

Living into Asia's Pain . . .

Rebuilding will take many years. Now that the TV cameras have moved away from the devastation, our attention will turn to other things. Building relationships through religious institutions is one of the best ways to maintain a continuing commitment to rebuilding. If you or your church feels called to be so engaged, here are a few suggestions . . .

- Continue in intercessory prayer for the individuals, families communities affected and for those who serve in affected areas.
- Seek God's guidance about making a financial contribution.

Contributions to the **National Council of Churches USA**, designated to the **Tsunami Relief Fund**, will support the needs expressed by Asian churches (particularly in Sri Lanka and Indonesia) such as the Sister Church Partnerships. Please mail your checks to:

National Council of Churches USA, Tsunami Relief Fund
475 Riverside Drive #880, New York, NY 10115.

Contributions to **Church World Service** will support the variety of recovery operations in which our sister organization is engaged.

Please mail your checks to: Church World Service,
P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515.

- Seek God's guidance about establishing a Sister Church Partnership. Talk to your pastor and church leaders about the possibilities.
- Read the document on Guidelines for U.S. Churches Seeking to Engage in Tsunami Affected Areas at www.nccusa.org and explore other ways of becoming engaged.



For further information please call or e-mail:

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Listening to, Learning from and Living into Asia's Pain

A Reflection Guide on the Three-Month Anniversary of the December 26 Tsunami Good Friday to Easter Sunday, 2005

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains
tremble with its tumult. (Psalm 46: 1-3 NRSV)*



Ten-year-old Nina of Banda Aceh, Indonesia went to her aunt's house to spend Christmas day and slept over. When the earthquake and the tsunami occurred the following day, her entire immediate family: parents, two sisters and baby brother were all swept away.

Tamara Mendis of Chicago, native of Sri Lanka and wife of Rev. Eardley Mendis, pastor of Purna Jiwan South Asian Church (ELCA), was traveling with her daughter to her home town to spend the holidays with her family. When the tsunami hit, their train was submerged and derailed. About 800 of the more than 1000 people in that train died. Despite her daughter's valiant attempts Tamara could not be rescued in time.



The people of this Lutheran church in Nias Island, Indonesia, were enjoying coffee following Sunday worship when the tsunami hit. The entire congregation with the exception of the pastor's husband and daughter who had gone on an errand was swept into the sea. This shell is all that is left of the church building.

The fishing communities who live along the shoreline are among those who suffered most. Their lives, communities and livelihood are destroyed. After the tsunami, fishing boats were found on roads and buses were found in the sea.



Listening to Asia's Pain . . .

The Asian Context

If South and South East Asian countries experienced a "loud" tsunami on December 26th, they have experienced many "silent" tsunamis over the years. Asian Christians live in the context of poverty, ethnic conflicts, religious persecution, wars, a burgeoning AIDS epidemic and the residual effects of centuries of colonial domination.

Asian Christianity, an ancient and mature tradition, always existed in the context of religious plurality. For centuries Asian Christians have had to theologially struggle with the awareness that among Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and other religious people, there are deeply devout, spiritually mature, ethically exemplary women and men who can be deemed saintly by any measure. Asian Christianity has much to teach U.S. about how to be Christians in a pluralistic environment.

Rebuilding Community #1 Priority, Say Asian Church Leaders

Community is what sustains people. When they have community around them, people show a remarkable resilience in bouncing back from disasters.



A conversation with a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka

The difficulty with the devastation of the tsunami is that entire families and communities were destroyed and displaced. The best contribution of U.S. churches is in helping to create the conditions that are necessary for the healing to take place. The number one priority is to rebuild community, say church leaders in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Involvements Must Be People-Centered, Says Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

People-centeredness means that all rebuilding efforts be based on fairness, transparency, and integrity, that projects be inclusive to insure that people of all faiths, ethnicities and political leanings are treated with equal respect, that preferential options be given to the most vulnerable, and integration between ecology, health, and development is ensured. We should also work for spiritual empowerment: From conflict to solidarity to healing and reconciliation, says a communiqué from the CCA.

Learning from Asia's Pain . . .

Sister Church Partnerships

Even though the tsunami provides U.S. churches an opportunity to give immediate relief, Sister Church Partnerships are intended for the long term and to serve the needs of both partners. U.S. Christians can benefit as they learn from Asian Christians, new ways of being Christian. Sister Church Partnerships can also mean building relationships between families, pastors and other professionals within the church family, such as doctors, teachers and business leaders. It can also mean that U.S. churches can encourage relationships between a local school and a school in the tsunami-affected region, or between hospitals, businesses, community organizations, religious institutions, etc.



Lutheran Bishops in Nias Island, Indonesia

Logistics of Relationship Building

A visit by a small team from the U.S. church is a good first step to establishing relationships. Many who live in Sri Lankan and Indonesian cities use e-mail. While this is not common in villages, increasingly young people are using it. Those who have not had any need to use e-mail may feel differently if meaningful relationships are being forged with U.S. Christians. (Internet cafes are readily available in most cities and towns.) A tried and true method of communicating is the old fashioned art of writing letters.

Complexities of Poverty and Wealth

Poverty is widespread in Asia. But the dynamics of poverty are very different than in the United States and must not be confused with unhappiness and depression. When communities are intact, however materially poor people might be, they have human resources to deal with the most difficult challenges of life. This is why the first priority is rebuilding community. Relationships between Americans and Asians necessarily involve an imbalance of power and wealth. U.S. Christians must take care not to exploit it inadvertently. While money is needed and necessary, it must be channeled through churches and denominational offices. It keeps relationships safe from the corrupting influence of money, and prevents persons or families within a church getting more or less than others from their American benefactors, which disrupts community rather than rebuild.