



World Relief

July 2004

Extending Jesus' Hand to the Suffering

By Janet Maxim

In a corner of Mozambique a mother sits on the floor of her mud hut, holding her quaking baby wrapped from head to toe. A second mother counsels, "The baby shivers because she has a fever, not because she is cold. Take off these wraps; they won't help. Do not go to the witch doctor. Go right away to the health post. They have medicine to heal her."

Because of the mother's advice one more African child now has a chance for survival. African mothers are helping their children—and each other—because of World Relief, an organization that is doing much to stem the flood of human suffering.

After World War II what was then called the War Relief Commission alleviated suffering in postwar Europe. Renamed World Relief in 1950, it continues to battle the forces waging war on body and soul. World Relief is currently dealing with poverty, AIDS infections, and infant mortality in twenty nations around the world, empowering churches and communities to bring those who suffer more than just money and medicines. Its mission, in the words of World Relief President Dr. Clive Calver: "We seek to be the hands of Jesus."

Mozambique

Elizabeth, her husband and young child ran for their lives when Rwanda was ravaged by tribal war in 1994. On foot, by bus and by thumb they traveled across Congo and Tanzania, finally reaching safety in a refugee camp in Mozambique.

One of the world's poorest nations, ninety-five percent of Mozambique's people are thought to be unemployed and living in poverty. Most survive on subsistence farming or with the help of relief agencies. Their country has been battered by twenty years of civil war, Marxist government, and two devastating

floods. About fifteen percent of its people suffer from AIDS. It is a place crying out for World Relief's reconstructive aid. Ruth Calver, a ministry associate and the wife of Clive Calver, says, "We don't work in very nice places. We work among the poorest of the poor."

But Ruth calls the average Mozambican mother "the most impressive being in God's creation." She rises by five in the morning to cook breakfast on a charcoal burner. Soon she is working in the fields, a baby slung in her *capilana* wrap, a toddler in one hand and a small hoe in the other. She has no modern comforts in her mud-and-thatch or block-and-tin house. Yet she seems to possess boundless energy; "she is vigorous, full of fun and laughter." Ruth says.

From refugee to leader

Elizabeth is such a woman. When World Relief (WR) brought its Microenterprise Development (MED) program to the refugee camp, she saw in it an opportunity to rebuild her family's life.

Elizabeth had worked in a bank in Rwanda and her husband was an accountant, but there was no work in Mozambique. Once she was approved for a small MED loan to buy supplies to sell in the camp marketplace Elizabeth showed that she knew how to grow a business. World Relief's Mozambique director Galen Carey took notice and hired her to work as an internal auditor for World Relief, where she took on increasing responsibilities. She now directs World Relief's operations in southern Mozambique.

Elizabeth is one of a hundred paid Mozambican World Relief staff members who guide another 4,500 volunteers. (World Relief typically hires, trains and pays 100 indigenous workers for every one American staffer. An annual salary of \$1600 pays a full-time qualified worker in Rwanda.)

World Relief has certain bedrock principles: it works with local churches to meet community needs; teaches individuals to cultivate and rely on their God-given abilities rather than on handouts; trains and empowers them to help their communities, and enables them to become financially self-sufficient. World Relief especially targets women, who receive ninety percent of MED loans. "In Africa, the woman is the mover and the shaker. She naturally wants to provide for her family," Ruth explains.

Neighborhood Mothers

World Relief also shores up the Mozambican family. By

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teaching basic health principles it has brought down mortality rates sixty percent in children under five over the past three years. It employs a simple approach: teaching illiterate volunteers who then instruct others. Ninety-nine percent of World Relief volunteers are nationals who speak the local language, are tied to their communities, and have a stake in the outcome of their efforts. “They see the dramatic difference they make,” says Melanie Morrow, World Relief child survival specialist.

A block of ten households is the smallest civic unit in Mozambique. World Relief staff train each volunteer, usually a woman, who is taught basic health principles with illustrated

around their sleeping children. World Relief works with the country’s Ministry of Health to provide immunizations—the Ministry provides the shots but WR has built trust with mothers to persuade them to get their kids vaccinated. The importance of abstinence in preventing AIDS and STDs is emphasized. Mothers are taught how to space the birth of their children and seek prenatal care.

