



# shared

# blessings

by Jonathan Krause

**When the preacher stood up to deliver the sermon, the service had already been going two and a half hours. Yet there was no shuffling from this Lutheran congregation. Instead, they leant forward to hear every word of the message about the cost of following Jesus.**

They listened, despite living in a country that is one of the poorest in the world. They listened, despite having suffered through years of civil war that saw hundreds of thousands of people slaughtered. Many of the congregation are returned refugees and most live on little more than a dollar a day.

Welcome to the Lutheran church in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, the newest ministry field of Australian and New Zealand Lutherans through Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS).

There to begin the partnership were Pastor Peter Hage, chair of ALWS, Peter Schirmer, executive secretary, and me, communications manager. ALWS will be delivering aid to the country's poorest communities through the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) World Service Burundi program.

Our Lutheran team works in close partnership with Burundi's Council of Churches, which includes Methodist, Baptist and Anglican churches and Quakers.

Moral support comes from the Catholic community, too. At a meeting at the Catholic bishop's office in Cancuzo province, we were greeted with the words, 'We've been praying for you. We have seen the fires you have suffered, and we ask God to be close alongside you.'

As the fledgling Lutheran church

grows stronger, enormous opportunities for partnership exist there, too. Already the tiny church of a few hundred people countrywide is teaching people to read and write, so that they can hear the Scriptures. They are also teaching basket-weaving in order to improve family incomes.

The 'building' the church rents in Bujumbura sits in what some might call a slum. It's more like a hayshed than anything else. The roof is corrugated iron held up by shaved branches.

The floor is a combination of cracked concrete, stones and pressed dirt. And the walls are tarpaulins (normally used for emergency shelter) provided by LWF.

Yet, despite the humble surroundings, and the desperate poverty of the congregation, the church explodes with joy. Their choir of young people, all dressed in blue, dance in the way only

Africans can and lead the congregation in long exultant songs of praise to God for his goodness.

To welcome us, their special visitors from Australia, the congregation saved enough money to hire a mini-bus to bring a choir from their other congregation in the mountains.

What was so unique about the choir is that it's made up of Batwa people, a pygmy tribe roaming between Burundi, Tanzania and Rwanda. These pygmies will be a special focus of our help through ALWS.

Because the Lutheran church in Bujumbura has no ordained ministers, they were overjoyed to have Pastor Peter Hage (from Mount Barker) deliver a message.

Peter, along with the local lay leader, used Luke 9:57–62 to talk about Jesus being the most important part of our lives. He said that each of us must be prepared to pay whatever it costs — home, job, family, financial security, everything — to follow Jesus. It was a message you could feel the congregation of 150 people taking deep into their hearts.

The service finally ended — after four hours!

We were presented with gifts of Burundi coffee and tea from people who could barely afford to buy food, and earthenware pots made by the Batwa people as their only means of income.

As the singing and dancing choirs led the congregation out, we gathered in a circle outside the church. The leader emphasised again that Jesus is what matters most in life, and urged us to take this message into our lives in a special way in the coming week.

Then the circle broke up, and each Australian visitor was surrounded by people wishing to welcome us. Tiny pygmy women in brightly-coloured scarves pulled our heads down onto their shoulders in enormous sisterly hugs. Young men gave the classic three-move African handshake: shake, clench fists, shake. Curious children stared with big eyes up at these strange white things. Wise old men simply asked for



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*Pastor Peter Hage from Mount Barker speaks passionately to a congregation of 150 in a church made of corrugated iron and tarpaulins*

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God's blessing on us.

From the outside it would seem that we have so little in common, yet the shared faith we express in the Lutheran church makes us brothers and sisters. As we support these people rebuilding their lives, it's clear that their friendship and love will be a blessing to us, too. ■

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**Lutherans reaching out**





## Grow a grocery store

ALWS works very hard to invest in people through long-term development that can help families and communities become independent. A very successful part of this work is supporting small businesses in countries like Cambodia. Through village banks (less than \$1000

to set up), families are trained in small business practices and given start-up loans of less than \$50. The results are clear for all to see – including little grocery stores like this one set up and owned by Phan Sen in the Aoral District.



