

UNITINGWORLD

UPDATE
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Meet the new *President* of the UCA

"... we need to remember
the good news that we
have to tell our world. We
shouldn't be silent."

~Rev Charissa Suli, President of the
Uniting Church in Australia



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

UnitingWorld is the international aid and partnerships
agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. Together we
work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful,
free from poverty and injustice.

Because every person matters.

Photo credit: The Signal Box, Sydney

Taking up opportunities to serve

A few weeks before her induction as the 16th President of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), we spoke to Reverend Charissa Suli about the journey that led her here, and her hopes for her time as President.

There was a time when Rev. Charissa Suli didn't think church leadership could be for people like her.

"My home congregation was one of the first Tongan or migrant congregations that was established in the Uniting Church in Australia," she says.

"I grew up in a tradition where it's predominantly been older Pacific men who are the leaders and the ministers and that was my normal, which was fine, but it meant I didn't think so much about paths like ordained ministry for myself."

That was until, as a young adult, Charissa was invited to use her gifts of singing and worship leading to serve at a cross-cultural gathering.

"The gathering was filled with so many culturally diverse people, younger and older generations, and I saw Pasifika women, Korean women, Armenian ministers, it really surprised me."

"For the very first time, I saw a Pasifika woman (Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll) leading a Bible study... and I said to myself: 'I can do that.'"

Encouraging others

Looking back today, Charissa acknowledges many mentors and vital opportunities that enabled her to step up into ordained ministry and church leadership.

"There's faithfully leaning into the gifts God has given me, but it has also been about people giving opportunities, people seeing me for who I am, passing me the microphone and saying, hey, it's your turn to speak."

Her journey has made her a passionate advocate for helping provide opportunities and platforms for others to take up leadership, particularly women.

"Because I always believe that there's enough room for all of us at the Lord's Table, and if we run out of the chairs, then get the *fala* (mat) out, get the camp chair out. Because when I think about God's inclusive and *agape* love, it's so wide and so deep and it's not going to run out. I truly believe that God will utilise each of us, in ways that we will never understand."

Seeing the work of UnitingWorld come to life

"I've loved the opportunities I've had to see the work of UnitingWorld come to life," says Charissa.

"The most recent experience I've had connecting with our overseas partners was being at a Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT) conference last year, after the tsunami."

"I was sitting at the front table, during one of the lunch times, and the FWCT President quietly says to me, 'we're just about to do a presentation of thanks to UnitingWorld... the National Director's not here, but you're here... I need you to represent the Uniting Church and present to the conference.'"

Charissa knew churches in Australia had given generously to support Tonga after the crisis but didn't know what exactly that translated into.

"So I get up and I'm rushing to the microphone, trying to think of what we gave, what it meant for people and the rebuilding effort," she recalls.

"Then before my eyes, this truck is driven into the middle of the square pulling an enormous boat that was donated through UnitingWorld, and with it was life jackets, shovels, gardening and kitchen equipment... anything you can think of that's going to help a community grow and rebuild again."

It was just a glimpse of a huge range of equipment that was acquired to help resource and reconnect outer islands to sources of livelihoods that had been wiped out.

