

# Organizations Shifting Crisis Response and Movements

From interviews by Dr. Mary Roberts with:

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**Mary Roberts**, Ph.D. focuses on equipping disciples, churches, and networks in multiplicative principles for physical, emotional, and spiritual response to disasters ([www.GodinCrisis.vision](http://www.GodinCrisis.vision)). She also serves on the 24:14 Global Facilitation Team, the Zúme Lead Team, and movements in crisis response.

“The Torch stopped the bullet!” exclaimed a Ukrainian chaplain from the frontlines of the war. One of the soldiers had found a Torch (solar-powered audio Bible with light features and phone charging capabilities) lying in the rubble after bombs had been dropped on a small town. It was scorched and burned from the explosion, but lodged in the front was a bullet. Later the chaplains confirmed that the device belonged to a woman who had found herself caught in the crossfire and miraculously survived. After Renew World Outreach was urgently prompted by the Lord to not forget their calling to engage in disaster response, they sent thousands of Torches to Ukraine, not knowing what to expect. Soldiers and civilians were receiving hope through audio Scriptures and local music, while also being able to charge their cell phones. As a ministry that makes technological tools to take the Gospel and Bibles to remote places, little did they know that decades after their founding, God would call them to equip others with these tools for disaster response.

This call from the Lord to include disaster and crisis response in their disciple-making and church-planting efforts has happened among many ministries in the last few years, including BigLife, Team Expansion, and Renew World Outreach. BigLife watched God redeem dire situations to fuel movements—among Pakistani day laborers starving from food shortages and among persecuted believers sharing the little food they received with their Muslim neighbors. Hundreds of thousands of newly baptized believers joined the kingdom, multiplying churches and transforming communities, with hundreds



of locally-led schools, medical camps, and micro businesses.

In a similar vein, Team Expansion has pursued loving people well by responding to crises in several nations. They have built bridges for churches in the U.S. to partner with special projects in disaster-response efforts—led by local partners with long-term visions to multiply disciples and churches. Linda Epeards, coordinator of Team Expansion’s responses, shared: “The call to make disciples is the call to love, not just through the immediate need but through recovery and rebuilding, as we respond to needs and make disciples as we go.”

I interviewed leaders from these three organizations concerning their journeys to rapidly respond to disasters and crises with a long-term movement vision. Here are some of their responses:

## Why have you shifted as an organization to rapidly respond to disasters with a long-term movement vision?

**BigLife:** For us, it’s a matter of loving God, loving people, and making disciples. As we looked in the mirror, we thought: “We love God and make disciples, but are we really loving people?” We were buying a lie that if we made disciples, the quality of life would rise for everybody. However, the harder part is to love people concretely when crises abound. There is no bait and switch; it’s all one package.

We would never consider ourselves a humanitarian organization; our focus is always disciples making disciples. Historically, we saw humanitarian relief open doors in various parts of the world. However, the pandemic taught us that chaos opens opportunities. The last few years have been the greatest opportunity in our lifetime to reach Afghans—who have been through the chaos. Evacuating and relocating 53,000+ Afghans, we saw God’s movement break out during the follow-up, with Afghans helping Afghans and Pakistanis helping Pakistanis. We were able to serve the movements responding to disasters, with no Westerners involved on the ground.

**Team Expansion:** We are called, first of all, to love. Loving, as disciples and churches, means meeting the immediate relief needs of people who have lost their homes and families and are looking for shelter and community after disasters. By partnering with local workers in or near disaster zones, we have become a bridge for prayers and funds from U.S. churches to neighbors in need around the world. We have seen churches multiply along the way.

By helping people recognize and leverage their own resources during recovery and rebuilding, we have enabled people to rebuild communities in God’s redemptive ways of restoring it better than it was before. In the Philippines, a cyclone recently wiped out entire communities. By coming alongside local disciples, we invested in micro-loans to help fishermen get new boats. Repayments of the loans became a community fund that helped others get their local businesses back up and running.

**Renew:** The Holy Spirit made it really clear to our team that we needed to be able to engage. We saw the unprecedented openness in times of crisis and the redemptive opportunity for rebuilding from a kingdom perspective. Coming alongside the provision of clean water, mental health, medical clinics, and other humanitarian aid with the tech tools has led to miraculous stories of breakthroughs!

Gospel advancement involves serving physical and emotional needs as well. We are seeing multiple uses for our tools and the variety of content that can go on them for different response phases. In responding to the war in Ukraine, the earthquake in Turkey, and the Afghan refugee crisis, we have seen this more fully than we had first realized. We discovered ways to serve inside those challenges and how that aligns with our calling.

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## Have you experienced pushback on humanitarian work? Or concerns about mission drift?