## Where 'Lutheran'

Here in Australia, we Lutherans may not realise what our help means to families in countries like Burundi, southern Sudan and Cambodia. Countries where war and poverty tear people apart. Where rocks are painted one side red, one side white, to show where landmines are (red side).

In these countries the word 'Lutheran' (which comes out sounding like **Looteran**) means help. And hope. When people see LWF (Lutheran World

Federation) they know they will be welcomed, cared for, and given support to rebuild their lives. Much of the work we Aussie and Kiwi Lutherans do through ALWS is in partnership with LWF.

What's interesting is that when refugees from places like Bhutan, Sudan and Burundi come to Australia, one of the first places they look for is the local Lutheran church! Few may actually be Lutheran, but they identify

## You're welcome!

Chey Mattner shared with Convention delegates how one morning in Ikotos in southern Sudan, he heard a man walking down the streets calling out into a megaphone in Dinka. All Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) were to meet outside the Lutheran compound to receive support: 1 blanket, 1 jerry-can, 1 mozzie net, 2 bars of soap. The only word Chey understood was 'Looteran'. Later, after receiving her goods, one woman thanked Chey personally. He said, 'You're welcome', but afterwards felt awkward and felt he should have said, 'On behalf of Australian and New Zealand Lutherans, you're welcome'.



## Healing the horror

When Australian and Kiwi Lutherans heard about the suffering of people with albinism in Burundi, the response was immediate and generous. ALWS reported that the target of \$228,000 was reached, and exceeded. People with albinism have been hunted down, and

their body parts sold to witchdoctors. As part of our overall Burundi program, these people are being provided with special support, and a coordinated action with churches across Burundi is aiming to change the cultural attitudes that have allowed this horror to grow.



Australian  
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World Service

# Lutherans reaching



# Water for life!

In Australia, through years of drought (and flood!) we've learnt how precious God's gift of water is to us. In many of the communities we support through ALWS, children are dying from diarrhoea, dehydration and diseases caused by dirty water. In fact, every 20 seconds a child under 5 dies from these causes. Therefore, it was a joy for

Synod to see and hear about the clean water supplies we're helping to provide in countries like Mozambique. Here in Malowera Village, children collect water early in the morning after their parents have left for work. Some children are as young as 7, and even though the full jerry-cans are hard to lift, the children's smiles show how precious the water is!



## means help (and hope)!

with the word, not only because they know it's a denomination of the Christian faith but also because, to them, it also means help.

A report of facts and figures in a Convention Book of Reports can never truly capture what we can do in people's lives through ALWS. The challenges are many, the work hard ... but for as long as there is a child at risk of hunger, a family forced from their home by conflict, a community

held back by poverty, we must continue to make the word Lutheran mean help, and hope, and together we will see people learn to walk again.

Thank you!



Chey Mattner  
ALWS Program Manager



## Earthquake Emergency Action

Synod heard about our Lutheran emergency response to the Asian Pacific natural disasters. Working through ACT International (Action by Churches Together), in Indonesia for example, temporary shelter is being provided: bamboo sheet walls, beams, tarps for roofing, plus saw, hammer, crowbar and other tools for \$189. A generous retiring offering kick-started Lutheran action.

**Credit:** ACT International



## School's in!

In areas like southern Sudan, support through ALWS is building schools, supplying school desks, books and other essential school supplies. ALWS program manager, Chey Mattner, reported to Synod the critical need to establish strong education in southern Sudan

so that refugees can be encouraged to return home. With our local Lutheran expertise in education, there is a real opportunity for us to make a lasting difference in the lives of children who have been through so much.

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out in love for justice!