UNITINGWORLD ISSUE 1 2018

CYCLONES DESTROY EVERYTHING – WE REBUILD STRONGER

As watery dawn breaks, Langi's family are among the first to brave the wind beyond the doors of the church to return home and face the damage. All night, the scream of wind and debris, the tears of children and adults who have never – in a lifetime of storms and cyclones – seen anything like this. 60 families in a concrete church, holding on for dear life, praying to a God they believe holds the earth on its axis.

The roof of Langi's home is gone, a plaything in Cyclone Gita's giant paw. Gone, too, the roof of the local school. Langi, her husband and three children stand in the clothes they wore yesterday, picking through the sodden mess of their lives. The family abandon the scene and head for Queen Salote College, where others are already heaving aside roofing material, trees and garbage to check out the damage to classrooms.

But don't be fooled. While the damage from a cyclone might appear obvious, it isn't. Distracted by the task of finding places to shelter and returning to school, children and adults are still deeply traumatised. Despair beckons: how does a family go on, knowing that the home they rebuild today may be shattered again tomorrow? And in a community where God is regarded as the unseen hand in every situation, suffering can lead to a crisis of faith that completely destroys hope.

Practical assistance after a crisis is vital. But so is seeding courage, resilience and faith. Punching far above its weight, the church is perfectly placed to help rebuild not just homes, but restore lives.

In an email we received the day after Cyclone Gita left 1400 families without homes, Ikani Tolu from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga told us 30-40% of properties had been damaged – particularly schools.

"Roofs of classrooms were ripped off and a lot of rubbish was left," he wrote.

"Psychological and emotional recovery is our major priority at this stage and our chaplaincy network has been activated as our very first response effort. Rebuilding is our second important priority."



Buildings throughout Tonga have been destroyed by the biggest cyclone in 60 years, but disaster preparation work throughout the Pacific provides hope to families.



Langi and her family are joined by pastors from the local church, working tirelessly to clean up and to offer support. Over the coming weeks, the Tongan Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network – set up in 2015 thanks to donations by UnitingWorld supporters – will be critical in the recovery of the nation, short and long term. Like many Pacific churches, Tonga's faith communities will be getting their hands dirty planting trees, helping with clean ups, sheltering families left homeless, removing debris after disasters and helping people replant their crops to grow food. They advocate among people across the Asia Pacific to take their responsibilities seriously as consumers and to act on the changing climate. They buoy whole communities to become the kind of people, like Langi and her family, who hold on through endless nights and stand shoulder to shoulder with others through long days of hard work and hope.

Seen and unseen – what disaster destroys, God's people rebuild stronger.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Help us prepare the Pacific for disasters. Make a donation by: calling **(02) 8267 4267** or go online to **lentevent.com/give**

We simply can't do this cutting-edge work without your support.

UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

UnitingWorld is an agency of the Uniting Church in Australia.



"The world doesn't stay still for disasters; it could be that people may now move to the next thing. But the reality is that, for the people of Tonga, this disaster will be a part of their lives for months or years to come."

– Rev Dr Stephen Robinson

PARTNERSHIP AT WORK

CYCLONE CHAPLAINS

Back in 2015, UnitingWorld assisted the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in establishing the Tongan Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (TDRCN). The network was put to the test when category 4 Tropical Cyclone Gita (TC Gita) struck Tonga, causing massive damage to the island nation and bringing huge stress and hardship to the people.

Since the cyclone hit, chaplains have been working tirelessly in communities to support those affected by the disaster. Rev Dr Stephen Robinson, the National Disaster Recovery Officer of the Uniting Church in Australia, has been in Tonga this week helping train more probationary ministers in how to provide psychosocial and emotional care in the aftermath of disasters like TC Gita. He spoke to us from Tonga.

"The nation of Tonga has really taken a pounding," says Rev Dr Stephen. "Tropical Cyclone Gita was the worst cyclone to hit their islands since 1983, and it shows," he says. Houses, churches and schools have been badly damaged; there is a huge need for rebuilding."

