

IN PARTNERSHIP

June 2020



How Toilets Reduce Disease in Bangladesh

Man Installing a new latrine

If you need to use the toilet, how far do you have to go? At home, it's probably close by in a private room with a locked door. At work or school, you might have to go a little further, and use a toilet in a row of stalls. But each stall has a lock, giving you privacy and dignity.

In Bangladesh, however, many people don't have a toilet at all. Only 55% of people have proper access to sanitation. Many people live in rural areas lacking these basic facilities.

People living in the Bandarban Hills often have to go to the toilet out in the open due to a lack of access to toilets. Open defecation puts women and girls at increased risk. Fear of assault and embarrassment threatens girls' safety, keeping many girls from attending school.

Preventable diseases like diarrhoea and cholera are common where there are not proper facilities. Without sanitary toilets, or enough education about sanitation, disease can spread quickly. A recent survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

(BBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that less than 60% of people properly wash their hands after going to the toilet. This isn't due to a lack of cleanliness. Without access to running water, soap or sanitiser it's almost impossible to stop the spread of germs.

There is a critical need for toilets in Bangladesh.

When people have access to functional and clean toilets, there is less sickness. The risk of drinking water becoming contaminated by faeces is lower. The possibility of bacteria spreading and causing outbreaks of diarrhoea is reduced.

All people deserve safety and dignity. Proper toilets provide these things to women and girls who desperately need them. They can reduce dangerous assaults, raise school attendance by up to 20%, and enable women and girls to practice proper menstrual hygiene.

This is why Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCOA) is supporting

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects in Bangladesh. Currently, we are finalising a new project in the Bandarban Hills. This project will be raising awareness of the benefits of using latrines, including proper sanitation training, and demonstrating how to build and maintain latrines.

But it isn't possible without the help of supporters like you!

It costs \$300 to hold a workshop educating people in proper sanitation and hygiene practices. This is an important first step for any WASH project, and something you can help make possible! When you give to the Mid Year Appeal, you are helping to reduce the health and safety issues that have horrible effects on people's lives in Bangladesh.

This is just one example of how your gift to the COCOA Mid Year Appeal can give vital support to our partners around the world. Donate today at www.gmp.org.au/change

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News & Events



COCOA Mid Year Appeal

Even in these challenging times, you can help provide some of the world's poorest communities with better access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene. Your tax-deductible gift to the COCOA Mid Year Appeal can make a difference. Donate before June 30 at www.gmp.org.au/change

IMA Essentials Pack

Provide essential supplies to vulnerable Indigenous Australian families and individuals experiencing hardship during COVID-19. Just \$50 will supply one Essentials Pack to someone in need. To give today visit extend.org.au/essentialspack

embody Mission Unplugged Podcast

embody recently launched their new podcast 'Mission Unplugged', featuring genuine conversations about Christian faith in action with young innovators locally, nationally and globally. Listen today on Spotify or at anchor.fm/embodyau

embody are also seeking to develop a permanent online Discord community for young people and leaders of young people to connect with one another across Australia. Young people and leaders of young people are invited to join in the conversation at embody.org.au/discord



Imagine Something New

As I write, it's the Week of Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Sunday in the middle of that week is Pentecost Sunday. This connection is powerful.

Pentecost is when we focus on the gift of God's Spirit to the disciples, which births the Church. A crowd gathered because of the sound that was being made. This crowd was made up of "devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem." It was a multicultural, multi-language and multi-ethnic gathering.

What happens? The disciples have the Spirit's gift to speak in other languages. The real mystery in this event is something else. People ask, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" (who normally speak with an accent) and "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" A native language is the language of the heart.

Peter goes on to help the listeners understand the meaning of this moment and the Church is birthed – multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-ethnic, united in God's Spirit across all differences. A community of reconciled differences.

The tabling of the *Bringing them Home* report in the Australian Parliament on 26 May 1997 started a national journey. Twenty years ago, on the same date, 250,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour in a commitment to Aboriginal Reconciliation. In 2008, the Australian Parliament apologised to Indigenous Australians. This date, May 26, is both National Sorry Day and the National Day of Healing.

Can we imagine something new, a work of God, that crosses the deep divides and pain in our nation? Something that speaks so deeply in all of our hearts with languages that begin to create a new reality – a healed nation with reconciled peoples, an end to racism and grace-filled justice made real.

We celebrate the birth of the Church in the moment of Pentecost. The church was made real as those who experienced God's Spirit shared it with others. We can be reconciled, and it can happen in Australia with our First Peoples and you and me. It won't happen overnight. There are signs of hope. We must keep listening and sitting with the reality of the pain of so many. As we do, God's Spirit of unity and healing will be at work in us all and reconciliation can be real.

John Gilmore,
Executive Officer

SPOTLIGHT



Some beautiful felt designs made by Fiona Briers and the Bright Solutions Team (pictured center)

The End of a Season

For the past 10 years, Fiona Briers has journeyed with many marginalised women in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They have acquired sewing and handicraft skills, providing programs that continually increase their abilities and expertise, and offer women experiences with formal work structures. Bright Solutions' highly crafted interactive children's play products are not just delightful; they are the means through which a woman's livelihood, self-esteem and capacity towards economic independence is provided.

It is with sadness that we share the following news. After much deliberation and a careful assessment of the situation of Bright Solutions based on professional analysis, the decision has been made that the time for the impact and effectiveness of Bright Solutions has ended. There have been high impact changes in Vietnam and Australia due to the effects of COVID-19 on marketing

and distribution. Key outlets and markets are closed and unlikely to reopen.

