

“Go Thou and Do Likewise”

The Church’s Humanitarian Service Program

by Richard McKenna
Director, Church’s Humanitarian Services

LDS Business College Devotional
September 22, 2004

I am grateful for the chance to be here and my heart is settled by seeing the friendly smiles on your faces, knowing that some of you in the audience are actually from our stake and I know you. This has been an intimidating thing for me, but I am grateful for the privilege to be able to speak here. I received an email the other day from a friend who went to college before I did, which had to be a long time ago. It makes a big difference between 1974 when he went to college and 2004 when you are going to college. Back then we used to talk about long hair, now we talk about longing for hair. We used to talk about acid rock, now we talk about acid reflux. We used to talk about growing pot—well, not really—but now we talk about growing a pot belly. We talked about going to a new, hip joint but now we talk about receiving a new hip joint. I was reading this email and just to make me feel really old he said, “Now the average age of those going to college is 18 or 19. They would have been born on average in 1986. These are the ones starting college. They have always had an answering machine, they don’t know what it is not to use a remote, they think that popcorn always came out of the microwave, and that Jay Leno was always on the tonight show,”... The fact that you’re not getting any of these is because there is a big generation gap here.

I’d like to comment about gratitude. We do need to be grateful for what we have. One of our traditions occurs when we go to the temple. We’re reminded of an opportunity we had to go to the temple with a neighbor of ours. She’s from Iran, and when the Bountiful temple open house was going on we took her with us to the temple. As we talked about the purpose of the temple, we mentioned that in the endowment room is where we learn about how we should live our life and about those things that are important in our journey back to live with God. As we left the endowment room on this tour we said to our friend, “The next room we will go into is what we call the Celestial Room and it is symbolic of what it would be like to return and live with God.” As we entered that room, our dear friend stood there in tears as she felt the spirit of what it would be like to return and live with God.

We have so much in common with people all around the world because of this expression of gratitude. My wife, Wendy, and I have a tradition now as we leave the Celestial Room. We pause at about that same spot and look back and think of how it impressed our friend that day and how grateful we should be for the principles of the Gospel that help us understand that we can return to live with God.

That's not the topic of my conversation but that gratitude, that feeling of turning back when we have received something and expressing gratitude for it I think is an important part of humanitarian work.

Jesus was asked by an attorney a very provocative question. He said, "Master what should I do to inherit eternal life?" The Savior replied, "What is written in the law?" The lawyer knew the law very well and responded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." The Savior said, "Thou has spoken right, do this and thou shalt live." The lawyer then asked a question that allowed the Savior to teach us a principle that we need to know. He said, "But who is my neighbor?" The Savior then told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He talked about a traveler on his way to Jericho who fell among thieves and was beaten and left to die. Three men saw that traveler on the side of the road, two passed by without stopping. The Samaritan stopped, cared for his wounds, took him to an inn and paid for his stay there until he could recover. The third man showed compassion and saved the traveler's life. In this parable the Savior teaches us in a powerful way that we are all sons and daughters of God, and we have an obligation to take care of each other. In concluding the story, Jesus turned to the lawyer and said this, "Go thou and do likewise."

Those words ring in my ears. I'd like to talk about going thou and doing likewise. I'd like to talk today about the humanitarian work of the Church. It's something I am involved in every day. I want to share with you some of the things I see that I think may be of interest to you. The Church is working throughout the world; every year we go into about a hundred different countries trying to provide means of assistance to the poor. Our goal is to help families of all nationalities and religions overcome the challenges of poverty, disaster and inadequate health care.

Over the past few decades the Church has become known around the world for being able to respond quickly when disasters happen. According to statistics, natural disasters are on the rise. Decade by decade they seem to increase; drought, devastating storms, floods, earthquakes, pestilence, and land slides destroy millions of lives every year. The accelerating pattern of natural disasters is quite ominous when you look at it. Now, more than ever before, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is committed to relieving suffering of those who are impacted by these disasters.