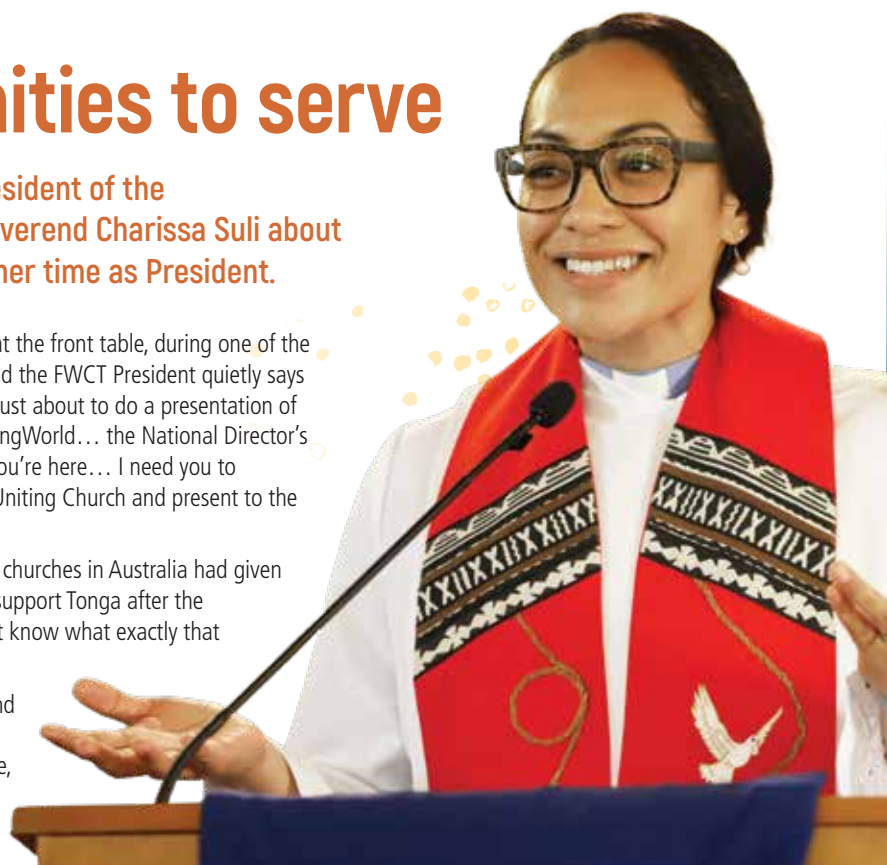
"I stood there with tears in my eyes because I got to see in real time the incredible work that happens behind the scenes," said Charissa.

"And it wasn't just me, I could see the leaders who were from the smaller islands who had really been doing it tough and they had tears coming down off their cheeks as they saw this equipment and knowing how much it's needed and will be put to good use."

"That was really beautiful and profound moment," she says.

"It was really special to see the fruits of all the fundraising done by local Uniting Churches and how it comes to life when our partners can get what they need to support communities around them," said Charissa.

"I felt so proud of the work that the Uniting Church and UnitingWorld does alongside the global church."



Hopes for the future

Charissa says she hopes to share and champion the story of UnitingWorld and UCA partners in her time as President, and particularly to lean into our mission of 'connecting communities for life':

"...when we have strong relationships, we can incorporate other voices, other generations, from people all over to be part of the *talanoa* (dialogue) that complements the work that's already been done in terms of our international aid."

"It's looking at who is the next generation in our partner churches, where we can begin to introduce the younger generations who are here in the diaspora so that they continue the important work - because they'll be standing on the shoulders of these amazing leaders who are here now in leadership, but who are we passing the baton to? I think that's so important as we look to the future of our church."

Despite being the first Tongan President of the UCA, Charissa is quick to point out that it wasn't a factor in her discernment or thoughts about what she hopes to achieve in the role. "If God is calling me here, it's a new opportunity to channel God's love," she says.

"If there's something I think the President should do, it's to remind the church who we're called to be, to inspire the church to lean into their spirituality, to lean into their community and think about what are some of the ways we can strengthen our relationships with God and with each other."

"And we need to remember the good news that we have to tell our world. We shouldn't be silent. We have such good news to tell!"

Amen.





Pacific churches strengthen partnerships to address climate change

UnitingWorld Pacific Partner Learning Forum

"What we have done this week is very very important in supporting how we collaborate in the Pacific."
Rev. Taualo Penivao, General Secretary of our partner Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu summed up the mood of the UnitingWorld Pacific Partner Learning Forum, hosted by the Pacific Theological College in Suva.

Representatives from eight church partners from across the Pacific joined UnitingWorld staff, special guests from Pacific Conference of Churches, Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and other stakeholders to further develop and strengthen our partnerships in the region.

One of the major themes was climate resilience.

Church partners took time to hear each other's stories and experiences before setting priorities for the future of our regional work addressing the challenges of climate change.

UnitingWorld's partners in Vanuatu, Tonga and Fiji shared with us their responses to recent cyclones and tsunamis. From the lower-lying, and

therefore more threatened, nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati, we heard powerful and moving stories of the existential threat of rising sea levels.

Two themes emerged: our partners' sincere appreciation and gratitude for the support Australians have provided in responding to these emergencies; and the recognition of the strong bonds of solidarity and love between Pacific nations who supported each other in whatever ways they could.

We're grateful for the time spent with partners, learning, sharing stories and communion, praying and seeking to walk more closely together to overcome the shared challenges facing our region and our world.

Otin Taai* +20

20 years ago in March 2004, church leaders from across the Pacific gathered in Kiribati to lead a vital consultation on climate change, releasing the powerful **Otin Taai Declaration**, which committed their churches to urgent action and called on Christians throughout the world to act in solidarity.

