

TSUNAMI!

Four years later



2004 tsunami spurs 'Tsunami of love, compassion'

A tsunami respects no differences, shows no favorites. Its powerful wall of water destroys all persons and property in its path, whether Hindu or Sikh, Christian or Jain, Buddhist, Muslim or Parsi.

The tsunami that hit Southeast Asia on Sunday morning, Dec. 26, 2004, and reached all the way to the east coast of Africa was the worst tsunami in history, causing unprecedented damage. Nearly a quarter of a million persons died and another 1.1 million were displaced.

Huge boulders piled along the sea coast to prevent erosion ended up tossed like children's blocks. Buildings disappeared, including large churches. In low-lying areas, such as Banda Aceh at the western end of the Indonesian archipelago, whole communities were wiped off the map.

In other areas, such as the southern tip of India, canals and rivers provided ready pathways for the surging water and instant death for many persons who were bathing, shampooing, or doing laundry several kilometers from the seacoast.

In response, the survivors experienced "a tsunami of love, a tsunami of compassion," says the Rev. Gnana Robinson, founder and director of Peace Trust Kanyakumari in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. "As I traveled around I saw all kinds of responses, from near and far," he remembers, "breaking barriers of race and caste."

Included in this immediate response were members and congregations of the United Church of Christ.

By the time morning services were underway in the United States that Sunday, the tsunami had already hit half-a-day earlier

on the other side of the globe. Pastors quickly added concern for persons in tsunami-affected areas to their morning prayers and alerted members of the need for special offerings.

By the next morning, the first payments of \$50,000 and \$20,000 sped on their way from the UCC to Church World Service (CWS) and ACT (Action by Churches Together). The three million dollars contributed by UCC members that year to One Great Hour of Sharing made this immediate response possible.

Over the next few months, the UCC generated its own "tsunami of love and compassion." Members and churches contributed \$4.7 million in special offerings designated to help tsunami victims and survivors.

Because of our global alliances through

membership in ACT and CWS as well as partner relationships, "the UCC was able to respond across the vast tsunami affected area," says Susan M. Sanders, UCC Minister for Global Sharing of Resources, "from Indonesia to Somalia."

What differences did our response make?

As the fourth anniversary of the Indian Ocean Tsunami approaches on Dec. 26, my wife, Deborah, and I were privileged to travel to the tip of India for One Great Hour of Sharing and Global Ministries to report on the impact of the UCC tsunami of love and compassion.

May the photos and stories in this special insert convey a sense of the care and stewardship of our gifts and of the gratitude with which they are received.

W. Evan Golder

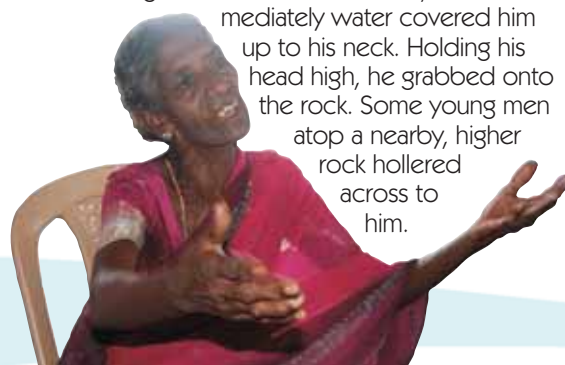
Editor Emeritus, United Church News

Tsunami survivors

All of the persons featured in these stories received aid from Peace Trust Kanyakumari, a Global Ministries partner in Tamil Nadu, India, funded in part with donations from UCC members and churches. Global Ministries is the common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.

Varghese Paniadimai and Susammal Varghese

A fisherman, Varghese Paniadimai was working on his nets at the beach that Sunday morning, when he ducked behind a large rock to answer nature's call. Just then the first tsunami wave hit. When he emerged from behind the rock, almost immediately water covered him



up to his neck. Holding his head high, he grabbed onto the rock. Some young men atop a nearby, higher rock hollered across to him.

They reached out and pulled him up to safety. Their efforts saved his life, but caused abrasions on both legs as they tugged and scraped him across the rock. He lost his boat to the tsunami. Later he received a new boat, engine and net.

After the 7 a.m. church service, his wife, Susammal Varghese, headed to the beach to dry some fish on the sand. Suddenly she heard voices yelling at her. "Grab hold of a net! The wave might pull you out to sea!" She grabbed a net, but as the wave pulled her, both the net and her sari got caught in a bush. Down she went, face first into the sand, breaking off both her front teeth. Seeing this, her grandson ran to save her — and was washed into the sea. The grandson's mother (Susammal's daughter) ran to

save her son — and in turn was washed into the sea. Next the grandson's father ran to save his wife — and he was washed into the sea.