Humanitarian services is first on the ground in emergency situations. The common question is, "How do you respond so quickly?" The answer is easy: our time and response is possible because we gather these items and store them before the disaster happens. We have an infrastructure in the Church Welfare System of food production facilities, warehouses, transportation, and processing facilities which allow us to be ready when a disaster strikes.

All of you are aware of the hurricanes that hit the southeast portion of the United States and the Caribbean. That trio of hurricanes in the Atlantic has allowed the Church to distinguish itself as one of the most prominent disaster response organizations in the nation.

When hurricane Charley first hit the west coast of Florida, we worked closely with the other agencies: FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), Red Cross and other agencies. We pulled supplies from our Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville and Atlanta warehouses. We also sent chain saws, plastic sheeting and other emergency supplies from Salt Lake and we used cash to purchase things that could be purchased locally. We also made a large cash donation to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

The response was reminiscent of the commitment that President Hinckley made in responding to the disaster of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 when he said, "If we are true disciples of the Lord, we must reach out. As long as this Church has any resources, those resources will be made available as they are needed to help those who are in distress anywhere in the world."

In response to Hurricane Charley, Church members came from throughout the southeast and organized themselves into work parties. The saints in the Miami area were particularly anxious to be involved because they had been recipients of help when Hurricane Andrew came through there more than a decade before. That group of saints in Miami felt a close kinship to those who were in need, both members and friends of other faiths.

Not more than ten days later Hurricane Francis again hit Florida. While other organizations scrambled to assemble their remaining resources and frantically appealed to the public, the Church was steady and ready. Again we responded with shipments where they were needed, when they were needed.

The Church system is full of trucks. We have 30 semis and dozens of smaller trucks, and they are invaluable in this effort. Convoys of our church trucks were guided by National Guard troops to points of distribution.

Hurricane Ivan then hit in Louisiana and in the pan handle of Florida. The Church again was prepared. Warehouses had been restocked, we had supplies, and we turned to the agencies and said, "Where do you need them?" The emergency response officials marvel at both the Church's depth of preparedness and their commitment to helping those in need. In all, over 100,000 hours of service have been donated by members of the Church to those in need, regardless of faith or nationality. Again we have responded where we have been needed.

Speaking of organizations that are less organized than ours, one of the federal officials said, "Some organizations spit in a tea cup and claim they've given water to those in distress. Your church does so much, for so many and seeks little recognition for what you do."

President Hinckley established that standard in a recent priesthood talk. He said, "In extending help we have not asked whether those affected belong to the Church, for we know that each of earth's children is a child of God, worthy of help in time of need. We

have done what we have done largely with the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing. We seek no commendation or thank you's. It is compensation enough that when we help out one of the least of our Father's children, we have done it unto Him and His beloved Son."

I have spoken about the assistance in Louisiana and Florida, but what about those who are in the islands of the Caribbean? To make a long story short, plane loads of emergency supplies have been sent in to Grenada, into Jamaica, into the Grand Cayman Islands, into the Bahamas, and we are working on one for Haiti right now. Additional supplies have been purchased from nearby islands and shipped in by containers.

Not all of the Church resources are dedicated to emergency response. We have four other areas of focus that I'm going to touch on briefly today. In doing so I'm going to tie them into principles that are important to you as you are here at LDS Business College.

Isaiah prophesied of the last days and he said this, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened." Of all the miracles that the Savior performed (short of raising people from the dead) restoring sight to the blind had to be one of the most miraculous. The World Health Organization acknowledges that 45 million people are blind. Twenty million of them could have their sight restored through a simple surgery. We are committed to follow the example of the Savior and help people receive sight. Working with established medical facilities in developing countries, Humanitarian Services donates equipment and supplies, and organizes training seminars led by professional ophthalmologists who are willing to give of their time to conduct training seminars. Ultimately those that are trained will be able to serve thousands of patients over time, and train other medical professionals so that blindness will be reduced throughout the world.

