CELEBRATING 30 YEARS
A YEAR TO BE PROUD OF

The Reverend Dr Bob Mitchell
CEO, Anglican Overseas Aid

For a small organisation, I believe AOA consistently achieves very big things. Reflecting back on the year just gone has confirmed my opinion.

In 2018, we exceeded our target of $300,000 to respond to the food crisis in East Africa. This was a very ambitious goal for AOA, and by God’s providence we were able to meet it. Our work through Christian Aid in South Sudan has become a source of real hope (p.8).

Closer to home, we’ve been working through our partners in the Pacific to help prepare communities for disasters. Churches in the Pacific are an influential voice with useful infrastructure in remote places (for example, church halls which can be used as evacuation centres). They are also usually the first responders in times of crisis. Our work through the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations consortium (CAN DO) has gone from strength to strength.

Still in the Pacific, AOA was able to help communities from the island of Ambae in Vanuatu. These communities, predominantly Anglican, were forced to re-settle after a volcanic eruption. The acid rain and ash cloud meant that over 10,000 people had to leave their homeland after it was declared uninhabitable (p.6).

During 2018, it was my privilege to represent Australian and New Zealand members of the ACT Alliance network on its global board. The ACT Alliance is the world’s largest Protestant and Orthodox humanitarian network, and to my mind is a wonderful example of practical ecumenism. By way of example, AOA was able to direct emergency relief funds to church and church-based partners after the floods in Kerala and the devastating earthquake in Sulawesi (p.7). We also continued our support for displaced persons in Syria.

A core activity at AOA is pursuing impactful long-term development programs around the globe. As one example, our work in Kenya was recently visited by Bishop Stephen Hale, the vicar of St Hilary’s in Kew, during a private trip. This program has a strong focus on responding to gender-based violence, including through the local churches. He reported “if this program were rolled-out across the country the impact would be profound.” In other parts of the world our work was externally reviewed and evaluated, and the summaries of these evaluations have been uploaded to our website. The overall conclusion is that AOA is making a real and sustainable difference in environments of great challenge.

Locally, we distributed over 20,000 Lent and Advent booklets to Anglican churches, schools and supporters and received some great feedback. We count it a privilege to help engage the hearts, minds and also the spirits of our growing supporter-base. During the year, we were welcomed at over 30 churches, community groups and schools, and we were especially proud to acknowledge the work of the many Op Shops around Australia that have generously supported our work (p.3).

On top of all this, 2018 was special for another reason: it marked the 30th anniversary of our organisation (p.4-5).

Looking back, it is clear that AOA’s work has been characterised by long term, respectful and learning partnerships. Over many years, our primary methodology has been to help communities to recognise and build on their own strengths. In this way, communities have been able to achieve their own development in sustainable and authentic ways. Over the coming months AOA will continue to celebrate this important milestone in our journey.

Finally, in introducing this edition of Abundance, I want to take the opportunity to thank our President, board, ambassadors, committee members, donors, supporters, volunteers and intercessors who make our work possible. I also want to thank our faithful and committed staff who routinely give above and beyond in their work.

A huge thank you to all, and I pray that 2019 will be another great year!

IN THIS ISSUE...

Pages 4-5  30 years of stewardship
Page 6    Appeal Update: Ambae
Page 7    Appeal Update: Indonesia
Page 8-9  Appeal Update: East Africa Food Crisis
Page 10   Bible Study: Seeing Christ in the poor
Page 11   Successful disability project in India

Pages 12-13 Staring down stigma in Gaza
Pages 14-15 Vanuatu: A Pacific island of great contrast

Front cover image: Fostered children from farming families in Rwanda, 2005. The children were supported after the genocide through the work with the Barakabaho Foundation, funded through the Australian Government and private AOA donations.
IN BRIEF

WELCOMING NEW STAFF

We have been pleased to welcome three new staff to our office this year. Renee has joined our Marketing & Communications team. She joins us with five years’ experience in the not-for-profit sector. Her role with AOA includes working on our social media, writing and some of our design work.

Vanessa and Belinda have joined our International Programs team to replace two of our staff who have gone on maternity leave. Vanessa is our new ANCP Manager, looking after our Australian Government funding. Her past experience includes extensive work in community development and microfinance across Tanzania, Cambodia, Australia and New Zealand. Belinda, the new Programs Manager also comes to us with five years’ experience in the development sector and is focusing on our work in Vanuatu as well as organisational effectiveness.