Miracle of miracles, all three were saved by fishermen in boats who had stayed off shore. And Susammal herself? She was saved by the people on the beach who had warned her about the tsunami. Four years later, she still is embarrassed to smile.



Crossing the Boundaries

Global Ministries missionaries Tim and Diane Fonderlin worked for Habitat for Humanity in Banda Aceh after the tsunami. In one fishing village one kilometer from the ocean, Tim says, nothing was left but rubble as far as the eye could see. After the workers cleaned the rubble off the slabs, they built 100 metal frame houses and painted them all green.



Tim Fonderlin photo

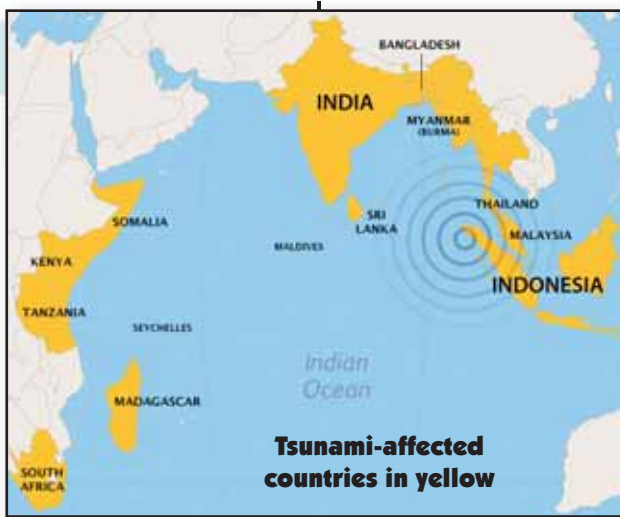
Diane's favorite story concerns "one of the most beautiful babies you've ever seen." When the tsunami hit, the mother was inside her home. Outside she could hear screaming. She went out to investigate and the tsunami tore the baby from her arms. As she watched, her baby bobbed away on the wave. Further downstream, a man on top of a palm tree saw the baby coming and snatched it from the water. When the water receded, he found the mother and returned her baby.



Diane Fonderlin photo

Before the tsunami, Aceh had been closed to the outside world for two decades. Its people were very fundamentalist Muslims, with strict Islamic Shariah law, not government law. Yet through the tsunami, the people changed, says Tim. "They knew we were Christians and that we came with a Christian organization," he says. "Yet they asked me, as a man of faith, if I would pray for their relatives in the hospital. Not only were a lot of houses and infrastructure rebuilt, but their eyes and hearts were opened to compassion crossing the boundaries of religion."

One Great Hour of Sharing and Week of Compassion joined together with Habitat for Humanity to fund the construction of 200 homes in Banda Aceh.



Tsunami-affected countries in yellow

'I'll never forget'

On the morning of the tsunami, Global Ministries missionary Grace Bunker, a teacher with the Jaffna Diocese in Sri Lanka, had gone on vacation to the beach. As she and a friend walked along a coastal road, they saw people running away from the sea. Two men held hands across and carried an old man. "I'll never forget the look of terror on their faces," she says. As the water receded, she saw buildings destroyed, furniture washed out of a church, vehicles strewn everywhere.

That afternoon, her friends drove her in their van to higher ground, where they found a motel with vacancies. Phone service was down, but one man shared his cell phone. "I called my family," she remembers, "but I didn't realize how traumatized I was." She got very angry when others in her group rejected a man's pleas for a ride to safety. "I had lived there for 3 1/2 years," she says, "and I knew that Sri Lanka people would have filled the van with people to get them out. And here we were, westerners, with a half-empty van and we wouldn't take anyone else out with us."

After she worked her way back to her mission station, she helped organize tsunami relief. "I felt that I was back to feeling like myself," she says. Then she adds, "But now, four years later, I find myself very nervous as I explain this to you. I thought I had moved on from all this — but I haven't."

Because of the tsunami, the government declared a state of emergency. Overall, more than 30,000 persons died in Sri Lanka, with 5,000 missing and another 100,000 displaced.



Frederick Raja Sakar photo

The guiding principle for distributing funds for disaster recovery is "Build Back Stronger." For 84 fishermen off the southern tip of India who lost their boats to the tsunami, UCC funds are being used to replace them with not only a boat but also an engine and a net. The lucky fisherman here (left) is Joseph Nayagam, shown with his wife, Shyamala Mary. Presenting the replacements are Deborah Golder, representing Global Ministries, and the Rev. Gnaana Robinson of Peace Trust Kanyakumari.

