

UnitingWorld

UPDATE

AUGUST 2010



UnitingWorld News

Restoring sight, restoring life

IN FIJI AND VANUATU

In our world today, there are 45 million people who are blind. In developing countries, extreme poverty and disadvantage are both a symptom and cause of blindness.

The single leading cause of blindness in developing countries is cataracts, accounting for 70 percent of cases. Most of these cases are treatable.

Blindness does so much more than restrict sight. It prevents people from living a full and independent life and restricts employment. It can also prevent children from attending school.

People in developing communities in Pacific island nations such as Fiji and Vanuatu face a raft of unique challenges in accessing basic eye health care.

Remote island communities often do not have the facilities required for eye surgery. In larger communities, surgery is often prohibitively expensive. Cataracts left too long can lead to irreversible blindness.

With your support, UnitingWorld is working in partnership with our Church Partners in Fiji and Vanuatu to restore sight – and life – to people who suffer the debilitating effects of blindness.

Each year, a team of 12 dedicated eye health professionals and ophthalmologists volunteer their time to provide sight-restoring surgery at Lautoka Hospital near Suva, Fiji.

In Fiji, the eye care team worked with local staff this year to restore sight to 100 people

and increase the capacity of local staff by donating additional equipment and conducting in-service training.

In Vanuatu, the ongoing partnership between the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu and UnitingWorld has enabled more than 4200 people to access eye care in the last 12 months. More than 210 of these people were referred for surgery, and approximately 2500 pairs of glasses were dispensed.

Dr. Jay Chanda, an eye specialist from Westmead Hospital in Sydney, takes part in the program in Fiji voluntarily each year out of his compassion for people who are disadvantaged and poor. He is so grateful for the opportunity to volunteer his time and skills to play an active role in this partnership.

“It’s beyond my conscience for people to go on suffering from preventable blindness,” he says. “If I can donate a just bit of my time and a bit of my energy for these people who are suffering, I think I’ve really done something worthwhile.”

Thank you so much for your support, which has been integral to continuing this vital work.



Kerry's Corner

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you so much for the overwhelming expressions of support UnitingWorld received throughout last year for our Relief, Development and Peacemaking programs.

Our latest Annual Report for our Relief and Development programs gives a complete overview of the programs that we operated in partnership with our Church Partners in Africa, Asia and the Pacific in 2009.

Through the generous donations of friends like you, we expanded our micro finance work in West Timor to an additional 1,200 families and groups. With your help, we were able to connect 5,200 people in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, to a reliable source of clean water.

Your support is enabling our 20 Relief and Development Church Partners to empower people who are disadvantaged and marginalised to confront the systems that subjugate them and embed sustainable change.

Your gifts and prayers have been vital to the work we have been able to accomplish with our Church Partners during this past year, and I thank you sincerely for your continued partnership with us.

Kerry Enright – National Director

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UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life



An Agency of the National Assembly
of the Uniting Church in Australia

Transform \$1 into as much as \$6



Over \$240,000 has been given to support UnitingWorld's human rights and development projects in Papua New Guinea and India.

In May and June, UnitingWorld invited you to enable us to multiply your gift by as much as six times, by donating to our Matching Gifts Fund. We're excited to report that through your generosity, over \$240,000 has been given to support human rights and development projects in India and Papua New Guinea.

Even though we're in a new financial year, you can still enable us to multiply your gift to support human rights and development projects in Papua New Guinea and India.

Any gift given to the Matching Gifts Fund during the current financial year will be eligible to be multiplied by as much as six times for a revised group of Relief and Development projects.

Thank you so much for your gifts, prayers and partnership, and for enabling us to multiply your gifts to restore dignity and alleviate poverty for some of the most marginalised people in India and Papua New Guinea.

