

IN PARTNERSHIP

February 2021



Finding faith in Bangladesh during the pandemic through: new marriage, baptism, the gift of song books, village visits and emergency relief support.

Reaching People Despite Challenges

The global pandemic has made many things impossible this past year. But it has not stopped God from showing His blessing and presence to people who seek him.

Pastor Rambuai is a full-time minister of the Bandarban Hills Churches of Christ. He focuses on outreach to the local Mru community. The Mru people are a small minority group (20-25,000 people) within Bangladesh, and their language and history are in danger of being lost. Approximately four percent of them are Christian.

For the church that seeks to reach this community, the lack of a common language is a barrier. Without recourse or preaching in Mru, it is difficult for people to hear or understand in their heart the message of God that is being shared.

Despite these challenges, Pastor Rambuai shared with GMP a story of a young woman who found Jesus during the pandemic. A young man

from his congregation had met her and, over time, the two became close. He shared his beliefs with her, telling her about his personal relationship with Jesus.

After some time, she came to Pastor Rambuai asking to be baptised! She was baptised in the river. Soon after, her and the young man were married. Seeing a new soul come to faith and be baptised brought great joy to the church.

Pastor Rambuai also gave her a gift upon her baptism: a songbook and Bible in Mru, in her own heart language! Over many years, Christians in Bandarban have worked to translate the Bible into Mru and share it with those around them. There are now Mru pastors and preachers who are sharing the gospel to people, sometimes for the very first time.

They are able to do this because of the help of supporters like you.

When you give to Walk For Hope, you're enabling the ministry of groups of churches like the Bandarban Hills Churches of Christ. You're helping their preachers persevere in the face of challenging circumstances.

You're spreading hope to the most remote areas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, through our family in Christ.

“We thank God for the opportunity to serve the Lord. And our humble request to pray for the Mru community to have adequate Bibles and songbooks for the new souls, and for all.”

—Pastor Rambuai

News & Events

Walk for Hope 2021

This Easter you can support evangelism, church planting and ministry training across the world when you give to Walk for Hope. More information will be available in the March edition of In Partnership.

First Nations Version of 'The Blessing'

The First Nations version of the song 'The Blessing' was released on Aboriginal Sunday (January 24.) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were invited to contribute to the video by recording themselves or their communities singing sections of the song in English or in their heart language. The video was put together by Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA), in collaboration with First Nations Peoples and churches from across Australia. You can watch the video on the [Our Country Speaks Facebook page](#) or on [YouTube](#).

COCOA Christmas Offering

Thank you for your generous gift towards the COCOA Christmas Offering and also participating online in the first COCOA Global Christmas Dinner! Together you raised \$78,216. Your support of long-term development projects in education, health, water and sanitation, livelihoods and emergency relief helps to build resilience, bring hope and change lives for the better.

GMP Great Gifts

Thank you for purchasing GMP Great Gifts for Christmas. Each gift fights poverty, builds up local Christian communities, or stands with Australia's First People. Did you know Great Gifts are available throughout the whole year? Order your Great Gifts online during 2021 for family and friends at www.greatgifts.org.au.



Going Forward

Each time I write the date I double check myself! Did I write 2021? This simple point of focus serves as a constant reminder that this is a New Year. One year ago, our hopes were high, but the reality of 2020 was different as lock downs, working from home and restrictions became the new norm. Anticipated face-to-face contact with our partners was not possible.

GMP's partners had plans and expectations for 2020. We saw projects adapted, pastors learning new ways to maintain contact with people, as they encouraged those who were experiencing greater levels of fear and vulnerability.

As we look ahead, we do so with less certainty than in the past. Let me offer some learnings from 2020!

1. **We need each other.** We are a global village and the actions of one impact on another. Rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable – all of us are at risk. We need each other – spiritually, relationally and financially.
2. **Mission continues.** The restrictions we have do not alter the call of God to be the people of Jesus. Our partners, national and international, keep reaching out and do so with a confidence in the presence of God.
3. **Flexibility is essential.** Rigid plans are not helpful in times of rapid change. Our identity and call to mission is not flexible. More than ever we need to be clear that we are the Church – with a clear message that God's grace shown in Jesus is life-changing. The means and strategies of expressing this change. The message does not.
4. **Technology and new forms of communication are gifts.** We thank God for them. We have learned so much in such a short period of time. In some ways we are all a little more connected and more aware of the situation others face.
5. **Questions of justice don't go away.** The pandemic is global. Many, many countries have health systems that struggle with the load. Well-ordered governments are planning the vaccine roll out. What of people living in situations of high risk? How can this be done following the words of Jesus where the 'least matter most'? The Australian Government's decision to increase the Aid Budget so that vulnerable countries get access to the vaccine is to be commended.

We still have hopes, expectations, plans. There are lots of opportunities before us and in going forward we do so in the confidence that we are not alone and that we have the grace and presence of God to guide us.

John Gilmore,
Executive Officer



SPOTLIGHT

Student group at Christian Church Theological School of Indonesia (CCTSI)

Unity in Diversity

When Indonesia gained independence from the Dutch in 1945, the ‘five principles’ or Pancasila were written to encapsulate the identity of the new state. These were: belief in one God; living with tolerance and peace; the unity of all within the national identity; democracy, and social justice. These principles were summarised in the national motto: Unity in Diversity.

