

LENT STUDY 2018

Written by Dr Julianne Stewart



This Lent, Hear the Stories

'Stories indeed reflect our common humanity and bind us to one another in a common destiny, apparently even beyond time and space.'

– William Bausch



**Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?**

**Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
(Isaiah 58:6-9)**

INTRODUCTION

As we begin Lent, it seems that Ash Wednesday's stirring words from the Prophet Isaiah were made for proclaiming the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), although the two are several thousand years apart.

I'm Julianne Stewart and I have just completed nine years of working as ABM's International Programs Director. It has been a wonderful privilege. During that time I met inspiring people in many developing countries; bishops and priests, community leaders and lay people. For each, the SDGs are a godsend. They already have a passion to lift themselves and their families out of poverty, and the SDGs bring together people from all walks of life – government, business, non-government organisations, community groups, churches – and from round the world, to help them to do it.

The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from the start of 2016. The MDGs (2000 to 2015) were less ambitious, with only eight goals, and were focussed mainly on developing countries, giving the misleading impression that the world's problems were confined only to them.

The new SDGs have gifted us with an exciting framework for action by all, on behalf of all, to work towards the kingdom of God; a world of justice and peace where we can all share in the bounty that God has given us.

At their heart the SDGs are about the unequal way that the resources of the earth are distributed among people. This is quite contrary to scripture's command to share resources equitably, so that there will be

no poverty, since God's earth has abundant resources for all.

And the crowds asked [John the Baptist], 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' (Luke 3:10-11)

Poverty is multidimensional and complex. A life in poverty may include inadequate nutrition, lack of education, high child mortality, reduced access to cooking oil and electricity, having a dirt floor, numbers of children, the presence of someone with a disability, low levels of sanitation and reduced access to clean drinking water. The development community measures overall poverty level using indicators like these and giving them particular weights.

People living in Niger, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad, Afghanistan and Somalia are among the poorest people in the world using this measurement. In South Sudan, more than half the population are classified "poor", with almost three quarters of these described as "destitute" (people living in extreme poverty).

These indicators do not tell the whole story. They only measure material things. There are many other aspects that impact on poverty, and which prevent people having what the gospel of John calls, "abundant life". These include social connectedness, psychological well-being, a sense of empowerment, quality of work and physical safety. These attributes affect rich and poor alike, but particularly impact on those whose vulnerability is exacerbated by poverty. Good development work not only seeks to eradicate poverty, but also to address social connectedness and quality of life issues.

People often ask me, 'why are we spending money trying to fix poverty overseas when we see poverty here in our own country?'

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel, 2013), Pope Francis writes:

(210) It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. . . .(234) We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground.

That is, it is not an "either/or" it's a "both". As people of God we care about poverty here as well as poverty overseas.

The Sustainable Development Goals are not just about people far away. They are about all of us, and what we can and must do to bring about God's justice and the reign of God. Both in our own neighbourhood and on the other side of the world.

My work has convinced me that the SDGs are today's response to God's clear voice speaking through the prophet so many years ago.

In these Lenten studies I use the SDGs, Scripture and stories told to me by the people I have worked with around the world to unpack the call of Isaiah 58 and to encourage you to respond to the challenges posed by the goals as you seek to answer Isaiah's call to us all, as God's people.

LIST OF UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2015-2030

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



AT ITS 2016 MEETING, THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA EMBRACED THE GOALS:

R55/17 16.10 The Global Goals for Sustainable Development

Bishop Sarah Macneil moving, Bishop Chris Jones seconding

That, celebrating the success of the Millennium Development Goals and noting that the number of people living in extreme poverty has more than halved since 1990, the General Synod:

- a) welcomes the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development which aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and pursue the common good;
- b) encourages theological engagement with the goals, and missional commitment to their achievement;
- c) commends the work of Anglicare Australia, the Anglican Board of Mission, Anglican Overseas Aid, Anglican Aid and other Anglican organisations in striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;
- d) renews our call for a fair share of Australia's national budget (0.7% of Gross National Income) to be dedicated to Overseas Development Assistance that aims to reduce poverty; and
- e) encourages each diocese, through its synod, to consider 0.7% of gross diocesan income, or some other meaningful proportion, to projects supporting the Sustainable Development Goals.

14 FEBRUARY, 2018



We pray for an end to poverty in all its forms, everywhere. Photo © Episcopal Church of Sudan, 2011. Used with permission.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Read Isaiah 58.1-12 and Matthew 6:1-6, (7-15), 16-21



Goal 1:

End poverty in all its forms, everywhere.

