



The **Methodist** Church



Anglicans in
World Mission



Bangladesh Bits

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Dear Friends,

I was reflecting recently on an aspect of work that we rarely talk about, that is 'meetings'! This is understandable, as many meetings especially those involving a committee can be dull and boring however others can be actually quite inspirational.

I have generally tried to avoid meetings if at all possible, although I enjoy workshops or conferences if on a topic I'm interested in, but even there, I prefer to be a participant. I have never really enjoyed an upfront role and initially even church link visits I found quite stressful, although now, I have got to know so many church members up and down the country and I am more relaxed as it feels that I am now among friends when I speak.

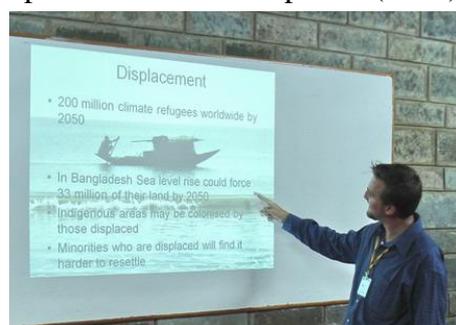
So you can imagine my surprise when the Pastor of King's Church, Epsom where I had grown up in late 2006 told me that God would increasingly give me 'a speaking ministry, even travelling to different countries to do so'. My initial reaction was a nervous laugh to which the Pastor responded by sternly telling me that it was a 'prophetic word' he was giving, so I should not laugh. Oops, but then if Abraham could get away with laughing at a prophetic word, perhaps so could I.

The idea was not entirely unexpected as during my time in the UK during 2006, I had spoken at 2 sessions of *Greenbelt Christian Arts and Music Festival* and 2 sessions at *The Crowther Centre for Mission Education* in the UK on 'Climate Change

Theology' with over 100 people present at one of the sessions at *Greenbelt*. But for it to be a significant part of my ministry was unexpected; but it has happened as predicted and by the time I get back to the UK again in October I will have spoken 11 times at significant workshops and conferences.

Some like the *National Consultation on Climate Smart Disaster Risk Reduction* organised by Christian Aid or the *National Workshop on 'Sharing findings from the review of National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) for LDCs'*, that was organised by Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) were very much straightforward work related affairs with mostly Bangladeshi development workers present, hosted in the capital Dhaka.

However, participants at the (American) Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD) Regional Partners Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand on '*Climate Change and Adaptation in the Asia-Pacific Region*' where I was 'guest presenter' in November 2008 were from countries as diverse as America (ERD staff), Pakistan, India, Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, China, Korea, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Australia.



Another equally significant meeting was a very much local affair: A church *Youth Seminar* at the small rural village of Khamamaria with 40-50 young people from local Lutheran churches, Catholic churches and a few from other faiths as well as from the Church of Bangladesh. It was great to be able not only just to explain about climate change and what we can do about it, but also to lead a Bible study in which the youth saw the connection of the 'environmental crisis' to sin, as well as looking at how God cares for His people in times of 'natural' disaster. At the end, each group wrote a statement, song or poem to express their feelings - my favourite was the following (translated from Bengali by a colleague):

*We are in lack of food,
All around us
We are killing our mother earth,
By cutting trees
We are destroying our land,
By our own hands*

*It is the time to think in a different way:
If you want a peaceful world,
If you want a green earth,
Follow the words of God.*



A presentation I gave in June 2009 on the 'Environment, Millenium Development Goals & Language Minorities' at the *Language, Education And Development Community of Practise* of SIL Asia (LEAD, Asia) with participants from throughout the region even led me to attend the 'Micah Network 4th Triennial Global Consultation on *Creation Stewardship and Climate Change*' in July 2009 in Kenya to

represent LEAD, Asia and the particular vulnerability of language minorities to climate change (including those I work with through the CBSDP). There I felt I received so much more in terms of spiritual refreshment, pastoral encouragement, great friendships, a renewal of vision, as well as some good birdwatching, compared to the input I gave in presenting and in helping to draft conference statements.



My favourite of all though was leading workshops at the 3rd South Asian Christian Youth Network Conference in Pokhara, Nepal not least because it made us feel like young people again (as well as just looking young) mixing with youth from Presbyterian, Orthodox, Anglican, United and house churches from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, as well as a few from England and Scotland. My first workshop on ‘What Can Christians do about Climate Change’ had gone well enough with a big group attending but it was the second workshop that was to prove really special.

The workshop was titled ‘Should Christians focus on faith, development or environment’ and I sent Raheel a young Pakistani to conduct a ‘straw poll’ on the issue asking those coming to the workshop or just passing by which of the three was the ‘burning issue’ of our time. I thought perhaps ‘faith’ might dominate as they were all at a Christian conference, but no; surprising Raheel collected 12 votes for ‘faith’, 12 votes for ‘development’ and 11 votes for ‘environment’; views seemed to be equally split. I then went on to look at case studies where there was a conflict between looking after the environment and development of the local communities, using actual examples from Portugal, Ghana and Bangladesh that I had visited and had good knowledge of and asked them to use Biblical principles to decide how to resolve the issues. I suspected all being from developing nations with urgent human development needs that that human needs would be at the forefront of the discussions, as in similar debates I’d had in Britain, but I was surprised again as each of the four discussion groups said the environment must come first! Their arguments were flawless, all based on the provision of nature to provide human needs but also on the responsibility of humans to be responsible stewards and take care of it outlined in the Genesis story, in the words of one group: “If there is no nature you can’t live there; you need to save water and the environment to sustain livelihoods.” The workshop was interesting and we were having lively discussions and I was in the middle of talking about a holistic approach to the question and the integrating of faith, development and environment when something amazing happened: it rained...

