

Aiding the People of Iraq *A Survey of Faith-based Compassion*

By Lynn Vincent

In a sweltering, faraway sand-scape called Iraq the oppressed are becoming free. But the cost of that freedom is high: death, displacement, food and water shortages, health-service interruption, and infrastructure damage. Scores of humanitarian groups worldwide are responding to the needs. From government-funded behemoths such as USAID and the United Nations, to smaller groups such as Nashville-based Healing Hands International, philanthropy-minded individuals around the globe are pouring resources into Iraq. This month, *Compassion & Culture* surveys a cross-section of faith-based charities to learn what they are doing to help.

Such groups are well aware of the challenges: Fifteen years ago, Jacob Kramer, who heads disaster relief efforts for the Christian Reformed Church World Relief Committee, explained one primary obstacle all aid groups face in Iraq: No one knows quite how big the problem is.

"There are no current surveys of humanitarian needs," Mr. Kramer said. "There are some overall figures that the World Food Programme reports, such as that 1.4 million people depended on food distribution before the war, that there was a lot of malnourishment, as well as high morbidity in children under five." But these are old data, Mr. Kramer explained. Now, with the collapse of industry and the economy in at least temporary chaos, the number of people dependent on food distribution is probably much higher.

That's a shame for a country so rich in agricultural plenty. Dutch by birth, Mr. Kramer worked in Iraq 15 years ago as director of sales and marketing for a western European equipment manufacturer. He describes the land around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as an "incredible, beautiful

valley. Farmers there grow wheat, tomatoes, and a whole variety of vegetables." In southern Iraq, the people grow sugar cane, Mr. Kramer said. In Kurdish areas to the north, potatoes are an abundant crop.

But he notes that the U.S.-led war to oust Saddam Hussein took place in March and April, during what should have been the seeding time in the Tigris and Euphrates valley. Because of that, many farmers missed their planting time, and crop results in the fall will be poor. This may extend the period of Iraqi dependence on humanitarian food aid.

His group, CRCWR, plans to distribute food through a Messianic Jewish group that has worked in Iraq for the past six years. But such faith-based humanitarians have faced criticism from U.S. and international media, public policy groups, and non-sectarian aid organizations who say religious groups handing out material help ought to keep their religion to themselves.

Some faith-based groups have agreed to do just that. For example, Paul Dirdak, CEO of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, said his organization will funnel aid through established groups that do not evangelize. Healing Hands spokesman Trent Wheeler leaned in that direction as well, noting a new trend in Christian relief: "It used to be primarily, 'Preach, preach, preach,'" he told the *Christian Science Monitor*. The new strategy, he said, is to meet human need first, and spiritual needs later.

Meanwhile, Salvation Army spokeswoman Theresa Whitfield said her group goes back to its mission statement when deciding how to balance material and spiritual aid. "Our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination based on religion," Ms. Whitfield told *Compassion & Culture*. "I hope people can see Christ in the services we offer, that they can see Christ in the work we do. It's one thing to articulate with your lips who you are, but we are more often judged by our actions."

Greg Dabel said logistical challenges make equitable action in Iraq difficult. Head of Graton, Calif.-based Kids for the Kingdom, Mr. Dabel said setting up physical delivery systems such as transportation and warehousing present a formidable challenge to aid workers. "When a whole society is in chaos, how do you set up a warehouse and distribute goods and services equitably? How do you triage the needs?"



Lynn Vincent is features editor at World Magazine.

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Iraqi Aid

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He said small groups like his own stand a better chance of reaching the Iraqi people with real help if they team up with other organizations that have distribution systems already in place. Kids for the Kingdom has partnered with a Jordanian-based ministry to provide food boxes filled with staples like rice, cheese, sugar, tea, and lentils for Iraqi refugees arriving in Jordan.

Many faith-based aid organizations are taking similar approaches, while others—usually larger groups—are able to provide stand-alone services. Below, *Compassion & Culture* looks at twelve groups meeting the Iraqi people in the gap between war and freedom.