Target 1.5

By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

“This drought is a big challenge for the women. There is food in the market, but it is so expensive that vulnerable people can’t afford it. If only it rained they could have backyard gardens, but nothing. Also people are moving from rural areas to urban areas for security and can’t farm. They are very insecure. When I called the Mothers’ Union coordinators around the country, some were reporting that the women are so hungry that they were going away from their gardens to pick wild fruits and were getting raped. From Bor I have received pictures of women who have been raped. Women have been taken and raped by the army, and are in bad shape. This lack of food is making them risk their lives to collect food for their families.”

I heard these words spoken over a crackly internet connection.

Mother Harriet Baka, the president of Mothers’ Union in the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS), was explaining the impacts of the 2017 drought as she sought the help of Anglican Churches overseas.

As I listened to Harriet’s words, I felt very angry. Angry that women bear the brunt of disasters. Angry that they are so vulnerable. Angry that the army, the very people who are supposed to protect citizens from harm, are inflicting harm.

As I read over my notes of previous calls with the South Sudanese church, certain phrases stand out again and again... “children malnourished...houses burnt down...families displaced...boys being recruited into armed groups...people staying in the ruins of their houses where they are exposed to malarial mosquitoes... many unaccompanied children needing urgent nourishment...”.

In our reading today, Isaiah warns that the religious fasting required at certain times of the year should not become merely a ritual. If the people of God do not seek ‘to loose the bonds of injustice’ where they see them, then a fast to show one’s piety, or to humble oneself before God, is useless.

Or, as the early 20th Century Anglican missionary bishop Frank Weston famously said, ‘You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the Tabernacle, if you do not pity Jesus in the slum’.¹

As a church we accept the clear mandate from Isaiah

...to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke...

This must include the most vulnerable people, living in one of the most vulnerable countries, in the world.

But it all seems so overwhelming. Hearing stories such as Harriet’s make us feel powerless and distressed.

What can we, as Australian Christians, do about these seemingly insurmountable problems?

This is no easy question.

One thing we can do is to sit with Mother Harriet’s story of unspeakable injustice. Read it again and bring your reaction to God, in prayer and in silence.

Another is to consider carefully the SDGs which give guidance as to how the world can come together to address the extreme kind of vulnerability Harriet describes.

The local South Sudanese church members are thankfully heeding Isaiah 58’s message.

They are protecting women, addressing emergency food needs and helping people grow sustainable food gardens to feed themselves into the future.

ABM has been working in partnership with them to help alleviate the needs of people devastated by years of civil war and now drought.

ABM has successfully appealed on many occasions for funds to support such emergency responses. Giving to these appeals is one way that we can help the local church to address urgent needs and reduce the long-term vulnerability of the people.



Group questions

1. Discuss the balance in your church between worship and social justice and compare it to Isaiah 58.
2. Talk in pairs about what you might “give up” for Lent this year (or are already giving up), and whether this sacrifice will have any impact on relieving poverty. Could you combine the giving up of something (such as coffee, chocolate or alcohol) with the giving of yourself or of something of yours to help another?
3. Is it important for the church to engage with secular programs such as the Sustainable Development Goals? Why/why not?



Actions

1. Visit the United Nations website <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> and read more about the Sustainable Development Goals. You can find out how they were formulated, how governments and civil society are working to achieve them, what some of the barriers are. You will also find that each of the goals is divided into smaller measurable targets.
2. Explore the Oxford University website’s comparison of countries against key indicators of multidimensional poverty http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/B47_Global_MPI_2017.pdf

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Reflect on whether your lifestyle contributes in any way to the poverty and injustice that others, both in our country and in our broader world, live with as you pray this portion of Psalm 51 for Ash Wednesday:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*

¹ Frank Weston, *Our Present Duty, Concluding Address, Anglo-Catholic Congress, London, 1923*

18 FEBRUARY, 2018



As we hear the story of the effects of Cyclone Nargis, let us take urgent action on Climate Change so that the poor and vulnerable are protected. Photo © Church of the Province of Myanmar, 2011. Used with permission.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Read Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15



Goal 1:

End poverty in all its forms, everywhere.

Target 1.5

By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.



Goal 11:

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Target 11.5

...significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected...by disasters... with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.



Goal 13:

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

About 10 years ago Cyclone Nargis caused disastrous flooding in the Ayeyarwady (Irrawady) delta region of Myanmar. The official death toll was more than 138,000 people. Countless more were rendered homeless.

A few years later, I was taken up part of the delta in a motorised canoe to visit a community there. It was peaceful, with the only sounds being birdsong, the buzz of insects and the putt-putting of the canoe motor. Occasionally I saw fisher-folk throwing their huge nets into the water to

yield a rich harvest of fish. It was hard to imagine the destruction those mighty waters had caused just a few years earlier.