AGM GUEST; ACT ALLIANCE UPDATE

We were pleased to welcome Revd Amy Chambers from Fiji as our guest speaker at our AGM last year. She spoke about the vision and work of CAN DO in Fiji, of which AOA is a partner. She also spoke passionately of her work in the area of disaster risk management, disaster preparedness, church involvement and women’s leadership and thanked us for our continued support.

Our CEO Bob Mitchell, along with our Disaster Response and Resilience Coordinator, Tim, headed to the ACT Alliance General Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden. Bob was elected for a further term on the governing board of ACT Alliance, representing the Pacific region, while Tim represented AOA as a part of the ACT Alliance Child Safeguarding Community of Practice, of which we are a member. During the week the Assembly affirmed a number of statements, including one submitted by Bob on behalf of Australian and Pacific members of the Alliance on climate change in the Pacific.

OUT AND ABOUT

This last few months we have sponsored a few conferences, where we have had the privilege and pleasure of talking to people (both old and new) about what we are doing. In September we were at the Anglican Future Conference, October at The Justice Conference, and just recently at Summer Under The Son.

We would also like to once again thank the Op Shops who are so generous in their support, particularly St Andrew’s Op Shop in Brighton who invited us to their AGM, and Christ Church Op Shop in Essendon.

WE WOULD LOVE TO TALK AT YOUR CHURCH
To have us speak or preach, contact Nils von Kalm, our Church and Community Engagement Coordinator: nvonkalm@anglicanoverseasaid.org.au or call us on 1800 249 880.
30 years of stewardship

This year, we are celebrating our 30th Anniversary.

Born in September 1988 out of a desire to show the love of God, Anglican Overseas Aid is an Anglican response to a suffering world.

We have come a long way since the early days in 1988 when the late Archbishop David Penman set up the Archbishop’s International Relief and Development Fund. We have responded to many needs around the world since then. From the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, to cyclones and earthquakes in the Pacific region, we have worked with our partners on the ground to provide life-saving needs to communities devastated by crisis and disaster.

Our work, however, has not just been limited to emergency relief. We are also committed to community development, and our model of using a strengths-based approach to long-term sustainable development has seen many thousands of people lifted out of poverty and given the chance of a better life.

A sense of dignity is central for every human being, especially those living in poverty. Poverty is more than a lack of material possessions; it is lack of self-opportunity and therefore a loss of a sense of dignity that is at its heart. That is why our work focuses on looking at the strengths, abilities and assets that communities already have.

It is important for organisations to remember their history and celebrate milestones. That is why we are marking this historic moment; we want to remember and share with you where we have come from and why we have chosen to do what we do.

In preparing for our 30th anniversary, we spoke to some people who were involved in shaping AOA: Beth Hookey, Denise Nichols OAM and Archdeacon Emeritus Philip Newman OAM.

Beth was Executive Officer of Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) from 1992 to 2001 and was present at the initial meeting when the Fund was first officially endorsed. She remembers that AOA was set up to enable church-to-church connection between Australia and the countries where we work. She says, “Historically, the church has always been involved in meeting people’s needs. Development is a natural progression. It’s seeking to change and improve life in the community wherever the church has been established.”

Denise Nichols has been a past Deputy Chair of the AOA board and, along with her husband, Archdeacon Alan Nichols AM (who was the first Director of the fund), has also emphasised the strong connection between AOA and churches.
Denise says that AOA’s deep Christian faith is not only a strength locally but also overseas in the field.

“People are enormously interested in connecting with their church and Christian counterparts and wanting to not only do something that shares what we have in a material way, but also trying to live out the Gospel,” she said.

Archdeacon Philip was a founding member of the Fund and was instrumental in spearheading our work in Rwanda during the genocide of 1994. He met with Rwandan bishop Belindabegabo and was confronted by the horror of thousands of lives lost and devastated.

These people are central in our history, and we are thankful for their incredible legacy. There are many more, too many to name, however we are grateful for everyone who has been involved, and most importantly, we are grateful for every supporter who has made the work possible.