Thank you, UCC!

Dear UCC family:

The Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami left a wake of immense death and destruction across a huge area from Southeast Asia to the east coast of Africa. While the impact of the tsunami may no longer be on the world's radar screen, it remains a deep concern to the United Church of Christ. Because of your faithful annual support of One Great Hour of Sharing, the UCC was able to respond immediately. Your amazing outpouring of love and compassion, expressed as \$4.7 million in the form of special tsunami response gifts, has enabled the UCC to sustain an eight-year commitment to recovery and rehabilitation.

We give thanks for you and for our partners in Indonesia, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Somalia who allow us to walk alongside tsunami survivors on the long road to recovery. While life will never be the same for the survivors, hope for the future is emerging.

This report shares glimpses of the first four years of our UCC response, highlighting the work of Peace Trust Kanyakumari, India. The UCC has supported similar restorative work across the tsunami-impacted area and anticipates continuing for another four years.

Thank you for making this ministry of love and compassion possible.

In gratitude,

UCC Wider Church Ministries and Global Ministries

Tsunami survivors

Punitha Christhuraj

On that Sunday, Punitha Christhuraj and her daughter, 12, were selling baked goods at the beach while her son, nine, played nearby. Her husband, a fisherman, had stayed home. When the first tsunami wave rolled in, neighbors grabbed her son and took him to safety on a nearby rooftop. But she didn't know that. Panicked, she ran all around the beach, screaming for him. Later, she reconnected with the neighbors and her son. Her family lost their house and all their furniture. They moved closer to the city and she no longer sells food at the beach although her husband still goes to sea. UCC donations funded uniforms and school supplies for her children and helped establish a vocational training program in which she is now enrolled.



Rosy Justin

As the towering wave surged past the beach, it coursed its way down canals and rivers, killing many people who were bathing or doing laundry three and four kilometers from the sea. One of these was a 14-year-old boy, one of four nieces and nephews that Rosy Justin and her husband, Justin Bergmans, were raising. The other three grabbed onto a tree and shouted for help. A passerby lifted them up into the tree, saving their lives, but then slipped and lost his life. The couple now raise six children, these three and their own three. Even with the new boat her husband received, the family struggles financially.



Tsunami survivors



Subiah Rajandran lost not only her house and belongings but also the family cow. She and her husband received a new milking cow from UCC contributions so they could sell milk again. When that cow gave birth, they sold the cow and now get high-quality milk from the calf.

Thangiah Chidambadaram, 70, made a living for him and his wife by recycling the stems of coconut leaves. He would ride his bicycle around his neighborhood, collecting bundles of stems. Then he would sell them to a wholesaler who, in turn, would sell them to someone who would make brooms from them. When the tsunami washed away his bike, Peace Trust Kanyakumari replaced it.



Immediately following the tsunami, the affected areas were flooded with food and used clothing. Still in short supply were school supplies and school uniforms. Within three weeks Peace Trust Kanyakumari gave school uniforms, notebooks, stationery and supplies to 750 children. On a second occasion, they outfitted thousands more children to return to school.



Using some UCC funds, Peace Trust Kanyakumari gave 10,000 Indian rupees each (approximately \$200) to 20 persons, on condition that they repay the money so it could be loaned again. Many of these persons were carpenters who worked for fishermen. Their tools, left on the beach, were washed out to sea. They used the money to buy new tools and have since repaid their loans. Latha Swamidhas (not pictured here) lost her rope-making machine and her supply of raw coconut fiber to the tsunami. She used her money to replace these and has since repaid the loan.

Antoni Lucas

Antoni Lucas attended the 7 a.m. church service, then headed to the beach to mend his nets. His wife was home, a bit further from the sea, with their daughter. Antoni saw the first wave, but had never heard of a tsunami. Nevertheless, he and other fishermen on the beach ran away to save themselves. When he returned, all the boats and nets on the beach had vanished, washed out to sea. He received a new fiberglass boat with an engine and a net. However, he and other fishermen with small boats would like to have nautical GPS (global positioning system) units. Some fishermen with large boats do have GPS units. When they discover large schools of fish, they catch what they can, then mark the latitude and longitude of the spot in the ocean on their GPS units so they can return the next day to continue fishing at the same place.



Lingadurai Rajamani

Lingadurai Rajamani, 22, grew up playing in the water, so he didn't see any reason to be afraid when he heard that ocean water had come inland 500 meters. As he stood and watched, a huge wave surged toward him, so he turned and ran. The wave caught him, knocked him down, and washed him into his cousin's house, banging his foot against the door jamb. Once inside, he saw his cousin's grandmother. As water filled the room, they floated to the ceiling and he was washed out a window. Grabbing the window ledge he held on desperately, the water now up to his nose. Once the water receded he was safe, although he spent a month in the hospital for treatment of his foot. He now works for Peace Trust Kanyakumari. Trapped in the house, his cousin's grandmother lost her life.



