



Sri Lanka— The Gift of Hope

**“Where there were ruins, now there are houses.
Where there was despair, now there is hope.”**

Guy Hovey, Head of Mission, UMCOR Sri Lanka

UMCOR ADVANCE # 274305

Mrs. A is one of many widows in Chetty. Her husband was killed in the conflict and she struggled to raise her four children. She had nothing apart from what she received by begging. Her children were constantly sick. UMCOR, using funds donated by United Methodists and others built her a house to provide shelter and safety. UMCOR will also give her goats and chickens so that she can provide her family with nutritious food and sell the surplus for some income. She is also growing food with UMCOR's assistance and can see a brighter future for her children.



UMCOR is building 52 houses and connecting roads. We are replacing a tsunami-destroyed culvert and bridge that will give access to clean water. We are helping vulnerable people like Mrs. A so they can restart their lives.

Photos by UMCOR

Often when we give in the wake of a disaster we do so with faith, not fully knowing exactly how our funds will help someone in a distant place in the midst of an unimaginable situation. This letter from Guy Hovey, the head of mission for UMCOR Sri Lanka, will help bridge that gap. In recent months he has coordinated work for tsunami survivors and found himself caught in a renewed humanitarian crisis caused by ongoing conflict.

Welcome to Chetty

A few months ago I was in one of the few truly natural paradises left on earth—the village of Chettiyarkudirupu (Chetty for short). This place has it all—jungle, open green spaces, monkeys, exotic birds and wildlife, and rich fertile soil fed by a network of irrigation channels. The crowning beauty is a vast lagoon which sweeps majestically across the front of the village which, at one time, provided a good income to supplement that provided by the soil.

However, the tsunami and continued conflict prevented Chetty's residents from fully reaping benefits from these resources. The first time I visited this community I saw two children lying on the ground. They were sick and dying because their parents had no money for medicine and no doctor would come to the village. Their grass hut dwelling provided no protection from the elements and the ever-present mosquitoes that carry the deadly dengue virus.

Young children stared at me blankly or in fear with eyes which at their tender age had already seen too much. Their original homes were destroyed by waves and war. A village meeting revealed no young men. They had either died or had fled the gangs of militias for whom forcible recruitment is a way of keeping up their numbers. What few older men that remained in the village were unable to fish as the conflict was also waged on the seas and launching a boat would invite an attack. Cultivating crops was also avoided as they brought unwanted attention as well. Wells had dried up. The village was dying. Hope was gone.

A New Village and a New Hope

This week I returned to Chetty. As I crested the rise which approaches the village I found myself being driven along a newly compacted dirt road. I could see the red tiled roofs of newly built houses sticking up between the trees, children playing and women smiling and waving when we passed. As we continued our drive we witnessed more and more new houses some fully built and others under construction. Although the fishing had yet to resume, the fields had been cultivated and crops of peanuts, corn and rice were

Uniquely Qualified

Amir and Nenad are the staff members who head UMCOR's office in the eastern town of Batticaloa. It is through this office that UMCOR is helping the village of Chetty. Amir and Nenad are uniquely qualified to do their job. They worked for UMCOR before in their homelands in the Balkans where they experienced war, death, displacement and misery. Their experiences give Amir and Nenad a unique perspective on the situation in Sri Lanka. They have lived it and they can empathize with the people they serve in a way that few foreigners working in Sri Lanka can match. Through their dedication and that of the UMCOR team in Batticaloa they have brought a community back from the edge of extinction. Through your gifts, UMCOR has provided the means for one village to make that vital first step to becoming a stable and thriving community. Most of all, your gifts have given people hope.

growing in abundance. The children looked healthy and fit. The people no longer had that haunted look caused by witnessing the darker places in men's souls made real.



“Although the fishing had yet to resume, the fields had been cultivated and crops of peanuts, corn and rice were growing in abundance. “

I stopped to walk through the village and met people who were helped by UMCOR's project that revitalized their community. Where there had been a small track covered with dangerous snakes, now there is a wide earth road. Where there were ruins, now there are houses. Where there was despair, now there is hope. This is what UMCOR, the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, our partner in our work, and most of all, the congregations in the US who gave so generously have achieved.

CONTACT US

UMCOR
475 Riverside Drive, Room 330
New York, NY 10015.
Telephone: 800-554-8583
Email: umcor@gbgm-umc.org
www.umcor.org

