

Report of the World Relief Officer to the World Relief Committee
June 5, 2015

In the world of relief and development, my ecumenical colleagues often speak in terms of “quiet” years---years that don’t see the occurrence of a major natural disaster. In many ways, 2014 would fit the traditional definition of a quiet year, and in many ways it represents the beginning of very “noisy” years in terms of chronic disasters happening around the world. Chronic disasters are often of human origin, or at least very much influenced by human behavior. And sadly, they are much more difficult to respond to, as the situation is often ongoing with no known resolution in sight.

Think of Syria...Iraq...Gaza...Nigeria...Ukraine...South Sudan. Those are a few of the chronic disasters that are taking human lives each and every day. And in each of these situations, there is no known resolution in sight. One implication of all of these conflicts is that today there are more people displaced from their homes than at any other time since WWII! Yes, that is correct---over 51 million people today are living and surviving somewhere other than what they have called home.

Record numbers of people displaced worldwide creates some of the same dynamics that we face after natural disasters: people have basic needs for food, water, shelter and medical care. Psychosocial needs of these communities that have been traumatized and often quite severe and deepen as the period of displacement continues. The influx of displaced people into countries and communities also places a significant burden on those receiving governments, residents, and the United Nations structures that are to provide for and protect them.

In the case of Syria, right now there are over 1.2 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon---that represents 25% of the population of entire country of Lebanon! Absorbing the needs of that influx of people puts an extraordinary strain on all the systems within the country---economic, educational, and political. For perspective, imagine the impact on the United States if 80 million people were to come across our borders---all fleeing violence and oppression and with no known timeframe in which to return home. That’s what the Lebanese people are facing today.

Chronic disasters don’t naturally create a financial response of the sort we see to One Great Hour of Sharing after a natural disaster. Yet the needs are just as real and sometimes even greater, as I believe we are going to see in the coming years. In the case of the Syrians, we have been using undesignated OGHS funds to assist with some of the relief programs of our partners, but as you know, those funds are limited. That is why the 2016 OGHS promotional materials will focus on the world’s displaced people. Through these materials we will seek to educate about the magnitude of the situation and tangible responses to the people facing the very difficult life that displacement means. We will also unpack the reality that only ½ of 1% of today’s displaced people will ever be resettled in the United States, so resettlement is not the answer. We need to find durable solutions for people much closer to the place they used to call home.

Financial Report on FYE 2014

The \$1,453,414 received by OGHS in 2014 represents a \$325,406 decrease compared to prior year giving. The decrease was driven mostly by the absence of any extraordinary disasters in 2014.

Undesignated giving totaled \$1,176,303 which represents a 3% decrease from the year prior.

World Relief Office administrative expenses totaled \$97,124 and the World Relief Committee expenses were \$9,318, for a total of 7% of receipts. Promotional expenses were \$77,346 or 5% of receipts. Cash reserves decreased from a fiscal year-end 2013 balance of \$485,872 to \$462,855 at the end of 2014.

Report on 2015 Year-to-Date Giving

Year-to-date receipts through April 2015 totaled \$163,667 compared with \$292,194 for the same period last year. The major difference is the YTD April 2014 giving included \$101,000 designated to Philippines Typhoon Relief.

Other Important Items of Interest

2015 OGHS promotional materials were mailed to all churches the last week of March. The materials included a Planning & Resource Guide, poster, bulletin inserts, offering envelopes, and coin boxes. The materials were sent to the 2,408 American Baptist churches that have requested to receive them.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Rothenberger
World Relief Officer