

Stories to accompany
Living in Tune with our Planet

An MWiB Eco-service

Story 1: Reaching isolated communities along the Amazon



You can't fail to have noticed the news reports in recent years about deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and issues around wildfires destroying many thousands of trees. These are not the only threats to indigenous communities in the Amazon region of Brazil. They also face exploitation by big companies seeking to access the land for mining and farming products for export such as soya beans and coffee.

But the indigenous people and local communities are part of the solution to some of the issues facing the area.

The Methodist Church in Brazil operates a 'mission boat' which travels along the river basin to isolated communities, bringing a mixture of preaching the gospel of Jesus and discipleship, along with much needed medical and dental care, children's activities and education in environmental matters. The staff and volunteers teach the local people how to look after their surroundings and equip them to stand up to the big companies who seek to exploit them and their resources.

The boat can house 22 medical personnel and evangelists, and the Brazilian church always welcomes medical volunteers from overseas for the trips, which last up to a week at a time. The District Bishop, Fabio Cosme, explained to me that they do nothing without a great deal of prayer and seeking God's guidance, and the mission boat is no exception.

Photo: the 'mission boat' on the Amazon delta; inset, left to right: Captain Paulo, Pastor Max (who manages the project), Carolyn Lawrence (Vice President of the Methodist Conference), Revd Mark Lawrence, Sandra Lopez (Global Relationships) and Bishop Fabio Cosme.

Story 2: The Great Green Wall of Africa



Africa is building a giant wall of trees stretching across the entire continent to help fight the effects of climate change. It's called 'The Great Green Wall'. Work began in 2007, and the wall – measuring 8,000km long and 15km wide – will eventually span 11 countries.

So far, Senegal has made the best progress, planting 11 million trees. Village chief Absaman Moudoube says that the Great Green Wall is reducing desertification:

“When there were no trees, the wind used to dig up and erode the soil. But it is more protected now. The leaves provide compost and the canopy increases the humidity of the environment and offers some shade, so there is less need for a lot of watering.

The project is planting drought resistant Acacia trees. The tree roots hold water in the soil, so previously dry wells have filled up again. Before, there was widespread drought and hunger here. Then the tree planting took place, and then a garden for the women to grow crops. The wall has generated a whole new economy. It has really helped the people. Now 200 women are working on it.

Desertification had forced thousands of people from their homes; people used to migrate, but nowadays they just follow the line of the Great Green Wall for jobs. They no longer leave.”

Amelie, a tree planter, says:

“Before the Wall we didn't have any work but now we have jobs and economically it's good. The Great Green Wall is very useful to us because we grow many vegetables and now we can buy produce more cheaply. Attendance at local schools has also increased. I want to continue to work and for our kids to work on the Great Green Wall so that they can make a future for themselves”.

The Great Green Wall is still years from completion but the World Bank, the United Nations, the African Union and the UK Botanical Gardens have all pledged money to continue the planting.

Story 3: Challenges in Ethiopia



The stunning scenery in Cherkos, Ethiopia, has been directly affected by shifts in climate change over the last 30 years. Where once there were two distinct rainy seasons which aided farming, there is now one with heavy rain which is difficult for the soil to absorb.

People like Belyu (*pictured above with her family*) have gone from having a surplus of crops to struggling to ensure there is enough food for all their family. The food gap they face because of the drastic climate changes has meant that families have needed to divide to survive. Can you imagine facing that dilemma?

All We Can, the Methodist relief and development charity, works with their partner in Cherkos to produce better harvests by using climate-smart agriculture – introducing new seeds and vegetables which grow well in the changing climate such as potatoes, wheat, and teff, a small nutritionally dense grain local to Ethiopia. Supporting families like Belyu's through training to use weather and climate information in their farming practices also improves their chances of a harvest by making informed choices about which crops to plant and when. If delays in the rainy season are predicted, then farmers delay planting their crops.

In the midst of the global pandemic, many crops failed to grow due to heavy rainfall, and the food gap became even more evident. Despite environmental challenges and damage to other crops, the potatoes grew and became even more important, enabling Belyu and her children, and many families like them, to survive. Adapting and finding alternative ways to grow crops will be vital for communities like Cherkos as they face the first-hand effects of climate change.

Story 4: Fiji Partnership 2019–2020



Deacon Glenda Sidding, Partnership Secretary for the Southampton District MWiB, writes:

A group of women from the MWiB Committee in the Southampton District sat around a table asking, “Who shall we support in the coming year through our Partnership?”

Over the years we had supported many women and their communities around the world, but in 2019 we decided to look at the issue of climate change (Sustainable Development Goal 13) and particularly how this impacts the lives of women in Fiji.

Contact was made with the World Church Office and, through their contacts with the Council of Churches in Fiji, it was decided that we support two villages, Nabuna and Vanuakula, situated on the northern side of the main island Viti Levu. These two low lying communities are near the sea on either side of the Navesi river, and they become severely flooded when high tides meet flood water from the hills following a cyclone. It is the women’s responsibility to get their families to the safety of the evacuation centre at the local school, built on higher ground in the next village. By the time the villagers have walked to the evacuation centre there is no time to go back for any belongings.

With climate change the floods are occurring more regularly. Our picture shows Susana inside her house, indicating where the flood water came to in 2018 when the village was flooded five times. The request from the women is that we, alongside them, raise enough money for a fibre-glass boat, and outboard motor for each village. These boats have two purposes: a means of getting to the evacuation centres quickly in times of flood, and for fishing, which will give them an income from the sale of surplus fish during normal times.

Through our partnership we pray that these two communities can continue living in tune with their surroundings within our planet.

Story 5: Going for Gold – Romsey Methodist Church



Concern for the state of planet Earth has been growing for decades, but the evidence has hit the headlines increasingly over the last ten years. Romsey Methodist Church has been a Fairtrade church for many years, and some members have been strongly involved with local environmental projects. We felt called to a Renewal project – renewal of both our building and our spirit.

Early in 2016 A Rocha UK launched its Eco Church program, and we quickly formed a working group as one part of Renewal. Our refurbishment helped us gain a Bronze award later that year, presented by Ruth Valerio.

The Eco Church survey prompted us with design parameters for ongoing refurbishments and enhanced care for creation as a theme in our worship (including an annual Green Communion), and started us on new ventures in our community, such as Green Fairs attended by local politicians and 'Curious Café' talks on environmental themes. We were delighted that Andy Lester, Conservation Director of A Rocha UK, was able to present our Silver award at a Sunday service in 2017.

Going for Gold in the Eco Church process highlighted what we still had to do. Some of the energy needs of our now growing church community are provided by solar panels, installed in 2019. We have engaged with other local churches, one result being that the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit (16 churches) received the first Eco Circuit award in 2020, and the Southampton District (over 180 churches) has started on the Eco District course.

Together we can make a difference by how we behave; together we can influence change for our world.