

IN PARTNERSHIP

August 2020



The Board of Christian Mercy International (CMI) in South Sudan recently appointed a COVID-19 Response Team in affiliation with South Sudan African Mission (SSAM) and the Ministry of Health in the State of Aweil.

Paulino Malou Bol, Director of CMI, was endorsed as the COVID-19 Response Team Leader, across six districts and counties in Aweil. The aim of this response team is to provide World Health Organisation (WHO) information to 30 local Church of Christ congregations.

Community awareness programs are very important for people to access correct information and prevent the spread of the virus. Paulino says, "At first, there was a stereotype that COVID is a disease for white, not for black people; that it does not infect the Sudanese, since our climate is very hot, the virus can't survive in South Sudan." In total, there have been 2,322 cases of COVID and 46 deaths in South Sudan, with nine cases and two deaths in Aweil, where CMI is based.

Each week Paulino's team visits churches across Aweil, travelling one to two hours between some of the remote churches by motorbike. While the main responsibility of the team is to provide updated WHO information to the congregations, encouraging them to practice social distancing and mask wearing, there is also opportunity to encourage congregations spiritually while visiting.

Paulino says, "The response team encourages the church leaders and believers to be strong in their faith and need to trust in God by using scriptures. We also explain prevention measures given by the WHO."

These face-to-face visits are important in a country where technology is very poor. Paulino says, "There is a challenge of preaching the gospel since we lack technology and can't use electronic systems. Instead, we encourage individual Bible studies and home-to-home Bible sharing with people seated 1.5 meters apart from each other using masks to cover the nose and mouth".

The response team will also visit other CMI ministries including the Emmanuel School leadership and school management committee, parent and teacher associations and the Ox Plough project in Akuakkou.

The children from Emmanuel School are currently in lockdown at home. Paulino says, "Children are self-reading at home, with help from the teachers, caregivers and education supervisors. Two challenges of not being present at school are printing assignments, and not knowing if the national exams will go ahead." Another major challenge is with the World Food Organisation (WFO) who have stopped providing food to the schools during the lockdown, therefore teachers are visiting the children to monitor their health. The Emmanuel School head teacher bluntly stated on

the phone to Paulino how difficult the situation is, "What can we do? If we are poor, then we remain poor." Challenges for the children also include a stronger focus on housework, raising goats and cows, and collecting water, with little time to rest and study. School Chaplain, Pastor Butros, is also visiting the children to check on their well-being. He travels long distances using a bicycle.

The Ox Plough training was also affected by COVID restrictions. Paulino reports, "Instead (of a community gathering for training) we had to instruct the trainer to carry out training from household to household." Colin Scott, COCOA Director, confirms that the government has officially noticed the project: "There will be an official day down the track to present people with certificates and government officials will be present."

Paulino likens the experience of COVID to the Israelites in the desert. The hope that comes to those suffering in South Sudan is this, "God provided manna to the Israelites in the desert. The Lord wanted them to trust Him each day for their daily bread, likewise the CMI team in South Sudan will trust God through this time." Paulino finally requests, "We ask for your prayers for safety for myself and the team."

You can support CMI in South Sudan and the work of GMP during COVID via the **GMP website**.

COVID-19 Response Team, Aweil, South Sudan

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News & Events



#EndCOVIDForAll

While Australia has been a leader in 'flattening the curve', too many of our neighbours around the world are ill-equipped to deal with this pandemic. With no fences standing between any of us and COVID-19, we must stand in solidarity with all our neighbours, by encouraging our government to provide vital support to vulnerable nations. With your help, Micah Australia are aiming to create a surge of Australians showing solidarity for our global neighbours who are struggling to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. You can get involved by signing the pledge, writing a letter to your local MP or by praying with others on August 19. For more information visit

www.endcovidforall.com



Safe Water September 2020

Can you drink nothing but water for one month to transform lives by helping people access safe water? Gather a team to take the Safe Water September challenge and help vulnerable communities prevent the spread of viruses and diseases through hygienic hand washing, education, and access to clean water. One month. Just water. Raise funds. Change lives. Sign up today at safewaterseptember.org.au



Image sourced from: www.endcovidforall.com

Our Lives Have a New Rhythm

Our lives have a new rhythm. The nature of the rhythm depends a lot on where we live. For some, lockdown is the current norm. In other places there are restrictions on the way we gather, and some state borders are closed. What a change all of this represents!