Church networks have been vital in helping the teams to find most vulnerable people in the most damaged villages, and the situation in Tonga is still one of heavy disruption. Power is still out, and will be for a long time in most of the outlying areas, and roadblocks restrict access to many parts of the CBD. Thankfully the network is working effectively to provide support where needed, food supplies are being maintained and there is still plenty of drinkable bottled water.

The Tongan Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network is just one example of what can be achieved when churches prepare in advance. Preparation means they can be ready to provide safe, pre-assessed buildings as shelters; to be equipped and trained to be first responders during emergencies, and to lead the crucial provision of psychosocial and emotional care in the months following disasters.

Your support is critical to the development of these programs. Proceeds from this year's Lent Event will be helping support our work alongside Pacific churches in disaster preparation.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE TODAY.

To read more about this amazing work, visit **Bit.ly/CycloneChaplains**

To support this critical work, make a donation via the attached slip or by calling **(02) 8267 4267**.

WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON IN...

BALI

Did you buy a goat for Christmas, or a pig? It's possible Wilbur is a member of a breeding program in Buleleng, Bangli, Jembrana, or Klungkung… one of 21 extremely poor villages we're working with in Bali.



407 families in Bali are breeding pigs – it's a new start to life!

Our partner, MBM, runs economic development projects in these areas and to date there are 407 families breeding pigs, 158 families breeding goats and 604 more who have started small roadside kiosks with loans we've helped manage. Not only that, education about clean water and sanitation is happening across the villages, with special emphasis on hand washing and clean water for cooking. Women in particular (289 of them) have been targeted in the last three months alone, and 40 new families are now using new toilets. That's your gift in action! This year's Everything in Common has almost hit its target of $350,000. If your congregation is yet to send in its fundraising total, act today so we can get the money to where it's needed most. Thanks!

PLEASE PRAY

For the recruitment of new staff for the health facilities and for the ongoing Child Protection Training taking place for all staff.

CHINA

It's home to the largest Christian printing press in the world, turning out 170 million copies of the Bible, about 30% of them for international Bible societies.



100 lay preachers have been trained to serve 1.8 million rural Christians

A delegation, including NSW General Secretary Colleen Geyer, UnitingCare National Director Claerwen Little and UnitingWorld National Director Sureka Goringe, have just visited to deepen relationship between our two 'Uniting' Churches. The Chinese Christian Council shares our dedication to unity and our expression of the mission of God through social service. It's eager to learn from our experiences, as well as share understandings of ministry in an ageing society. Your support has enabled us to:

- Support 34 teachers from 20 theological institutions in education programs
- Allow 100 clergy and lay preachers from rural China to participate in an intensive preaching course to serve 1.8 million rural Christians
- In partnership with UnitingCare Australia, provide training in best practice aged care for 350 aged care managers from 30 Chinese provinces

Thank you!



WHAT DOES PRAYER ACHIEVE?

"The time for praying is over. We need your action, not your prayer."

From the mouth of a man who believes in the power of prayer, these words drop like stones. "For too long we've heard that people are praying for us and thinking of us, but we need more than that. We need people to do more, to act, to change their behaviour. That's what will make a difference."

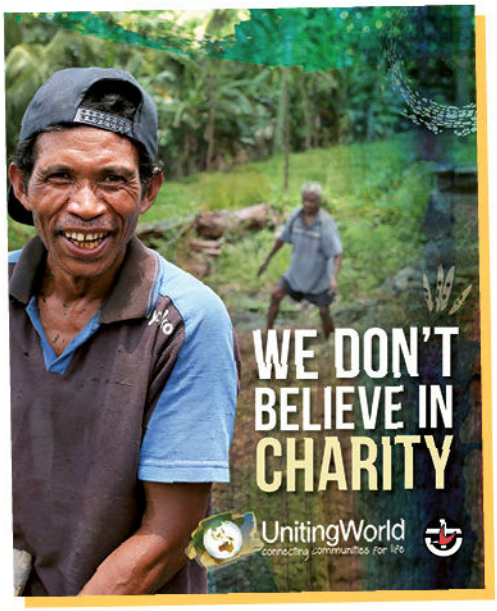
The place is Funafuti, Tuvalu, just two metres above sea level and between 20 and 400 metres wide. Increases in king tides, devastating storms, salt-poisoned ground water and drought mean that most young Tuvaluans are resigned to leaving their home in search of a sustainable future. For people who find their spirituality in the land and sea God gifted them, this is more disorienting than we can imagine.

