

IN PARTNERSHIP

July 2020



Dena Gower, Wadjak Community Leader

Wadjak Community Leader, Dena Gower, walks down to the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan in Western Australia. Now commonly known as the Swan River, this is the land where her ancestors lived. “I always go down there,” Dena says. “I just go and sit at the river, I just go down there, and sort of close my eyes, and think ‘I wonder what it was like when my mob was here’. Their spirits were happy and free. It would have just been noise of the language and the people.” When the first fleet arrived in Australia 232 years ago, it marked the beginning of English colonialism in the country. Dena says, “The first time they came to the Aboriginal country, they came with firearms, and they started firing within 15 minutes. That’s a criminal act. The second time they come they took possession, and it’s all in history.” Dena says, “It wasn’t being respectful to the Aboriginal people. They came here by force and took this land. It’s something that’s affected the Aboriginal people for a long time.”

It’s important to acknowledge this past, and to acknowledge that Aboriginal people are the traditional owners of the land we live on. Dena says, “The Aboriginal people are the humblest people, I feel, in the world, who are trying to reconcile for their country.” It is important for non-Indigenous people to stand with and

support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters. “When you do welcome to country, that’s very special to us,” Dena says. Because it makes you think, “Yeah, this is our land, it does belong to us.” In Noongar Country, it makes me proud that my brothers and sisters in Christ are respecting that, “Yeah this is their home, and they want to welcome us here.” And whether you don’t understand it or what, it doesn’t matter, you must respect our Father, we have one Father, who give this land to the Aboriginal man.”

Dena walks along the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan, into the bush that grows alongside it. She crouches down and picks up a shell midden, to show us. This artefact, made of discarded waste, gives us insight to the lives that were lived here, so many years ago. “I think what Australia needs to learn, is that the land does so much. It feeds us, it shelters us, it gives us finances, it takes care of our children. The land gives so much back to us.” Dena explains how God gave this land to the Aboriginal people to look after, “It’s like when you come with us (saying) ‘Wow! That river’s beautiful, how did you look after it?’ Well then, we’ll tell you! ‘How did you grow those trees like that?’ Well ask us, and we’ll tell you! We’ve got our Elders out there that can tell you.”

Healing will come from realising how skilled the Indigenous people are, “Until our Aboriginal men can put their hands back into their own land...and the Aboriginal women to do their part that God gave them to...there can be no healing.” Like a family separation requires support to rebuild, Dena says, “Back to the way it should be, in this country, that’s what’s needed.” Dena has one more thing to ask of us, as brothers and sisters in Australia. “Allow our Aboriginal kids, all over Australia, to be able to grow up feeling proud of who they are, who God has made them – God has made us Aboriginal people.”

Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA) encourages all Australians to commit to listen to, and amplify the voices of, Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal Christians. Please, continue to pray without ceasing for racial justice and healing; only possible through acts of truth-telling, listening, confession, hospitality and solidarity.

You can read the full interview with Dena at gmp.org.au/news/Dena-Gower or watch the video at youtu.be/TuvtgUVx9hE. Dena and Garry Gower run Perth-based Ngaama Ministries. Ngaama seeks to provide training and discipleship to raise up a new generation of young Indigenous leaders. For more information go to [Ngaama’s Facebook page](#).

News & Events



**Always Was,
Always Will Be.**
8-15 NOV 2020

NAIDOC Week 8-15 November

In the interests of, and safety for, local communities, the National NAIDOC Committee has postponed celebrations for NAIDOC Week until 8-15 November 2020. NAIDOC Week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. More information can be found online at:

www.naidoc.org.au/about/naidoc-week

IMA Essentials Pack

Indigenous Australian families and individuals are experiencing hardship during COVID-19. With your support, IMA will safely deliver essential items like groceries, sanitisers, gloves and face masks to those at high risk of virus exposure, with compromised health or experiencing financial hardship. To give an essentials pack visit:

extend.org.au/essentialspack



Safe Water September 2020

Every person deserves safe water. Gather a team to take the challenge and sign up today at safewaterseptember.org.au



Beyond Labels

Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

Many things shape our perceptions of reality. Our fears sometimes limit the conclusions we draw, and our blind spots can limit our vision. Painful memories or regrets that come into the present limit our ability to let the past be the past.

Jesus models an all-embracing framework of grace, forgiveness and love. The people around Jesus are labelled. One is a tax-collector, another a leper, some have questionable reputations and many are discriminated against because of their racial identity and background. Jesus takes us beyond all these labels and into the reality of who a person is and what they can be. The labelled people are set free in the grace of Jesus to new lives, and their labels are left behind – the ‘blind’ man loses the label in being healed.

We are seeing a return to labels. People from particular countries are labelled as being responsible for the pandemic. Others are marginalised due to the colour of their skin, or the different ways their culture is expressed. The stranger is a threat and some have, understandably, become fearful of mixing with others. Anxiety has increased.

I have been reflecting on this after being asked ‘a question by a lawyer’; “What does the Church say in all of this?” He said the government is saying what the churches should say – we are in this together, be kind to each other and think of your neighbours!

Yes, these are good and important humanitarian sentiments. Consistent with what we say and seek to do. The Church can say more.

