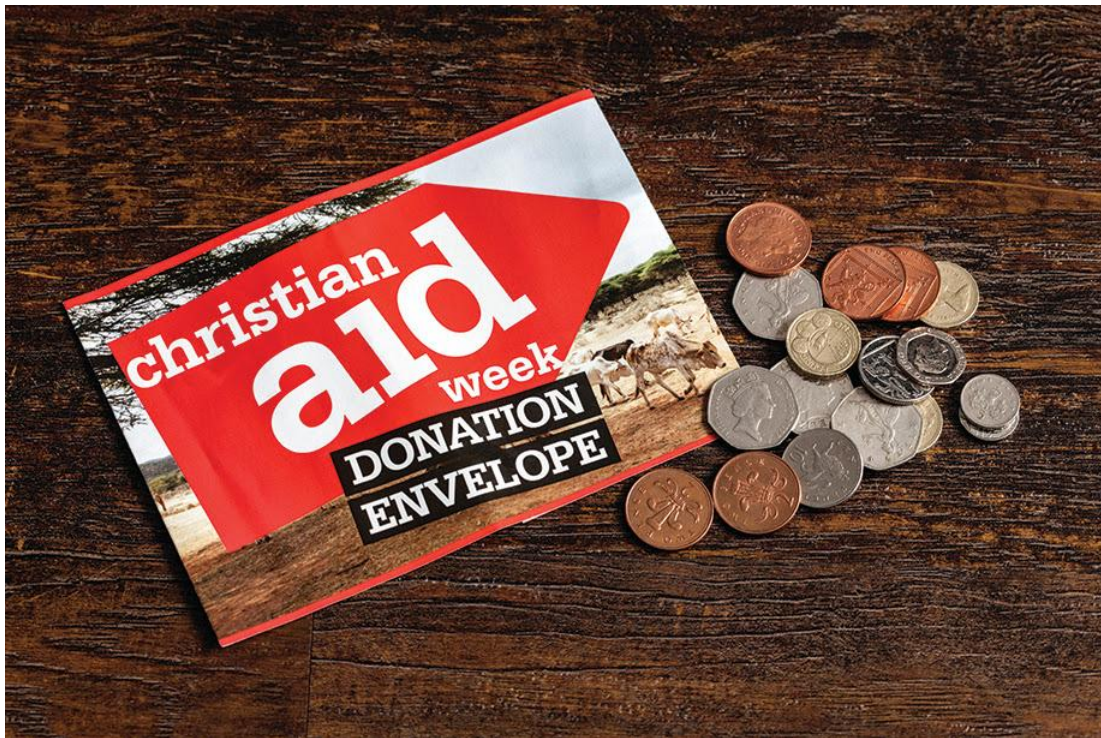


Christian Aid

By Judy Taylor



This week is Christian Aid week. I wonder if anyone can remember some years ago when the little red envelope would appear through the letterbox and a few days later someone would come and collect it hoping that some money had been placed inside, for the work of Christian Aid. Some of you may even have been a Christian Aid volunteer; it wasn't always a pleasant task, we had our fair share of refusals, rudeness and fierce dogs to contend with! But it could be very humbling too, especially among older people. Often when the door opened it would be clear that the occupant living there was far from wealthy, quite the opposite in fact, yet very often there would be an apology for the small amount of money they were able to afford.

It began with a war and a woman.

After the horrors of the [Second World War](#), with its endless capacity to kill and maim, uproot and bereave, impoverish and disillusion, came a wave of idealism determined to build not just "a land fit for heroes", but a world fit for all humanity where such horrors would be no more.

But the aftermath of those horrors remained, and compassion could not turn a blind eye. In Europe alone, 40 million people had been displaced, 11 million of them in Allied-occupied

Germany. They included survivors of concentration camps and prisoners of war. They were known as displaced persons (DPs), and were not always welcome when they tried, or were forced, to resettle back home.

Employed at the time by the YWCA and then YMCA as education secretary, was Janet Lacey who worked on social projects that brought together soldiers from the British Army of the Rhine, now being demobbed, with young German soldiers and [refugees](#).

Janet Lacey was appointed youth secretary of the British Council of Churches (BCC) in 1947. In 1952, she became secretary, and later director, of its faltering Inter-Church Aid and Refugee department. In 1957, during the second week of May, she organised the first Christian Aid Week. She renamed her department "[Christian Aid](#)" in 1964.

BUT, if Christian Aid began with this remarkable woman, it also began in response to an emergency in Europe, closely followed in 1948 by the flight from their homes of 700,000 Palestinian Arabs to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Lebanon. They fled, never to return, during a war triggered by the withdrawal of the British, and by the declaration of independence by the State of Israel.

Christian Aid's story make up a tapestry of efforts to support desperate men, women, and children doing their best to survive as they lose their homes, their loved ones, safe havens, health care, schools, drinking water, the means though not the ability to feed and take care of themselves, and more.

Christian Aid's non-operational approach is fundamentally a matter of respect for people, and what they are well able to do for themselves; of finding out their needs from them, and what forms of support will be of most use to supplement their own resources.

Whatever that may mean, from ready money to training, it definitely does *not* mean outsiders' assuming what is best for desperate people and flying it in, acting *for* people and not *with* them. When it comes to accountability, it is not only about agencies' being accountable to funders, but whether, according to local people, they received the kind of support they needed, and, in turn, whether they made good use of it.

This approach gives people the dignity and resourcefulness to eventually become independent; this can be through setting up a project that involves making and selling items such as clothing, pottery, baskets, whatever the indigenous people can create from their own skills and materials. Very often the cost of this is comparatively small but the output, with the help from Christian Aid can be enough for families to educate their children and have a regular income which will provide food and clean water.

Christian Aid is involved with some of the poorest and most desolate countries of the world where poverty grinds on day after day. To bring hope to people caught up in the ravages of war and/or climate change cannot be over estimated. Whatever you can give this month it will be used to bring relief to the millions who struggle each day to survive and God will bless that goodness as we, his children reach out to those of his children, our brothers and sisters who so desperately need our help.

Thank you