Escape from witchcraft

Healthcare is a huge part of World Relief’s work, as is MicroEnterprise Development, but they are incomplete without the healing of spiritual lives. Westerners “have no concept of the power of the witch doctor and the ancestor and the occult” for the African, Ruth has observed. “For them, it’s huge.”

Melanie saw it when she worked in Mozambique: “Most mothers don’t attribute their child’s lack of growth to a lack of food. They think it’s spiritual. They say ‘the child’s spirit is being sat upon’. They don’t believe you if you just tell them that feeding and growth are connected; you must demonstrate it.”

So World Relief developed the Hearth Approach, in which groups of six village children and their caretakers gather daily for two weeks where they are taught nutritious cooking and “active feeding techniques.” As the mothers see their children “brighten and gain the energy to play and even be naughty, they realize the connection of food to growth and behavior,” says Melanie.

Other spiritual and social benefits occur. As a Mozambican mom explains: “Now we know malaria is caused by a mosquito. We used to think it was bewitchment from an enemy, so we would take our children to the traditional healer to undo the curse and to seek revenge for it. Now we don’t need to get revenge.” Improved human relationships are strengthened when parents help each other through their troubles rather than foster cycles of conflict.

Dr. Meredith Long, World Relief director of international health, has seen suspicion and fear rend communities in Mozambique. “When bad things happen people look to the spirit world for an explanation,” he says. “Thinking there is evil in the community, they call in a spiritist to sniff out the ‘witches’ and drive them away. This alienation is very serious—it deprives persons of their identity.”

“When there is a sudden death of a child, at the funeral, people review which spirit they’ve offended or which enemy may have cursed or poisoned the child,” he explains. They assume the curse was due to a violated taboo, and this has a strong stigma attached to it.”

These falsehoods are corrected through training and experience, but also by faith. World Relief staff explain their personal faith in Christ as they work with families. They also help churches expand their influence, having helped plant fifty new churches since the organization came to Mozambique in 1998. That year 200 children came to WR Bible study clubs, receiving a strong dose of health messages plus fun and games. Now over 27,000 participate.

Ruth recalls the testimony of Cecilia, a young teen, who

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booklets, drama, song, and dance. Each volunteer works through a local church and is responsible for her family and nine others on her block. Her task is to educate her fellow villagers and check on them, usually every two weeks. According to Melanie, this method reaches every Mozambican household with women of childbearing age and/or children under five.

In Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa, misinformation, superstition and witch doctor practices kill young children at a rate of about 200 per 1,000. (In America, infant mortality is about seven per 1,000.) Most children in Africa die from preventable or treatable sickness, so mothers must be taught preventive healthcare and to recognize symptoms and practice basic care until they can get a sick child to a health post where most illnesses can be treated.

World Relief has worked with Mozambique’s Ministry of Health to establish health posts within five kilometers of every village. The “major health intervention areas” in Mozambique are the prevention and treatment of malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea, and malnutrition, as well as immunization, reproductive health (including STD and AIDS) and maternal care.

Medical misinformation leads to remedies that would be laughable if they didn’t come at such a cost. If a baby has diarrhea, his mother washes his bottom and rinses the cloth in the same bowl of water all day, then spoon-feeds the water to the child. When a child lapses into a coma from an untreated malarial fever, mother bangs a metal pot near the child’s head, hoping to awaken her. When a malnourished child loses interest in food, mother believes he no longer needs it and stops feeding him.

To combat these practices World Relief teaches families to hydrate babies with water or electrolyte mixtures. They learn that breast milk is the best nutrition and immunity they can give their babies. They learn how to mix a more nutritious maize gruel, adding local greens and ground nuts to enrich this staple food. They learn to hang insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets

described how she came to believe in Christ and introduced her sister Yvonne to Him. Their father, who practiced witchcraft, bound them together and beat them. They would not deny their Savior, and finally were cast out of their home. "The cost is huge for young people who follow Christ," Ruth says.

