

UNITINGWORLD

UPDATE
ISSUE 1
2025

Stories from *Tonga*

Lent Event 2025
is coming!

Our world
needs good
*global
neighbours*

Monthly giving: the most
effective way to make an impact



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.



Hope after the storm: Rebuilding lives in Tonga

In January 2022, the Pacific Island nation of Tonga faced one of its most devastating natural disasters—the eruption of the *Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai* volcano. The eruption unleashed massive tsunamis and volcanic ash, destroying homes, crops and livelihoods across the country.

Entire communities were left reeling from the destruction, but for many women and girls, the disaster was particularly challenging as they shouldered the responsibility of caring for their families amidst the chaos.

Taisia Heiumuli, a senior pastor with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT), played a key role in the recovery efforts that followed. “Women and girls were deeply affected,” Taisia explains. “Many of them were responsible for finding safe places for their children while their husbands were away, leaving them to bear the emotional and physical toll.”

When Taisia led a project in partnership with UnitingWorld and the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP), aimed at addressing both the psychological trauma and providing practical tools

for recovery, she made sure that the specific needs of women were given equal priority.

The project had two main components. The first was psychological support, aimed at helping people traumatised by the disaster. “The wounds were deep, especially for women and children,” says Taisia. “Through counselling and support, we aimed to heal those wounds and create a space where people could share their struggles and rebuild together.”

The second component focused on rebuilding the livelihoods of families. People were provided with tools like sewing machines, cooking stoves, gardening equipment and fishing gear—resources that allowed people to regain a sense of autonomy and contribute economically to their families. “We didn’t want to just give people fish; we wanted to give them tools to go get their own!” Taisia says, emphasising the long-term empowerment the project aimed to foster.

This community-wide effort ensured that everyone was able to rebuild. Women learned new skills and shared them within the community, creating

a powerful network of support. “One woman was able to sew children’s clothes for a ‘White Sunday’ celebration, earning \$800 from her work,” Taisia proudly shares.

Another inspiring story to come from the project was that of Michelle, a young woman from another denomination whose business was destroyed by the waves. With the help of the project, she received new equipment and was able to rebuild her business. “She cried when she shared how blessed she felt,” Taisia recalls. “This project wasn’t for members of the Free Wesleyan Church—it was for the entire community, and we’ve been blessed to be able to support so many people.”

As the season of Lent approaches, we invite you to reflect on the power of faith, community and collective action through **Lent Event!** More of Taisia’s story will be featured in an upcoming six-part video series for Lent, highlighting inspiring stories from our partners in Tonga.



“We didn’t want to just give them fish; we wanted to give them the tools to go get their own!”

Is Lent still relevant?

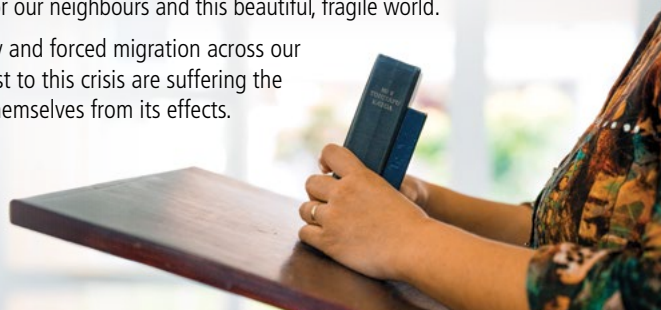
In a fast-paced world dominated by 24-hour news cycles, consumer culture and the dizzying expansion of technology, the season of Lent can feel like a relic of the past. One more tradition squeezed out by our busyness and distractions.

As Ecclesiastes reminds us, **"God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated."** (Eccl 7:12)

But perhaps now, more than ever, Lent is a rare invitation to pause. To follow Jesus into the stillness of creation. It's a time to give our full attention to God, to live more simply and to act generously out of love for our neighbours and this beautiful, fragile world.

Climate change is undoing decades of progress, driving poverty, food insecurity and forced migration across our world. There's profound injustice at its heart: those who've contributed the least to this crisis are suffering the most, while those who've burned the most fossil fuels have largely insulated themselves from its effects.

What can we do? We can follow Jesus. Our world urgently needs a movement of attentive and generous discipleship. Lent can be that annual 'spark' that reminds us of who we are in Christ, and all the love and hope we have to offer a hurting world.



"We hope and pray the world will join us."

We asked partners from across the Pacific about their experiences of climate change and environmental degradation.



