of the Church help those who are in distress is through “fast offerings.” Once a month, families go without eating two of their regular meals, and they give the value of those meals to the bishop (a lay leader over approximately 300–500 members). The money is set aside to be used exclusively to help those in need. There are no overhead costs associated with the fund, which means that 100 percent of the money given as a fast offering goes directly to those who most need assistance. Although some members of the Church give the bishop the exact value of the meals they did not eat, many give much more.

This fast offering has been a part of the Church from its earliest days when the Prophet Joseph Smith introduced it to help Church members who were not able to support themselves. The concept of the fast offering may go back even farther—perhaps even to Old Testament times (see Isa. 58:6–7).

A leader of the Church, former President Gordon B. Hinckley, said that if the principles of fast day and the fast



▲ For more than 20 million people who can't walk, moving from place to place is only a dream. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has provided wheelchairs or other walking devices to more than 400,000 people.

◀ The World Health Organization estimates that 884 million people do not have access to clean water. The Church helps local communities to establish local water committees and provide hygiene training for families. More than 7.5 million people now have access to clean water as a result of these efforts in the past ten years.

offering were observed throughout the world, “the hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. Our burden of taxes would be lightened. The giver would not suffer but would be blessed by [this] small abstinence. A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere.”³

Self-reliance

Members of the Church believe that “when our wagon gets stuck in the mud, God is much more likely to assist the man who gets out to push than the man who merely raises his voice in prayer—no matter how eloquent the oration.”⁴ As a consequence, self-reliance has always been seen as a governing principle among the people.

Members who cannot make ends meet sit down with their bishop, who discusses their needs and resources and helps with their plans to become self-reliant. Each bishop knows the families and individuals and makes the judgment



▲ Mormon missionaries and Japanese soldiers clean up a feed store that was damaged in the tsunami of March 2011. More than 22,000 Church-sponsored volunteers helped distribute 250 tons of supplies from the Church.

about what kind of assistance is needed, whether it be food, furniture, counseling, job placement help, or housing. As part of this process, the bishop asks the various members of the family to do what they can to carry out their self-reliance plan. Sometimes, a family is able to do a great deal. Others may be capable of doing only a little. But how much or little does not matter. What matters is that they do what they can.

Because of this emphasis on getting people back on their feet, many members are able to become self-reliant quickly, and thus they can help others do the same.

All members are counseled to prepare for future adversity by storing a three-month supply of food—longer if possible—planting gardens, eating healthy foods, maintaining the best possible physical and mental health, and saving money for times of need. This emphasis on self-reliance and preparing for times of need have caused some to say that the “Mormons may be among the country’s best prepared to weather the current economic hard times.”⁵



▲ Mormon missionaries and several hundred local members assisted in the clean-up after hurricane Sandy devastated parts of the eastern US seaboard in October 2012.

Humanitarian Work

The humanitarian work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reaches out to people throughout the world regardless of religion, race, sex, or political affiliation. Because of its ready store of food and needed emergency supplies, the Church is often among the first to respond in times of disaster. Along with their food, clothing, and medical and emergency materials, members of the Church are known for gathering by the thousands, eager to help those in distress in whatever way they can.

The Church has responded to hundreds of disasters—both natural and man-made. It has partnered with such respected charitable organizations as the International Red Cross and the World Health Organization, among many others, to bring help and hope to countless millions of people throughout the world.

Another of the distinguishing features of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' humanitarian effort is that 100 percent of the money donated goes directly to help those in need. Overhead and administrative costs are supplied by a different fund.

The Church has identified specific areas of specialization when it comes to humanitarian relief :

- Providing safe, clean water
- Providing training in neo-natal resuscitation to doctors, nurses, and midwives
- Providing wheelchairs to those who have difficulty walking
- Providing food and agricultural training to the hungry
- Immunizing children against disease
- Performing eye surgery on those who have difficulty seeing and training other medical professionals to do the same
- Flying to the relief of the millions each year who are afflicted by disasters, both natural and man-made.



The Great Commandment

For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, caring for the poor is a covenant obligation and one the Savior listed as a “great” commandment (Matt. 22:39, 40). It is what the Savior did when He walked upon this earth. It is what He would have us do today.

The Prophet Joseph Smith told the fledgling Church in 1840, “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.”⁷

From that day to this, members of the Church have given their time, resources, and material goods to reach out and lift up others in need. This act of charity is central to the disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the essence of the gospel.

It is one of the key things that must be known to truly understand The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members.

Notes

- ¹ See <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormons-work-with-communities-to-prepare-for-hurricanes>
- ² Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons*, 15 March 1842.
- ³ *Ensign*, May 1991, 52–53.
- ⁴ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Two Principles for Any Economy,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 56–57.
- ⁵ Associated Press, 2008, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28392743/ns/us_news-faith/t/mormons-prepared-hard-times/#.T-t_A5Hud8E.
- ⁶ Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report*, October 1978, 131.
- ⁷ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:2278. See also Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, October 1977, 123–24.

◀ *The Church provides funds for health education and immunizations. In the last decade, 60,000 Church volunteers have donated 766,000 hours to immunization campaigns in 25 countries reaching more than 100 million children on six continents.*

▶ *Members of the Church who are medical professionals (pediatricians, neonatologists, and nurses) go to areas of the world that have high infant-mortality rates and train doctors, nurses, and midwives to save the lives of newborn babies. In the last decade more than 190,000 medical professionals have been trained, who in turn are expected to train others.*