I was accompanied by a young man who had been coordinating the Anglican Church in Myanmar's response. He told me that once the flood waters receded, and people returned to rebuild their homes, many found that they no longer had any home or land, since the mighty river had changed its course as a result of the flooding. Parents had lost children, and children had lost parents. He went quiet after he told this story, as it was

obviously still very raw for him.

This young man has devoted much of his time since the cyclone to raising funds for children whom it had orphaned, and who were now being cared for by the Church.

His story shows the compassion of those who act to provide love and care in response to unimaginable sadness and loss.

In Mark 1:9-15 Jesus begins to proclaim “the good news of God” and urges people to “repent and believe in the good news”. What is this “good news”? If we look at the Lenten story so far, the good news is that God’s kingdom, the “reign of God” is near. From what do we need to repent? We need to repent from greed, from storing things up that we don’t actually need and from selfishness –things that lead to others experiencing poverty and lack. It might be a repentance from tricking people out of their money, or from tax evasion or from the comfortable isolation that prevents us seeing the need in our own communities.

Often we can see connections between our behaviour and others’ lack locally but do we really have any connection to far away floods, cyclones and tsunamis which destroy lives, wipe out livelihoods, and render people homeless?

The growing frequency and intensity of “extreme weather events” is increasingly being linked to changes in the Earth’s climate. Scientists are finding that these changes are in large part human-caused and, to some extent, preventable.

Climate change also has more gradual and insidious effects, such as a steady rise in sea levels of around 3mm per year, affecting many low-lying coastal areas globally, including the islands of the Pacific

region, where the rate of sea level rise is up to 12mm per year due to the trade wind cycle. This has led to eight low-lying islands disappearing under the sea in recent years¹. So this is an issue where we have a shared responsibility for one another and there is much we can do. We can lobby our government to accept the immigration of those whose homes have been destroyed by climate change. We can encourage our government to support mitigation and adaptation activities which empower people to deal with climate change issues affecting them. Most importantly, we can show our government that we want urgent action to stop greenhouse gas emissions which are contributing to the global warming causing the sea-level rise.



Group questions

Pope Francis says:

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity².

Have you, or your church already taken some actions to address the human contribution to Climate Change? Discuss what they are and what effect they have had. Can you do more?

1. What protections do you have against extreme weather events? What it would be like if you, your family, your animals and your home were vulnerable to severe weather events? What if you didn't have any access to protection, insurance, compensation or food and water relief? Discuss.
2. How can we influence our government to help achieve SDG 13, especially the impacts of Climate Change in the Pacific region?



Actions

Learn more about how urgent SDG 13 is for our church partners in the Solomon Islands:

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2087356-five-pacific-islands-vanish-from-sight-as-sea-levels-rise/>

PRAYER

*All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.*

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

*Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.*

*Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one...³*

¹ Alice Klein, 2017, 'Eight Low Lying Pacific Islands Swallowed Whole by Rising Seas', *New Scientist, Daily News*, September. Available at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2146594-eight-low-lying-pacific-islands-swallowed-whole-by-rising-seas/>. Accessed 21/12/2017.

² Pope Francis, 2015, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home – An Encyclical Letter on Ecology and Climate*, paragraph 211.

³ Pope Francis, 2015, 'A prayer for our earth', *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home – An Encyclical Letter on Ecology and Climate*, p 189.

25 FEBRUARY, 2018



As we hear the hope-filled words of Alphonse, "We are sure we will now become sustainable," let us pray for an end to hunger and the achievement of food security and sustainable agriculture. Photo © ABM/ Lina Magallanes, 2013

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Read Genesis 17:1-7,15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25;
Mark 8:31-38



Goal 2:

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

“Before you came, many families went without food, because we experience unpredictable rain patterns. We had inadequate support for our crop production, and we didn’t have training in what were ideal crops for this area. When you arrived we were able to identify our key challenges. And we were able to identify drought-resistant crops. You provided us with a seed bank. Unfortunately the rains failed us at that time. But then you provided us with a second lot of seeds, and we have had good rains. We are sure we will now become sustainable.

You have also provided us with training. You showed us how to harvest run-off water through our farm ponds. We have constructed six ponds already. And we are using these ponds to train others. The farm ponds come with drip irrigation kits so we can engage in vegetable production – cabbages, tomatoes. This has created employment. People can now buy vegetables locally. People can afford school fees. People can buy better clothes.”

Alphonse is a community leader in Kenya’s Makeuni County, a semi-arid zone about half a day’s journey from the capital, Nairobi. He was describing the fruits of several years of very hard work with one of ABM’s partners, Anglican Development Services Eastern (a part of the Anglican Church of Kenya.)

What he describes is a miracle-like transformation, from hunger to enough food and from subsistence living to having a little left over to pay for vital things like school fees.

