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The Community Steps Up for Tsunami Relief

The devastation wrought by the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia last December has been overwhelming. At press time, over 220,000 deaths in 11 countries had been reported. Across the U.S., members of the gay community have been decisive in their desire to show compassion and caring for people impacted by this event.



Rev. Jo Hudson of Cathedral of Hope

"We had several members of our congregation come to us in the aftermath of the tsunami and ask how we should respond to this," says **Rev. Jo Hudson**, senior pastor of Cathedral of Hope, the world's largest liberal Christian church that draws its membership largely from the GLBT community. "We did quite a bit of

research. It was our goal to make sure that the money we collected went directly to relief and not to administration overhead. We chose to work with the **Rainbow World Fund.**"

The San Francisco-based Rainbow World Fund (www.rainbowfund.org) was founded in 2000 to promote GLBT philanthropy in the area of world humanitarian relief.

"We focus in four main areas: hunger, safe drinking water, land mine eradication and global HIV, specifically in Africa," says Rainbow World Fund president **Jeffrey Cotter**. "Rainbow World Fund is about putting our highest values as a community into action—values of love, compassion and kindness."

Everyone involved with Rainbow World Fund is a volunteer. They channel the funds they collect to existing agencies.



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For the tsunami relief efforts they are working with **CARE** (www.careusa.org).



"CARE was already established in most of the countries that were hit," Cotter notes. "In India they had almost 3,000 staff.

"I realized we can build partnerships with the best existing agencies," he adds. "That is a way of getting GLBT aid to a place as soon as possible."

When the pastoral staff at **Cathedral of Hope** put the word out that there would be a special offering on Sunday, Jan. 9, worshippers raised \$17,000 in a single day.



Jeffrey Cotter of Rainbow World Fund

"This tragedy really touched a lot of people because it happened so suddenly; it happened to so many countries, and we saw so vividly the devastation. It reminded every one of us how fragile life is," Hudson says.

"It puts you in touch with the need for us to truly be a global community, helping each other," she adds. "A lot of people felt the grief of this."

SCENE entertaining columnist **Arnold Myint**, whose mother comes from Thailand (one of the countries affected), returned to his hometown of Nashville with a group of fellow New Yorkers to stage a gala benefit dinner at his family's restaurant. That dinner, which featured all Thai-inspired cuisine, began his family's fundraising efforts, which, to date, have resulted in over \$35,000 being sent to Thailand to aid in relief and reconstruction.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC) board member **Bruce Bastian** made a donation from his Utah-based **B.W. Bastian Foundation** (www.bastianfoundation.org) to the HRC, which that organization in turn sent to Rainbow World Fund.

"I was going to make a contribution one way or another, but I was motivated to try to do something to pool money from other GLBT sources and people to make a statement that the GLBT community does really care about what's going on in the world," says Bastian. He says he felt the visibility of the HRC would serve as a motivator for members of the gay community to become involved.

"Maybe you have no money to give, but when you start giving of yourself in energy and in caring, your life changes," he says. "The

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foundation has given me great pleasure.”

Rainbow World Fund’s efforts do not begin and end with tsunami relief—they also have an ongoing project in Guatemala. They’ve worked with Adopt a Mine Field in Cambodia. And last year they staged a concert to raise funds for relief efforts in Haiti, after it was hit with a series of hurricanes.

“What happened with the tsunami really broke people’s hearts in our community,” says Cotter. “The response we’ve gotten from the GLBT community has been absolutely tremendous.”



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