UNITINGWORLD

UPDATE
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GOD WITH US

Up close, you can see the brush marks in the walls of Attika's house. The rendered concrete has been painted by hand – pink inside, bright blue outside.

All over Ambon, Indonesia, the houses are a defiant dazzle in a place where you might easily expect pain to have completely stripped the colour from life. It hasn't.

Conflict between Muslims and Christians here in 1999 killed 5,000 in hand-to-hand fighting and left 70,000 people homeless. Attika, who fled her village during the conflict and lived for years in a refugee camp, could scarcely imagine ever speaking with a Christian again, let alone working beside women who have since become her closest friends. The transformation is the work of the Protestant Church of Maluku, who've been running projects in Ambon that bring Muslims and Christians together to beat poverty and build peace. Their story is one for the ages.



Attika's house after the earthquake in September.

Attika's smile is radiant as she shows us the home she built with $5.00 a week saved from a business built as part of a group of Christian and Muslim women run by UnitingWorld's partner in Ambon, the Protestant Church of Maluku. Expressed differently but closely held, the women's faith in God bound them together as they rebuilt homes, lives, each other's churches and mosques.

Rev. Jeny Elna Malupane, who coordinates the project in Ambon, says that the work of peacebuilding is central to our identity as God's children.

"I see the way life is changing for people in the community," she says. "This is how I see God at work in humanity. It is incredible, actually. It is like nothing else, this grace of God bringing people together."

A month after we return from Ambon, a series of devastating photographs arrive here in our office. They show Attika's home completely destroyed by three earthquakes that hit the island in September; in one photo, Attika sits among blue and pink rubble, still selling her homecooked snacks.

We gaze in silence at the two sets of images of Attika's home, side by side, and I struggle with the idea that in both, God is present – in and through the relationships that have been built. Jeny's team, through the Church's *Sagu Salempeng Foundation*, is already on hand providing supplies to people living under tarps in the forest, too frightened to return to their homes. Jeny's own family are among them.

"People are resilient," Jeny says. "They dig deep. And they see God providing for them, even in this tragedy. The women's groups have already been there for one another, sharing their food and resources: Christians, Muslims. They have become like family."

And again, I'm reminded that in a world of pain and suffering, God's intimate and powerful act was to come close as a child named Emmanuel: "God with us." Born into the reality of our lives, sharing our existence, experiencing our hunger, sorrow and even our death. This is the God who is ever-present. This is the God who also, ultimately, overcomes.

God does not do this work alone. 'God with us' calls us alongside in partnership as we work toward the love that conquers death. For Attika, for Jeny, for every person digging deep to rebuild a life of dignity: please join us in giving the hope that holds us together this Christmas.

EVERYTHING IN COMMON GIFTS CHANGE LIVES BY ENDING POVERTY AND BRINGING HOPE

They're available to order until December 14 by post, **www.everythingincommon.com.au** and you can send digital gift cards to loved ones right up until Christmas.

Call us on **1800 998 122** to order gifts or donate this Christmas season.

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.

THIS LIFE AND BEYOND

Many of you will have chatted with Rev Paul Bartlett over the past few years, a faithful advocate for our work who encouraged people far and wide to pray for, support and learn about our church partners.

With a genuine heart and gift for mission, Paul has been a cherished part of our team. He has hung up his boots this December for the final time after having been coaxed out of retirement twice before! UnitingWorld and our partners are grateful for the love and service he's offered over many years.

Reflecting on his work, Paul writes:

"My parents, Rev Dr Warren Bartlett (OAM) and Mrs Lorraine Bartlett, grew up within the life of the Methodist Church in Victoria. They were deeply influenced by its central commitment to support overseas mission with 'their prayers and their resources.' The minister at their church in High St Preston in Melbourne during the 1940's, the Rev Alfred Guy who served in Papua New Guinea, as well as the Rev Stan Weeks who served in India, kept alive their desire to make a difference with all that their Lord had given them. As a result, they decided to include a tithe or 10% of their estate to the mission work of the church.

Forty-five years ago, they let their three children know of their intention. Thirty years later my wife Janene and I decided that we too would leave a tithe of our estate to the wider work of the church, including to UnitingWorld, and we too have told our three children!