This is the sort of change that is possible when we embrace the call of Isaiah 58.

The staff of the Anglican Development

Service inspire me with their unselfish pursuit of the gospel of Christ in the service of their neighbour. For many years they were led by a particularly visionary bishop who preached to his priests and congregations at any opportunity about the need to plant trees to encourage restoration of the land and reduce soil erosion, and the need to restrict family size.

This bishop believed that priests should model Christ and that Christ would be the first to care for the land, and to ensure the viability of families by keeping them to a size which the land could support.

Alphonse’s words also show a strong sense of reciprocity. The church gave the community training, new seeds and different ways of looking at the age-old problem of scarce and unpredictable rain but it was the community who put those ideas into practice; building the farm ponds, digging, planting, watering, harvesting and selling. They are not sitting back waiting for the church to do these things for them.

They are aware of the fact that the only people who can really help the community in any sustainable way is the community itself. By applying the knowledge learnt and making the most of the assistance provided by the church, the community will ensure they don’t suffer again from hunger and malnutrition.

I have witnessed retired school-teachers using their skills to lead community organisations. I have witnessed elderly women carrying rocks to build sand dams and digging to lay water pipes. I have witnessed the joy in people’s faces as they see a positive result for all the work they have put in.

It seems to me that people like Alphonse are demonstrating a similar faith to that of Abraham, as described by St Paul in today's reading in Romans:

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead ... No distrust made him

waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

I see in Alphonse a faith that God will deliver on God's promises, and a willingness to work with God and not to give up.



Group questions

1. Are there ways in which we can learn from Alphonse and the people of Makakya CBO?
2. Do you think that God's reign of justice and peace is possible on earth?
3. Do you know of any programs that have effectively addressed any of the aspects of SDG 2?



Actions

Australia is committed to the SDGs and will deliver its first Voluntary National Review in July 2018. Find out more about this at <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Pages/default.aspx#vnr> Consider asking your own local member or your state senators what they are doing to achieve the SDGs, and how they see them impacting on your electorate or state. What will Australia say in its first review? Are we doing enough as a country? You can find out more about what Australia is doing at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/australia>

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Read the verses from Psalm 22 below and reflect on the fact that this is the same psalm that begins, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ – the same words that Jesus uses as he hangs in agony on the cross. Those words are the most desolate and “God-forsaken” words in the whole bible, and yet, the psalm moves from a terrible sense of desolation to joyful verses of praise. Reflect on this turn from desolation to joy.

*The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.*

May your hearts live for ever!

*All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.*

*For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*

Now pray these words by the late Anglican priest and poet, Jim Cotter, written especially for Psalm 22:

Risen Christ, breaking the bonds of death, shine on us with eyes of compassion and glory. Let light flood the dungeons of our rejected and downtrodden selves. So may the oppressed go free, the weak rise up in strength, and the hungry be fed, and in these our days. ¹

¹ Jim Cotter, 1989, *Prayer for Psalm 22, Through Desert Places*, Cairns Publications, Sheffield.

4 MARCH, 2018



Let us pray for the work of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, and give thanks for all that they are doing to achieve well-being for all at every age.
Photo © ABM/Julianne Stewart, 2013.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Read Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22



Goal 3:

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Target 3.2

By 2030, end preventable deaths of...children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce ... under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.

“The key success factors for this program are the mother’s cooperation and the family’s means to buy nutritious food. It can be a real challenge for many families to buy food that is low in price and also nutritious. Many families receive relief food from UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) and this relief food is high in calories, but low in nutrition. It was intended for emergency relief, but these people have been refugees now since 1948. Because of this, we encourage breastfeeding until the child is two, but encourage the mothers to add solid food after 6 months of age.

Through this program, about 80% of the children improve, but overcoming stunting takes longer. Additionally, because of the high cost of transportation to the hospital, which many families cannot afford, we are only able to target those families who live nearest to the hospital. Another challenge is that women here like to have large families – it is a security for them.”

Dr Suad Obaid is a Nutritionist at the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, a facility of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, in war-torn Gaza. She is describing a feeding program for underweight babies to me. It is amazing to me that her tone is so matter-of-fact when she is describing the nightmare of refugees for almost 70 years still being fed by refugee programs with an inadequate diet. I am horrified to think how “commonplace” the situation she is describing is.

Dr Obaid points to a tiny baby wearing a red outfit, who seems intent on defying the odds stacked against him, “This eight- month old baby is severely underweight. His name is Majed. He still prefers breastfeeding, but I’m encouraging his mother to mix breast milk

with the nutritional supplements I’m giving her. There is a milk formula for underweight infants, but at USD10 a week per child, it is too costly for us to provide. The mother has three older children and is pregnant with her fifth. The father is out of work. Majed had a premature birth, and his mother’s milk is also nutrient-deficient.”

