UNITINGWORLD

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WHY WE JOINED THE CLIMATE STRIKE

When the Uniting Church in Australia was formed in 1977, we made a statement to the nation that included this commitment:

"We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment."

Caring for creation is in our DNA. It's a long legacy that inspired our decision to join the Global Climate Strike in solidarity with students and young people who are scared but holding onto hope as they advocate for a better future.

More than a thousand of you were right there with us. From Sydney to Perth, Darwin to Hobart, Adelaide to Brisbane, Alice Springs to Melbourne and dozens of towns across Australia; faithful Uniting Church members, UCA-affiliated schools and UnitingWorld supporters were a visible presence of hope to their communities.

In Sydney there were more than 360 people in our group. Starting in the morning with worship and prayer at Pitt St Uniting, we heard a challenging sermon from Tongan-Australian Rev Alimoni Taumoepeau, Minister at Strathfield Homebush Uniting Church. *"Why do I join the climate strike? God gave me—and each of us—the responsibility to take care of this world, not to destroy it,"* said Rev Alimoni.

"Ultimately, I am here because Jesus calls me to be. In Chapter 4 of Mark's gospel, after Jesus calms the storm, he asks his disciples, 'where is your faith?' Do we believe God is with us? Walking with us? Calling us to love one another as God loves us?"

"Well, already the impacts of climate change are hitting the world's poorest. This moves me to act in faith."



Led by the Pasifika-Australians in our group, we headed out of the church to join to the wider community for the largest public demonstrations in our nation since the peace marches to oppose the Iraq War in 2003. We joined with people expressing solidarity with rural Australians struggling through an unseasonably early fire season and the most severe drought conditions in 120 years; people fighting to save the natural wonder of our Great Barrier Reef; children and youth who want a safe, healthy planet to grow old in (with parents and grandparents who want that too!); and our partners in the Pacific who are already leading change in their communities.

A group of Tongans, Fijians and Niueans sang the Fijian hymn *Eda sa qaqa* ('We have overcome') and Kepueli Vaka, a Tongan-Australian ministry candidate of United Theological College, blew a deep note on a *Kele'a* (conch shell).

"With tears rolling down my face, I realised that the voices of the voiceless, the people of the South Pacific were present through the ringing vibrations of the Kele'a. It was crying and calling for people to unite for all of God's creation," he said afterwards.

We were so encouraged by the turnout and messages of support from people in areas too remote to get to an event but wanted to express their appreciation that the church was involved.

And we were moved by messages of thanks and support from our international partners, many of whom are on the front lines of climate impacts and looking to developed nations to take the lead in reducing global emissions.

At a time when our partners in the Pacific and Southeast Asia have been stepping up their disaster preparation and climate justice work, it's been a joy to follow their lead and act in solidarity for the whole creation.

CHURCH PARTNERS STEP UP CLIMATE JUSTICE

With climate change intensifying the ferocity and frequency of natural disasters—typically in regions where the poor are disproportionately affected—how do we as the Church respond?

That was the question posed at UnitingWorld's annual conference of Southeast Asia Partners, held in Bali in August.

Delegates from Bali, Java, Maluku, West Timor, Timor-Leste, Papua and West Papua and North Luzon in the Philippines gathered to hear from experts and share their own experiences of climate change and disasters.

Read full article on our online news page!
www.unitingworld.org.au/news

UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

UnitingWorld is the international aid and partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. Together we work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice. Because every person matters.

LAMINGTONS: SERVING BEYOND THE QUEENSLAND COAST

80 dozen lamingtons walked out the door as part of North Rockhampton Uniting Church's Market Day recently, central to a fundraising effort that will see $1,000 sent to support women in Kiribati.

The friendship between the two churches has been growing since early 2018, when North Rockhampton committed to helping UnitingWorld provide resources for women dealing with issues of poverty and domestic violence in the Pacific. The church was especially keen to provide money to build raised gardens in Kiribati so that women could grow vegetables untouched by increasingly salty soil. By the end of 2018, street stalls, 'Bring and Buy' stalls at women's meetings and a Market Day had yielded $2021.75 to assist the work in Kiribati.

"Our recent event was wonderful," co-ordinator Ros told us. *"The ladies sold a cuppa and two slices for $5 and made $210. Our craft stall made $299. When we sell the left over lammies, we'll have more than $1000. Most importantly, the event was happy and fun. We are really pleased."*



Zucchini ready for picking at the women's garden project in Kiribati.

We're right in the middle of a Campaign to boost funding for our women's work in the Pacific, and we're inspired by stories like these from our congregations. Thank you! While the work in Kiribati continues, we're excited to begin rolling out gender equality workshops in Tuvalu, where the ordination of women is yet to be approved.

THANK YOU

to everyone who has already given to our 'Achieving Equality and Ending Violence' appeal – Find out more and make a donation at:
www.unitingworld.org.au/pacificwomen



A PRAYER FOR WOMEN

God of all people

Today we pray for women -
Women who hold the hands of children through the night
Women who sit on Boards and make decisions for our nation
Women who give birth barely sheltered from the rain
And women who have the skills to save their lives in hospitals sometimes too far away
When it matters most

God of all people
We pray especially for our sisters in the Pacific –
Women who are the centre of their families and their communities
With so much to give,
Women who've been bruised by the violence of others
And those who stay strong for their families
Women who've been silenced and those who continue to speak up with dignity
Revealing all you created them to be.