"In Kiribati, we are experiencing coastal erosion, and we believe that increasing sea level rise contributes to the losing of some of our lands."

Teraoi, Kiribati Uniting Church

"Climate change is severely impacting our land [West Papua]. In the highlands it is becoming harder to grow potatoes and catch animals. Without our staple foods it affects our health and nutrition."

Ekyen, Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua



"Here in Tuvalu, young people have anxiety about sea-level rise, droughts and migration. I fear for the loss of our culture and traditions, but I tell myself: 'God has given us this land, and we must hold onto it for future generations to enjoy.'"

Tetavaa, Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu

"Across our communities in Kiribati, climate change is causing reduced rainfall, droughts and lack of accessible clean water."

Bubutei, Kiribati Uniting Church



"The dry season [in Solomon Islands] feels hotter and longer. Mass logging has removed so many trees, king tides wash the fertile soil away and it doesn't come back. I've seen small islands that now look like deserts."

Caleb, United Church in the Solomon Islands

"In Fiji, we feel the rising sea levels. There are burial sites that are now underwater and villages that are being forced to relocate. We all think it is a serious issue that needs to be tackled, and we pray the world will join us."

Rev. Asinate, Methodist Church in Fiji

A vertical poster for the Lent Event. It features a man in traditional Tuvalu attire (a blue patterned shirt and a long, yellow and black woven skirt) standing on a wet beach with palm trees in the background. The text "lentevent" is written in a stylized white font with a yellow star above the 'e'. Below it, the dates "5 MAR - 17 APR 2025" are displayed in white on a dark green rectangular background. To the right, a quote from church partners is written in white. At the bottom, more text about the event is provided in white on a dark background.

lentevent

5 MAR - 17 APR 2025

We've heard our church partners' call for solidarity and support to help vulnerable communities build resilience to climate impacts. We invite you to join us in answering that call.

Lent Event offers a way to step into action, faithfully and meaningfully.

Commit to 40 days of faithful action for God's creation. Fundraise or donate for communities on the frontlines of climate change. Speak out for justice.

Throughout Lent, we'll share stories from our partner, the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga, showing how your actions will help transform lives across the Pacific, Asia and Africa.

Will you join us? By acting together, we can challenge the status quo of a distracted and disconnected world, make a real difference in the lives of our neighbours, and inspire vital hope and courage for the future.

Sign up, get ideas for action and connect with a community of like-minded people at www.lentevent.com.au

Annual Report 2023-2024

132,555 people reached

34 Projects
23 Partners
13 Countries

Türkiye
1 PROJECT

India
5 PROJECTS

Sri Lanka
1 PROJECT

Zimbabwe
2 PROJECTS

UnitingWorld's Annual Report for the 2023-2024 Financial Year gives an overview of our achievements for the year and shares the stories of some of the 132,555 people whose lives were impacted by our work.

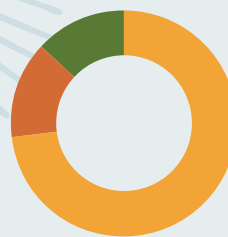
Our projects addressed poverty, gender equality, climate resilience, emergency response and 'building back better'. We also supported our partners to drive meaningful, lasting change in their communities through strengthening governance and management.

We are so proud of the work we have done, in partnership with our overseas church partners and our faithful supporters in Australia.

Thank you so much for the vital role that you play in addressing the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice and violence.

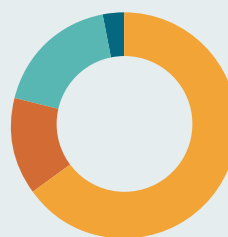
Read full report at <https://unitingworld.org.au/AR-2024>