For Dr Obaid, such cases are all too common. The problems in Gaza are complex and longstanding. At times they seem insurmountable.

But there is a strong network of community-based groups within the Gaza Strip who connect families to the Ahli Hospital for assessment and possible treatment. The groups typically consist of a handful of paid staff, assisted by numerous volunteers. One such group is the Zakher Association ¹. The head, Enam Em Samer, tells me: “I’m proud of my organisation and our relationship with the Ahli since 2003. And I’m proud of all the work we do with them, such as the Child Nutrition Program, and health campaigns for women.” Enam proceeds to show me into a cool and darkish room within the old Ottoman-era building which is the Association’s headquarters. A small group of women is gathered around a kitchen table– some are victims of gender-based violence, some are divorced and some are elderly widows with little means of support. They are busy making samosas, pastries, and other snacks to sell for 10 shekels (about \$3.75) a pack for the Ramadan Iftar feasts that will happen that evening. This typical activity is designed to provide support for the women, both material and social, and to build their confidence.

In this Sunday’s reading from Exodus, we are reminded of the Ten Commandments,

which Jesus later summed up as the two great commandments: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind' [and]... 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39).

Although the Ahli Hospital is a Christian hospital, owned and managed by the Anglican Church, its staff are almost entirely Muslim, as are the members of the Zakher Association. And, like the Good Samaritan in the Christian gospel story, they are living lives which express these

two great commandments; lives which contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. So the end result of following Jesus' commandments or of putting the SDGs into practice is the same – the neighbour in need is provided with assistance, and God is honoured. It is because of this that I believe the SDGs are a 21st Century version of God's commandments about how to treat the other, as expressed both in Isaiah 58 and in today's reading by Jesus himself.



Group questions

1. What can Christians learn from the work of the Zakher Association?
2. In Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Good News)², he says we should call it murder when an elderly homeless person dies from exposure. Should we apply the same moral logic when underweight babies with malnourished mothers are not able to be assisted to full health because of the high cost of nutrient-enriched infant formula?
3. What are the ways in which you put into practice the great commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself"?

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Read this Sunday's psalm (19) and reflect on its meaning as you pray the following words from Anglican priest, Jim Cotter:

Creator God, yearning and striving to bring harmony out of chaos, so fill with your Wisdom the inscape of our being, and so move with the Wind of your presence among the landscapes of our world, that the Earth may reflect the glory and wonder of the universe, transfigured in the image of Jesus Christ, at one with you in the cost of creating.³

¹ You can read a little more about the Zakher Association here: <http://www.zakher.org/en/about-zakher/>. Accessed 13/12/2017

² Pope Francis, 2013, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel (Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World)*, St Paul's Publications, Strathfield, NSW

³ Jim Cotter, 1989, *Through Desert Places: A version of Psalms 1-50*, Cairns Publications, Sheffield, UK, p.39.

11 MARCH, 2018



Let us pray that these girls will grow up knowing equality and empowerment. Photo © ABM/Julianne Stewart, 2012.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Read Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21



Goal 5:

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Target 5.2

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Target 5.3

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

On a flood plain in a little village in Zambia's remote Western Province, where sandy tracks and seasonal rains limit access to four wheel drive vehicles and bullock drays, lives a community which has had an epiphany. Their traditional views of women are changing because of training received as part of the Zambia Anglican Council's Gender and Governance program. On this particular day they are giving testimonies to me, a visitor from the funding organisation in faraway Australia.

The first to speak is Amooyate, the village headman:

"I want to talk about my life with my wife prior to this training. Previously I thought women were not important. In fact, I used to beat my wife, and my children did not go to school. When this group started going in our village, some of us thought at first we might go to jail.

The group emphasised the importance of change. My wife started talking to me. I knew that unless I changed she would not stay. I am proud of myself because I listened to my wife. I made improvements to my house, putting iron sheets on the roof. Even those doubting Thomases are now saying they should follow my example. This program should continue so that others may change too."

Amooyate is soon joined by Grace, one of ten women and men in the community who have received training as Gender-based Violence counsellors:

"The main thing I have learnt is that we counsellors are prophets of peace in the household. We are discouraging all the bad behaviour. A few days ago a pregnant girl child was about to be married, with a fee

being paid to the girl's parents by the new husband, who was also just a school boy. I went to the village and advised the parents not to marry her off, but to let her stay at school. I convinced them that the value of the child to the family would increase if she stayed at school. They resolved it by asking the girl's uncle, who lives in the Copperbelt (in Zambia's north), to come and take her to live with him and his wife, so the girl could go to school there."