Mariana lives in Moldova. When she was a young mother with two small daughters, she lost her eye sight. Her husband left her and the state took away her two children because she was no longer able to properly care for them. With the vision treatment program of the Church, Mariana received surgery which she could not afford on her own. In her country that surgery would have cost 30 dollars. Because of the surgery, she received her sight back.

At an appreciation luncheon where others showed appreciation to the Church for what they received, her eyes filled with tears and she couldn't speak. Later that day I had the opportunity to interface with her as we went on a tour of another facility. I saw her with her young daughter as she walked around a barn yard. They played together with a puppy, they looked at the flowers together, and my eyes filled with tears knowing the difference that had made in her life. The Savior spoke to His disciples about the need for them to see with spiritual eyes and that applies to us today.

In the musical "Fiddler on The Roof," Tevye, the father, gathers his lovely daughters around him and in the simplicity of his peasant surroundings counsels them as they prepare for their future. He says, "Remember in Anatevka each one of you knows who she is and what God expects her to become." Do we have a vision enough to see what

God expects us to become? My belief is that you were not created to be mediocre. In fact, Heavenly Father preserved you to come in these last days because He knew of your potential greatness.

First learn to be optimistic, recognize the opportunities that Heavenly Father places in your path. My son, Mark, is returning from his mission in eight days. He has always been optimistic about life. As a youngster, he woke up one morning and said, "I wonder what good is going to happen today." I hope that's how we look at life. Learn to see with an eye of faith and understand that when a door shuts, a window opens. Don't be so much focused on the ground in front of you that you don't recognize the angels who are round about you to bear you up.

As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints you have an obligation to prepare for the future. I extend that thought to those not of our faith as well. This is an important time in the history of the world. You have an obligation to prepare for the future and to seek to become self reliant. Obviously education is important to you or you wouldn't be here. It is a large part about preparation.

In the "Strength of Youth" Pamphlet we read, "The Lord wants you to educate your mind and improve your skills and abilities. Education will help you be an influence for good in the world. It will help you better provide for yourself and your loved ones and those in need. Be willing to work diligently and make sacrifices to obtain learning. Education is an investment that brings great rewards."

I've never said to myself, I wish I hadn't gone to so many years of school, I wish I would have stopped after my first degree. Whenever there has been an opportunity and I have been in a position to find new employment and be considered for a new job, I've always been grateful that I received as much education as I could.

We were married and had two children when I entered the masters program at Berkley. It was no small sacrifice on the part of my wife and I recognize the great contribution she made in my education. I'm grateful she received her degree as well and has a bachelor's degree in education.

Addison Groff said this, "Disturb us, oh Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we dream too little, when we have arrived in safety because we sailed too closely to the shore." Our risk is not in aiming too high and missing; the greatest risk that we face is in aiming too low and reaching it.

The second program that the Church does is to follow the mandate of the Savior when He asked the Nephites, "Have ye any that are lame among you? Bring them hither and I will heal you." The Church is involved in a worldwide effort to eradicate immobility. Studies show that there are about 100,000,000 disabled people in the world who don't have access to a wheel chair. Those individuals are physically dependent on family members and there is not much support structure for the disabled in the developing world. In

response to this great need the Church has distributed over the last two and a half years almost a 100,000 wheel chairs. That's about 350 container loads of wheel chairs.

Bridgett lives in Zambia by Victoria Falls, one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world. She was born without legs. Her address is BH3 which refers to bore hole number three. You go down the dirt road to the third bore hole which is a water pump and that's where her mud hut is. She was born without legs, but even as a young girl she had a very cheery disposition, a smile from ear to ear. She was able to get around by using her arms as crutches, swinging her body like a pendulum to go forward. She was able to go to school, was loved by the other children, and she had a bright mind.