World Vision

The World Food Programme has designated the evangelical group World Vision as the lead agency for emergency food distribution in Iraq. The Washington state-based group plans to ship more than 8,000 metric tons of food and other emergency supplies to the region. The first shipment will feed 250,000 people for two months.

World Vision has also been assisting displaced families with clothing. Many families fled their homes during allied bombing with only the clothes on their backs. Some, who wound up in refugee camps and aid centers, wore the same garments for weeks. Others, expecting to gather more clothing at home returned to find their belongings looted, or destroyed.

A man named Abu explained to World Vision in April that when he and his family fled Baghdad, they wore the same clothes for 20 days. Ironically, Abu, a Palestinian, had headed a prosperous garment factory in Iraq's capital city. At a third-country refugee camp in Jordan, in a big, warehouse-style tent, World Vision workers spread out for Abu and his family a tarpaulin covered with shirts, trousers, and some children's clothes donated by Australians. Finally, Abu's clan wouldn't have to hand-wash and don again the same clothes they'd worn on the run.

World Vision is accepting donations to assist the Iraqi people with food, health care, and clothing needs.

World Vision – USA

PO Box 9716
Federal Way, WA 98063-9716
888-511-6598
www.worldvision.org

Episcopal Relief and Development

Headquartered in New York City, Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) calls itself “the organized, tangible response to Christ’s call to minister to the hungry and thirsty, the sick and those in prison, to clothe the naked, and welcome

the stranger.” Its mission in the U.S. and around the world is to provide emergency assistance and rehabilitative support to people affected by natural disasters, war, and civil strife. It also funds development projects around the world.

In its response to post-war efforts in Iraq, ERD is working in partnership with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Before the war began, that group maintained relief distribution centers inside Iraq—in Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Basra. In April, it began restocking those centers. MECC reported then that nearly 3,000 families had fled to unsafe areas in central and southern Iraq. MECC set up centers in Karakosh and al-Kush that housed at least 2,300 displaced families.

ERD has sent relief shipments containing food packages, blankets, and tents to Iraq through Amman, Jordan. Foods are basic: canned beef, tuna, cheese, beans and, for children, powdered milk. As of mid-April, MECC, aided by ERD, was the only group providing food to Iraqis who had fled to northeast Syria.

Episcopal Relief and Development

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Christian Reformed World Relief Committee

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) is a relief, development, and educational ministry supported by the Christian Reformed Church in North America. CRWRC supports 100 staff and many programs in North America, and in over 30 countries.

The group plans to deliver post-war charity to the Iraqi people through Menorah Ministries, a Messianic Jewish group that has done humanitarian work inside Iraq for the past six years. CRWRC will deliver blankets, food, some clothing, and other material support through local churches already established in the major cities of Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul. There is also the possibility of “expanding out to distribute aid through some mosques,” said Jacob Kramer, CRWRC’s administrator for disaster relief in the U.S. and Canada.

CRWRC

2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560
www.crwrc.org
800-55-CRWRC

Baptist World Aid

Baptist World Aid (BWAid), is the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, the official global fellowship that unites 206 Baptist conventions and unions.

BWAid is reaching out to Iraq in cooperation with the Jordan Baptist Convention, the Jordan Bible Society, and the Jordanian Evangelical Committee for Relief and Development (JECRED), as well as the Middle East Council of Churches, and United Nations agencies.

During the war, BWAid sent an initial \$10,000 for relief work among Iraqi refugees, including \$5,000 to the Jordan Baptist Convention and another \$5,000 to a network of churches in the Middle East. Despite the war's short duration, said BWAid Director, Paul Montacute, the needs of the Iraqi people, "are still enormous, and we have the opportunity of helping local Christians to care for all, irrespective of their race, creed or nationality; of sharing unconditional love with the people of Iraq."

BWAid has provided for immediate relief needs in Iraq, focusing particularly on the need for safe drinking water to avoid serious outbreaks of cholera and typhoid. The group is distributing water purification tablets and new water purification units and gathering and distributing supplies, including hygiene kits, to schools and orphanages.