Zambia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with 31% of women married by the time they turn 18, and 6% by the time they have turned 15. The legal age for marriage is 21, but in rural areas traditional beliefs are stronger than the law.

Child marriage usually means an end to a girl's education and her hopes for a better life. It can impact on her health, and many child brides are victims of domestic violence.¹ Child marriage is often a result of poverty, as it relieves parents of daughters from the financial burden of feeding and educating them into young adulthood. It often has strong cultural support, with traditional village elders encouraging girls to marry early to ensure their "destiny" as a mother of many children is fulfilled.

The program that Amooyate and Grace are part of also works with schools to encourage girls who do become pregnant to stay at school, and bring their babies with them. This requires the active and willing leadership of the school principal, teachers, the local community nurse, families, and, importantly, the traditional elders.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them,

and delivered them from destruction.
(Ps 107:19-20)

For girls and young women in Zambia, the work of the Zambia Anglican Council can be an answer to prayer.

Increased gender equality also benefits men and boys. In one community where this Gender and Governance program was operating, the people had started to ask themselves questions about the way things were always done. They started asking questions about women; Why are girls encouraged to marry early? How can domestic disputes be solved without violence? However this led to broader questions; Why are young primary school aged boys taken out of school to care for the family cattle, when there are plenty of unemployed young men who could do the job? This community was able to turn things around very quickly for the little boys as well as addressing the age-old practices that were harming women and girls.

In one dramatic performance prepared by a group of young men and women, and performed in front of the whole community, the benefits to the whole family of women's empowerment were made clear: participating more equally in farm work gave men a purpose and took them away from sloth and drunkenness. Women flourished in a more balanced life, and children started to see their parents as equally hard working and deserving of respect. Families had money to fund education and to enjoy some of the good things of life.

Gender equality and sustainable development reinforce each other in powerful ways². When women have power to make decisions they tend to take into

account the broader issues that affect families and have a longer-term view. When women farmers in Kenya were given training and seedlings to improve crop production, they used the income earned to send their children to school.

Addressing gender inequalities and empowering women and girls is one of the powerful tools the church has to fight poverty.

Those who receive this awareness, who "come into the light" (John 3:21), are able to pray with the psalmist:

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south...*



Group questions

1. Grace and Amooyate express gratitude for the opportunity to transform both their own lives and the lives of others. How important is it to cultivate a sense of gratitude? Why?
2. How do men and boys benefit from greater gender equality?
3. Imagine you are Amooyate. You have been behaving in an age-old customary way all your life, and then find out that that behaviour is not socially acceptable any more, and in fact it has been harming those you love most. How might you feel? What might you do? What can we learn from him?

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

As you pray the lines below from Psalm 107, slowly and meditatively, reflect on the immeasurable goodness and love of God.

As you are doing this, think about those, like the Zambia Anglican Council, Amooyate, Grace, and many others, who seek to bring about God's reign by working for justice and peace. With them, let us pray:

*Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.*

*And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.*

Finally, reflect on what you are thankful for:

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

¹ Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mabel van Oranje, 2014, 'Ending Child Marriages in Zambia' (originally published in Zambia Daily Mail, 19 September, 2014). Available at <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/ending-child-marriages-zambia/>. Accessed 3/2/2018.

² UN Women, 2014, Gender Equality and Sustainable Development: World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, p.24. Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1900unwomen_surveyreport_advance_16oct.pdf. Accessed 3/01/2018.

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As we ponder the strength of this woman fetching water from the well, let us give thanks for water projects like this one in Myi Ni Gone Village, Myanmar, that help achieve healthy lives and promote well-being for all. Photo © ABM/Ivy Wang, 2017.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-14;
John 12:20-33

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



Goal 3:

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 6:

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



Target 6.1

By 2030 achieve universal and equitable access to safe, affordable drinking water for all.

Target 6.2

By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

A few years ago I visited a village several hours drive from the capital city of Myanmar, Yangon.

ABM had been supporting a project that helped with livestock and constructed pit toilets with a thatched wall, a door and a tin roof. Previously the community, like 15% of the world's population (1.1 billion people), went to the toilet outside.

When I asked a group of villagers what the single most important improvement was, one middle-aged woman said, "That's easy. For the first time I was able to have complete privacy using the toilet".

That is the key benefit of a new toilet was not the improvement of health, it was the dignity it provided.

I have heard women in other places tell stories of how important dignity was to them. Farmers in Kenya have told me how an increase in income (due to learning improved farming techniques) had enabled them to buy new clothes, and made them "look smart, like teachers". They explained they could now buy sheets and mattresses, instead of having to sleep directly on the dirt floor with a blanket.