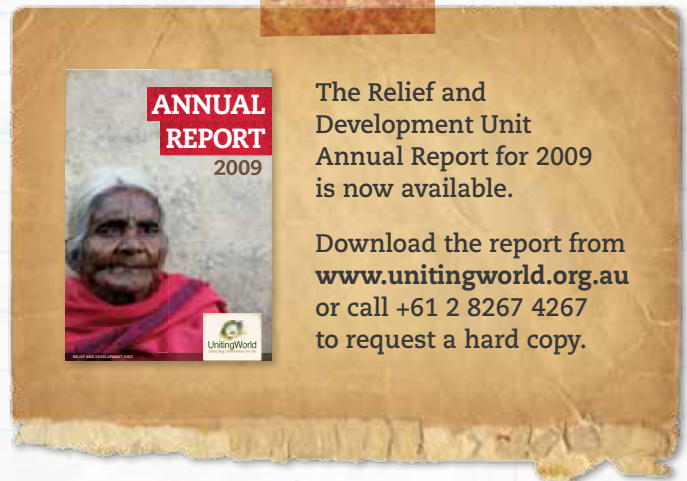
Peacemaking

Mindanao binds together for peace

Communities in conflict-ridden Mindanao endured a deadly massacre of 57 people in November 2009, just one event in a string of election-related conflict situations. Ongoing tension between and within Christian, Muslim and indigenous communities continues to create violence. But YAP (Young Ambassadors for Peace) is responding by sowing the seeds of peace through ongoing peacebuilding workshops.

Associate Director for Peacemaking, Joy Balazo, oversaw a peace building workshop in June, which took place in Zamboanga del Sur, a province located in the south of Mindanao. Forty-three participants consisting mainly of teachers and local government members joined from communities throughout the province, determined to grow peace in their local areas.

Each YAP workshop begins with participants opening themselves up to the group and identifying where they experienced conflict within themselves. While this was a moving and emotional time for all involved, the life story told by Leti, a local primary school teacher, had a strong impact on Joy.



The Relief and Development Unit Annual Report for 2009 is now available.

Download the report from www.unitingworld.org.au or call +61 2 8267 4267 to request a hard copy.

"Leti grew up oppressed by poverty, not only poverty of her basic needs, but poverty of opportunity. When she was a child, she was smarter than average and tried so hard at school," said Joy.

"But she faced many hardships on a daily basis and was often discriminated against for this. She recalled that one day, her school books were swept down a dangerous rapid running river that she was attempting to cross.

"Tears streamed down her face. Leti had held so much pain and anger, and had not cried for 35 years. Emotions such as these can cause anger and conflict. When participants open up and move on from the past, they are able to work towards their future, to be part of peace in Mindanao," said Joy.

Joy talked with the participants about the recent presidential election that took place on May 10th, and the violence that surrounded it. Joy responded by stressing that it's important to leave the past in the past, and instead be part of the solution.

"The YAP philosophy means that we must move forward," Joy said. "What is done is done. If you are stuck in the past, then you cannot move forward. We must be part of the solution if we are to spread the seeds of peace in Mindanao."

Thank you for your support that has made this work possible.

Close the door on sex trafficking and child labour in North East India

With Nepal to the west, China and Bhutan to the north, Bangladesh to the south and Burma to the east, large numbers of people are constantly moving through North East India.

Hearing stories of children as young as eight who had been tricked into slave labour and forced prostitution is heartbreaking. Many communities in North East India also suffer from the effects of extreme poverty. As a result, children who are poor and vulnerable too often become victims of human traffickers for slave labour.

The story of a young girl Noha* brings to the fore the reality of this human rights abuse.



At just ten years of age, Noha was forced to drop out of school because her family were unable to pay her fees. She had to work and contribute money to the household.

When a wealthy family from a city in North Bengal sent a scout to look for a domestic cleaner, and promised good pay and treatment to Noha, together with shelter and sufficient food, she accepted the job. She was filled with a sense of responsibility to earn money for her family. But the reality was so far from this.

For the next two years, she was rarely allowed to make contact with her parents. She toiled seven days a week, from the crack of dawn until late at night. Her body gradually grew weaker as she was made to wash heavy clothes and linen by hand. For this thankless and backbreaking task, she earned less than \$0.50 a day.

The day Noha refused a task due to exhaustion, she was beaten beyond recognition. After hospitalisation, she was sent home with nothing more than the clothes on her back.

The Anti-Trafficking Program, which operates in partnership with the Church of North India,

seeks to give hope to boys and girls just like Noha who are too often trafficked into prostitution and slave labour.

Through your support, the program is building community awareness about the dangers of slave labour and prostitution. As the program expands it will provide enhanced counselling and support to survivors and help many more to get back on their feet and teach them vocational skills through livelihood and education programs.