Following graduation, Bridgett was not able to get a job. No one would hire someone that spent all of her time looking up at the world. When she heard of the wheel chair distribution, she knew her prayers had been answered. I was there when Bridgett arrived in the back of a pick-up truck. I helped lift her from the back of that truck. I felt guilty setting her down on the ground in the dirt. I asked her if we couldn't put her in a wheel chair. She said, "No, I want to wait to be placed in the one that will be mine."

That day was a great day in Bridgett's life. That day she gained a dignity she had not had before. She now has a job, is able to provide for her family, and feels that she is no longer a burden on her family. The concept of becoming self reliant is what happened in Bridgett's life. She was able to go from being dependent to being self reliant. We all have an obligation to become self reliant.

As disciples of Christ we should honor our covenants to consecrate ourselves our time, talents and resources to build up the kingdom of God and to care for those in need. We need to strive to give and serve as Christ did. If we do so we will be abundantly blessed. Heavenly Father will help all of our efforts as we seek to care for the poor and the needy.

There are many ways to care for the poor and the needy. I want to talk specifically today about fasting and paying a fast offering, something you think is only an obligation of your parents when the deacon comes around with the little blue envelope. The principle is that fasting will bless each of us spiritually; it is something that draws upon the powers of heaven. Isaiah taught about the blessings that come from fasting when he said, "Those who fast, thou shalt call and the Lord shall answer, Thou shalt cry and He shall say here I am and the Lord will guide thee continually and satisfy thy soul in drought and make fat thy bones and thou shalt be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters fail not."

Which one of you doesn't want to be able to call and have Heavenly Father answer, "Here I am." Every one of us has opportunity to do that as we fast. The principle of the fast offering is simply taking the money that was saved from those two meals that were missed and donate it to care for the poor and the needy. That gives the resource to bishops around the world to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and to take care of the needs of the widows and the orphans. What a great covenant that is, an opportunity that we have. There are many other ways; we can't talk about all of them but I believe with all

my heart that we will be guided by the Spirit as we seek to serve and find ways to best meet the needs of others.

The Lord taught this, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.” I’m reminded of a hymn that says, “I will be my brother’s keeper, I would learn the healer’s art, To the wounded and the weary, I would show a gentle heart. Savior may I love my brother, As I know thou lovest me. Find in Thee my strength, my beacon, For thy servant I would be. Savior may I love my brother; Lord I would follow Thee.”

The third program that the Church is involved in is actually helping to raise people from the dead. I say that with all sacredness. There are 900,000 babies a year that die because of breathing difficulties at birth. In the developing world, the equipment and the training is not available often times for them to be able to resuscitate those babies and bring them back to life. We are involved with sending teams of doctors throughout the world. We’ll be in 46 locations in 23 different countries. It’s a train-the-trainer approach where we are teaching others to train people how to resuscitate babies born not breathing.

Ironically I was recently asked why the Church would have a program to save the lives of babies only to have them suffer through a life of poverty. I was initially offended by that question. While I don’t have a definitive answer, I have formed a very firm opinion. As we think of the plan of salvation, we know that one of the key ingredients was for us to come here and gain a body. We also know that key to the plan of salvation was that we would have the opportunity to come here to grow and develop, to suffer and to have success, and to learn so that we could return to live with our Heavenly Father. I believe with all my heart that Heavenly Father has provided a way for those who die without that opportunity that they will, in fairness, be able to return and live with Him. I also believe that if we could save a poor child and allow him the opportunity to gain the experience that Heavenly Father prepared for him, he will be better off.

I saw a young girl in a squatter camp in Phnom Penh. Her house was smaller than our family tent. She was playing hop scotch with her friends in the dirt road. The pattern for the hop scotch had to be etched with a stone which later became the taw, but she was happy and I thought what if she didn’t have the chance to live. In her future are opportunities to learn, opportunities to serve, opportunities to be a wife and a mother. Those are the opportunities that Heavenly Father wants us to have.