Privacy, smart clothes, or new sheets may not seem to outsiders to be the top priority for the poor but they are surprisingly important. These are the kinds of things that help to create in people a sense that they are no longer "poor".

I once visited a little village perched on top of a steep hill in the Visayas group of islands in the Philippines, and needed to use a toilet. I was directed to the home of the only family who had a toilet in their house. The sense of pride of the women whose house it was, in being able to offer this facility to a guest was palpable. This contrasted sharply with the times my requests to use a toilet have been met with looks of shame, and apologies made for the basic nature of the facility which we in Australia take so much for granted.

Scripture is full of images relating to water, that most precious of commodities. Lack of water was an acute problem for the people of God being led from Egypt into the Promised Land. Water scarcity is still a problem in the Holy Land. Visions of plenty always contain images of abundant water: the "river of God is full of water", says Psalm 65, and Jesus is called the "living water". Our new life in Christ is marked by abundance of water at our Baptism.

Today 2.1 billion people still lack safe drinking water in their homes, and twice that figure lack safe sanitation. This represents 30% and 60% of the world's population respectively ¹.

Lack of safe sanitation (and the impact of open defecation on safe water sources) is also responsible for the deaths from diarrhoea of more than 361,000 children under 5 each year. This is an example of the way the goals are all linked, here the Water goal relates closely to the Health goal.

The Preamble to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) recognises that "the inherent dignity and... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the

human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".²

This same idea is found in the gospels. Jesus went out of his way to reach out to those whose dignity had been compromised, particularly women. We see this in the stories of the haemorrhaging woman and the woman who had had "many husbands" and was about to be stoned by her accusers in John's gospel.

Access to clean water and safe sanitation is not only vital for life but by making it possible to wash, have clean clothes, and practise menstrual hygiene, it also restores human dignity.



Group questions

1. You may find it difficult, or embarrassing, but are you willing to share a situation where you have felt ashamed, or experienced a lack of dignity?
2. Do you mostly feel a sense of gratitude for the fact that we live in a culture which bestows privileges such as a private flush toilet, a private bathroom (or two), sufficient income to purchase smart clothes, or any number of electronic devices, and a knowledge that you, your children or grandchildren are unlikely to be made ill by drinking your tap water. Or do you mostly take these things for granted? How can we develop a humble heart and a sense of gratitude?
3. Discuss what you can do towards the Sustainable Development Goal of achieving availability of clean water and safe sanitation for all.

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Think of one or two of Christ's acts of compassion as you pray, using these lines from Psalm 119:

*With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.*

*I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.*

*Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes.*

¹ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, 2017, *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and Sustainable Development Goal baselines*, Geneva. Available at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2017/water-sanitation-hygiene/en/>. Accessed 12/12/2017.

² United Nations, 1948, Preamble, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf Accessed 11/12/2017

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A man going home at sunset in Kyo Kyar Village, Myanmar. "Then they brought the colt to Jesus... Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!' Let us search for Christ's face in the faces of all those we meet this Holy Week and beyond. Photo © ABM/Ivy Wang, 2017.

PALM SUNDAY

Read Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118:1-2,19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 11:1-11



Goal 10:

Reduce inequality within and among countries



Goal 17:

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

“To you they are ‘projects’, to us they are life.” As I heard these words spoken to me by the Bishop of Mandalay (part of the Church in the Province of Myanmar) whilst I sat next to him on our journey to see these very same ‘projects’, I felt humbled and a little discomfited. He had gently, but unmistakably, pointed out the difference between me and the people I had come to visit.

My job meant I flew into a country, travelled by air-conditioned vehicle out to see a community, travelled back to the capital city, had a few meetings, stayed in a comfortable hotel, and then flew home.

The people I was visiting were unlikely to have travelled very far from their village, apart from the daily trek to fetch drinking water.

ABM raises funds for any number of ‘projects’ in many parts of the world. I visited many of them and had not thought much about this particular ‘project’ until my pre-travel preparation. I had certainly not thought deeply about the people I might meet. And yet each one has a name and a history and hopes and fears for themselves and their families, hopes and fears I could not begin to imagine. For them these ‘projects’ were in fact ‘life’.

Of course I hoped our projects were life-changing. But the bishop’s comments made me aware of the fragility, and almost randomness, of the funding which results in sending a ‘project’ to any particular group of people.

I think what I was feeling has a name; First world guilt. I suspect most of us have felt it. It can be so uncomfortable that we give up trying to do anything to make the

world a more equal place. Colleagues have commented from time to time, especially after staying in a remote community, that they feel enormous guilt about the gap between themselves and the people they wish to serve. Their freedom of movement and apparent freedom of opportunity contrasts starkly with the seeming lack of opportunities of those they are visiting.