Now, we were lucky to be in the ‘Gurka Bar’ a venue with a two side’s panoramic view to the mountains of the Himalayas, only they had been cloaked in cloud all week and few had even seen them. Following the rain storm, the sky suddenly cleared and the imposing peaks of Lamjung Himal, Annapurna IV and Annapurna II were suddenly dramatically revealed crystal clear in all their snowy glory! Apologies were quickly made and those in my workshop rushed to the windows transfixed by the

scene that had unfolded. Apologies weren't actually needed; it was perfect! That view spoke more to participants than any of my words and it was almost as if God Himself were demonstrating visually, the wonder of His Creation and that it deserved careful attention and providing an illustration for my seminar!



For the second part of my seminar, I had actually planned to get people enjoying, appreciating and being creative themselves by writing poems, statements, songs, or drawing pictures of creation (taking photographs was also added by the group as a response). They had all the inspiration they needed and I got them to face the windows to 'create', leading to a wonderful burst of creativity, it was an almost magical or perhaps miraculous turn of events that touched all the lives in that room very deeply. Then guess what? As I closed the session by presenting some of my creativity (my poem: Bangladesh Psalm 104 using music and powerpoint) the mountains disappeared as quickly as they had appeared, never to reappear again during the late afternoon for the life of the conference!! Here are a few poems and extracts from statements that were written in the workshop and express the feelings of those present:

This is God's Creation...we cannot see to anywhere else when such a beautiful scenery or view is in front of us by Sehrish John, Diocese of Faisalabad, Pakistan

When we see the nature we realize the presence of God... by Mehboob Naz, Sialkot Diocese, Church of Pakistan

Creation is the action of knowledge, to destroy creation hence means to deny knowledge.... by Sam, Mar Thoma Church, Delhi, India

...life means nature, take care of it and love it by Regan Mandal, Bangladesh

..the view after the rain...was so beautiful that I was not able to control myself and rushed outside. It was really awesome...I looked up and I said: "Oh Lord you are great and you have created such extraordinary things that shows you're really Almighty" by Raheel Suleman, Multan, Pakistan.

*When I see green hills created by you
When I see rivers and lakes created by you
My heart feels peace and joy given by you
My all tension washed out when I'm with you*
by Renuka Surkheti, Butwal Jyoti Church, Nepal

*Greeny greeny creature,
How God created you so lovely!
You look so pretty
You make us to enjoy
I love to take care of you
Let both of us praise God*
by Hannah Shirley, Church of South India

*Beautiful mountains with snow caps,
Rivers, valleys, forests and deserts,
Trees, rocks, animals and birds,
Shows us how much God loved the world,
For unto u, he has given this earth,
To live in it and take care of it,
So why do we pollute and destroy it?
We must take care of it, love it and thank God for this lovely world.
Oh Lord, how beautiful is your world?
My words are not enough to express it.
Let us get together as one family and take care of it throughout our lives!*
by Sudarshi Nonis, Sri Lanka

Thank God...

- For the privilege to have presented at some great workshops and conferences
- A good start to MLE teaching in CBSDP-Rajshahi's schools
- The new CBSDP/Tearfund project on Climate Change Adaptation in Jobarpar Deanery has started
- That Dipti's brother found a temporary job.

Please pray...

- For *Restoring Creation: A Seminar on Environmental Degradation & Creation Care* at College of Christian Theology Bangladesh, 7th to 9th October that James is helping to organise and where I will present two sessions.
- For Linda who will attend MLE training that follows on from her previous course entitled *Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: Planning Curriculum And Learning Materials For MTB-MLE Programs In The Formal Education System* that will take place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from October 11th through to November 5th.
- God would guide Linda and the 2 newly recruited School Supervisors as they develop materials, curriculum and other MLE resources, as well as begin to prepare MLE materials for next year for 5 year olds.
- Pray for God to continue to bless & guide James' ministry in climate change adaptation
- For wisdom for James & David Hall as they help to guide the implementation of recommendations from the CBSDP External Evaluation Report.
- For our preparation to come back to Britain for a period of UK Service between October 2010 –February 2011.
- Please pray for the complete recovery of my Father's sight after a recent stroke, as since the wedding it had deteriorated a little.
- Pray that Linda's brother would find a permanent job.
- Pray that the Lord would keep watch on Linda's mum who is quite frail in good health and that Linda has God's peace.
- That God would protect Linda's father and neighbours (who are vulnerable, being tribal & Christian minorities) as last year, some criminals tried to seize some of his farmland by force, beating and hospitalising one of his neighbours.
- Also, pray for our colleagues in the CBSDP and friends in the Church of Bangladesh, that God would supply his wisdom and blessing to their life and work.
- That the love of God would really touch the hearts of the men, women & children we are working with and that we would be effective in our activities to uplift them.

James & Linda