Our funds went to*

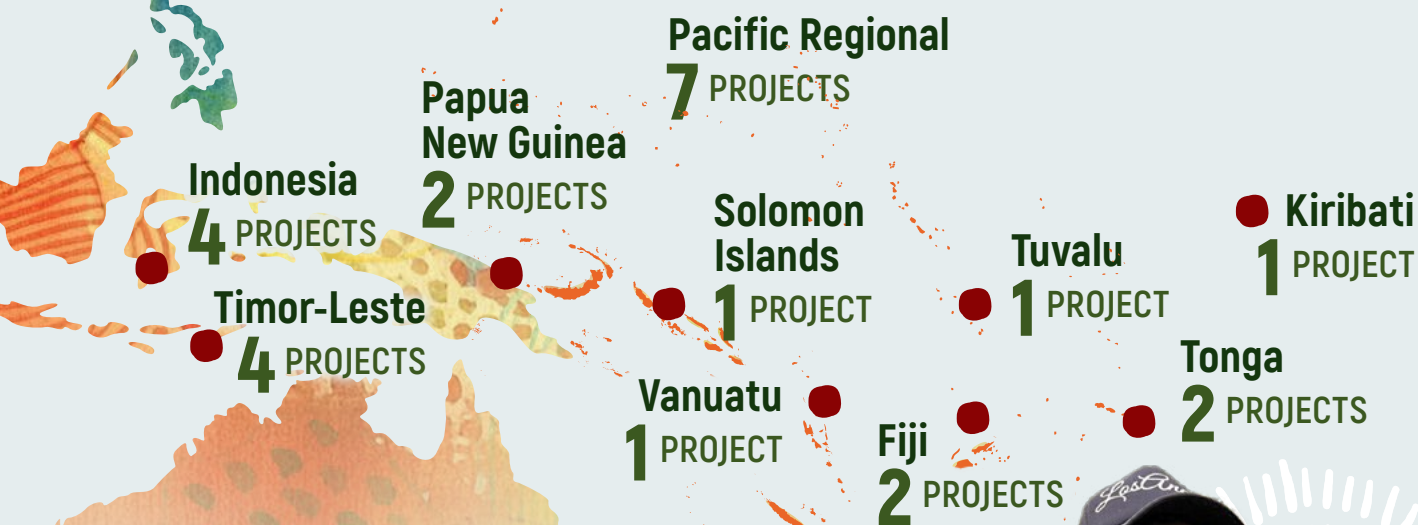
- 73% Programs
- 14% Fundraising
- 13% Accountability & Administration



Where we work*

- 65% Pacific
- 18% South East Asia
- 14% South Asia
- 3% Africa

*Charts based on the financials presented in our FY24 Annual Report.



Paying vegetables forward in Bali

Pak Sipil wanted to start a kitchen garden at his home, so he attended basic agriculture training provided by MBM, the development agency of our partner, the Protestant Christian Church in Bali. As part of the training, Pak Sipil received seeds for growing chillies, eggplants, tomatoes and water spinach, as well as compost soil.

Find out how Pak Sipil shared his knowledge and his seedlings to help other families in his village start their own gardens - see page 19 of the Annual Report.

"From small interventions like seeds and training, entire communities can reap the benefits of sustainable farming, one garden at a time."



Our world needs good global neighbours

As the saying goes, "Big change comes from small actions, repeated".

Monthly giving as a UnitingWorld Global Neighbour is a way for you to 'put on repeat' your commitment to building a more just and equitable global neighbourhood.

Poverty and injustice have complex causes, and there are no quick fixes. Regular giving provides our partners with a reliable income stream to deliver powerful and effective programs, day in and day out, until the work is done.



Scan to find out more



Why give monthly?

Expression of Faith

Live out your values of justice and compassion as part of a community of givers, celebrating stories of progress and equipped to pray for our partners.

Impact

Monthly giving is one of the most powerful ways to support people fighting poverty. It creates a secure funding base for our partners, faster response in disaster, lower fundraising costs and more lives changed.

Accountability

As a monthly giver, we'll tell you where your donations are used and how we're resourcing our partners to continually assess, monitor and improve the projects you support.

Become a UnitingWorld Global Neighbour *today!*

www.unitingworld.org.au/globalneighbour

Supporter Survey 2024

Thank you for your feedback!

Thanks to everyone who responded to our Supporter Survey earlier this year and to those who participated in the focus groups.

As expected, there was a wide range of ideas and opinions, but we were so happy that the overarching message from the collated data was that our supporters value and trust UnitingWorld and they care sincerely for the people we work with around the world. Survey comments from some of our supporters are shared below.



You are doing what Jesus asked us to do - help the needy.



I am proud to support UnitingWorld as I trust UnitingWorld to give aid in an appropriate and just way.



"I contribute to UnitingWorld because of your interest and support of Pacific neighbours."

"UnitingWorld stands out for its focus on particular issues and locations, its depth of partnership with local organisations, its quality of communication, and its commitment to be God's agents in his passion for justice. Good on yer!"



..the increasing attention in recent years to issues of gender inequality and to climate change enables the organisation to provide effective help to partners in the region.



