



The **Methodist** Church

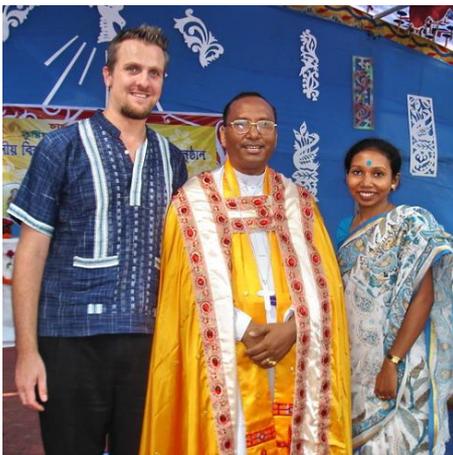


Anglicans in
World Mission



Bangladesh Bits

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With Bishop Sunil Mankhin

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Dear Friends

How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: ‘What’s change?’
How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: ‘No thanks, we prefer candles’. How many reformed/Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: ‘7, one to change it and 6 to form the committee’. How many Charasmatics/pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: ‘who needs light bulbs when we have tongues of fire floating above our heads?’ Ok think I’ve now covered all my link churches, friends and family, perhaps not atheists but then they’ll be too busy reading Dawkin’s latest book: ‘The Light bulb Delusion’.

But what is it about ‘change’ that we don’t want to take her seriously? Sure we all know change is necessary to grow, to develop, we may even like change or find it exciting but usually only if it is on our terms or under our control. Unexpected change can be unsettling, stressful or even frightening. Development work is by its nature a process of walking alongside a community and encouraging them to change their habits, attitudes, aspirations, ideas and practises for more positive or accurate ones.

In the past year working with the Church of Bangladesh we have had more than our fair share of change! Firstly, we have been involved in an *external evaluation* process of the CBSDP, secondly, we saw a new *Bishop of Kushtia consecrated*, thirdly, Linda

has facilitated a new approach to schooling through *Multi-Lingual Education*, and fourthly, we have been planning a new project on *Adaptation to Climate Change*.

The *CBSDP External Evaluation* and its follow-up has been a very exciting process to have experienced and we have contributed in many ways, from suggesting an evaluation, to helping to plan it, to being interviewed by the external evaluation team, to obtaining a Bengali translation, to discussing with the implementation committee and to facilitating discussion meetings for all CBSDP staff and stakeholders on the evaluation report. During October, we went to all corners of Bangladesh, meeting staff from all of the CBSDP offices (numbering 230 people in total), discussed the



evaluation report and then recorded and summarised all their comments on it. Most were overwhelmingly positive about the recommendations (even though there was an overwhelming 123 of them!), and we are now moving forward firstly with the appointment of Thomas Das as Director (a new post that was recommended) but with a long way to go yet.

The *consecration of Samuel Sunil Mankhin* as Bishop of Kushtia was a much more colourful affair and very interesting for us as we'd never seen a Bishop consecrated before. There was lots of nice symbolism in the ceremony such as the giving of the shepherd's crook the symbol of his pastoral care, then the ring, cloak, his mitre (hat) and of course he needed to be commissioned by at least 4 other Bishops continuing the succession from St. Peter. Fortunately, there were many Bishops: Three from

Church of Bangladesh, two from India, one from England, one from Pakistan and even a handful of Bangladeshi Catholic Bishops, I wonder what a group of Bishops is called? A 'flock' or 'herd' doesn't sound right but maybe a 'pondering', a 'debate' or a 'sermon' of Bishops sounds better? Anyway, all dressed up in their finery, it was a visual



spectacle to behold and we found the traditions fascinating and meaningful. On top of the church traditions, the occasion was further enriched by Bangladeshi cultural traditions with dance, songs which further encompassed three separate ethnic traditions of the Garo, Santal and Bengali that make up the church here.

The consecration of Bishop Mankhin in fact had added significance because he is the first from an ethnic minority background. Despite ethnic groups like the Garos and the Santals being in what is now Bangladesh, thousands of years before the Bengali identity was even born, they have been discriminated against for many years, lost most of their land and are now small minorities in their ancestral homes. The process of land loss and marginalisation was accelerated during the social turbulence of the partition of the Indian Empire (following independence from Britain) and the struggle for self-rule and the war of independence during the Pakistani period. The fact that he became Bishop bears credit to both the open-mindedness of the Church of Bangladesh members who are mainly ethnic Bengalis as well as the hard work and persistence by Bishop Mankhin himself to overcome his disadvantaged situation.