Baptist World Aid

Baptist World Alliance

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Contacts: Paul Montacute or Lee Hickman

(Donations should be designated for BWAid's Iraq / Middle East Appeal)

American Jewish World Service

New York-based American Jewish World Service is working in cooperation with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to help the people of Iraq. The outreach, said AJWS president Ruth Messinger, fits with the "reason for our existence. Our mission is to raise understanding and financial support from the Jewish community for people in the world dealing most vividly with poverty, hunger, oppression and disease." AJWS usually focuses on development projects such as education and agriculture, but Ms. Messinger said the group's "mission includes responding to world disasters. It's quite central to what we do."

During the uncertain and chaotic times immediately following the liberation of key Iraqi cities, AJWS's partner organizations, the IRC, focused on "quick impact" projects to meet emergency needs for water, sanitation, primary health care, child protection and logistics. Longer-range goals for cities like Umm Qasr in the south included establishing more water access points and support for damaged hospitals and clinics. UNICEF also designated the IRC as the lead agency for assisting traumatized children in Iraq, includ-

ing those separated from their parents. The group will partner with other aid organizations to identify separated children and trace their families.

AJWS is collecting funds which it will then pass along to the IRC "to enable that group to expand its mission," Ms. Messinger said.

American Jewish World Service

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www.ajws.org

Christian Children's Fund

Founded by a Presbyterian minister who had witnessed first-hand the devastating events leading to World War II, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) began helping the children of China in 1938. Today the group continues to respond to relief needs among children, including those caused by war. In late April, CCF sent its first child-protection assessment team into Amman, Jordan. Communications Manager Ellie Whinnery, said the team expected to find needs among Iraqi children similar to those found in Afghanistan following last year's U.S.-led ouster of the Taliban.

"There were so many psycho-social issues among the children from the trauma of the war," Ms. Whinnery said. Many children were separated from their families. Some watched their parents and siblings killed. Still others were pulled from their families and forced to become child-soldiers. The child-soldier problem found in Afghanistan will also be a problem in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein's government routinely impressed into military service boys ages 10 and up. "They called them 'Cub Lions,'" Ms. Whinnery explained. "They were given guns and forced to fight. Once the war is over, those children will have a difficult time reintegrating into families and communities because many of them were ostracized after they became soldiers."

CCF will assist in reintegrating those children, and also will help kids who were disabled during combat, or because of land mines. Historically, the group has established "Child Center" spaces, where traumatized kids can go to feel safe. CCF provides a school-like setting, and also gives children opportunities to do artwork, or express their feelings through writing. "When they write poems," said Ms. Whinnery, "it kind of breaks your heart when you see how they have internalized what has happened to them."

CCF is currently accepting donations to support its child protection effort in Iraq. At this writing, the group had not yet completed its needs assessment, and therefore had not set a specific fundraising goal. Ms. Whinnery said she expected a goal would be set, and posted on the CCF website, by late May.

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IraqiAid

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Christian Children's Fund

2821 Emerywood Parkway

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www.christianchildrensfund.org

Catholic Relief Services

Founded in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States to assist the poor and disadvantaged outside the country, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is reaching Iraq with medicine and food aid. In April, the Baltimore-based group sent four trucks loaded with 45 tons of such supplies from Amman, Jordan to Baghdad. That shipment contained enough medicine to treat 25,000 people, and enough food to nourish 10,000 children. As of May, CRS had also provided blankets, kerosene, mattresses, and daily health services to more than 900 families displaced from Mosul to Karakosh in northern Iraq.

CRS is distributing relief to the Iraqi people in partnership with Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of 154 Catholic relief, development and social service groups committed to "social justice in times of peace.... emergency relief, advocacy, peace building, respect for human rights and support for proper stewardship of the planet's environment and resources" in 198 countries and territories.

Caritas Iraq was already positioned inside the country before the war broke out on March 19. During the height of combat, the group provided first aid services to the injured using CRS- and Caritas-supplied medical supplies. In April, CRS announced an \$8.3 million international fundraising effort to support more than 43,000 displaced families over the next three months.