Over the past 18 weeks we have been monitoring week-by-week the impact of COVID-19 in our partner settings. Some are doing really well (Vanuatu, Fiji and Vietnam). Others are managing to limit the spread of the virus, while in several settings the situation is worsening and their vulnerability is growing.

Already one overwhelming reality is clear. This unseen virus affects us all. Everyone is vulnerable. If ever there was a way of saying that beyond language, racial identity, culture and skin colour we are all human, this is it. All of us are in this together as God's rich and multi-faceted family.

However, there are also big differences. The wealthier the country, the greater the resources on hand to manage the situation. The poorer the country, the greater the likelihood is of people living in large slums and high-rise housing situations where basic social distancing is impossible. Additionally, in those settings, we observe inadequate health services and governments with a limited capacity to respond.

So, what can we hope for? In one sense we hope for the same thing – End COVID For All. A vaccine, health resources and adequate care, so all can be safe.

It will be interesting to see who gets the hoped-for vaccine first. The gospel value is clear in this regard – the first shall be last and the last first! How would that be? End COVID For All means that the most vulnerable are cared for first, while others follow the guidelines and wait.

In the meantime, all of us in the relative security of Australia have an opportunity to express our care for those most at risk through generosity and shared compassion. This year, Safe Water September's focus on the provision of clean water is one way of saying we are working to *End COVID For All*.

John Gilmore,
Executive Officer



SPOTLIGHT

MECOC Leaders

Reaching a New Province

GMP supports various projects within the Melanesian Evangelical Churches of Christ (MECOC) in Papua New Guinea, including two Bible schools which equip students to share the gospel with people living in remote villages. Yabru Jerry, MECOC Director, reported recently that the Gandep Bible Training Centre and the Yamen Bible School are doing well, despite COVID. He says, “Our two Bible schools, being in the remote regions of PNG, were able to continue with their mission in teaching the word of God to our spiritually hungry students. ‘Trusting in God’ is our motto. With God, there is no impossibility.”

Yamen Bible School has seven students this year. Thomas, founder and principal of the school, has been faithfully ministering for seven years, teaching and coordinating the program. The Bible school is the centre point of the Yamen community and students from the region make sacrifices to attend. Long-term student Raphael Napon, who is aging and having some hearing difficulties, isn’t deterred from attending classes. He tries his very best with the assistance of a listening piece. Raphael says, “Studying is about the mindset, true worship and character building.” Thank God for such committed people who have a love for God and his people.

This group of seven students will go out for practical ministries in August, before they graduate in early October.

The other MECOC Bible school, Gandep Bible Training Centre, is located in remote central north Papua New Guinea. Classes resumed in February 2020, with seven new students enrolled in first year and 11 students completing their second and final year of studies. Steven Yamok, the Bible school principal, says the final year students were sent on their practicals to four provinces. “It is the first of each kind in the history of Gandep Bible College to send students out to do their practicals in another province.” Students were divided into four groups and sent to the Sogeram Area, the Tumba Area, the Bunam Area and the fourth group crossed the Blue Ocean to Kimbe (West New Britain Province). Steven says, “We are motivated with such results, and we know that God has a bigger plan for our college.”

GMP continues to be committed to the leadership development of student pastors at Yamen Bible School and Gandep Bible Training Centre as well as supporting local pastors and leaders in their communities. Steven says of Gandep, “The college aims to train



Yabru Jerry, MECOC Director

men and women to be spiritually and physically fit, so they can return and help their local sending churches.” Yabru says of the students in Yamen, “These seven (final year students) are on fire for the Lord and I’m convinced that God will use them mightily wherever they serve after graduation.”