Believers may suffer, but their joy and gratitude is deep. At a conference of African women, Ruth recounts, "they gathered three hours before the conference began, to sing and dance and worship. We joined them, and in the heat we were soon mopping our brows and grabbing our bottled water. They were just swept up in joyous worship. Later, after we had washed their feet and prayed over them, they would not let us go but insisted on washing our feet."

Haiti

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Eighty percent of Haitians live in conditions that make poor Americans look wealthy, and political turmoil since the overthrow of Aristide in February only furthers the country's destitution. One in seven Haitian children die from malnutrition and disease. Desperate mothers and daughters resort to prostitution to fend off poverty. Not surprisingly, twelve percent of city-dwellers are infected with AIDS, a record for the Western Hemisphere, and many are women and children.

While the UN holds international councils on the status of women, World Relief provides the direct services that help women overcome their exploiters. As a young teen Celeste reluctantly agreed to be the sexual partner of an older man who provided her with food and shelter. But at her friends' urging she began attending BAS youth events sponsored by a local church and World Relief. (BAS is Brigade Anti-SIDA; SIDA is the term used for AIDS in French-speaking countries.) There she heard other teens and young adults describe how they had overcome poverty and promiscuity. She learned about the tender love of Jesus and took to heart the Bible's lessons on sexual purity. Through her relationship with Christ Celeste found the courage to walk away from the false security of her old life.

In Haiti as in Mozambique local people accomplish most of World Relief's work with the help of neighborhood churches.

Socra St. Joy is a BAS youth officer. Churches, youth groups and schools give her a platform because "I am passionate about the anti-AIDS mission—it's one of the leading causes of death in Haiti. I want to help the young people in my community and I want to help my country by teaching them that abstinence is the best way to stop AIDS." Socra says, "I believe that peer education is the best way to promote the anti-AIDS message, and Christian values that promote abstinence are the best way to prevent AIDS." BAS youth officers organize presentations on AIDS prevention and transmission, encourage churches to become involved with BAS, teach others to make present the presentations, and write for the quarterly BAS magazine.

World Relief teaches that abstinence is the best way to prevent AIDS. Knowledge, condoms and fear of disease and

Some believe a man will lose his mind or his potency if he abstains. Women worry that abstinence causes acne, or think they must prove they can produce a child.

death aren't deterrent enough. Says BAS leader Vastie, "Condoms only promote promiscuity, which is against the Christian value."

Can AIDS be conquered? Socra St. Joy estimates that over half of Haitian youth engage in sex before marriage, starting as early as twelve or fourteen. Peer pressure, fueled by American fashion and media, pushes young people to conform. And there is a mythology about sex, physiology, and AIDS. For example, some believe a man will lose his mind or his potency if he abstains. Women worry that abstinence causes acne, or think they must prove they can produce a child. Some deny AIDS exists. As in America, too many Haitians don't take abstinence seriously as a solution to AIDS. Vastie observes, "When I explain that abstinence is the best way to stop HIV/AIDS and I tell them that I am abstinent, the students don't believe [me]. They do not believe that an individual can be abstinent."

Yet leaders like Socra and Vastie hold on to the hope of Christ. And they know the example of their own changed lives yields power. Says Socra, "When I give seminars at schools and share about my abstinence, the students have a hard time believing me. But when it's their peer who is actually practicing abstinence and encouraging others to do the same, the effect is much more real and practical for them."

The BAS clubs challenge teens to make a commitment to abstain for a year, teach them social skills and how to handle peer pressure, and provide better ways to have fun and friendship. Vastie says, "I have seen changes in youths who agreed to practice abstinence for a year. Even though it was very difficult for them to change their lifestyle and give up some friends, they were willing to make all those changes because they were convinced that abstinence is the only way to prevent AIDS."

Mobilizing churches against AIDS—and Voodoo

World Relief launched operations in Haiti in the 1980s,

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partnering with organizations like Hospital in the Air to promote child health. In 1993, it found a local leader in Dr. Hubert Morquette. As medical director of Mission Hospital, he already ran community health and child survival programs. With matching funds from USAID World Relief was ready to work with Dr. Morquette, whose new job as World Relief country director is to mobilize churches on three fronts: AIDS, child health and community banks. These programs now run in thirty Port-Au-Prince churches.

