

Love Thy Neighbor



Responding To A Complex Food Crisis In Africa

by the Rev. John L. McCullough

(NAPSA)—Southern Africa is experiencing a perilous food crisis that threatens millions—a severe humanitarian emergency that requires immediate action.

Disastrous flooding in 2001 followed by extensive drought in



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2002 has caused almost total crop failure in five countries: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique. This complex emergency is made worse by pre-existing

conditions—widespread poverty, political instability, lack of infrastructure and HIV/AIDS infection—together presenting a grim prognosis for the future.

The United Nations World Food Program estimates that 12 million Southern Africans are in danger of imminent death by starvation. Meanwhile, in East Africa, Ethiopia continues to face significant food shortage problems due to poor rainfall. More than five million people there are looking for immediate assistance. These crises require a long-term response.

The global humanitarian agency Church World Service (CWS) is responding through partners in Africa who provide emergency food and shelter assistance. The vision of CWS and these partners is to promote programs that extend

beyond the emergency phase of this disaster to strengthen communities' capacity to better endure future adversities. During an August 2002 Africa consultation coordinated by Church World Service, partners agreed that the focus of the relief and development work should be:

- Food-for-work projects;
- Crop diversification initiatives to improve soil condition and drought resistance;
- Micro-credit programs;
- Small-scale irrigation systems to help improve the growth of food crops in the area;
- Animal restocking programs with goats and cattle;
- Kitchen gardening techniques; and
- Increased disaster preparedness education.

CWS and its partners are assisting several hundred thousand people in Southern and Eastern Africa with food, seeds, tools and fertilizer, restocking of livestock, well development, medical assistance and nutrition education, along with in-depth training on disaster management and early warning systems. It is the last of these programs that is expected to have the greatest long-term effect.

• *John L. McCullough is executive director of Church World Service. To learn more about CWS work, call 1-888-CWS-CROP or visit www.churchworldservice.org.*