COVID’s impact on Papua New Guinea is growing, with 111 cases in total and two deaths. Please continue to keep the ministry of MECOC and the two Bible schools in your prayers. You can support the PNG church partnership via the [GMP website](#).



What We Mean When We Talk About Solidarity

One of the best things about Safe Water September is the opportunity to stand in solidarity with people in rural Zimbabwe and Vanuatu. We give up our hot drinks, our smoothies, our soft drinks—the luxury of being able to *choose* what we drink—and drink just water for one month.

‘Solidarity’ is a tricky concept, and it’s something that can easily become a bit of a cop-out. Because, really, I can say, “I’m drinking just water this month as an act of solidarity with people who don’t have access to safe drinking water,” but what does that actually achieve? What benefit does my solidarity bring to people in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu?

I was reading *Mobilizing Hope* by Adam Taylor recently, and he has a chapter where he talks about “pragmatic solidarity”. He quotes Dr. Paul Farmer who says, “Pragmatic solidarity is both the desire to ‘make common cause with those in need’ and offering ‘goods and services that might diminish unjust hardship.’” Taylor continues, saying that “solidarity requires being connected to the experiences and soliciting the views of the oppressed...” (p.93) From that, I want to offer three ways that taking the Safe Water September challenge is an act of solidarity.

1. We become connected to the experiences of people living in poverty.

Taking the Safe Water September challenge does *not* mean that I know what it’s like to live in poverty. I have no idea. But, in giving up my favourite drinks and restricting my choices to just water for one month, I can get a tiny glimpse into a life where poverty limits my choices. But it’s not just through the challenge itself: every year we share new interviews with people in areas of Zimbabwe and Vanuatu affected by drought and volcanoes about how access to safe water changes their lives. And people in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu hear about us, and how you and I are raising money to support their projects. That’s an encouragement to them, and they often send the GMP team messages of thanks and encouragement for the work that we’re doing. It’s a two-way relationship. As Taylor says in his book, “It’s far too easy to forget and feel distant from the people and experiences that motivate and necessitate our work for justice.” (p.92) Safe Water September is a way of closing the distance between us in Australia and the people who do the work, and are affected by the work, on the ground.

2. We make meaningful change for people experiencing poverty.

Safe Water September provides, as Dr. Farmer puts it, “goods and services that might diminish unjust hardship” (quoted in Taylor, p.93). The money we raise together as a community goes to our partners—Showers of Blessing in Zimbabwe, and the Churches of Christ Conference Vanuatu—where it is put to use addressing real, immediate needs in communities. We assist our partners in diminishing hardship, which has a flow-on effect for education, health, and economic development, all of which contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty.

3. We make ‘common cause’ with people in our partner communities.

The idea of having a ‘common cause’ with someone is that what affects them affects us too. And our relationships are not one way. We in Australia don’t have the answers for people in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu; we need to create solutions *together*. The relationship between the Safe Water September community and our partners in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu, supported by GMP and COCOA, means that we are *working with* the locals, who are people we *know*. The solutions to problems—from boreholes to water tanks—are developed in consultation and in relationship with the local community. We are doing this *with*, not *for*, people on the ground in rural Zimbabwe and Vanuatu.

Solidarity requires us to commit to the journey. It means developing relationships over time and being ready to suffer the hurts alongside our friends and celebrate the victories all together. By standing in solidarity with people, we reduce the distance between us: we’re not raising money for abstract people *way out there*, we’re raising money for real people who we know, and who know us.

Commit to standing in solidarity with people in rural Zimbabwe and Vanuatu by signing up for the Safe Water September challenge at www.safewaterseptember.org.au, and get to know the locals through the interviews and stories at www.embody.org.au/resource/blog.

Mitch Salmon, embody National Coordinator