Jesus calls us to go further and say, “People are not labels, they are our sisters and brothers – all are people for whom Christ died.” We can also say, “People are not their past – they are forgiven and healed.” We can say, “All people irrespective of skin colour and culture are created in God’s image.” We can keep using a language of grace, inclusion, justice and forgiveness – the language of the gospel, and a rich message of hope in uncertain times.

John Gilmore,
Executive Officer



SPOTLIGHT

Women collecting water in Zimbabwe

How Safe Water Stops Sickness in Zimbabwe

Recently, we've all been thinking a lot more about sickness. Thinking about the ways we can reduce the risk of getting ill. Washing our hands with soap, and washing the food that comes into our homes.

But in many parts of the world, people can't reduce the spread of illness so easily. Much of this is due to a lack of clean water. Their water often comes from a dirty river or a shallow hand-dug well. Washing your hands or your veggies with dirty water quickly leads to contamination from dirt or animal faeces and to diseases

like cholera and diarrhoea. People do their best, but with limited hygiene education and access to clean water, it can be tough. Without the resources to change their situation, it can even be demoralising.

This is what life was like in villages along the Ngezi River in Zimbabwe. But things changed – dramatically – with a bore hole project through Showers of Blessings.

Safe clean water became available, and within walking distance! People were able to wash their

hands, clean their vegetables, and drink water without the fear of sickness.

“I was using a cloth as a sieve, to separate germs from my drinking water,” said Sithembile, who attended a water workshop in Palawani. “But now I have learnt that I should boil my water instead.”

Since communities like Palawani have gained access to safe and clean water, they have reported that waterborne diseases are no longer present.

Safe Water September 2020

Safe Water September returns in 2020! Last year challenge takers like you smashed our fundraising record, providing \$162,500 to support safe water projects in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu. This year the challenge is back with a revamped look and new options for challenge takers! We're aiming to raise \$150,000 to continue the work of our partners on the ground in vulnerable communities. Can you drink nothing but water for one month to transform lives through safe water? The whole world knows the value of water and sanitation, and this is our chance

to help vulnerable communities prevent the spread of viruses and diseases through good hand washing, education, and access to clean water. For the cost of just four cups of coffee, you can transform a life in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu.

Gather a team to take the challenge with and sign up at safewaterseptember.org.au because every person deserves safe water.

Mitch Salmon,
embody National Coordinator

ONE MONTH.
JUST *water.*
RAISE FUNDS.
CHANGE *lives.*

 SAFE *water* SEPTEMBER

Discipleship at a Distance

In the Bandarban Hills Churches of Christ in south-east Bangladesh, Christian community and discipleship has often been done at a distance – even before restrictions imposed by the coronavirus crisis. Made up of 16 churches in small hillside villages, the church has around 700 members. Some meet in bamboo-and-timber church buildings and others in members' homes. Stretches of 15 to 20 kilometres of rugged terrain separate one church community from the next and, with no transportation, if you want to visit another village you must walk. Vana Bawm, General Secretary of the Bandarban Hills Churches of Christ, planted these 16 growing churches by walking from village to village sharing the gospel and raising up local leadership so the churches could continue to grow without his physical presence. Vana said, "I want to empower leaders and teach faithfulness so they can pass the same lesson to others. I train my leaders to be stronger in my absence than what I am today." Empowering others to lead where they are, means that evangelism and discipleship can flourish in each village despite the challenges of distance. Read the full article by Emily Fergusson on the Fresh Hope blog via this link:

<https://bit.ly/BangladeshDiscipleship>



Vana Bawm (centre) with one of the local churches he oversees in South-East Bangladesh



Hery Susanto, Indonesia

Working Among the Aceh People

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped Karen from sharing the love of Jesus with Indigenous tribes and Muslims in Indonesia. Karen teaches elementary school in the morning while also assisting three children learning to use computers. Karen builds friendships with her neighbours that haven't heard about the Good News. Karen says of her ministry, "COVID-19 could not stop us to do missions. Perhaps we should change the way to do it, but don't get lost in that. Whenever we keep stepping forward, we will be getting closer to the goal. His love for the people never ends." - Hery Susanto, Academic Dean of Christian Church Theological School of Indonesia.

Generosity in Fiji

During the beginning of COVID-19 in Fiji, Pastor Munesh Goundar told us how the community at Sigatoka had reverted to a barter system in order to look after each other. Munesh said, "Things changed very much. People looked for other ways to sort things out. Many years ago, when there was not much value for money, people were doing a barter system (exchanging things for what they needed). People have begun to do that again, even if they do not have anything to give out – they would clean gardens for rice. It seems even without jobs there is a way out." Pastor Raj Deo, from Vuci Road, also reported, "We were able to help some families with groceries who were really in need and were facing difficulties."



Pastor Raj and Nirmala Deo (standing) help community members with groceries



School lessons in the library at KCV

God is Able

Kids in Zimbabwe at Khayelihle Children's Village (KCV) are following the WHO guidelines for staying safe. All the children at the village are in good health. Vimbai Vuma, the KCV Director, reports that the children enjoyed staying at home and adapted well to the lockdown. Children are encouraged to stay within their family units and to wash and sanitise their hands as often as they can. They take turns to use the library under strict supervision of a caregiver, who makes sure that social distancing is maintained. The KCV farm has also provided milk, vegetables and some fruit for the children. Mrs Vuma said, "The virus has not stopped us from smiling and enjoying life, because we believe that there is a God who is able."