A turning point occurred when 288 evangelical church leaders signed a resolution to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis. This is not a job for the weak of faith. “Twenty years ago we thought it couldn’t get worse here. Now it’s chronic; we’re digging lower into the ground. AIDS is growing faster than ever, especially among women. By 2010 there will be almost a half million AIDS orphans on the streets of Port-Au-Prince.” But Dr. Morquette and his staff persist; they have spoken to hundreds of churches and community leaders, imploring them to send staff members to be trained as “peer educators.”

Fortunately, says Dr. Long, “few churches have a theology of health well-defined enough to split over, so it’s a great way to bring them together.”

World Relief has set up Rally Posts—free vaccination and health clinics—in the churches. They offer prenatal care and teach mothers how to treat children for diarrhea, dehydration, malnutrition, malaria, typhoid, and respiratory infections. These services continued throughout the violence and disorder that accompanied the fall of President Aristide.

Dr. Morquette’s anti-AIDS motto is “Abstain and Be faithful.” He points out that abstinence programs reversed the AIDS rate in Uganda in 1998. This led USAID to reverse its policy of only supporting condom-use programs.

When Katie Bradley, program assistant for maternal and child health at World Relief headquarters in Baltimore, visited Haiti she watched Dr. Morquette deal with another national scourge—voodoo. Katie watched as the doctor sat with a teenage boy who had a plastic Voodoo statue. Dr. Morquette was explaining the truth about Voodoo, and his own belief in Jesus.

“That is just as important to Dr. Morquette as the health message,” Katie says, adding that World Relief does not give aid to convert the recipients, but “the staff are very vocal Christians. There are lots of one-to-one interactions about the gospel” amidst their daily work.

Dr. Meredith Long recalls a man who stood

up in a health education session to announce, twice, “In Voodoo, we worship Satan.” World Relief staff have witnessed the effect of Voodoo, which is practiced by roughly half of the population. Dr. Morquette explains, “Voodoo thinking creates irresponsibility in Haitian culture: ‘It’s not my fault, it’s the spirits.’”

All the more important, then, are the churches in Haiti. “Entire communities are based around churches. Even without input from World Relief or other NGOs or government services, it is primarily the church that fills in the gaps in healthcare and education. And they do it with very few resources,” says Dr. Long.

Small Loans, Big Impact

World Relief also has a Microenterprise Development program in Haiti. Unlike many welfare programs, MED doesn’t cut monthly checks. It equips the needy to become self-sufficient by working with local churches to set up “community banks.” Members must save money before they are eligible for a small loan (average Haiti loan: \$80). At biweekly meetings, community bank members learn to budget and save. They are taught business planning and marketing skills, hold each other accountable and support each other. Members are given a loan repayment schedule and moderate interest is charged, according to WR, “not for private gain (the motivation of money lenders), nor for corporate gain (the motivation of commercial banks), but for the community’s gain.” And to create self-confidence.

Over a thousand Haitian mothers like Solange have used MED loans to buy supplies to start businesses. Solange and her husband could not support their four children until two years ago, when she took out a MED community bank loan. After two years of hard work and consistent loan repayments, she had saved 20,000 gourdes (about \$800), which made her eligible for a second loan of 50,000 gourdes (about \$2,000). She bought a “tap tap,” a public transportation vehicle, which her husband drives while Solange manages the money.

Eighty five to ninety five percent of loans are repaid, but when a borrower can’t repay, the Christian element of the community bank shines through. Ersil, mother of four, was a community bank member for two years and never missed a loan payment or a bank

meeting. Her business went well until it was robbed of money and goods. The bank forgave her loan, but nagged by the shame of defaulting, Ersil stopped coming to meetings and church. When the loan officer heard she was discouraged, he proposed a new loan with another community bank, which sent her back to work, back to church, and back to hope.



A happy microenterprise participant in Haiti

Patching a war-torn nation

World Relief's post-World War II mission was war relief. That now continues in Iraq, where the agency set up operations in March 2003 on the heels of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Despite media reports of Iraqi hostility to Coalition presence, World Relief reports innumerable instances of gratitude from Iraqis who welcome the end of an entrenched, ruthless dictatorial regime.