To mark 20 years since Otin Taai, the Pacific Conference of Churches hosted the **Otin Taai +20 Conference** to take stock of the impacts of climate change, the lack of an appropriate collective global response, and to discern how best to work together on the issue into the future.

UnitingWorld Head of Programs Peter Keegan attended the event on behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia along with Rev. Alimoni Taumoepeau from the UCA Synod of NSW & ACT. Peter shared:

"As we knelt to pray on muddy sands beside seawaters that just a generation ago had been fertile and productive land, the reality was starkly evident before us. What was a prophetic warning in the Otin Taai Declaration twenty years ago is

today a reality. And it is a reality that is impacting all of the peoples and creatures of the earth."

Otin Taai +20 was another powerful time of sharing about the impacts of climate change on people, communities and biodiversity across the region, and resulted in the **Tuākoī 'lei** Declaration** (read it at www.unitingworld.org.au/tuakoilei).

"God has called creation out of the chaos of ocean covered earth, yet the actions of fossil fueled greed, selfishness and apathy, manifested as extractive industries and economic globalization are driving us back to chaos as we experience the ocean rising to reclaim the earth, our common home. We call the world to embody neighbourly love, compassion and hope, which are needed more than ever to turn the tide for climate and ecological justice."

*Otin Taai is the iKiribati phrase for "sunrise"

**Translated from the Tuvaluan phrase for "good neighbour" or "loving neighbour"



Lent Event a big success!

Since 2009, UnitingWorld's Lent Event has invited Australian Christians to a deeper understanding of global poverty and injustice, highlighting the imperative for the Church to work in partnership, share resources and seek justice. This year we raised more than \$240,000 together!

In response to the needs and priorities of our church partners in the Pacific and Asia fighting to mitigate climate impacts, this year Lent Event shifted to focus on 'faithful climate action', calling on people in Australia to make personal, practical and political change during the 40 days of Lent.

Our incredible network of supporters stepped up in so many ways.

Thank you to the hundreds of faithful people and communities who took up a commitment, who spent time listening to the wisdom of our partners and theologians through our daily reflections and weekly video series, who joined us in prayer, and who generously shared their resources.

Funds raised are now being used to support our partners in the Pacific and Asia as they work to safeguard communities from climate disasters, plan and stock emergency shelters, build local food security, plant trees and stabilise landslide-prone areas.

We look forward to making an even bigger impact next year!

We also got great feedback on the resources we created as part of Lent Event and they're all still on the website, so visit www.lentevent.com.au/resources to take a look and register your interest to take part in 2025.

Real relationships, real impact: A partnership with Timor-Leste

In a sunlit room on a warm day in May, a group of men and women sat singing together around a coffee table.

The language was Bahasa Indonesia but the tune was well known, and those gathered laughed and craned their necks over song books to puzzle through unfamiliar words and phrases. Three guests from Ekaristi Church in Dili, a congregation in the Protestant Church in Timor-Leste, were leading the music; their hosts were men and women from Ipswich Uniting Church in Queensland.

Between their respective communities, they've forged a relationship that spans the Timor Sea to share dreams of a world transformed.

"We became interested in getting to know and support our brothers and sisters in Timor-Leste many years ago, encouraged by UnitingWorld," said Timor Team member, Noel Rothery.

"I think we had a sense that there was more we could be doing for our near neighbours –



but none of us anticipated how the relationship would develop or how much both sides would be changed by our partnership."

Over the past fifteen years, the Timor Team from Ipswich have visited Timor-Leste nine times, supporting the Church's leadership to increase its capacity, adding to its school building project and helping foster ministry to young people.

In return, leaders from Ekaristi Church have come to Australia as guests of Ipswich Uniting, sharing their knowledge of Scripture and encouraging the Australians in local ministry. The congregation in Timor-Leste also took up a generous collection to help the Ipswich church rebuild after a fire at their Glebe Road church in 2022.

This most recent visit introduced the community in Ipswich to Pastor Wisrahayati, Pastor of Ekaristi Church, Ms Yersiana Kasantri, Youth Leader, and Mr Soffian Abpranus, Church Elder.

"It truly is a mutually beneficial relationship," says Soffian. "Our people have been richly blessed through our Australian friends, and we believe we've collaborated in helping to build the Kingdom across our two nations."

