Minute for Mission (to accompany *Internally Displaced Persons* insert)

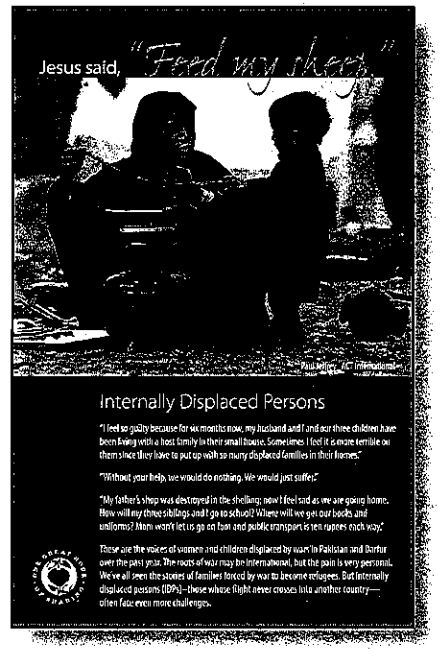
Wars and natural disasters engender a very curious phenomenon of human behavior. I don't mean among the participants and victims but among the vast majority of the world who look on at these events in horror as they happen and then, when the peak of the violence has past, look away at some new horror. In a way it's like a tsunami itself—a huge wave of destruction passes through, sweeping away communities, infrastructure, families, all signs of normalcy for large groups of people—and usually displacing huge numbers of those people themselves. Then, once it has passed, so does most of our attention.

What's left behind—the large number of people uprooted from their homes and lives, the long, slow process of rebuilding those—they tend to become yesterday's news. As people of faith, we've learned that sticking with people through that lengthy process after disasters is crucial, and we're justifiably proud of the record of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) of staying with those who are still trying to piece life together long after the cameras have moved on. But one group of people whose suffering I think we're still pretty unaware of is the subject of the insert in your bulletin today—internally displaced persons.

When people are displaced to the degree that they flee their home country, most of the world starts to pay attention. There are international treaties that give these refugees rights. If nothing else, the fact that their arrival changes life wherever they flee to means that we pay attention to their situation. But when they remain within their borders, none of that applies, and they truly become the forgotten people of God's world.

Are they not exactly who Jesus might mean when he says, "Feed my sheep?" Even though we may have anguished for the people in Central Africa whose wars have spilled from country to country, once that violence is largely contained within the Democratic Republic of Congo, even Presbyterians, who have a long history in the country, tend to forget the vast numbers of people whose suffering continues.

While many people were moved by the genocide in Darfur as refugees spilled over into Chad and Kenya, now that the violence is more contained within Sudan, our outrage has begun to cool, although the people are no better off than they were. In Pakistan, because the war is still going on, and because it's a war that touches Americans more directly than many, we're still somewhat aware of the suffering, but even there, how deeply did it register with most of us that there were more than four million people displaced in Pakistan within the past year?



I say all this not to provoke guilt—by and large, Presbyterians tend to respond when we are moved by the plight of our sisters and brothers around the world. Actually, I say it because we need to be thankful for the parts of our church that keep their ears to the ground for the cries of the suffering, and that channel our gifts where they are needed. And there again, we can be proud of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, because they stay abreast of these situations around the world, and they share the church's resources with those whose cries for help might otherwise never be heard. But here is where we come in—PDA can only share the resources that we have shared with them. Today is our chance through One Great Hour of Sharing to ensure that when they learn of needs of the world's forgotten people, PDA can give as generously as the needs call for. God knew of our need before we recognized it ourselves, and shared God's son. Today, in thankfulness, let us share our blessings with people throughout the world whose needs we don't even know.