Bright Solutions as it currently stands, will close by the end of June 2020. Although a difficult decision with serious implications for all, Fiona Briers shares that it seems timely and God-directed for many reasons,

"To you all, we thank you for walking with us along this 10-year journey. You have been our strength and ever-appreciated supporters. I indeed value your prayers as we proceed through liquidation; that the Lord will grant me discernment in ways to daily encourage each woman; for the Lord's unending mercy to help us finish well!"

GMP's SA/NT Partnership Coordinator, Val Zerna, visited Bright Solutions just before the COVID-19 travel restrictions and reported, "Pray for Fiona and the Bright Solutions women in this time

of significant change. Especially for Fiona – there will be the challenge of concluding the organisation, and the major reorientation of life after a decade of passionate service and connection in Vietnam."

GMP thanks Fiona for her incredible commitment and investment into Bright Solutions and the women. Bright Solutions will officially remain operational until the end of 2020, although the empowerment program will be closed. The remaining six months' goals are to help the Bright Solutions' women transition successfully to new microenterprise businesses or alternative options, whilst selling all remaining stock. The Bright Solutions website will remain operational. Now is the time to order and buy their products online to assist them to finish well.

If you would like to purchase from the Bright Solutions range, you can do so at their website www.brightsolutionsvietnam.com/products/

Binh Phouc Association for the Disabled, Poor and Orphans (BPADPO)

The current Community Support in Health and Self Care project with BPADPO in Vietnam, will conclude at the end of the financial year. BPADPO has focused on improving sanitation for disabled people, through providing toilets and community hygiene training. A number of Australian churches and individuals have taken a special

interest in BPADPO, and our thanks goes out to them for their faithful and generous support. Over the past three years, BPADPO has provided over 400 people with new toilets, including Ms. Luc Thi Khieu, who says, "I don't need to look for bushes in the garden to defecate anymore and I'm not afraid of anyone watching me like that."

It has been a long and fruitful partnership, helping people most in need.

You can read the full statement BPADPO- A Long and Fruitful Partnership from COCOA Director, Colin Scott, in the 'News' section on our website at www.gmp.org.au/news/2020-news

*In concerning
ourselves with their
health we will find
our own healing*

(Isaiah 58:7-9)



*Photo by Robert Norton
retrieved from: [unsplash.com/
photos/zDYzS4YRvD4](https://unsplash.com/photos/zDYzS4YRvD4)*

A Gospel Reflection on Coronavirus

Coronavirus appears to have originated in the wet-food markets of Wuhan, where live wild animals are often sold for food. The sellers struggle to make a living, so many use their animal cages as a bed, guarding their livestock while they sleep. This close contact, it has been argued, provided the opportunity for the transfer of the virus from animals to humans. See [here*](#) for an Indigenous Australian insight.

When we give to the poor like the marketeers of Wuhan, we often do so out of compassion, out of a sense of responsibility and of solidarity. These are all good motivations, but this example reminds us that there are solid self-interest, self-care, and self-safety motives for giving to the poor. God has set us in a connected world. What we do affects others. The whole creation – not just people – groans for the kingdom to come (Rom 8:22). A recent news story featured an oyster farmer who had inherited the farm from his father. He was bemoaning the fact that he could not pass it on to his children. It no longer produced oysters at a level that could sustain a family business. The temperature of the water had changed. We have all helped to change the temperature of the water. The Coronavirus health message is clear: The health of the poorest in the global community is critical to the health of the whole global community. In concerning ourselves with their health we will find our own healing (Isaiah 58:7-9).

God is in the business of directing the history of nations. Repeatedly in the prophets we hear how the Lord of history determines the future of the nations (Isaiah 2:4). Is this what is happening now? Because the virus travels person to person, all are at risk. Cities all over the world have been impacted, and often the poorest people are most vulnerable. The first spread reflected the travel of the wealthy; Milan and then New York, but now it is cities of the poor such as Mumbai, Dhaka and Sao Paulo. It is as if God bringing low the proud (Luke 1:51-52) and reminding us powerfully that we are in this together – no one is exempt.

I have always taken our dog for a morning walk, so I know the local morning walkers. These days my wife joins me, and we use the commuting time that we have saved to go for a longer walk. There are a lot more walkers these days. Families are rediscovering jig-saw puzzles and warm ways of being together. And the simple joys of a book or a garden and many familiar things that we have been rushing past, have shown their true value. What is God saying? Life does not consist in busyness or consumption or power! It never has! All the essentials of life; love, relationship and spiritual sustenance are still fully and freely available.

Churches have had to stop and rethink what it means to be church, now we can't put on a big show on Sunday. At our church, we have never engaged with each

other with such joy and such depth. Churches are dropping notes in letterboxes, not just of their members, but across their communities, offering to lend a hand. We are the people who are unflustered by pandemics. We stand in the constancy of Christ's living presence. We stand in the compassionate and courageous tradition of Christians who risked their lives to give victims of an earlier Roman pandemic a proper burial. This is the time to offer our communities a steady, compassionate hand and a pathway to Christ.

The virus has made its way to places as poor or poorer than the wet markets of Wuhan. To countries where hospitals and health care are a shadow of those in Milan, New York or Sydney. Their only real protection is their isolation from the rest of the world. In South Sudan, the first cases of the virus were four UN workers. The general population can't afford to travel. In places like this, Coronavirus could have an enormous impact. What is God saying here, but to get outside of ourselves and engage our compassion, our sense of responsibility and of solidarity, and help – to give generously? It will be an act of self-care that will help to heal us.

*Colin Scott,
COCOA Director*

*Watch the video here
<https://bit.ly/COVID5>