All along, AOA has seen itself as not just a humanitarian agency; we see ourselves as a Christian faith-based organisation.

As our current President, The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier says, “The work of Anglican Overseas Aid illustrates the Good News through practical action and care in times of crisis and need; they serve indiscriminately, simply helping those who are hungry, in pain, broken and without hope.”

Just like the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ famous parable, we serve anyone regardless of race, religion or gender. As our CEO, Bob Mitchell, says, “we are striving… to provide a glimpse of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.”

We have served with this hope for 30 years and, God-willing, we will continue to do long into the future.

Above: An 18 year partnership with Valerie Browning and APDA in Ethiopia has given AOA the privilege of working with local nomadic communities to offer them better access to healthcare and education.

Frame credit: Jerry Galea

Below: Families with access to solar lighting in Vanuatu are healthier and have better income opportunities.
Appeal Updates

AMBAE, VANUATU

Try to imagine yourself living in a tent for months, away from your home, with no idea when you will have more stable accommodation. You feel insecure, have no income, and the tropical wet season has arrived.

This is what the majority of people from Ambae in Vanuatu are currently living with after they were forced to relocate in August when the government declared a state of emergency and mandatory evacuation due to a surge in volcanic activity causing ash fall and acid rain.

Leaving everything behind was heartbreaking for the 10,000 evacuated residents.

Since we reported on the situation in our last Abundance and in our Spring Appeal, we have continued to work with impacted communities through our partner, the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), and through the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) consortium.

From the onset, reliable access to food and water was addressed and remains crucial to enabling people to resettle and recover. Through training and allocation of seeds and tools, more than 3,000 evacuees have been given the ability to grow their own vegetables to eat or sell.

In any emergency, the most vulnerable are women and children. So, a core focus of our work has been to ensure that women and children are protected during this upheaval.

Dignity kits were also distributed to women, which made them more comfortable and provided an opportunity for conversations on a range of other issues including gender-based violence. Communities were educated around child protection risks and protections put in place.

Despite the lifting of the state of emergency at the end of November, the Vanuatu government has recommended Ambaens concentrate their efforts on building lives in their new island homes. This means working with local communities in resettlement areas through church leaders, families and women’s groups to provide a sense of dignity, stability and social cohesion for everyone. Psychological first aid is also made available to those struggling with the trauma of the changes.
INDONESIA TSUNAMIS

In September last year, the people of Sulawesi, Indonesia were hit by a tsunami as a result of a 7.5 magnitude earthquake. Then, on December 22, another tsunami hit the coastline of West Java and Sumatra, caused by an underwater landslide triggered by the eruption of Anak Krakatau in the Sunda Strait. Both these incidents brought up memories of the pain and devastation of the Boxing Day tsunami 14 years earlier.

The first tsunami in September caused incredible devastation. Waves as high as six metres hit the coastline, leaving vast damage and more than 2,000 dead. As a result, we launched an appeal to help aid and recovery efforts through the global ACT Alliance.

Our response has included sending more than $25,000 to our ACT Alliance partners, Peleski, YEU, and Church World Service.

The hardest hit areas have been the districts of Palu, Donggala and Sigi, with more than 100,000 people affected, including children, pregnant and nursing women, the elderly, and people living with disabilities.

On top of that, the earthquake and tsunami effectively cut off much of Palu and Donggala from the outside world for several days, with electricity and telecommunications cut, and supply routes damaged. Debris and landslides also blocked sections of main roads, and whole villages were submerged when the land they were built upon liquefied. The destruction was almost unprecedented.

When emergencies like this happen, recovery takes place in two stages. The first response is to make sure immediate and basic needs of shelter, food and clean water are met.

The next stage of recovery looks at the longer-term; supporting the communities in their rebuilding, rehabilitation and helping them earn a livelihood again. This work continues for years post-disaster.

It might be difficult for many of us to imagine the devastation of suddenly losing everything you own. Disasters like this affect every part of existence. More than the physical loss is often the psychological distress that lasts for many years afterwards.

The wave of devastation that hit Sulawesi in September has been met by a wave of compassion and determination in the recovery efforts in the months since.

As always, your support has been wonderfully generous and we are enormously grateful.