As the singing concluded, UCA leaders and federal and local political representatives arrived for lunch with the guests. They heard about the history of the partnership and the need for funding of education and leadership capacity training in a nation still beset by high levels of poverty.

But perhaps what is most striking is the genuine warmth shared between the two groups, who have taken Paul's words to the Galatians deeply to heart: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ."

In the community of Ipswich and beyond, the relationship is a powerful witness.

Find out more about UnitingWorld's partnership with the Protestant Church in Timor-Leste, and especially our health initiatives to help combat nutrition-related disease at www.unitingworld.org.au/projects/community-health



Elder Soffian accompanying the singing on guitar.

Pictured above: Visitors from Timor-Leste and invited guests with Ipswich Uniting Church's Timor Team.

Project Updates

Supporting cyclone-affected communities in Vanuatu

Our partner, the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu (PCV), has been supporting communities since two cyclones, Judy and Kevin, hit the island nation in March 2023.

Through the support of UnitingWorld, PCV was equipped and ready to assist with safeguarding women and children, as abuse and violence is known to increase during and after disasters.

PCV delivered eight workshops on gender and protection in cyclone-affected communities in Tafea Province, increasing knowledge of culturally-relevant gender equality and child protection messages. Participants came away with improved knowledge about how to report abuse and the confidence to speak up. 274 community and church leaders, including women, men and youth took part.

The workshops were very successful, with participants later confirming positive changes in their understanding.

"I thought and believed only man has the authority in decision making, but the workshop changed the belief that I was taught before. Today I know that men and women are equal," said a young female participant.

"My belief has changed after the workshop. I thought men are the leader at home and have the authority. After the workshop [my] belief changed. I now believe men and women are the same and can share responsibilities," a male villager leader shared.

PCV delivered a health outreach program on Tanna Island as part of its disaster response, reaching almost 1,500 people. The outreach aimed to address limited access to health services, which was an existing challenge made worse by the impacts of the cyclones.



Martha from PCV Gender Program showing the training booklet in Bislama language "Good Life: Say no to violence"

Interdisciplinary health teams conducted screenings for non-communicable diseases, eye and hearing tests, provided basic medical and injury care and health advice, and made more than 120 referrals for specialist care.

Improving food security in Timor-Leste

UnitingWorld has been supporting our partner in Timor-Leste to help communities prepare for and respond to the impacts of El Niño.

As a small island nation, Timor-Leste relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture and imported food. Since September 2023, the El Niño weather event has led to drought-like conditions, irregular rainfall, and flash floods during the country's main planting season.

The nation was already grappling with rising food insecurity, with twelve out of fourteen municipalities facing drought and almost a quarter of the population in Timor-Leste currently food insecure.

Our partner FUSONA* has been working alongside other church agencies as part of CAN DO** and local government bodies to roll out new large-scale projects to address climate change and keep people safe during disasters.

FUSONA is now working in three communities identified as most vulnerable because their crops were destroyed in flooding in 2021 and 2022. The project has provided seeds, tools and training in disaster preparedness and is working to improve access and preservation of water supplies.

As part of the project, schools are being engaged in disaster risk reduction training to equip youth to be able to help their communities during emergencies. Youth will also conduct tree planting in their schools and wider community to reforest vulnerable areas and reduce disaster risks.

With improved knowledge of food production, processing and storage and how to mitigate disaster risks, the project will help whole communities be better prepared and resilient to future disasters.

Timor-Leste Community Health Update

Timor-Leste has one of the highest rates of malnutrition among children in the world. Our church partner IPTL and FUSONA have decided to shift the focus of their work from running health clinics to addressing food insecurity among the rural poor in three communities.

The decision was made based on the resources and technical capacity available in FUSONA and the increased capacity of the Timor-Leste government to provide health care services. The first phase of the redesigned project is already underway, expanding the kitchen garden activities to 100 new families in vulnerable areas, providing seeds, tools and training to help people grow nutritious food on their land.

This was made possible thanks to your support. Thank you!

*FUSONA is the development agency of the Protestant Church in Timor-Leste (IPTL), a partner of UnitingWorld and the Uniting Church in Australia.

** The Church Agencies Network – Disaster Operations (CAN DO) is a consortium of Australian faith-based agencies.

Paulina in Same Timor-Leste was helped to expand her food garden thanks to UnitingWorld supporters and our partner FUSONA. She says it's been hard to grow things during the dry season and would like training on different methods to improve her crops.