Catholic Relief Services

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Church World Service – USA

Founded in 1946, Church World Service (CWS) is the relief, development, and refugee assistance ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations in the United States. It is the relief agency for the National Council of Churches.

CWS works in partnership with indigenous organizations in more than 80 countries. Through its participation in

the multi-agency "All Our Children" program, the group has provided to the Iraqi people wheelchairs, blankets, and bedding kits—a total of three tons in supplies, as of May 1.

CWS-affiliated U.S. church congregations are assembling personal hygiene kits to distribute through the aid agency. For example, the Women's Fellowship Group at First Congregational Church, River Edge, New Jersey, is one of hundreds of volunteer groups across the country assembling kits intended to meet children's day-to-day hygiene needs. Sealed in a one-gallon plastic zip bags, each kit contains a hand towel, washcloth, comb, metal nail file or clipper, a large bar of soap, a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, and six Band-Aids. Volunteers provide the contents, pack the kits and provide funds for shipping.

In an effort to prevent the spread of disease, CWS is funding the purchase of soaps to assist Iraqis in maintaining basic sanitation and hygiene. A shipment of 5.5 metric tons of personal hygiene soap—enough for more than 14,500 Iraqi children for six months—and 5.8 metric tons of laundry detergent arrived in late March for distribution to 68 pediatric and district hospitals throughout southern and central Iraq.

Church World Service

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574-262-0966

www.churchworldservice.org

Lutheran World Relief

Delivering humanitarian aid in the Middle East for more than 50 years, Baltimore-based Lutheran World Relief's goal is to raise \$1 million to deliver basic medicines to Iraqi children via the multi-agency "All Our Children" campaign.

The group points to the decline in health of Iraqi children over the past 10 years. Since the last Gulf War, infant mortality has increased more in Iraq than anywhere in the world, according to the World Health Organization. Since the most recent combat action waned in the region, LWR has delivered three medical shipments. Relief items included vaccines, antibiotics, surgical sets, and nutritional supplements for vulnerable infants and nursing mothers.

The group also had pre-positioned emergency supplies, including health kits worth \$457,000, plus 22,000 quilts donated by U.S. Lutheran parishes. LWR delivered a second shipment of quilts to a Baghdad hospital in late April.

LWR has 52 parish and community aid shelters located in border areas in Jordan and Syria, where Iraqi refugees are able to seek emergency shelter, water and food. Though the number of refugees immediately following the conflict was lower than expected, LWR communications assistant Vicky Whetstone said LWR shelters by late April had seen an increase in the numbers of families seeking aid.

Lutheran World Relief

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American Friends Service Committee

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker group founded in 1917 to provide conscientious objectors an opportunity to aid civilian victims during World War I. Today, AFSC focuses on “issues related to economic justice, peace-building and demilitarization, social justice, and youth, in the United States, and in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and at the United Nations,” according to its website.

AFSC correspondents working in the Iraqi capital reported what they saw there on April 14: “Conditions in Baghdad remain volatile. The team was struck by the devastation in and around Baghdad. Burned-out tanks and civilian vehicles punctuate the streets. Dead bodies remain on the streets. Many streets are impassable due to debris, bomb damage, military roadblocks, and checkpoints.”

AFSC says clean drinking water is the number one concern in Iraq. Prior to the war, the group had helped to rehabilitate a large water treatment plant northeast of Baghdad. In post-war efforts, the group is drilling emergency wells, and setting up water treatment equipment and portable water tanks in key areas. AFSC plans additional water-related shipments and cash grants to purchase supplies for the region, as part of a long-term relief and reconstruction plan.

American Friends Service Committee

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The Salvation Army

With portions of the U.S. and British armies already moving out of Iraq, the Salvation Army is moving in. The Army already operates in 109 countries around the world, but did not have a presence in Iraq. The World Food Programme and the United Nations have asked the Army to operate in Iraq as an NGO. In response, the group’s International Headquarters dispatched Major Mike Olson to the region, along with Emergency Services Coordinator Maj. Cedric Hills.

