

PURE RELIGION

An Eyewitness to Tragedy

On December 26, 2004, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck deep beneath the Indian Ocean, 100 miles west of Sumatra, Indonesia. The shock cut fissures into the ocean floor, shifted entire tectonic plates, and even slightly altered the Earth's rotation.

The inevitable consequence of this earthquake was the deadliest tsunami in recorded history. The resulting destruction ultimately took tens of thousands of lives and left thousands of others without homes. People as far away as 5,000 miles felt the deadly consequences of this devastation.

Thomas and Gretna Palmer of Flagstaff, Arizona, were in Indonesia serving as humanitarian service missionaries for the Church on the day the tsunami hit. Two weeks later, Elder Palmer wrote the following:

“Our lives will never be the same as a result of what we have witnessed. Hundreds of thousands are searching, wondering, and few still hope that a family member may be found. We were taken to the city of Banda Aceh, one of the hardest hit areas of the country. It was a quiet and sobering experience as we moved through the remains of this once beautiful city. As we traveled further, I saw a very old man next to a large pile of rubbish, softly poking a stick into the mud and debris, seemingly looking for something—perhaps a grandchild. It was almost more than I could bear and is a scene that I cannot remove from my mind.

“The Church responded immediately to the disaster, and as we did so we witnessed the Lord

opening door after door. We had nine pallets of medical supplies in temporary storage that were immediately available for relief. Two full containers of clothing had been shipped from the Church Humanitarian Center and were distributed in the hardest hit areas.



“The Church, in cooperation with Islamic Relief Worldwide, chartered a cargo plane and filled it with 143,000 pounds of humanitarian emergency relief supplies from the LDS Humanitarian Center (consisting of medical and first aid supplies, hygiene kits, clothing, and shoes).

“The U.S. Air Force shipped Church relief supplies to afflicted areas. It was a joy to witness Indonesian and U.S. Air Force personnel working shoulder to shoulder loading these planes.

“Dr. Alwi Shihab, the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare of Indonesia, praised the Church's humanitarian efforts and expressed his gratitude that we had offered relief to his Muslim brothers and sisters.

“We do not know why such a tragedy has occurred, but our Heavenly Father does, and that is sufficient for us. We have witnessed many blessings, many miracles, many hearts softening, many relationships mending and many opportunities for reaching out with love to those in need. Our lives have been blessed to be a small part of the Lord's offering and to witness His mercy towards the victims of the tsunami.”