If you want to share your thoughts about UnitingWorld anytime, you can email us at info@unitingworld.org.au

Healthy Kids and Mothers

Alor and Rote Islands in West Timor are home to some of the poorest communities in Indonesia, where many people still live off the land in traditional subsistence lifestyles.

With the rise of imported foods and uncertain growing seasons, families struggle to get the food and nutrition they need. Mothers and babies are the hardest hit, with malnutrition leading to high-risk pregnancies and stunting of children.

Our local partner, the Christian Evangelical Church in Timor, and their development agency TLM are determined to make change, both now and into the future.

Working in eight villages, our partners are:

- providing health checks and education for pregnant women, new mums and their children
- distributing locally-grown fresh vegetables and resources for families to grow their own food
- installing clean water sources in villages that need it.

Looking beyond, our partners are using the villages as models to inspire others, working with local governments and church communities to tackle the health crisis for good. We'll keep you updated about their progress!



A huge thank you to everyone who gave our *Healthy Kids and Mothers* card or any of the life-changing gifts from our *Everything in Common* gift catalogue during Christmas. At time of writing, you've helped raise more than \$250,000 through the catalogue, supporting our partners to impact their communities in so many different ways. Thank you!



Young Leaders advocate for a safer, more just and sustainable future

"You are here because you care about your community ... you care about your country ... you care about your culture and you want to play your part in making your community stronger."

- Senator Penny Wong

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong addressed the Pacific-Australian Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS) hosted by Micah Australia and the Pacific Conference of Churches in November.

Now in its third year, PAELS gathered a diverse delegation that included 34 young leaders from 16 Pacific Island nations, nine First Nations leaders and 23 leaders from the wider Australian family.

We helped bring 11 delegates from our Pacific partner churches and 17 young leaders from

Uniting Churches across NSW, VIC, QLD and WA to PAELS 2024.

It was great to see so many young people forging deep and valuable connections with other young leaders and change makers from our partner churches across our region.

Victoria Su'a Falo, a first-time delegate from St Johns Uniting Church in Essendon (VIC), said it was a powerful time spent shaping her values as a Pacific emerging leader.



"I felt a strong sense of unity and empowerment being amongst Pacific indigenous, First Nations communities, Pacific diaspora and extended Australians," she said.

Following advocacy training in groups, PAELS delegates spent a full day of meetings with Members of Parliament to share their vision of a safer, more just and sustainable future.

Special thank you to the Synod of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania and Uniting Mission and Education (UME) in NSW for sponsoring Uniting Church delegates to attend from interstate.

NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

We're a small team here at UnitingWorld, but it never feels small. Every day, I am reminded of the extraordinary network of people and communities across our world who make change possible. You, our faithful supporters here in Australia, working together with our church partners overseas, turn love and generosity into precious resources, opportunities and improved quality of life for people who need it.

It's God's love in action.

Thank you for making 2024 another year of remarkable impact. Together we helped transform lives and communities in the face of a changing and uncertain world. I hope you take the time to read our Annual Report for FY2024 and feel the full scope of all you are a part of.

As we begin another year, we must acknowledge the huge challenges before us. Global inflation, stalling progress on poverty

and extreme weather are making life harder and leaving millions behind. At the same time, authoritarianism and unjust wars are adding fuel to the fire when what we really need is all hands on deck to end poverty and address the climate crisis.

We can't solve it all, not by a long shot. But what we must do is play our part, faithfully and ambitiously, as part of a global network empowered by God to make a big difference. In that light, the UnitingWorld team and our partners are looking to the future with hope and possibility. We have a ten-year plan to do all we can to help vulnerable people and communities in the Pacific, Asia and Africa overcome poverty, adapt to climate change and tackle injustice together.

We need your help to do it. If you share our vision and want to be part of making it a reality, I urge you to consider becoming a monthly giver through our Global Neighbours program.

Your regular gift will enable our partners to scale up life-changing projects providing reliable food and water supplies, income and education opportunities, and life-saving projects to mitigate the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.



If you've ever considered it, now is the time to jump in! It can't be overstated how much our world needs thoughtful and committed people working together to bring hope, justice and lasting change for people in poverty.

I hope you'll join us. Visit www.unitingworld.org.au/globalneighbours to sign up.

In hope,

Dr Sureka Goringe
National Director, UnitingWorld

P.S. Please put 5 March – 17 April in your diary and join us for Lent Event! 40 days of faith-filled action for God's creation. Visit www.lentevent.com.au to check out the resources, including a great video series from our partners in Tonga.

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the Uniting Church in Australia.

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