Above: Jono, a village near Palu, Sulawesi in Indonesia, was hit hard by the earthquake and resulting tsunami, with 166 of the 203 houses in the village destroyed. ACT Alliance partners provided emergency tarpaulins for shelter to families who lost their homes.

Photo credit: ACT, Simon Chambers

Right: Water was provided by our ACT Alliance partner and used for cooking, drinking and washing.

Photo credit: ACT, Simon Chambers
$360,000 raised for East Africa Food Crisis Appeal!

The food crisis in East Africa has been out of the news for most of the last year. Thankfully though, the people are not forgotten. The work of recovery for them continues.

It seems like a long time ago that we reached out to you with our East Africa Food Crisis Appeal. It was early in 2017 that we first launched an appeal to help the millions of people suffering in Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Since that time, East Africa has been facing a famine brought on by drought and conflict which has affected up to 20 million people. That is close to the whole population of Australia. It’s devastating and a difficult figure to comprehend.

In August last year, the Archbishop of Melbourne and our President, the Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier, sent a letter to many Anglican churches around Australia stating our aim of raising $300,000 for our East Africa Food Crisis Appeal. The monies raised were to be directed toward the work of our partner in South Sudan, Christian Aid. The goal was ambitious, but necessary.

We can now report, with enormous gratitude, that the $300,000 has been raised and more!

You, our supporters, have once again risen to the challenge of responding to the needs of the world’s poorest people and we thank you sincerely for your generosity.

When Archbishop Philip wrote to churches, it was estimated that nearly five million people in South Sudan urgently needed food. It turned out much higher than that, and every dollar we have raised has helped people who might have otherwise suffered much more, or not made it through the most difficult period.

Money from your donations has mainly been used to provide food for people who are starving. But it has also provided many other needs, including the following:

- Improved access to clean water and sanitation for vulnerable community members
- Enhanced access to materials for basic households and shelter
- Increased access to a safe and inclusive learning environment for children
- Strengthened relations and peaceful co-existence among communities

As with any crisis situation in developing countries, particularly when people are displaced, women and children are the most vulnerable. That is why most of the aid being directed to affected areas is being used to help children in their education and to keep them and women safe from physical and sexual abuse.

Our partner on the ground, Christian Aid, is one of a number of agencies working in the region. Specifically, they are working in the local States of Unity and Northern Bahr el Gazal.

Left: A mother and her two children are safe in the camp after leaving their home. Photo credit: ACT, Paul Jeffrey

Top right: People wake up from sleeping in the open air camp in Wau, South Sudan that houses over 5,000 internally displaced people. Photo credit: ACT, Paul Jeffrey

Bottom right: An eight year old girl cooks over an open fire in the camp. Photo credit: ACT, Paul Jeffrey
SITUATION UPDATE:

The latest reports say that, unfortunately, the situation in South Sudan is worsening. The deterioration has been due to insecurity driven by violent armed clashes that have resulted in mass displacement of civilians, killing, looting, destruction of property and gross violations of human rights. About 4 million people have fled their homes, both inside South Sudan and across its borders to neighbouring countries.

To make matters worse, the conflict means that humanitarian access is hindered and planned interventions have been disrupted. The latest figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimate that 7 million people in the country are in need of humanitarian assistance.

As a result, it is estimated that 48 percent of the population do not have reliable access to food, with approximately 1.1 million children under the age of 5 estimated to be acutely malnourished and in need of life-saving services.

Our latest ACT Alliance report estimates that more than half of the population will be at risk of starvation as lack of access to food continues.

Malnutrition in children will continue to increase, and outbreaks of diseases such as diarrhoea from lack of clean water for infant feeding will also continue to rise.

The conflict and how it affects the people in South Sudan can be hard to comprehend for us in a peaceful country like Australia. However, it would be a lot worse if not for the amazing generosity of our supporters. In this difficult situation, we remain grateful for the faithful support of AOA donors.

Although our initial target was reached, the East Africa Food Crisis Appeal is still open. If you would like to donate, please head to our website or call us to contribute - there is still more work to do!
The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is possibly the most confronting story Jesus tells, especially for those of us living in the West. It seems to clearly state that, in the end, we will be judged on whether or not we fed the hungry, clothed the naked and took in the stranger.

