
“I Was an Hungred, and Ye Gave Me Meat”

President Gordon B. Hinckley



Gordon B. Hinckley, “I Was an Hungred, and Ye Gave Me Meat,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 58

In 1936, 68 years ago, one of the secretaries to the Quorum of the Twelve told me what a member of the Twelve had told her. She said that in the coming general conference there would be announced a program which would come to be recognized as even more noteworthy than the coming of our people to these valleys as pioneers.

Now, parenthetically, you should not tell your secretary what you should keep confidential, and she should not tell anyone else when she is given confidential information.

But that was what happened back then. It never happens today. Oh, no! I should add that my able secretaries are never guilty of such a breach of confidentiality.

As you who are acquainted with the history know, there was announced at that time the Church security plan, the name of which was subsequently changed to the Church welfare program.

I wondered back in those days how anything the Church did could eclipse in anyone’s judgment the historic gathering of our people to these western valleys of the United States. That was a movement of such epic proportions that I felt nothing could ever be so noteworthy. But I have discovered something of interest in the last short while.

We receive many prominent visitors in the office of the First Presidency. They include heads of state and ambassadors of nations. A few weeks ago, we entertained the mayor of one of the great cities of the world. We have, likewise, recently entertained the vice president and the ambassador of Ecuador, the ambassador from Lithuania, the ambassador from Belarus, and others. In our conversations not one of these visitors mentioned the great pioneer journey of our forebears. But each of them, independently, spoke in high praise of our welfare program and our humanitarian efforts.

And so as I speak in this great priesthood meeting, I wish to say a few words concerning our efforts in behalf of those in need, be they members of the Church or otherwise, in various parts of the world.

When the modern welfare program was put in motion, it was designed to take care of the needs of our own people. In the years that have followed, thousands upon thousands have been served. Bishops and Relief Society presidents have had available to them food and clothing and other supplies for those in need. Numberless members of the Church have worked in volunteer capacities in producing that which was required. We now operate 113 storehouses, 63 farms, 105 canneries and home storage centers, 18 food processing and distribution plants, as well as many other facilities.

Not only have the needs of Church members been met, but aid has been extended to countless others. Right here in this Salt Lake City community, many of the hungry are fed daily by non-LDS agencies utilizing LDS welfare supplies.

Here, in this city, and in a number of other places, we operate beautiful stores where there is no cash register, where no money changes hands, where food, clothing, and other necessities are provided to those in distress. I believe that no better milk, no better meat, and no better flour is found on any grocery shelf than that which is distributed from the bishops’ storehouses.

The principles on which these establishments operate are essentially what they were at the beginning.

Those in need are expected to do all they can to provide for themselves. Then families are expected to assist in taking care of

their less-fortunate members. And then the resources of the Church are made available.

We believe in and take very seriously the words of our Lord:

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (**Matt. 25:34–36**).

This is the Lord’s way of caring for those in need which, He declared, “ye have . . . always with you” (see **Matt. 26:11**).

Those who are able voluntarily work to provide for those who are not able. Last year there were 563,000 days of donated labor in welfare facilities. That is the equivalent of a man working eight hours a day for 1,542 years.

A recent issue of the *Church News* carried the story of a group of farmers in a small Idaho community. May I read briefly from that account?

“It is 6 a.m. in late October, and frost already hangs in the air over the sugar beet fields of Rupert, Idaho.

“The long arms of the ‘beeters’ stretch out over twelve rows, slicing the tops off sugar beets. Behind them, the harvesters thrust their steel fingers into the soil and scoop up the beets, pulling them up toward a belt and into a waiting truck.

“... This is the Rupert Idaho Welfare Farm, and those who are working here today are volunteers. ... At times more than 60 machines [are] working in harmony together— ... all owned by local farmers.”

The work goes on throughout the day.

“[At] 7 p.m. ... the sun has set, leaving the land dark and cold once again. The farmers head home, exhausted and happy.

“They have finished well another day.

“They have harvested the Lord’s sugar beets” (Neil K. Newell, “A Harvest in Idaho,” *Church News*, 20 Mar. 2004, 16).

Such remarkable volunteer service goes on constantly to assure supplies for the storehouses of the Lord.

Since the early beginnings, the program has moved beyond caring for the needy to the encouragement of preparedness on the part of families of the Church. No one knows when catastrophe might strike—or sickness, or unemployment, or a disabling accident.