My parents hope that their example might inspire others to this life of sacrificial giving, keeping alive the vital work of UnitingWorld and bringing abundant life for all beside God's global Church."

Our gratitude to Paul for his faithful service encouraging so many to consider God's call to generous prayer and giving, as well as to Warren, Lorraine and many other faithful supporters who choose to give in this way.



Reverend Dr Warren Bartlett (OAM) and Mrs Lorraine Bartlett

Your gifts are providing the foundation of ministry for years to come.

Please get in touch with Rick on **02 8267 4267** if you'd like information about leaving a bequest.

AMBON: AN INCREDIBLE STORY FOR OUR TIMES



Peace. Compassion. Security. They're the building blocks of a world we all long to see, but how do we make it happen? In a world where **extremism, intolerance** and **fear** threaten to turn us inward, how do we build peace and beat poverty?

Lent Event 2020 takes us to the Indonesian province of Ambon, where our church partners are working with Christians and Muslims to overcome decades of suspicion and resentment after religious conflict in 1999 took 5,000 lives and left 70,000 people homeless.

Meet the people, watch video stories together, engage in Bible studies, raise funds for projects that show the future of God's people alive and at work in the world.

Sign up today!
www.lentevent.com



UCA President Deidre Palmer with emerging leaders of the church in Vanuatu

WORDS OF SUPPORT: SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN CHRIST

In September we asked you to help support Pacific women in the fight against inequality and violence. And you responded, donating over $58,000 so far, and sending beautiful words of encouragement for your Pacific sisters!

Throughout the year we've been heartened to see more men attending workshops that address equality, hear more stories of changes in family and community life and a gradual take up of biblical messages around the equality of women and girls.

If you want to inspire your congregation with a real-life story of change, watch Pastor Nipi's testimony from Vanuatu at **www.unitingworld.org.au/pacificwomen** "I never knew what gender balance was or what it meant in relation to the Bible," Pastor Nipi said. "At first I thought – what is this 'gender balance' they are talking about? We never believed men and women could be equal. But as I made my studies and we talked, I realised there is something there for me to learn! It has infected me! I like it!"

Thank you for the $58,000 you've given so far for this project. Your gifts will:

- Pay trainers for workshops for advocates against violence against women
- Help develop and distribute Bible study material to be used in difficult to reach places in Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

We continue to need funding to provide places for women and men to attend training for anti-violence advocacy in Kiribati and Tuvalu, where our work is just beginning and critically needed. In these communities, women are still unable to practice leadership even if they are trained for the positions, and the issue of domestic violence desperately needs to be addressed. If you're still planning to give, we'd gratefully receive your gift for this work at **www.unitingworld.org/pacificwomen**

Here are a few of the messages of support we've been delighted to pass on to our friends in the Pacific:

Dear Sisters in the Pacific, I encourage you to remember John 10:10 "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." Please believe and discuss the biblical understanding that men and women are equal. I am sorry that earlier church teaching has disempowered women. I encourage you all to follow your dreams, to claim equality with all people, to take up any opportunities for learning and employment, to know that you are not alone. Women in Australia support and pray for you.
– Jennifer

Keep going. Stay strong. I admire your bravery
– Aasha (11yrs)

I look forward to receiving news about how my friends in the Pacific Islands are going. I was very excited to read the account of Past Lima Tura and activities in Timor Leste. I like to show the photos to my grandkids. One of my favourite verses is Philippians 4:19. It says "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."
– Anon

Hello my sisters in Christ, I encourage you to continue to make the gospel of Jesus Christ known, sharing His love and His power to transform lives. There is no male or female in Christ so do not think yourselves inferior in any way, for you were created in His image to give Him glory. Your brother in Christ.
– Gordon

Thank you everyone who sent messages!

A PRAYER DURING TIMES OF DISASTER

Leader: We come before the God of compassion who aches with those hurting in the world,

and before the risen Christ who heals.

We stand in silence and offer up our prayers.

As the candle is extinguished, we acknowledge the darkness

that disasters bring to the lives of many.

Leader extinguishes the candle.

Leader: Let us pray.