Indian inter-faith group meets unmet needs



To most of us, this photo probably shows some scattered activity around a muddy hole in the ground. But if you look with the vision of the Rev. Gnana Robinson, you see the first steps in constructing a home for the care of the aged.

Robinson is president of Peace Trust Kanyakumari, an inter-faith organization he founded in 1985 at the southern tip of India to bring harmony with peace and justice among people of all religions and ideologies. In the 23 years since, he has organized inter-faith seminars, consultations, rallies, meetings and festivals all over India toward that end.

Peace Trust also tackles social evils such as poverty, corruption, caste- and gender discrimination, "dowry menace," and drug and alcohol addiction.

Robinson's *modus operandi* is to seek unmet needs and to develop programs to fill those gaps.

For example, when he learned that young women who stayed home all day were being abused by alcoholic young men, he offered vocational training. So far, 250 women have taken courses in tailoring, typing, computer skills, candle making and fiber craft.

Since the fishing families in Kanyakumari are Christian, the women begin each day with worship. They also benefit from socializing while they work.

Following the tsunami, Robinson avoided the rush to provide food and clothes, since others provided these in abundance. Instead, he toured the area, noting what needs



Student uses a light table to trace embroidery patterns.

were not being met.

When fishermen lost their boats to the sea, Peace Trust replaced not only 45 boats but also engines and nets – with another 35 yet to be given. Carpenters who lost tools to repair fishing boats received new tools. When children skipped school because they lacked uniforms or supplies, Peace Trust supplied them.

And when most attention focused on fishing families along the coast, Robinson learned of lower caste families three and four kilometers inland, where the tsunami water had killed people and destroyed homes as it surged through rivers and canals.

Some people lost cattle and livestock. Others had their land ruined by muddy, salty water and no longer could grow rice, bananas or coconuts. In their economy, for example, they use every part of the coconuts: the shells, milk, meat, fibers and leaves.

So far Peace Trust has built and given away 54 houses, with another 20 to be built. It has replaced livestock, bicycles and tools so that others can earn a living.

Most of this was accomplished through Peace Trust's partnership with Global Ministries, the common witness of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with funding from One Great Hour of Sharing.

Oh, and about that muddy hole in the ground? Partly due to the tsunami and partly due to changing social conditions in India, many elderly persons are being left with no one to care for them. Responding to yet another unmet need, Robinson and Peace Trust have determined to build this two-story residence for 60 aged persons.

During our October visit, work had stalled because of the monsoon season — but now it has resumed. Soon the rest of us will be able to see what Gnana Robinson had envisioned all along.



Tsunami Summary

Definition: A huge destructive wave or series of waves caused by large-scale disturbances on the sea floor such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or landslides.

When: This tsunami, the largest in recorded history, occurred in the late morning of Dec. 26, 2004.

Where: The earthquake that triggered this tsunami occurred approximately 90 miles off the west coast of Aceh, in Sumatra, Indonesia. The tsunami waves caused deaths in more than a dozen countries from South Africa and Somalia to Indonesia (see map inside).

Why: Although tsunami waves travel between 300 and 600 mph in deep water, they form only a very small hump and do little damage. In shallow water near coastlines, a tsunami slows down to only tens of miles per hour but forms large destructive waves. Along long stretches of coastline near Aceh, the tsunami waves reached between 75 and 100 feet tall.

How many deaths: The death toll reached around 230,000 persons.

Who: Aid agencies estimate that children made up one-third of those killed, because of the high proportion of children in the affected regions and because children were least able to resist the surging waters. In some regions, four times as many women as men were killed, while they waited on the beach for their fishermen to return.

How: In many countries, the tsunami came in stages. First, a huge wave surged inland around a quarter of a mile. Second, it then reversed itself and dragged homes, boats and persons out to sea, leaving exposed large areas of coastline never seen and attracting thousands of persons to capture floundering fish and collect shiny shells and stones. Third, after about 30 minutes another wave returned, even higher and stronger, flattening homes and drowning people.

\$\$\$ Contributed: Public response to tsunami victims was immediate and overwhelming. UCC members and churches contributed \$4.7 million in special offerings. This magnificent outpouring enabled the UCC's Global Sharing of Resources Ministry to respond in a tsunami of love to unpredictable needs.

This special 'TSUNAMI! four years later' insert prepared by

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