**Team Expansion:** We are first and foremost a disciple-making organization. However, before we are even that, we are Christians called to love others. We see it not as either/or, but rather as both/and. When Jesus engaged communities, He met concrete needs. By loving people through physical, emotional, and spiritual care, we have seen many of those impacted become disciples. Equipping local believers in trauma care that pairs with spiritual tools has led to new believers in trauma-healing groups that are multiplying.

**BigLife:** We were concerned at first that too much crisis response might negatively impact multiplication. We have seen the very opposite. Responding to crises has given movement practitioners much greater opportunities to respond in love. Seeing lives transformed by God through disciple-making is addictive. We have been able to also pass that on to other disaster-response organizations, training them to multiply disciples and churches, who transform communities together.

**Renew:** Some people’s natural pushback is: “We need to wait for the Word of God.” Yet we have repeatedly seen and heard of the power of engaging in disaster response together with giving access to hear the Word of God. If we don’t wrestle with everything God says, as messy as it is, we have a lopsided solution. Jesus called us to make disciples. The discipleship process is both spiritual and practical, not one or the other. A crisis situation always involves spiritual elements: knowing “Who is God in the midst of this?” Partnering with local churches also can help provide part of the solution. One challenge is that there never seem to be enough resources to sustain all the phases of a crisis. Yet Renew’s mission is not just to make tools but to provide strategies that harness tools.

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## What have you learned since starting to engage in disaster response with movement vision and principles?

**Team Expansion:** We are always asking the Lord, “Where is the need?” and asking for wisdom on how to respond. We’ve been blessed with people who consistently pray,

listen to God, and obey. Those impacted by the disaster see who God is through their experience with us, and many have come to Jesus. We focus on getting into communities where relief has not yet reached. Over time, as people recover, baptisms have occurred, and new churches have formed after all the disasters we have engaged in thus far. We are honored to partner with disciples who have become frontline workers.

**BigLife:** Chaos brings ministries together to collaborate. We want to be prepared moving forward, helping others learn to collaborate and including crisis response opportunities in our budget ahead of time. Anything we do is temporary, but disciples on the ground can continue walking with people along the entire way. For example, persecution in many areas has escalated; we've lost a lot of our leaders. Yet local leaders have asked, "Please don't pray for persecution to stop. Pray we have the endurance to get through it because it always leads to opportunity."

Some of the barriers we have to overcome:

- Persecution killing leaders
- Moving money around
- Tariffs on materials coming from nearby areas
- Doubt: "Why haven't we heard of it?" or "Is this a funding ploy?"
- Pride (which we combat by not having our name on anything, consistent with Psalm 115:1)
- Spiritual warfare

**Renew:** Every crisis provides a unique opportunity to work together. It also allows ways to innovate: not just in the moment but in long-term community. We all have so much to learn. The biggest challenge is to discover how to do it together—knowing we will all see things we haven't seen before. For example, Renew has been connected to humanitarian networks for years, and areas such as clean water often seemed separate from evangelism and discipleship in tangible ways. Yet, as ministries like Crisis Response International (CRI) used our tools, we saw the learning multiply through sharing stories and ideas with others. By facilitating across relationships, we became more intentional in reaching out to our partners concerning crisis opportunities. This raised our excitement about what God is doing on Earth around crises and how we can be a part of it.

## Conclusion

In addition to the groups interviewed, several others have begun rapidly responding to crises with a long-term vision for Kingdom Movements. Beyond and e3 Partners have been serving alongside local partners in Ukraine, India, and other places—pairing disaster response with making disciples and planting churches. Jeff and Angie Sundell, who serve with refugees across Europe, often have mentioned, "Where there is smoke and fire, God is at work," as they mobilize disciples to respond. As a network of church-planting churches, Antioch Movement-Waco has reignited its Acts of Mercy disaster and humanitarian response arm in recent years. Mobilizing various professionals from within their churches, they pursue disaster response with a vision for movements.

More examples could be shared of this pattern. God has shifted several groups, in the last few years, to combine responding to needs during crisis and disaster with long-term movement efforts. Should we perhaps give more attention to this pattern? Might there be some reading this whom God is prompting to explore joining what He is doing through this approach?

In each of the above examples, the goal is not traditional relief work. It is caring—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—for those affected by the disaster. Loving, equipping, and walking alongside them with the long-term vision of multiplying disciples and churches who transform their communities. God is displaying His grace and mercy by advancing the light of His kingdom through the loving deeds and Good News carried by His children in times of crisis. Let's join God in crisis!

If you are interested in learning how to respond to disasters toward movement as a church, network, or organization, you can contact [mary@2414now.net](mailto:mary@2414now.net) to get connected with others who are making the shift. 