Power outages and other infrastructure damage have stripped Iraqis in some regions of the ability to cook food and heat water—both critical to health and sanitation. For now, the Salvation Army is focusing on providing clean water and cooking fuel to those living in war-damaged cities, according to spokeswoman Theresa Whitfield.

Working from Kuwait City, its advance team is evaluating how well a shipment of cooking fuel was distributed. In addition, arrangements are underway to transport bulk, liquid propane into Iraq via military-controlled roads, and other routes considered secure. Ms. Whitfield said the Army expects the propane to be purchased with donor funds; in addition the Kuwaiti government is expected to make large contributions of bulk liquid cooking fuel.

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Samaritan’s Purse

Despite taking fire for its leader calling Islam a “very wicked and evil religion,” North Carolina-based evangelical aid group Samaritan’s Purse is ready to help in Iraq. Muslim leaders were outraged when they learned that Samaritan’s Purse would be allowed to assist in post-war humanitarian efforts in Iraq. But in an interview with Beliefnet.com, Director Franklin Graham did not seem concerned: “We are there to reach out to love [the Iraqis] and to save them, and as a Christian, I do this in the name of Jesus Christ,” he said.

In April Samaritan’s Purse issued a fairly circumspect press release about the nature of its humanitarian plans for Iraq. But Mr. Graham was more specific when he spoke with Beliefnet. His group, he said, will distribute 5,000 hygiene kits, 5,000 pots and utensils, thousands of yards of plastic to make tents, and enough medicine to care for 100,000 people for three months.

Samaritan’s Purse has also dispatched an international assessment team that includes veterans of several war-relief projects. The team includes Americans and Canadians who have worked in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Somalia. Among them are a doctor, an engineer, and a water specialist.

Samaritan’s Purse

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www.samaritanpurse.org

Choosing a Charity

While *Compassion & Culture* has surveyed a handful of faith-based charities working in Iraq, dozens of other worthy groups, both faith-based and non-sectarian, also are delivering aid in the region. You may choose to donate through a group that aligns itself with your own beliefs or prefer to give through a non-sectarian charity that delivers critical medical care. Others may decide based on a group's spending ratios, or political bent.

With so many organizations working in the same region toward a common cause, Suzanne Coffman, of the charity watchdog organization GuideStar, offers the following suggestions to donors choosing a charity through which to help the people of Iraq.

Identify your preferences.

Identify what kinds of activities are important to you. Are you interested in food aid, medical care, or some other form of immediate assistance? Do you want to give to a charity that offers several kinds of programs, or would you prefer to support one engaged in a single activity? If a long-term approach appeals to you, should it focus on education, village reconstruction, or something else?

Look at the organizations' missions and programs.

Identify the nonprofits that best fit your preferences by reviewing groups' mission statements and programs. Visit the group's website. Read its fundraising literature. GuideStar.org features reports on hundreds of charities.

Evaluate how the charity defines its goals and accomplishments.

How does a charity define success? A nonprofit should have measurable goals—"Feed 500 refugees a day"—rather than vague objectives—"Fight hunger." It should use concrete criteria—gallons of potable water delivered, number of buildings reconstructed—to describe its achievements. You can find this information on the Goals & Results page of a charity's GuideStar Report or in Part III of its IRS Form 990.

Assess the charities' financial health.

Use GuideStar financial summaries, images of a nonprofit's IRS Form 990, and information on a charity's Web site and in its fund-raising appeals to evaluate its financial health. Don't automatically assume there's a problem if you see a deficit or surplus. Contact the organization—charities should willingly discuss their finances. If you are looking at several organizations, be sure that you only compare nonprofits that do the same kind of work. Different programs have varying costs, so compare medical organizations to medical organizations, food charities to food charities, and so forth.

Get more information from the charity itself.

If at this point you are still unsure about which charities to support, contact them directly. Sometimes a visit to a nonprofit's Web site or a telephone call will give you exactly the information you need to make your decision.



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Capital Research Center is a nonpartisan education and research organization
classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity.

CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER, 1513 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-1401 (202) 483-6900

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