Australia is very privileged on any number of development indicators. It ranks 14th out of 195 countries in terms of absolute wealth. Most of ABM’s development partners are among the 60 poorest countries in the world.

And yet, a little further reflection leads one to realise that, in spite of the poverty, there are aspects to living in a small, close-knit, remote, community that could be compared with the ‘pearl of great price’ of Jesus’ parable. In such communities the visitor often experiences amazing hospitality and joy, a quiet but persistent sense of responsibility for “the neighbour”, and abundant thankfulness for the gifts of God.

This realisation that many people living lives of material poverty actually have riches that we in the affluent west can only dream of should lead us to humility.

In the Palm Sunday epistle, we are challenged to contemplate Jesus’ humility:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

*who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of
death—
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)*

Jesus humbly obeyed God for the good of humankind. As members of the Church, we are all challenged to follow Jesus' humility as we pursue justice for all.

This requires looking and acting with compassion, listening carefully to what the people in need actually want, and it also involves a recognition that we too need to be changed. The SDGs reveal that we too have problems that need addressing. We may be a "wealthy" country, but our wealth is increasingly unevenly distributed.

When we experience humility in our pursuit of justice, we realise that we are not called to be saviours of the world, but just to play our small part in God's plan.

We experience humility when we listen to people in developing countries, and when we listen to the churches in those countries.

ABM is guided by our Church Partners in our responses to poverty and injustice, since the Partners have the experience in applying the gospel to the needs of their own people.

We have learned a great deal from these Church Partners. For instance, here is Bishop David Njovu, of the Anglican Church in Zambia's Lusaka Diocese, explaining the role of his Church on the ground:

"The Church has strengths in this area of social outreach. We have our voluntary contributions, and the fact that social outreach is part of living the gospel. We need to bring back the concept of 'I am my brother's keeper', since these things (like

violence against women, and provision of home-based care for people living with HIV and AIDS) are community responsibilities. For example, there is a great need for people to get information on their human rights. Again, the Church is an ideal place for this information dissemination to happen. The Church has the people. We gather on Sundays, so churches are obvious places to pass on information about rights. . . . There are also strong linkages between the churches and government structures. We have a lot of influence. The church can model good behaviour to its members. For example, to remove the stigma attached to HIV and AIDs, as a bishop I would eat and drink with these groups, and always give them space during my sermon."

As we move through the passion and crucifixion this coming Holy Week, and finally to the resurrection of Jesus, wouldn't it be wonderful if on Easter Day we could go to church and worship our God, the God of Love, Hope and Justice, with a humble, contrite and joyful heart and a clear intention to join in and be part of God's mission to:

*... loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*... to share ... our bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into ... our
house[s];*



Group questions

1. How can we turn feelings of guilt about our privileges into something more positive?
2. Do you think that the Sustainable Development Goals have anything to offer the Christian who is trying to make Isaiah 58's words become a reality? Give some reasons for your answer.
3. Is there something specific that you can take from these studies into your journey with the crucified Christ as an expression of the new life of Christ's risen people?



Actions

1. Go online and have a look at 'The Lazy Person's Guide to Saving the World' <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction/> and make a Palm Sunday commitment to actions from at least two of the groups of suggestions. Some are very easy such as remembering to turn off your appliances at the wall to save electricity. Others require changing long-held shopping or eating habits. You might find it helpful to discuss these things with friends, or a group at church.
2. If you run a business you may be interested to look at how Australia Post has embraced the SDGs as part of how they are shaping their business for the future. <https://auspost.com.au/about-us/corporate-responsibility/our-approach-to-corporate-responsibility/united-nations-sustainable-development-goals>. How could you incorporate one or more of the goals into your own business practices?
3. Australia is committed to the SDGs and will deliver its first Voluntary National Review in July 2018. Find out more about this at <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Pages/default.aspx#vnr> Consider asking your own local member or your state senators what they are doing to achieve the SDGs, and how they see them impacting on your electorate or state. What will Australia say in its first review? Are we doing enough as a country? You can find out more about what Australia is doing at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/australia>

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

As you pray these words from Psalm 118, think about the nature of the Lord we are praising, and the nature of the 'light' God has given us.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

*The Lord is God,
and he has given us light....*

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*



Let us pray for a world more hospitable to beautiful things. Photo © ABM/Brad Chapman, 2015

“We were made to enjoy music, to enjoy beautiful sunsets, to enjoy looking at the billows of the sea and to be thrilled with a rose that is bedecked with dew... Human beings are actually created for the transcendent, for the sublime, for the beautiful, for the truthful... and all of us are given the task of trying to make this world a little more hospitable to these beautiful things.”

- Desmond Tutu

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD



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