Indonesia is extraordinarily diverse: hundreds of different cultural and ethnic groups are spread across this vast archipelago of 17,500 islands. Dr. Hery Susanto, Academic Dean of the Christian Church Theological School of Indonesia (CCTSI) shares, “Unity in diversity is the soul of Indonesian identity. To maintain peace and harmony, we have to think about something bigger than ourselves.” Daniel Trihandarkha, chairperson of Churches of Christ in Indonesia says, “Many communities in Indonesia are isolated by geography. This can cause conflict between different groups. So, we strive to have Pancasila and ‘Unity in Diversity’ as our ideal.”

The church in Indonesia plays a valuable role in creating a flourishing society that reflects the values of

Pancasila, by living with generosity among their neighbours. One of the founders of Churches of Christ in Indonesia, Pak Gi, explains: “Through our friendships within the neighbourhood, we are known to be different kinds of Christians – throughout the village and beyond. If we are friends, treating others as humans created in the image of God, we don’t have the problem of ethnicity, social agenda or social standing.”

However, in many communities, Christians face hostility; their difference is not tolerated. Recently a small church was forced to close by local authorities in West Java but, even still, they continued to provide support and care for mothers and their children, building a playground and computer room, and distributing food during the COVID crisis. “When you have made an impact in a community, they have a different picture of what Christianity is all about. It’s about love. It’s about caring and giving,” explains Ibu Leila, from API (Asia Pacific International) Indonesia, another of GMP’s partner colleges. “When this church was closed down, the community recognised that something had been lost, and the church was welcomed back.”

“We keep trying to be good neighbours, even if the bridge between our differences has become risky, or we are met with resistance,” says Hery. “Sometimes our neighbours are suspicious. But we do not treat them as the enemy but as brothers and sisters. We try to be an open-minded community, to be salt and light to others.”

While the Indonesian state tolerates Christian faith as a religion, the life of the church exceeds the ideals of Pancasila. By loving one’s neighbours with generosity despite any difficulties, Pancasila is fulfilled in Christ, who brings peace and justice to all.

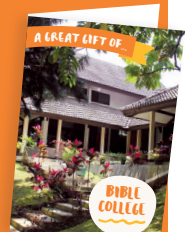
Sam Curkpatrick, VIC/TAS Partnership Coordinator

Support students in Indonesia by purchasing the Great Gift of a Bible College.

BIBLE COLLEGE

\$1200

Maintenance and improvement of educational facilities enables students to access training and further develop their skills as church planters IN INDONESIA





Not Growing Weary

Christmas in Fiji (Muneshwar standing), the Lomowai church under construction, Evangelist Banzi's new church at Game, Zimbabwe.

In a recent letter to GMP Australian supporters, Pastor Doan, from the Churches of Christ in Vietnam, wrote: “2020 has been a challenging and difficult year for the world, including Vietnam and Australia. We know you have also experienced a hard period like us, but you are not weary of doing good work.”

We want to thank you for your support of GMP during a difficult year. It has enabled our partners around the world to persevere through the challenges of the pandemic — to not grow weary in doing good work.

Pastor Raj from Vuci Road Church in Fiji says that during 2020 and the pandemic, God has worked in people’s lives in many ways and has brought families together. “God touched one of our older members who has been supporting families with the supply of groceries during the pandemic and still does now as many families still do not have a stable income.” He thanks God for the growth of the church during this time.

Lautoka-Vitogo Community Church, Fiji, also want to focus on the spiritual growth of all the members in the church during 2021. “We want

to identify and train new people to stand up in leadership roles,” says Pastor David Reddy. “Also, to reach out to unbelievers with the word of God.”

The Bandarban Hills Churches of Christ (BHCOC) in Bangladesh, held leadership training for church leaders, including women, youth, outreach leaders and community leaders in December 2020. Vana Bawm said, “The training program is a great tool to impact the leaders in doing ministry and various activities such as financial management and evangelism.”

In Zimbabwe, BJ Mpfu reports on a new church plant at Game. “The church is six months old and there is room for growth.” This congregation is overseen by Evangelist Banzi. In 2021, BJ would like to see some more congregations in Zimbabwe move from worshipping under the trees and build their own church building. “Every member in the church moulds bricks. Members donate a window or some packets of cement.”

Last year was challenging for the Lomowai congregation in Fiji, who were constructing their new church building. “Getting all the

documentation done and then getting it locally funded by the members of the church was quite a task,” Muneshwar says. “We had fundraising events where people brought in clothes, food and snacks to sell. Some even raised chickens to sell to help build the church. Finally, we have a building where we can worship God despite the weather.”

One of the many ways you can continue to support GMP during 2021 is to pray. Colossians 4:2 says, “Do not grow weary in prayer; keep at it.” (TLB)

Prayer is one of the ways that Pastor Doan in Vietnam has felt supported. She says that when you pray, “You are a comforting source and huge encouragement for our spirits.”

Please keep all of GMP partners, projects and ministry in your prayers as they prepare for the new year ahead. Pray that we don’t grow weary.



You can pray for GMP partners using the monthly Going Deeper resource on the **GMP website**.

GMP Child Sponsorship

Can you help support children in South Sudan and Zimbabwe? A child’s life is improved when they have the opportunity to attend school, feel secure and receive hope. You can partner with Emmanuel Children’s Program in South Sudan or Khayelihle Children’s Village in Zimbabwe and connect with a child through prayer and sponsorship for \$40 per month. Sign up to sponsor a child online www.gmp.org.au/get-involved/through-the-eyes-of-a-child or free call 1800 467 222 to begin this life-changing partnership.