Tassie churches look beyond the Apple Isle

On a crisp May weekend, Mardi Lumsden, UnitingWorld Donor Relations Manager, had the pleasure of venturing to Tasmania to visit UnitingWorld supporters and churches.

In Launceston, Mardi spent time with Presbytery Chairperson Rohan Pryor, hearing about the joys and challenges of the Uniting Church in the region. She also met with the staff of Scotch Oakburn College, a UCA school, as they shared their unique style of teaching and learning at AgFest.

On Sunday, Mardi enjoyed joining Penguin Uniting Church on Tasmania's north coast to celebrate UnitingWorld Sunday, where everyone was welcomed with a lei*. Mardi presented Penguin Uniting Church with a certificate celebrating the fact that this small regional church raised over \$5,500 through their Everything in Common stall last Christmas, the most raised in Australia!

Members of the community didn't just buy gift cards. They also sold knitting and craft creations

and donated the proceeds. The congregation were delighted at their achievement!

"We were most surprised to receive the news about Penguin being the best Everything in Common stall in the country," said Penguin Uniting Church's Jeanne Koetsier.

"To us it was a wonderful way to give twice: gift cards to family and friends especially at Christmas, then for the money raised to be given to countries where it will make a difference. In giving to UnitingWorld, we can be assured that we are 'connecting Australian people to God's work in the wider world'."

Locally, the Penguin congregation has also made an intentional connection with seasonal workers in Tasmania. This year, that included

around 40 young people, mostly women, from Timor-Leste who joined the church for the special UnitingWorld Sunday service and sang in multiple languages as well as giving a blessing to the congregation.

"UnitingWorld Sunday was joyous," said Jeanne.

"We were inspired by our global church neighbours as we heard about their work ... and were delighted to celebrate our global neighbours together with our friends from Timor-Leste."

Mardi's final stop was at Hobart North Uniting Church, where she enjoyed hearing an update on the region from Presbytery Minister, Rev Denise Savage. She also met with a group of wonderful UnitingWorld supporters coordinated by past UnitingWorld Board Chair, Rev Andrew Glenn, to discuss the vision and mission of UnitingWorld and hear of their own connections to this important work.

*Traditional Pacific garland worn around the neck.



UnitingWorld Sunday: A celebration of our global neighbours

Hosting a UnitingWorld Sunday service is a chance to hear the wisdom of our overseas church partners, learn more about our work together, and how we can all make a difference.

You can host your UnitingWorld Sunday service whenever it suits your church calendar!

This year we produced a video sermon from Rev Dr Mery Kolimon (pictured), a theologian in the Christian Evangelical Church in Timor, preaching on Micah 6:8. A full liturgy and other resources are also available to make your UnitingWorld Sunday service easy to run.

Find out more and sign up here <https://unitingworld.org.au/sunday> or scan the QR code.



Thank you for helping create justice for generations!

"If a girl is educated ... then the next generation will be illuminated in that light."

– Laboni

You can help
create
JUSTICE
for
GENERATIONS

In the final months of the financial year, we told the story of Laboni, who grew up in a tribal village in remote West Bengal, India.

It's a place where education is out of reach for many because families are too poor to invest in it. Children grow up to help in the household or in the fields as soon as they are able; girls are married off young.

Our church partner, the Church of North India – Diocese of Durgapur, supported Laboni's education, and she became the first in her family to ever finish school. Today she's pursuing her

dreams: working on a university degree and hoping to return to her community as a teacher to inspire others to follow in her footsteps.

"The girls of my village [now] see me, and they are encouraged to study. I'll tell them to go further!" says Laboni.

"I would urge every girl to stand on her own feet. We girls can participate in the development of our family, society and village."

The impacts of our partner's education support won't stay with Laboni and her peers but will be felt for generations to come...

THANK YOU to everyone who donated to our End of Financial Year Appeal to enable our partners to give opportunities for people to live whole and hopeful lives, as God intended. Together we raised \$496,000, an incredible result! It will be combined with funding we can access from the Australian Government, which will help us make an even bigger impact on poverty and injustice in our world.

Here's some more of the change you've helped create!



Back in 2013, Sahadi's family lived off what they could grow on a small patch of land – paddy, mustard and vegetables. Then Sahadi joined a Self-Help Group established by UnitingWorld's partner in Durgapur. Within a year, she had received, as an investment from the group, a single goat and livestock breeding training – a huge opportunity she was eager to make the most of!