As the church has been in the forefront to uplift these ethnic minorities, we arrive nicely at the third change the start of a *Multi-Lingual Education* approach to education in some of CBSDP Rajshahi's schools where ethnic Santals predominate. For the past three years, we have been preparing for its introduction and it was a thrill in February to see 4 year olds learning in their own language for the first time and clearly enjoying it! They were singing songs, reciting poems and using the colourful materials that Linda and her colleagues had prepared, when we visited. Of course not

everyone is happy with change and there has been some confusion, but by holding workshops with the local community and explaining for example how Bengali and English language teaching will also be phased in to the curriculum in subsequent years, so academic standards as well



as cultural understanding will be raised among Santal children; parents and Santal community leaders have become enthusiastic about the process, especially when they see posters and books in their own language! In fact most of the complaints have come from a small number of Bengalis who don't yet understand the need for minority language and cultural learning. Believing minorities should simply adopt the identity of the dominant culture (for their own good), reminiscent of past times in the UK when Gaelic, Welsh and regional dialect speakers were prohibited from using their local tongue in school. However, I believe that if a community feels that they as a people are worthless, they will not be able to improve their situation, in fact to enable development, the community must be shown that they have much to value within their traditional knowledge, language, skills and heritage giving them the pride and self-confidence to succeed in life.

Climate Change is another controversial issue; however, while attitudes to minority rights are more advanced in the UK than in Bangladesh, perhaps the converse is true on action to climate change. It was, if I'm honest, quite a surprise to me to find out that around 40% of people in the UK are still not convinced about the reality of climate change despite the fact that around 99% of scientists are. While in Bangladesh, I've yet to find a climate sceptic. However, things became clearer after a *facebook* debate where it was noted that a lot of our perceptions are determined by where we are standing, how we read reality and how we wish to see reality: In the UK, we are largely urban in service related jobs, the only impact of the seasons is 'leaves on the line' or heavy snowfall affecting commutes to work; our understanding of the weather comes from BBC forecasts (which are frequently wrong); we are postmodern, suspicious of 'big stories', disbelieving of scientists for various reasons (especially Christians many whom reject the theory of evolution); and at the present time changes to our lives (i.e. driving/flying/consuming less) to prevent climate change appear to threaten our lifestyles more than impacts of climate change (unless your house is near a flooding river).

However, in Bangladesh, 70% of people are still living in rural areas, they don't use weather forecasts, they don't have access to scientific reports, have never heard of 'global warming', yet everywhere that I go in Bangladesh farmers are telling me that the weather is changing: That Bangladesh used to have 6 seasons but now you can only identify 3, that 'you cannot predict the weather anymore' and that 'now farmers do not know when to plant their crops'. Most Bangladeshi's don't use much of the earth's resources and in terms of emissions their 'carbon footprint' is very small but their already marginal lifestyles are hugely vulnerable to climate change. It was an international expert on climate change adaptation that said: "The real experts are not scientists like us, but ordinary farmers". They have been following the seasonal patterns since settled agriculture first developed thousands of years ago in the 'fertile crescent' of the Middle East where much of the Bible's narrative is set. They are used to variability but not at the scale it is now occurring, they are not used for the increasing power and regularity of cyclones, the grass becoming too salty for their cows to eat, the regular failure of rains or unseasonal storms knocking the mangos of their trees before they can ripen.

So a new project that we have developed with the support of Tearfund to assist communities to adapt to the climate changes that are already affecting them and to prepare for disasters and future climate scenarios is good news! We will work in the southern districts of Faridpur, Gopalganj, Khulna and Barisal starting in July. Another exciting aspect of the project is it won't just be implemented by professional development staff working for the CBSDP but we will work through the local church congregations and communities stimulating and motivating them to reach out to their neighbours in voluntary loving service. This is very much a new approach both for the CBSDP



A raised tubewell is an important adaptation to increased floods

and for Tearfund but we hope it will leave a lasting impact on both the lives of the volunteers and on the communities they will serve.

Pray that through all these changes, God will change us, our colleagues, and the lives of those in the communities we seek to serve; in many positive ways.

Thank God...

- Safe travel as we conducted Evaluation Review Meetings throughout the country
- A good start to MLE teaching in CBSDP-Rajshahi's schools
- A new CBSDP/Tearfund project on Climate Change Adaptation in Jobarpar Deanery
- That James had a good meeting with the UK Conservative Party Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and on another occasion with Norwegian Bishop Nordhaug when they visited Bangladesh to look at Climate Change impacts.

Please pray...

- God would guide Linda and our colleagues 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.
- Rt. Rev. Sunil Mankhin the new Bishop of Kushtia for anointing & wisdom.
- Please pray for the complete recovery of my Father's sight after a recent stroke, as since the wedding, it has deteriorated a little.
- Pray that Linda's brother would find a 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.
- That the Alpha Course in Rajshahi would be restarted.
- That we will be able to wisely develop the arsenic mitigation project.
- Also, pray for our colleagues in the CBSDP, 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