

An Episcopal Letter to United Methodists  
In the Wake of the Tsunami Disaster  
January 25, 2005

Dear United Methodist Pastors and Members:

*“In my distress I cry to the Lord, that he may answer me.”—Psalm 120:1*

*“You are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”—Psalm 23:4b*

In the twinkling of an eye, walls of water swept tens of thousands of our sisters and brothers in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa to their deaths. Some firsthand observers recall that the onrushing torrent looked like smoke, so quickly did it move and so high in the trees. A third of the dead may be children. Millions of people are destitute.

Now the long recovery has begun. Thanks to the generosity of big hearted people—United Methodists in the United States as well as people in the affected regions and persons of all faiths—aid is moving into place in nearly a dozen stricken countries. The emergency aid includes medicines and health camps, temporary shelters, food, and clothing such as saris and dhotas.

Rapid measures are possible because of cash donations to many relief and humanitarian agencies, including the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

The outpouring of response deeply moves me and other members of the United Methodist Council of Bishops. The bishops are profoundly grateful to our church members who have heard cries of distress on the other side of the world and responded with action. UMCOR dispatched \$750,000 in aid in the first week, and there is more to come.

Another important contribution is your gift of your trust in a sound relief process. UMCOR is listening closely to our ecumenical partners and to communities most affected by the disaster in planning long-range efforts. We are notably interested in ministries that fill the gaps in humanitarian response. UMCOR’s strength is in finding those who are or may be missed, identifying the services that will assist over-stressed providers, and in respecting the strengths and the capacity of the local people to manage their own recovery.

We thank you for the generosity of your donations by phone, on the Internet, and in special Sunday offerings. We urge congregations that have not received an offering for tsunami relief to prayerfully consider the possibility. The needs for renewal and restoration in the vast areas swept over by the tsunamis will be acute for a long time in the future. UMCOR is evaluating the roles it can play in reconstruction. A delegation visited Indonesian sites January 12-16. Staff was on the way to Sri Lanka that same week. Their observations and recommendations will help us determine a long-term strategy for the region. Your persistence in giving and your heartfelt prayer for these colleagues will be important sources of support as we enter this future work.

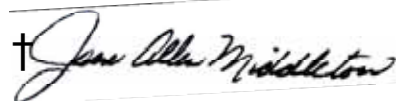
Soon the tsunami story will move off of page one, out of the 24/7 television news spotlight, perhaps out of the consciousness of many of us as the next news takes its place. But the beauty of The United Methodist Church is that it has always found the resources to stay the course. UMCOR will be there, assisting in whatever way it can for years to come. That is how we do things. We have the patience to abide with the most vulnerable.

On March 6 our church will have an opportunity to underscore both emergency assistance and patience in the long haul, this United Methodist gift of bearing witness away from the spotlight. On that date, our congregations will receive the annual One Great Hour of Sharing offering. This offering supports the administrative costs of our humanitarian mission. Our stewardship in this offering makes it possible for every single dollar of your gifts designated for the tsunami emergency to reach the people whose lives changed on December 26.

The response of the Central Pennsylvania Conference has once again witnessed to the overwhelming generosity of our people. We have received \$121,351 through our Conference Treasurer's office. In addition Mission Central has been crowded with volunteers who have been verifying and packing health kits, school kits, sewing kits and layette kits. We have already sent one shipment of clothing, medical supplies and 4,000 health kits to Southeast Asia. There is still a need for financial assistance and kits and we know you will respond.

Again, thank you for your gifts of money, trust, and ability to abide so that cries of distress do not go unheard. Thank you for your generous hearts. Thank you for strengthening survivors and aid workers alike with your gifts of ceaseless prayer in the Lenten season ahead.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Allen Middleton". To the left of the first few letters of the name is a small, simple cross symbol.

Jane Allen Middleton  
For the Council of Bishops