I pray that as we think about that program of the Church, we recognize that life is precious and that we have an opportunity to make the most of the life we have been given. We should respect all men and woman everywhere as sons and daughters of God.

The last program we are involved is that of providing drinking water. Believe it or not, one-sixth of the world’s population or just over a billion people do not have access to clean water. Our program goes out into the villages, identifies communities that need water, then organizes so that the water will be sustainable year in and year out. We provide the resources necessary to provide water. This year alone we will provide water

to over 500,000 people. I've seen the benefit that comes in those wells. The women typically are the ones who spend hours a day going to the closest water source and bringing it back. If it could be within a hundred yards of their home, how much better off they will be. They will be able to cook better meals for their families and perhaps they will be able to tell stories to their children and help educate them.

I want to talk about another well; this well was just outside the city of Sychar. A woman came to draw water out of that well; this was part of her daily routine. She was grateful that that life-sustaining water had been provided by her forefathers. That day however she would receive more than water. There was a man sitting near the well as she drew her water. He spoke to her, asking for a drink and she was surprised by his request. But then he said that if she would give him a drink, he would give her a drink of living water. As he spoke, her interest was piqued; she felt a desire to learn more. Jesus explained, "Whosoever drink of this water which I shall give them shall never thirst again." Her reply was much like yours, "Sir or master give me of that water." We can receive of His living water everyday of our lives. In fact, I would say the receiving of His living water is more important than drinking water.

You think how urgently we depend on water. Go two days without drinking water, I challenge you. We don't think much about going two days without reading our scriptures or saying our prayers. We don't think much about going without serving others. I believe that a source of living waters is obedience of the commandments from which I think we receive great protection and peace. The Atonement of Christ is given to all of us, to help us overcome our sins but also to help us overcome the natural man. Thus, becoming meek, humble, submissive, patient, full of love, and daily repentance allows the Spirit to be our constant companion. I can hear the voice of the Savior calling, "Come unto me and drink of my well."

In accomplishing this work, the Church has met many fine people around the world, people who respect God's children and want to serve them. For example, we have worked with Sister Margaret who runs a facility in Zimbabwe. She refers to herself as the Mormon nun. She is running a program to help family members treat those who are dying of AIDs. As an outreach into the community, she has over 400 volunteers who go into the community and help those in need. The worse cases she brings in and nurses them, teaching the family how to take care of them.

We've also provided containers of clothing, blankets and other items to Father Georgie in Russia. He's a Russian Orthodox priest involved in helping orphans and prisoners in his area. Doctor Bill Fryda runs a hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. He's been there 25 years. Saint Mary's Mission Hospital is probably one of the finest hospitals in Nairobi; it's set up primarily to provide assistance to the poor. He is a great friend to the Church. Recently Doctor Fryda hosted our neonatal resuscitation training and our vision treatment training teams as they went into Kenya. We have worked with over 1500 organizations like that and developed friendships with the Church all over the world over the last 20 years.

President Hinckley recently committed, “We will go on in this work. There will always be need. Hunger and want and catastrophe will ever be with us.” Then he said a remarkable thing which I believe. He said, “The spirit of the Lord guides this work, this work is but an outward expression of an inward spirit. The spirit of the Lord of whom it was said, he went about doing good.”

I honor you today. You are doing what you ought to be doing, making the sacrifices you ought to be making. Your goodness radiates in your countenances; your friendship for each other is very wholesome. I hope that you will remember the words of the Savior when he said “Go thou and do likewise.” Open your eyes to see who you are and what you can become. Be feet to the lame by capitalizing on opportunities to serve including fasting and paying a fast offering and donating to the humanitarian aid fund. Cherish life and the opportunities to become more like our Heavenly Father and come unto Christ and drink of his living waters.

I pray that the Lord’s blessings will be with you as you pursue the amazing opportunities you have in your life. I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, He is our exemplar. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.