Stories like this need to be taken in the context of not just the broader biblical narrative, but more specifically, the character and life of Jesus. If we look at his life and teachings, we see that love of neighbour is directed at anyone in need, regardless of their race, religion or gender.

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which he says to follow the example of the ‘outsider’ Samaritan by being a neighbour to the one in need.

Our philosophy at Anglican Overseas Aid is to also follow Jesus in the work we do. We do not see ourselves as just a humanitarian organisation. We are specifically Christian; that is our identity. What we do comes out of who we are.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. Who are the ‘Samaritans’ in our society today? If you were re-telling the parable in our society, who would you make the hero of the story?
2. Thinking about the answer you gave to the previous question, how does your response make you feel?
3. Who are the hungry, thirsty, naked and strangers in your life and how you can respond?

REFLECTION
Jesus was known as a ‘friend of sinners’ (Luke 7:34). In his society, ‘sinners’ included the poor. The extremely poor were often despised in 1st Century Palestinian culture.

In the gospels though we see that Jesus had a special affinity with these people. His interactions with them confounded the religious leaders, as he was claiming to be from God, and yet he broke many of the religious laws of the day. He clearly favoured people over legalistic niceties.

By doing this, Jesus broke down the social divisions that existed between the wealthy and the poor. This pointed the religious leaders back to the reality of who God is and to the true purpose of the Law. The Scriptures that the religious leaders observed talked a lot about care for the poor. The Torah in particular gave clear instructions about looking after the widow, the alien and the orphan.

The importance Jesus attaches to treatment of the poor is very confronting at the end of Matthew’s Gospel in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

The profound emphasis in this parable is that Jesus identifies so closely with the poor that he says that whenever we serve them, we are actually serving Jesus himself.

This begs the question of us – do we see Jesus in the eyes of the poor? Do we see them as he does? When we hear of the plight of people affected by earthquakes, famine and conflict and see their photos in the news or online, do we see an opportunity to serve Jesus?

Following Jesus is often uncomfortable. But it is on this narrow road that we find the abundant life that Jesus promises.

IDEA FOR APPLICATION...
Find a photo of a poor person, or someone who has just experienced a disaster or trauma. Spend some quiet time looking at their face. Then close your eyes and imagine them as Jesus himself. What is he saying to you?
Successful disability project wraps up in India

For two years Anglican Overseas Aid has been supporting a project giving new hope to people with disabilities in India through our small grants program.

The project finished in July 2018 and was evaluated afterwards by Rebekah Pederson from the University of Melbourne. The evaluation concluded that the project enjoyed much success; the 43 people with disabilities who were involved with the project were supported both socially and economically.

Life for people living with a disability in India is hard. For those already living in poverty, the likelihood of having to cope with a disability is higher. For those who aren’t, the difficulties for people with an impairment can exacerbate or lead to poverty.

Such is the case in the north-eastern state of Uttarakhand, India, where 55% of people with mental or physical disabilities are living in poverty, most of whom were unemployed with no income.

To tackle this issue, Anglican Overseas Aid, along with the Community Global Health Network (Uttarakhand Cluster) and the Nossal Institute, developed the Disability Inclusive Livelihoods Initiatives Program (DILIP). This program was designed to offer people living with a disability the opportunity to meaningfully engage in social and work activities, with a view to increased social integration and income generation.

Through guidance and help from disability coordinators, people with disabilities were mentored and advocated for, supported to start an agricultural trade, linked into social services and assisted to problem solve issues stemming from their disability.

After the two year project all of the 43 participants had taken up and were continuing their trades.

As found in the evaluation, despite varying levels of disability, literacy and family support, all the participants had been impacted positively by the project, either financially or psychologically.

The majority were considered to have achieved a level of gainful employment, with over 70% of the participants generating income, and over 85% able to implement some savings strategy. This is significant considering the level of poverty many of the participants were living in.

Aside from the financial benefit, participants were empowered to be more self-reliant, and through the learning process, attending meetings and networking, they were given more of a sense of value, community and relationship.

Many of the participants reported increased confidence and said that their life had become more meaningful through their livelihood activities and were now more aware of the services available to them.

CASE STUDY

Arjun (below), age 23, who has an intellectual disability, was very disconnected before participating in the program, often wandering around unable to communicate with his local community.