World Relief first sent aid to the support of the Jordanian Evangelical Committee for Relief and Development (JECRaD), a group of churches already supplying food to Iraqi refugees in Jordan. After the period of "shock and awe," it teamed up with JECRaD and Mission East, a Danish humanitarian organization, to tour the country and assess its needs.

Focused mainly on the Kurdish region of Iraq, World Relief is reconstructing schools, homes, churches, roads, and lives. Saddam Hussein tried to destroy Iraq's independent Kurds. A school headmaster in Dohuk recalls that he was fourteen when Saddam began bombing the Kurds. His father took him and his brother by the hand, leaving everything, and headed over the mountains in snowstorms to Turkey. Many were dying around them, including his grandfather and cousin, from exposure or falls. In Turkey, landmines and deadly diseases took their toll. At last American soldiers arrived to protect them. "We will never forget the USA's help. In a difficult time you know who is your friend," the schoolmaster says.

Saddam Hussein destroyed 5,000 villages. But JECRaD, Mission East and World Relief are committed to the rebuilding effort. They built twenty-three kindergartens and five secondary schools in Kirkuk, and ten more are in progress. In Baghdad, children will soon attend twenty-two restored kindergartens. Always finding ways to cultivate self-reliance, World Relief requires local residents to work alongside volunteers. They find, buy and cart back building materials (no Home Depot delivery here!), get elbow-deep in concrete, wield paintbrushes, and learn to plumb and wire their new homes. In Mangesh, villagers welcome emergency supplies of cement, sand, concrete block and plastic sheeting, with which they use to patch gaping holes in roofs and walls.

The killing of four relief workers in Mosul this March remind WR staff of the risks they face. Brandon Pustejovsky, on loan from World Relief to Mission East, spent 2002 in Afghanistan and arrived in Iraq in May 2003. He observes that "risk is associated more with country of origin than religion... The [Christian] believers themselves and the obvious way that God is working in them are my courage and my hope. Despite the risks that confront them, they are not about to abandon the Truth and Life they have found. Ultimately, the risks they face are to this life alone. And, I take the risk because of some supernatural compassion God has put in my heart."

Less than two hours from Mosul, World Relief and Mission East have just finished building thirty-two new concrete homes in the village of Ekmala Barkhabiri. The village leader's son, Khalid Ahmed Khalid, describes the improvements: "We were dreaming about this. The old houses are in bad condition so that we have to cover the roofs by plastic to stop leaking during the

rainy season. There is no way to remove the snow during winter [or] you will tear the plastic cover. It is a miserable life under mud roof."

Not only do the new houses have real roofs, they each have a kitchen, bathroom, and water closet, plumbing, electricity, fixtures and two bedrooms, or three for families of more than seven. "We will enjoy the new houses, and we are very happy," says Khalid, "We will never forget Mission East."

Mission East also gave the village sixty-three sheep. "The sheep were very important for us," says a village woman. "We will raise them and they will become more. We will benefit from their wool and milk."

The local school building was also restored. Headmaster Mr. Khasti explains, "Two months ago our school was without a

In Baghdad, children will soon attend twenty-two restored kindergartens. Always finding ways to cultivate self-reliance, World Relief requires local residents to work alongside volunteers.

fence, paint, electricity, a yard, or a bell. Children would throw stones and break the windows. The animals would lay by the school wall, yapping and howling. We were in torment. But now the school situation is much better."

In Dohuk governate, World Relief and Mission East are working with nine villages to repair roads, schools, houses and water lines. Plans are being laid for similar projects in up to thirty more Dohuk villages.

Restoring the Victims of War

World Relief also works to rebuild the human spirit. The deepest injury a war survivor suffers may be the hellish evil he has witnessed. The story of Massoud (sidebar) points to the critical role of the Gospel in restoring Iraq.

World Relief shores up churches which shelter people like Massoud. The Kurdish schoolmaster tells of starting a home church with friends. World Relief helped them to rent and equip a place to meet. Now twenty-five others join them "and we hope in the future to be more than 1,000 people and to open many churches in many places," he says. "I know that Jesus cares for us. He has sent organizations like World Relief to help us." World Relief has helped six churches in Iraq "grow in size and hope," says Brandon. It also helps with pastor salaries and housing.