When food and water are scarce, it's no small task to keep a goat alive and successfully breed it. But Sahadi was incredibly determined and over the past ten years she has increased her goat flock to 15! Already this year, she has sold seven goats and added an extra AUD\$551 to the family income. Her entrepreneurial spirit on fire, Sahadi also invested in three cows – one for domestic use, the others for sale at market bringing in an additional AUD\$147.



When a submersible water pump arrived in his village, courtesy of UnitingWorld partners in Durgapur, Dinanath Mahar was delighted. He'd watched his parents struggle as the land was so difficult to farm without irrigation.

And now – WATER! Dinanath underwent training with the Community Development Program and began cultivating crops, including sesame, mustard, paddy, and potatoes. The outcome? An additional AUD\$991 per year. The family invested the money back into their farm, buying a second-hand power tiller and a motorcycle to move around the property.

For the first time, they could afford better health care and education. Dinanath's granddaughter was born in a private health care facility, the first in her family with this start in life. Dinanath's daughter-in-law, observing how effective the program was, joined also and is now breeding goats, bringing yet more income.



Just 20 years old, Simran is a tailor earning an income of around AUD\$91 a month. The job represents a huge change for her whole family – and not just materially. Simran's three elder sisters are all married, and Simran says her parents had been preoccupied with seeing her wed.

Simran met a Community Facilitator from the Diocese of Durgapur, who encouraged her to undertake training at their Stitching and Tailoring Centre. Her training allowed her to secure her first job as a tailor.

"Initially, my father discouraged me from taking up the tailoring job thinking that it might not look good for our family," Simran says. *"But he has since changed his perspective."*

Now, as a working woman, Simran is independent, contributes to the household income, and is eager to encourage other young women to consider a career before marriage.

UnitingWorld Supporter Survey 2024

We want to hear from you!

Enclosed is a short Supporter Survey. Your feedback will be incredibly valuable to us as we plan our future work.



Please complete the survey and return it to us in the envelope provided. If you prefer, you can complete the survey online at <https://unitingworld.org.au/survey> or scan the QR code to access it.



NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

"Justice is what love looks like in public."

Dr Cornel West, a Black American philosopher and theologian said, "justice is what love looks like in public". According to Jesus, God's plan for transforming the world is for us to love one another. The idea of taking love and building it into the way we organise ourselves as community is a vision that I cannot resist. UnitingWorld operates at the intersection of faith, justice, and compassion, driven by the belief that God calls us to work together to create a world where all people flourish.

Our partners are churches in the Pacific, Asia and Africa, some with longstanding connections with the Uniting Church and others connected to Australia's newest citizens. We help them tackle the most pressing social justice issues in their communities, seeking to address the root causes so that changes are sustainable. They understand their own culture and the context so can identify effective local solutions, while working with UnitingWorld's development professionals who apply sustainable community development principles through the lens of Christian faith. While we work with and through churches, our programs include all people regardless of their faith, sexuality, ethnicity, ability or gender.

Global wealth inequality is an enduring injustice, with Australia one of the world's wealthiest

nations. When we provide financial aid to our partners, we recognise this as a step towards restorative justice.

Our programs drive change in the lives of everyday people, but they also strengthen our partner institutions. When we support the strengthening of a partner church's organisational capacity, it transforms a whole national church, lifting every ministry it undertakes.

Advocacy is also key to our work. Our advocacy with the Australian Government is aimed at policy changes that promote justice, equality and human rights, and boosting Australia's international aid program. We also use our influence to 'pass the mic' for our partners to speak for themselves at events with the Australian Government, media and with the wider development sector.

The other half of our work involves fundraising for our partners, which is admittedly more challenging. We reach out to the UCA community and beyond and invite them to join in with donations and prayers. We are also able to access grants from the Australian Government's aid program. But being a church organisation, it's challenging to raise funds from other sources. We work hard to balance the desperation of the need with the capacity to deliver impact and our ability to find funding. And I grieve the missed opportunity



Sureka with participants in education and community development projects in Durgapur, India.

of how much more our partners could do with increased funding.

Working with our church partners is truly inspiring. It's a privilege to work alongside people with such faith and tenacity, who dare impossible dreams, and teach me wisdom, courage and resilience. And what a gift it is to my own faith, to witness the transformative power of the gospel every day.

You're part of that transformation too. We couldn't do any of this without your love, prayers and support. Thank you so much.

Dr Sureka Goringe
National Director, UnitingWorld

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