Since taking part in the project, growing plants and raising chickens, Arjun is now more engaged; he looks after his plants and chicks, gets ready and attends school three times a week and can now go to the shops alone to buy groceries for his family.
Staring down stigma in Gaza

In August, our own Nils von Kalm, and independent evaluator, Tim Budge, visited our Australian Government-funded project in Gaza, the Ahli Arab Hospital. They went to plan future work with the hospital and their support of women with breast cancer.

The ‘Women’s Heath, Women’s Rights’ project has been running since 2009, and despite an incredibly challenging environment, has proven itself indispensible in what it contributes to the health of local women. Here, Nils discusses the trip and what came out of it…

Getting into the taxi at Ashkelon on Israel’s coast to make the trip down to the Erez crossing at Gaza, our driver didn’t understand at first that we actually wanted to go into Gaza. When we assured him that is what we wanted to do, he quickly dropped us off and left us to go through the checkpoint.

Life in Gaza is a constant, daily struggle for its 1.8 million inhabitants. My colleague, Tim, and I, had been here before, but since my last trip in 2016, the situation had deteriorated. Electricity is on for only 6-8 hours per day and most of the water is contaminated. The air and sea space is controlled by Israel, and residents cannot leave without a valid permit. The environment is oppressive.

Life for women in Gaza is particularly difficult, but if you are a woman with breast cancer in Gaza, your troubles are compounded. Survival rates for breast cancer in Gaza are approximately 40 percent (compared to 85 percent in Australia). Then, there is the cultural stigma. If you are a young woman and your mother or aunt has had breast cancer, you will most likely not be considered to be marriageable and will be ostracised. Marriage is culturally important as it provides stability and can keep women out of poverty. However, it is not uncommon for men to leave their wives who have breast cancer. Sometimes they may also take another wife, disrupting the family order.

Addressing these stigmas is just part of the work we are doing with the Ahli Arab Hospital. The purpose of this trip was to speak with administrators at the hospital and many of the community-based organisations (CBOs) it works with to plan the project’s priorities for the next four years. Ahli Arab Hospital works with an impressive 40 CBOs throughout Gaza. This makes them a very important part of the health infrastructure, giving them much social value and ensuring they are a vital part of providing the community’s health needs. These CBOs refer women to the hospital for screening, so the relationship between the CBOs and the hospital is strong and interdependent.

Our first meeting took place in Rafah, down near the Egyptian border. There we met with the Sahem Association for Cancer Patients.
Just about every CBO we met with emphasised the need for the education of men in their attitudes towards their wives. Sahem is one of those organisations which is seeking to ensure that men are part of the process of supporting their wives once they have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

In 2017 there were 1,680 cases of cancer in Rafah. Of these, approximately 680 were breast cancer. Despite these numbers, there is good news coming out of Rafah. One woman we met with breast cancer, Maha, is now recovering and working. She is raising the profile of cancer patients in Gaza. And her husband, Basem, is standing out as a role model of a supportive husband to other men. Basem cuts Maha’s hair and even had his own head shaved in solidarity with her when she went through chemotherapy treatment.

Our project in Gaza has been called Women’s Health, Women’s Rights, however with women’s rights still a major issue, there has been an agreement to look at how to strengthen the rights advocacy work in the next phase of the project. This issue came up with all of the nine CBOs we met with. As well as reaching out to men, the project will also aim to reach out to women in border areas of Gaza, and also to women with disabilities.

Speaking with the women from the CBOs, as well as those with breast cancer, was a moving and eye-opening experience. The resilience among these women is astonishing. Despite the daily struggles of living in an occupied land and facing cultural stigma, often from within their own families, they move forward with hope.

We ask you to join us in praying that this resilience and hope will remain strong as the hospital and the CBOs continue to work together in the next phase of this ongoing project.
Vanuatu: A Pacific Island of great contrast

As one of our closest neighbours and one that many of us have at least some degree of familiarity with, Vanuatu is a Pacific Island nation of great contrast. In August, our Acting International Programs Manager, Kylie, visited our work there. Here, she reflects on the visit...