Last year the program helped families store 18 million pounds of basic foods against a possible time of need. Hopefully, that time will never come. But the good, wholesome, basic food so stored brings peace of mind and also the satisfaction of obedience to counsel.

Now there has been added another element. It began some years ago when drought in Africa brought hunger and death to uncounted numbers. Members of the Church were invited to contribute to a great humanitarian effort to meet the needs of those terribly impoverished people. Your contributions were numerous and generous. The work has continued because there are other serious needs in many places. The outreach of this aid has become a miracle. Millions of pounds of food, medical supplies, blankets, tents, clothing, and other materials have staved off famine and desolation in various parts of the world. Wells have been dug, crops have been planted, lives have been saved. Let me give you an example.

Neil Darlington is a chemical engineer who worked for a large industrial company in Ghana. Eventually, he retired.

He and his wife were then called as a missionary couple. They were sent to Ghana. Brother Darlington says, “In areas of famine, disease, and social unrest, we were there as representatives of the Church, extending a helping hand to the destitute, the hungry, the distressed.”

In small villages they drilled new wells and repaired old ones. Those of us who have fresh, clean water in abundance can scarcely appreciate the circumstances of those who are without.

Can you picture this couple, devoted Latter-day Saint missionaries? They drill into the dry earth. Their drill reaches the water table below, and the miracle liquid comes to the surface and spills over the dry and thirsty soil. There is rejoicing. There are tears. There is now water to drink, water with which to wash, water to grow crops. There is nothing more treasured in a dry land than water. How absolutely beautiful is water pouring from a new well.

On one occasion, when the tribal chiefs and the elders of the village gathered to thank them, Brother Darlington asked the chief if he and Sister Darlington could sing a song for them. They looked into the eyes of the dark-skinned men and women before them and sang "I Am a Child of God" as an expression of their common brotherhood.

This one couple, through their efforts, have provided water for an estimated 190,000 people in remote villages and refugee camps. Contemplate, if you will, the miracle of this accomplishment.

And now, literally thousands of their kind, married couples, couples who otherwise might simply have lived out their lives in largely idle pursuits, have served, and are serving, in scores of ways and in scores of places. They have worked and continue to work in the impoverished areas of America. They have worked, and still do so, in India and Indonesia, in Thailand and Cambodia, in Russia and the Baltic nations. And so the work expands.

Joining with others, the Church has recently provided wheelchairs for some 42,000 disabled persons. Think of what this means to people who literally have had to crawl to get about. With the aid of selfless doctors and nurses, neonatal resuscitation training was provided to nearly 19,000 professionals in the year 2003 alone. The lives of thousands of babies will be spared as a consequence.

Last year some 2,700 individuals were treated for eye problems, and 300 local practitioners were trained in sight-saving procedures. The blind have literally been made to see.

Where devastating floods have come, where earthquakes have created disaster, where hunger has stalked the land, wherever want has been created by whatever cause, representatives of the Church have been there. Some 98 million dollars in cash and in-kind assistance have been distributed in the past year, bringing such aid to a total of 643 million dollars in just 18 years.

I have been a firsthand witness to the effectiveness of our humanitarian efforts. In traveling the world, I have seen the recipients of your generosity. In 1998 I visited the areas of Central America, which had been ravaged by Hurricane Mitch. Here the distribution of food and clothing was quickly organized, and the cleaning and rebuilding of devastated homes and shattered lives was a miracle to behold.

There is not time to go on recounting the reach of these great and significant programs. 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-yous. It is compensation enough that when we help one of the least of these our Father's children, we have done it unto Him and His Beloved Son (see [Matt. 25:40](#)).

We shall go on in this work. There will always be a need. Hunger and want and catastrophes will ever be with us. And there will always be those whose hearts have been touched by the light of the gospel who will be willing to serve and work and lift the needy of the earth.

As a correlated effort we have established the Perpetual Education Fund. It has come about through your generous contributions. It is now operating in 23 countries. Loans are extended to worthy young men and women for education. Otherwise, they would be trapped in the stagnated poverty their parents and forebears have known for generations. Some 10,000 and more are now being assisted, and experience to this date indicates that with such training they are now earning three to four times what was previously possible.

The Spirit of the Lord guides this work. This welfare activity is secular activity, expressing itself in terms of rice and beans, of blankets and tents, of clothing and medicine, of employment and education for better employment. But this so-called secular 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" ([Acts 10:38](#)).

May heaven prosper this great program, and may heaven's blessing rest upon all who serve therein, I humbly pray, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Gospel topics: couple missionaries, education, welfare