God of all people
Today we pray for ministers and leaders of the Pacific church
We ask that men will hear anew of your undiscriminating love for all people
And commit to equality and an end to violence
We thank you for the determination to stand alongside our sisters
As your Spirit creates new possibilities for the people of the Pacific

Amen.

– Cath Taylor



Thank you for supporting our partners in Timor Leste as they protect and raise up the next generation.

YOUR GIFTS AT WORK IN TIMOR LESTE

Timor Leste is still one of the youngest nations in the world. Officially formed in 1999, 42% of its population is under the age of 14 (18% of Australians are under 14). That adds up to lot of young people to be nurtured and guided, all of them the children of parents traumatised by years of conflict during the fight for independence.

Timor Leste's Protestant Church is building the future from the ground up by nurturing and protecting her young people. With UnitingWorld's support, they're giving groundbreaking insights into the nature of child protection, implementing new policies in schools and churches, teaching leaders to spot the signs of neglect and abuse, and standing up for the victims of family violence.

The workshops have been funded by your recent gifts through Lent Event and are dramatically changing the way children and young people are cared for.

"There were 60 people at the recent workshop in Dili from churches, schools and the community," says UnitingWorld's South East Asia Coordinator Debora Murthy. "For most, this is very new information. Culturally, children tend to be overlooked, especially when there are added pressures like family trauma or poverty. If a child has a disability, they are even more vulnerable. We've been looking at the special place Jesus gave to children and the way Jesus stood up for those who were badly treated. In many places, if abuse happens it is covered up; both pride and shame prevent crimes against children from being reported."

Recognising Frederick Douglas' suggestion that it is *"easier to build strong children than to repair broken (wo)men,"* the Church in Timor Leste is determined to chart a future of peace, compassion and hope by providing the best possible care for its next generation.

YOUR GIFTS ARE MAKING IT POSSIBLE.

THANK YOU to everyone who gave so generously to Lent Event this year, making it one of our best supported fundraisers in recent years.



YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

Enclosed with this edition of Update you'll find a survey which we hope you'll take time to complete and return to us via the reply-paid envelope.

The information is useful to us in getting to know you better, helping us communicate better with you and informing us about the kind of projects you're most interested in supporting. Please take the opportunity to add your voice!

CAN GOOD THEOLOGY PREVENT DISASTERS?



UnitingWorld staff display the new Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate publications.

No. But it can help people prepare for them and lessen the impact. That's why we've been working hard to roll out our resources on a theology of Disaster Resilience among our Pacific partners, some of whom work among people who have been taught to believe that natural disasters are an unavoidable punishment for personal wrongdoing.

This understanding of the nature of disaster sometimes means communities haven't thought through what they could do practically to avoid and lessen their impact. Our new resources are written by Pacific theologians and designed to be shared as Bible studies as widely as possible with people in their own language. They teach about the nature of disaster and suffering, God's call to care for creation, our role as stewards, and preparedness and advocacy as acts of discipleship. The Bible studies will work alongside teaching about evacuation plans, risk assessments and the provision of pastoral support.

In the face of increasing threats from drought, fire, flood and storms in our region, we're doing everything we can to equip our partners to respond with determination and hope, starting with foundations of faith.

NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

The singing. It's one of the real joys of visiting our partners across the Pacific, Asia and Africa. Long flights, lack of sleep, hard pews and lengthy sermons in a language I do not understand – these things mysteriously melt away as the opening chords are struck to some old Methodist hymn I've known since childhood. Voices lift. I add my own.

There's something about the language of music that crosses all the boundaries we put in place between ourselves and others. In the swell of shared melody, a person can be lost or found; leading or led. Even when the language is different, it's enough to know that I am one among many, playing my own small part. My voice matters; my small offering will join others to form something far more beautiful than anything I could accomplish alone.

Much of the work you've read about in this edition of Update shares that theme – the part played by Rockhampton Uniting in harmony with the women of Kiribati; the carefully crafted Child Protection work that becomes a thing of strength and beauty for the children of Timor Leste; the soaring symphony of millions of voices lifting as one to support the earth in the face of a changing climate.

September is one of my favourite times in the office, because it's counting time. This is when our team spends days collecting the stories and reports of all the people who have been touched by our projects in the last financial year – people whose lives are changed because of your gifts. Men, women, children, people with disabilities, minority groups, we gather data on all of them – because we want to know how they fared, learn from their experience and figure out how we can do better. Imagine the stories and numbers from villages and towns and churches across Asia, Africa and the Pacific coming together like quavers and crotchets, till we can hear the song that the Spirit sang last year through all of us. It's a hard work, and takes a lot of chocolate, but it is a humbling and inspiring privilege. Thank you for being part of the song and look out for our Annual Report soon.

I'm interested in your voice too. Enclosed with Update is your personal survey, from which I hope to learn more about what inspires and interests you as one of the faithful people I report back to each quarter. You matter because without your prayer, love and financial support, the work we do would not exist. Please take the time to add your voice to ours by filling in the survey and posting it back to us. I would appreciate it very much!



Pictured here are two children from the church in Ambon, Indonesia, delighting in the experience of singing for their congregation in a small village about an hour from the city. Twenty years ago, this province was virtually destroyed by conflict that played out in hand to hand fighting between Muslims and Christians, with homes, mosques and churches burnt. We've just been in Ambon to capture stories of the peace building process led by God's people and transforming the entire island. It's an incredible story of God's redemptive and reconciling love at work, and we'll be telling it for the first time for next year's Lent Event! **Stay tuned.**



Dr Sureka Goringe,
National Director, UnitingWorld

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connecting communities for life

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