*Noha's name has been changed to protect her identity.

FACTS:

- 2.8 million sex workers in India
- 35 % of sex workers enter the trade before the age of 18
- 40% of prostitutes in a Mumbai brothel precinct originated in Nepal

Source: <http://www.cwmission.org/features/all-work-no-play>

Onwards in Ministry course EQUIPPING LEADERS IN EAST TIMOR

Thanks so much for your support of the Onwards in Ministry training course.

Since the Onwards in Ministry appeal in April this year, your generous support has enabled 15 participants to attend two ministry training workshops. A total of \$42 000 has been donated to this appeal to equip church leaders for ministry in East Timor.

Rev. John Ruhle of The Gap Uniting Church in Queensland recently visited the most recent ministry training course in Dili. In Australia John, known as a fitness fanatic, met his match when he

came face-to-face with a minister in training, Alberto da Costa Ximenes.

John said, "I love my sport and it at once keeps me connected to the community whilst also providing the practice of discipline that I need in my ministry. But what is clear from Alberto's life as a runner in the resistance is that he learnt much more.

"In the most most dangerous circumstances he learnt courage and discipline that even without formal training has made him a key leader.

"By standing with the Protestant Church in Timor Leste (IPTL), you have to provide training that is relevant to them and not

purely Indonesian-based, such that they can be further equipped to lead the Church."

Our Church Partner in East Timor are grateful for your support which has enabled the ministry training course to operate. Please help us continue supporting this program to its conclusion in 2011.

Image above: Rev. Alberto da Costa Ximenes, an Onwards in Ministry course participant from Baucau, 122 kms east of Dili.





Stories from the Field:



Andy Tiver

The North Luzon region in the Philippines is located approximately 250 km north of Manila, and is home to several vibrant and unique indigenous cultures. But many of these communities are situated in remote areas and live in extreme poverty due to discrimination and an inability to access their most basic needs.

For the next three years, former Melbourne Uniting Church minister Rev. Andy Tiver is tackling poverty in North Luzon by undertaking an Experience volunteer placement with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), a Church Partner of UnitingWorld.

Andy's placement has been facilitated by UnitingWorld and the UCCP, and he is supported through Volunteers for International Development from Australia (VIDA). VIDA is an Australian Government, AusAID initiative.

Andy, his wife and two children will move from their home in suburban Melbourne to Baguio City, capital of North Luzon, where he will work closely with the UCCP as a Community Engagement Facilitator and Trainer.

He will work in partnership with local communities to establish livelihood projects that will enable those who are poor to generate an income, enabling access to health care and education.

By the end of his placement, Andy will also establish the Institute of Indigenous Peoples Studies at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Baguio City. This will give the UCCP a greater capacity to understand

the issues indigenous people face and work towards addressing their needs.

Andy has previously worked on development projects throughout the Philippines, but he is looking forward to immersing himself into the life and culture of indigenous peoples, and further enabling the UCCP to address the many development issues that they face.

"I have to get used to it again, learning a new language and coming to understand new cultures, which are very different than mainstream Filipino culture," said Andy.

"There's no formal health care and the indigenous populations experience a great deal of discrimination. I really hope I can make a difference in their lives."

Please pray for Andy and his family as they carry out this important work.

Andy needs your support to enable him to establish these vital community engagement projects. For more information or to support Andy in his work, visit www.unitingworld.org.au.

Experience placements



AVAILABLE
ONLINE FROM
1ST SEPTEMBER

On September 1st, a full list of Experience volunteer opportunities for 2011 will be released on the UnitingWorld website.

The UnitingWorld Experience team has been in active dialogue with our Church Partners about how we can stand with them and support them in serving their people.

A range of placements will soon be available to work with our partners in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

For a full list of placements visit www.unitingworld.org.au/participate/experience from September 1st, or call + 61 2 8267 4267

We are pleased to announce that UnitingWorld is now a fully accredited member of People In Aid, and a signatory to the People in Aid Code.



Being a signatory to the Code means that UnitingWorld provides high-quality guidance and support for volunteers and staff working internationally and in remote locations, like UnitingWorld Experience volunteers.

To read more about the Code, visit www.peopleinaid.org

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