All: God of mercy, love and compassion

Christ who enters into the pain of the whole creation

We cry out to you for all the suffering people of the world,

and especially today the victims of natural disaster –

the dead, the injured, the bereaved;

and those who have lost everything and their livelihood.

Leader lights the candle

All: God of mercy, love and compassion

Creator who calls us to care for people and the earth,

Fill us with love for our neighbours that we may know

the encouragement that comes from solidarity

Give us the wisdom to act; generosity, courage and unity

Most of all we pray that the God of all comfort and renewal will be powerfully present

In and through your people

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.

REACHING OUT IN DISASTER



Under Construction choir who sang at the Adamstown Concert

As fires burn throughout Australia and flooding takes the lives, homes and livelihoods of people all over Europe, Africa and the Pacific, we're reminded again of our deep vulnerability. We're grateful to our Uniting Church ministers and partners in places where people cling to hope by a thread – managing drought, stretched finances and in places like Tuvalu, lack of fresh water and food.

Adamstown Uniting stepped up to acknowledge the global need to support people at the mercy of a changing climate by hosting 'Songs for Tuvalu,' a concert that raised over $1,000 for disaster relief and recovery work.

"It was so timely to be able to speak about the importance of UnitingWorld's climate change and disaster readiness work," says Roslyn, coordinator of the event at Adamstown. "At $15 a ticket, we're delighted to have been able to raise $1,000 – and so many people spoke to us afterwards about how worthwhile the work is."

UnitingWorld's disaster relief and readiness work helps prepare Pacific communities for the impact of increasing storms, cyclones, dry seasons and other disasters. It includes equipping leaders to carry out assessments to determine people and places at risk; increasing awareness of safe evacuation places and helping people understand the biblical call to take responsibility for their environment.

A series of Bible studies have been developed by Pacific theologians to answer questions about God's role in suffering and disaster and people's responsibility as stewards of the earth. You can see a copy of the resources on the UnitingWorld website here: **www.unitingworld.org.au/projects/disaster-preparation-climate-change/**

A HUGE THANK YOU

to Adamstown for their fundraising effort and to all who've been supporting our climate change and disaster readiness projects. If you know people who are enthusiastic about the work, buy them a gift at www.everythingincommon.com.au!

GIFTS TO CARE FOR CREATION

www.everythingincommon.com.au

The Whole World *in Your* Hands

Give a gift to a loved one that supports our Pacific partners to prepare communities for the impact of disasters and build resilience to the changing climate.





New *Growth*

Your gift will support tree-planting projects that pull carbon from the air and provide livelihood opportunities for people as they regenerate the environment in Indonesia and the Pacific.

UPDATE FROM ZIMBABWE

International Day of People with Disabilities is celebrated annually on December 3. We're supporting the Methodist Church of Zimbabwe over the next three years with new programs designed to improve the ability of the church to protect and support people with disabilities.

Our first activity is a workshop providing training on disability inclusion to over 50 church leaders, ministers, preachers and young people, including people with disabilities as both facilitators and participants.

Next will be the development of a church-wide Disability Inclusion Policy to address the stigma associated with disability. Many people still believe that people with disabilities should be 'fixed' and that a lack of healing indicates lack of faith or punishment from God.

We look forward to working with our partners in Zimbabwe and learning from them as we prepare resources and programs together.



A person with disability and the Moderator of MCZ at the 40-year anniversary of autonomy celebrations.

GLEBE ROAD UNITING VISIT MARIA

Many of you will remember Maria's story from this year's Lent Event. Diagnosed with tuberculosis — a death sentence for many in Timor-Leste's remote mountainous regions — Maria visited our partner church's clinic for help.

With the support of Albert and his team, Maria learnt life-saving health and nutrition skills. Her family are eating better, Maria's health has improved significantly, and she has gone from strength to strength throughout the year.

Glebe Road Uniting Church, who actively support the projects in Timor-Leste, sent a team to visit her village earlier this year. Pictured here are Noel and Noela Rothery with Maria, her husband and one of their sons outside their family home.

A huge thank you again to everyone who rallied for Timor-Leste and families like Maria's!



Members of Glebe Road Uniting Church visit UnitingWorld projects in Timor Leste

WORK FOR PEACE

UPDATE FROM SOUTH SUDAN

Jane Kennedy, Associate Director, has recently returned from visiting our partners in South Sudan, where we help facilitate trauma healing and peacebuilding projects.