Like most of the people here, my friend is a Christian. And like many Christians here, he has become disillusioned about the gap between promises of prayer and action, not only by his local friends but on the part of those who call themselves his brothers and sisters in the West. No doubt he does not literally mean we should cease praying. But his question – along with recent criticisms of 'thoughts and prayers' around school shootings in the US – raises the very real issue of how prayer relates to action.

Theologian Soren Kierkegaard wrote that "Prayer does not change God, but it changes him (her) who prays."

When we pray for those impacted by natural disaster, by poverty or famine; what questions do we ask ourselves about the way we use natural resources personally – including our wealth, our power, our voice – or more practically, our plastics, our consumption of electricity and food? **How is prayer linked to action for you?**

RECORD GIVING FOR BIG IMPACT



Last June, you gave more than $400,000 toward smart, creative people starting their own businesses and pulling themselves out of poverty. It was your most generous effort ever and we can't thank you enough.

Your gifts helped us attract available government funding that multiplied the impact of your donation up to sixfold. Here's what it's achieving:

- **PNG** – 700 more people to have clean water and learn about sanitation and hygiene
- **Indonesia** – 11,4360 people will take part in income generation, health, sanitation and hygiene projects
- **West Timor** – 12,491 people will take up small business and education loans or take part in community gardening projects!
- **India** – 13,292 people are benefiting from community education, health projects and increased access to basic services
- **Zimbabwe** – 1,133 people in rural areas are raising chickens, pigs, goats or making money from other livelihood projects.
- **South Sudan** – 23 midwives are being trained

"We don't believe in charity. We believe in solidarity."

Thank you!

NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR



"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."
– Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jnr.

It's hard to ignore the global challenges that loom before us – from school shootings to cyclones and the loss of compassion and generosity that seems to characterise much of our international discourse. But then I look at the work of our Christian brothers and sisters in the Pacific, in Indonesia, in South Sudan and Zimbabwe – and I suddenly see how it is that our God sets about redeeming the world with no more than a handful of passionate disciples and the idea of sacrificial love and unconditional grace. And I know that Dr King's words ring true. Truth and love will have the final word.

Our partners, who can't even dream of the kind of wealth we have in Australia, let alone the rights and freedoms we enjoy, are stepping out in faith and taking on the big issues – peace in South Sudan, domestic violence in the Pacific, malnutrition in East Timor. Their witness, and the undisputable impact of their work, is what gives me hope and courage to once more hurl myself and UnitingWorld into the fray.

We're almost through the season of Lent and I hope that you've enjoyed hearing these incredible stories of faith in action. You're part of the story now, and as we step out in resurrection life together I look forward to seeing how we'll continue to work side by side to bring change. Keep your eye out for news of our work in West Papua in April/May – I know many of you have a keen interest in this area.

Finally, many of you know Rev Dr Sef Carroll (you may have seen her in our introductory Lent Event video). It gives me such pleasure to let you know Sef is off to Princeton University this year! Sef is on long service leave to further her research into *'Re-imagining home: migration, identity and law in a changing climate'* as part of an exceptional group of scholars. This prestigious invitation is a tribute to Sef's brilliance as a theologian and a recognition of the sheer magnitude of the struggle faced by our Pacific neighbours in maintaining dignity, identity and culture in the context of disappearing islands. We'll keep you up to date on her research as it develops.

For your love, support and strength, I'm grateful.

Peace and hope,



Dr Sureka Goringe,
National Director, UnitingWorld

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