The apparent tranquillity of life and the moniker attributed to the ni-Vanuatu people as among the happiest on the planet belies the fact that Vanuatu is one of the most dangerous places on earth for a woman to live and raise her family. With high levels of susceptibility to natural disaster combined with an inability to adequately prepare for and cope with them, Vanuatu is ranked as the country with the highest disaster risk of extreme natural events (World Risk Report 2018). And unfortunately for women, the risk of harm is exacerbated closer to home as six in every 10 women report experiencing violence from an intimate partner at some point in their life (UN Women, EVAW Global Database).

These seemingly contradictory images of Vanuatu were highlighted for me on my visit there in August. My only previous visit had been some 25 years prior - on my honeymoon! On that trip I gave no thought to the impacts of a changing climate, the risks to life and livelihoods or the daily threat to many women and girls. But back then, as now, Anglican Overseas Aid's (AOA) partner, the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), was a part of the community, providing the strength and guidance needed to stand against these threats, just as it is currently doing on the remote island of Maewo.

Maewo has a population of about 3,000 people. This population doubled as refugees from the nearby island of Ambae were relocated there due to the volcanic eruption. Men, women and children are still being housed in tents, dispersed among existing communities. ACOM is working tirelessly to help the locals accept, welcome and support the people relocated from Ambae. And for women like Trudy Butu, her family's capacity to welcome and care for the stranger has been made more manageable through her involvement with the Women's Livelihoods and Empowerment Program, a collaboration between AOA and ACOM.

Trudy has always been enterprising and, along with her husband Jerry, wants to provide in the best way she can for her five children aged from 17 down to 5 years old. So, a couple of years ago, she took up an offer of an air dryer from a business group with the intention of becoming a producer of coconut oil. However, with no knowledge of how to actually use the dryer, it sat idle until she heard about the Women's Livelihoods...
and Empowerment Program from a friend. Ethel George, the Women’s Desk Officer from ACOM, arranged for Trudy to attend intensive training conducted by the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce.

Once she had the required skills, Trudy began producing the much sought after coconut oil and selling to her community for 200 vatu (approx. AUD2.50) per bottle. Trudy usually produces about two bottles a day, but wants to extend her production by working at night. “This is why I’m saving to buy solar,” she says. “The children will also be able to do their school work more easily and my husband is happy that my business is helping our family.”

Trudy keeps to a committed savings regime through her membership of her local village savings and loans group, also established by ACOM. The Savings with Education Program teaches Trudy and the other 47 women in the group about financial literacy and saving, equipping them to take small loans and develop their businesses. Now the President of her savings group, she is helping other women with their savings as well. She is confident she will have enough saved by Christmas to be able to purchase her solar lighting.

“The Anglican Church helped me find the knowledge and the confidence to help my family and the other women in the community. They believed in me, and I’m so grateful for that,” Trudy explains.

I’m also grateful for our partnership with the Anglican Church of Melanesia and feel privileged that we assist to build strong communities, minimise risks and undermine threats, particularly for some of the most vulnerable women in this beautiful, contradictory nation.

NB: The Women’s Livelihood and Empowerment Program is part of the Australian NGO Co-operation Program, an initiative of the Australian Government.
Our Lenten Reflection booklets have arrived!

Order your copies today to have them in time for the beginning of Lent (starting Wednesday March 6). Stocks are limited, so order them before they run out!

This year we have called our Lenten Reflection “An Armchair Pilgrimage” to encourage us all to take time out of our usual routine to go on a journey, a pilgrimage, in the lead up to this deeply holy time. We hope that as you follow through the booklet with us, you will be blessed with a deeper awareness and insight of Jesus’ journey toward the Cross.

To order, email us aoa@anglicanoverseasaid.org.au or call us on 1800 249 880

*If you received the Advent Reflection, you will automatically receive the Lenten Reflection. Please contact us only if you would like to change the amount that you receive.

Jennifer, who received the 2018 Advent booklet recently wrote to us with some feedback:

“It was an amazing resource for our Life Group and we used it to finish off our study year!

The information was interesting and the reflection questions very powerful. They created intelligent discussion and made us think deeper about the true message of Christmas. It’s very easy to think we know the age old story of Christmas but the context for each of the Advent themes made us think differently!

I look forward to receiving the 2019 Lenten Booklet.”

Thanks Jennifer - your Lent Reflections with be out in the mail soon!