Jane writes: "Peter Gai is the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan. Until recently, he was also the Chair of the South Sudan Council of Churches.

This year he took South Sudanese political leaders to meet the Pope, who kissed their feet.

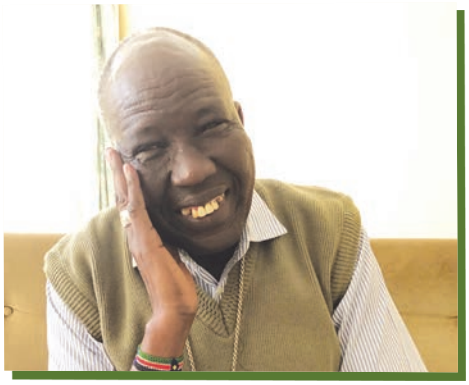
While there he experienced the joy of a cappuccino. He has learnt to eat when there is food and to go hungry when there is not. He doesn't eat three times a day. He once knew abundance and lived off the land and rivers in South Sudan for 23 years with no income. He had all he and his family needed. He has six children and 12 grandchildren but doesn't live with them because of the war. He told me even the wild animals have crossed the border running from the gunshots, but they will come back. There is no electricity where he lives in Juba and no work.

He is about to retire from decades of service that has brought conflicting tribes together and is pleased about his legacy. He has travelled the world finding partners in peacebuilding and he is tired.

The church he leads has a dispersed 1.5 million members across the country, as well as in Sudan and Egypt. They are brokenhearted but many are hopeful, against all odds. Peace will bring South Sudan to life; he believes he will see it prosper again in his old age. He prays and works for peace. He laughs and says there are a lot of women at UnitingWorld, but he likes women as they are merciful – men cause trouble and then don't fix it.

He says whether we are rich or poor we need friends, and we are friends."

Jane also visited the office of the All Africa



Conference of Churches in Nairobi. "They represent 200 million people and speak into policy at the African Union. They lobby governments on issues of peace, gender justice, youth leadership and climate action. They told us about the challenges of non-Africans treating climate change as a hoax while ignoring their experience. They spoke of the urgency around addressing violence against women. Churches here have to be political and loud to bring about change," said Jane.

With your help, UnitingWorld has assisted the Presbyterian Church of of South Sudan to run peacebuilding and trauma healing workshops this year. Thank you!

NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

"Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord."

It's advent, and as we belt out that wonderful hymn, Mary's Magnificat reminds us of the importance of sharing our stories of what God has done amongst us.

At UnitingWorld, we gather stories everywhere we go. Wonderful, inspiring, heart-wrenching stories – but always stories that point to the infinite grace and outrageous generosity of God. And of course, these are not our stories to keep. Just as when we go out to our partners and supporters, we go on your behalf, the stories we bring back are to share with you.

We need these stories. They nourish us and connect us with the body of Christ across the world. When we are feeling tired and lost, that we haven't seen God at work recently, when the service we offer God feels like it makes no difference, we need to hear and tell these stories. They remind us of the power and faithfulness of God. Throughout the year, I've listened to countless stories of God at work in the world – both here in Australia and among our partners. And I've come to realise how much we need them.

When we get too caught up in our own picture of God, when we try and box God up into something we understand – we need to hear these stories. Stories that blow our minds with the unfathomable grace and radical generosity of God.

When we are close to despair, when suffering and pain has worn down our faith – then we need these stories. Stories that show how God is with us, remind us of hope and point to the dawn to come. Stories that teach us new ways to think, new ways to imagine, new ways to connect.

These stories bring us good news from far away places, so we can celebrate and give thanks. These stories bring us news of pain or need in other places, so we can share what we have. These stories bring us new ways of knowing God and each other, so we can grow stronger in faith.



Worship in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea

Thank you for listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters in South Sudan, Vanuatu, India, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and many other places this year. I am grateful beyond words for your prayers, gifts and loving action. On behalf of all the UnitingWorld team, we wish love and joy to you and your families and hope you have a very happy Christmas and a blessed New Year,

With hope,

Dr Sureka Goringe,
National Director, UnitingWorld

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UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

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