World Relief offers its hand to all, regardless of religion. "We work to provide equally for Christian and Muslim," says Dr. Calver. "I believe in being love in action—the hands of Jesus—without respect to religion or culture. And where we work we see the cessation of hostilities between Christian and Muslim."

Letter From Iraq

From Brandon Pustejovsky

March 20, 2004

There is a large and important part of the Iraq story. It is the story of the church, the story of local Iraqis who have searched their own hearts and souls, sought answers in ancient texts, relationships, and achievements and found very few answers . . . until they came upon the message of Christianity.

But the house where I am now sitting has been rented by more materially fortunate people outside Iraq for the sake of Iraqi Christians. The house is nothing to speak of, really. The rent is one hundred dollars per month. I sit in its nicest room just now, a single light bulb burning faintly to my left, just above a small television with a metal antenna. Just below the bulb is the photograph of a mustachioed soldier, in the prime of his youth, his serious visage looking just to the left of the camera. It is his family who now resides in this house. He was once a soldier, and a good one, but he is a different man today.

The walls of the house are cracked and mostly barren, covered with drab coat of yellow paint. Plaster peels from the wooden frame of the door just in front of me, exposing the raw concrete below. Two days ago this room had no curtains, but that small improvement has since been made....The restroom is located just outside and to the left...The steel door creaks like that of a prison cell. In fact it locks with a sliding bolt, not from the inside but the outside. The windows are barred. Since my first entry into Iraq in May 2003, I have been astounded at how many rooms in this country could be used for makeshift incarceration.

The inhabitant of this house, whom I shall call Massoud, lived in the house of his parents until perhaps a week ago. At least ten people inhabited the dwelling, including his mother, father, brother, sister, wife and his four children. But his beliefs did not coincide with those of his parents. He wanted to read the Bible in his home with his wife but was not permitted to do so. The tension was palpable. His parents expected him to continue his successful career in the army. But something changed him. I do not know the whole story. But the senselessness of killing was definitely one thing.

As his wife prepared tea and his children drifted off to sleep, Massoud told me about his role in the Iraqi army during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. He led a mechanized unit which entered Kuwait two months after the initial

invasion and did not see combat. But shortly after the withdrawal, uprisings against Saddam began, partly at the behest of the United States. Although Massoud did not see the revolt of the Shi'ites in the south, he did witness some of the ensuing atrocities.

He recalled being commanded to send heavy machinery to a remote location in southern Iraq to dig a very large hole. At first he thought it was for a protective staging area for tanks. But when he asked the political officer in his unit about the hole, he was told to shut his mouth and obey orders. That evening trucks arrived loaded with Shi'ite men, women, and children. Soldiers ushered them into the hole. Women pleaded for their lives. The civilians were all shot that evening as they stood in the hole, some 500 of them according to Massoud. The hole was then covered with dirt.

Massoud looked for answers that did not include weapons and violence. He examined the Koran, the Bible, and spoke with friends. For some reason he returned to the Bible, to the Gospels in particular, and the message of Jesus. Its unconditional, self-sacrificial love was hard to fault, hard to reject. He found himself defending the message during chats with other soldiers. Soon, he was accused of being a Christian, even a missionary, which he at first denied. But as his heart began to change, he felt something he could no longer refute.

In a region where foreigners who proselytize are met with hostility, Massoud's case is encouraging. Massoud would say God changed his heart, not that he was "converted" by foreigners. I agree. Rather, God opens the eyes of those who seek Him. A god who depends on the persuasive power of the human intellect is no god at all.

Today, Massoud fights a cultural and spiritual battle. Being Kurdish or Arab is synonymous with being Muslim in Iraq. It's a challenge, even dangerous, to acknowledge you are a Christian. There are many others like Massoud. Some have been prompted by the violent death of loved ones in Iraq. Others have encountered foreigners sharing the message of Christ. Still others, like Massoud, have intensely painful and personal journeys. They may hide their beliefs from family and friends, but under Massoud's leadership, they meet together several times a week at some risk to themselves for prayer, mutual encouragement, and Bible study.

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