

Gay churches extend help to tsunami victims

San Francisco-based international relief group keeps track of GLBT contributions

By David Webb

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Dallas' two largest GLBT congregations have linked with international relief efforts to provide aid to survivors of the tsunami disaster in Southern Asia.

The Cathedral of Hope and White Rock Community Church have scheduled special offerings during their Sunday services on Jan. 9 to assist the homeless residents of Thailand, India, Indonesia and other areas devastated by massive waves that struck Dec. 26. The tsunami were spawned by a powerful earthquake that rocked the northern Indian Ocean.

The Cathedral of Hope is cooperating with the Rainbow World Fund, a San Francisco-based gay group, which will in turn forward funds to CARE, the global humanitarian organization. White Rock Community Church has identified World Vision International, a Christian relief group, to provide help.

The Rev. Jo Hudson, rector of the Cathedral of Hope, said church officials chose to align with the Rainbow group because it is the only gay group providing help and keeping a record of the GLBT community's contribution to the relief effort. The organization has pledged that all of the funds would go directly to relief work, she said.

The Rev. James Walker, pastor of the White Rock Community Church, said church officials chose World Vision because it is a reputable Christian organization with 3,700 workers in place in the affected countries. The special offerings will extend through the month of January, which the church has named January World Vision Month, he said.

Hudson said her congregation has



A woman on Wednesday walks past a house destroyed by tsunami at Devanahpattinam, in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.



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voiced great compassion for the tsunami victims. The enormity and the suddenness of the disaster have caused many people to better understand the fragility of life and to feel connected to the tragedy, despite its distance from the United States, she said.

“What I see here are people of tremendous grace and generosity wanting to make a difference,” Hudson said.

Cathedral of Hope has scheduled a memorial prayer service for Tsunami victims during its Sunday evening services at 6:16 p.m., and the Children and Youth Ministry will collect funds through Lent to help buy fishing equipment for Tsunami survivors who make their livings fishing.

Hudson said church officials believe youth need special attention during the aftermath of the tragedy.

“We’re really interested in helping children come to grips with the magnitude of this tragedy and getting them involved,” Hudson said.

The Rev. Michael Piazza, dean of the Cathedral of Hope, said the church gives away more than \$1 million annually in goods and services to the needy.

“Time and again the people of the Cathedral of Hope, and the lesbian and gay community in general, have shown themselves to be people of great compassion and generosity,” Piazza said. “The grief that we experience is given meaning when we offer our gifts to others.”

Jeffrey A. Cotter, founder of the Rainbow group, said the gay community’s interest in helping Tsunami survivors has been significant. The group has already received pledges of \$150,000, including one for \$100,000 from Bruce Bastian, a member of the Human Rights Campaign board, he said.

“There’s a huge outpouring of compassion,” Cotter said. “For the past 10 days it’s just been nonstop answering e-mails and speaking to people on the telephone,” Cotter said.

Cotter said he believes the nation’s gay community has had “a lot of pent-up compassion” that the images of the devastation in Southeast Asia

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"It took a tragedy like this to break our hearts," Cotter said.

Danny Resnic, the inventor of a new genderless condom being introduced, said he suspects that his press releases have sparked many of the e-mails and phone calls to the Rainbow group. The inventor, who lives in Los Angeles, began looking for a gay organization that could give credit to the gay community for its contributions.

"I knew people were donating money, and I wished there was a way for it to be recognized," Resnic said. "Once I found the Rainbow Fund, I thought that was the best way to do it."

Resnic said he hadn't heard of the group until he found the group's Web site, rainbowfund.org.

"Virtually no one knew about it," Resnic said. "Once they heard about it people said they were definitely going to do it."

Resnic said one couple he spoke with donated \$4,000.

Cotter, a professional social worker and psychotherapist specializing in trauma recovery and HIV case management, said he began laying the groundwork for the group in 2000. It started fund-raising in 2004.

The group has raised money in cooperation with CARE for holiday gifts to children in Guatemala and for flood relief in Haiti.

Cotter said the Cathedral of Hope is the only group in the Dallas-Fort Worth area to contact him so far.

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