



Commitment

**FOR LIFE**

2018 Update

# Life-giving faith, defiant hope, generous love

Inside: Inspiring stories, news and updates  
to help you give, act and pray

# Welcome

## Welcome to our 2018 booklet!

Through generous love, Commitment for Life has been able to educate and inspire churches across the three nations to see giving and acting as an integral part of their faith. Our recent review has shown that Commitment for Life has a special place in the life and mission of the United Reformed Church.

I want to say a very big thank you to those churches and individuals who have contributed to Commitment for Life over many years. You really have given hope.

As you read the stories in this booklet and learn more about recent campaigns, remember that your life-giving faith has given life to others and will continue to do so.

## Linda Mead

Programme Coordinator

Christian Aid is the official relief, development and advocacy agency of 41 sponsoring churches in Britain and Ireland. It works in 37 countries, with people of all faiths and none, to stand up for dignity, equality and justice.

Global Justice Now (formerly the World Development Movement) is a democratic social justice organisation. It's part of a global movement to challenge the powerful and create a more just and equal world. They mobilise people in the UK for change, and act in solidarity with those fighting injustice, particularly in the global South.



**For information about Commitment for Life, email Linda Mead at [linda.mead@urc.org.uk](mailto:linda.mead@urc.org.uk) or visit [cforl.org.uk](http://cforl.org.uk)**

Commitment for Life encourages all United Reformed and Local Ecumenical Partnership churches to take action, pray and give for people living in poverty across the world. 75% of all income raised goes to Christian Aid to be divided equally between the partner countries, and 5% to Global Justice Now (previously called the World Development Movement). The remaining 20% is spent on education, resources and administration.

**Cover image:** Young chocolatiers in Nicaragua making their prize-winning chocolates. Photo credit: Christian Aid

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# Bible reflection

## **'Life-giving faith, defiant hope, generous love'**

On the mud wall of a small field office in Rwanda, I noticed the remains of a poster. It was faded and weathered as it flapped in the hot breeze. It read: "A candle in the darkness is a non-conformist: it says to the dark, 'I beg to differ.'" Those words have challenged and inspired me ever since.

We have all experienced times when, metaphorically or actually, the lights have gone out, leaving us momentarily lost and bewildered. Deep down, many of us are afraid of the dark.

It only takes someone to light one candle for two important things to happen. Firstly, every eye will turn to the flame, because where there is light there is hope. Secondly, after only a few moments our eyes will adjust and we will be able to see around us – not in great detail, but enough to make out the obstacles, the people around us, and the safe way out.

Hope and illumination from just one small flame.

I have seen, with my own eyes, nights of despair, hopelessness and pain transformed by the light of love. I have stood with Christian Aid partners in some of the poorest communities on the planet as they have wept and danced and sung with celebration because their hard work, courageous campaigning and heartfelt prayers have been joined by ours – a future of hope and healing has been unveiled for them and their families.

In a world in which we are warned against the threat of others, encouraged to be suspicious of them, and told that we should look after number one, such love that embraces the poorest is seen as non-



## **'Commitment for Life gives us the tools to live as though the Kingdom of God is here'**

conformist. It screams at our selfishness and fear: "I beg to differ."

Following Jesus today demands such life-giving faith, defiant hope and generous love.

It always has.

Commitment for Life gives us the tools to do just that – to live as though the Kingdom of God is here. Because when we do, it is.

### **Martin John Nicholls**

Chaplain to Point in View Chapel, Exmouth, Devon and former Youth Programme Coordinator and Area Team Manager for Christian Aid



# Growing confidence for first-time tea gardeners

**"I had never been seen as an income earner", says Sumaiya Shimu, a member of the Small Tea Growers Group from the village of Berajot. Shimu lives with her husband and children. They have a small plot of land, but it wasn't providing a good income for the family.**

In 2015, Shimu joined a Christian Aid and Traidcraft project that offered to train women to grow tea on small plots; it helped them with saplings and an initial investment to prepare the land. Shimu was hesitant at first – nobody in her family had any experience of growing tea – but as her saplings grew well, she began to see

results. The first time Shimu harvested the tea, she sold the leaves for 700 Taka (around £6) – enough to encourage her to keep going.

## **From small shoots to a profitable business**

Now Shimu's tea business is properly up and running. From April to September last year, she sold 48,000 Taka of tea leaves (around £410), as well as cultivating and selling saplings which are worth more. The business makes a yearly profit of around £2,500 – it's been enough to buy another small plot of land, raise chickens and cows, and repair her house.



Sumaiya Shimu and her family outside their home.



Asiya Khatun tending her tea plants.

Before, Shimu's family could never afford to celebrate festivals like Eid and New Year, but this year they celebrated together as a family. Shimu says: "Now I feel proud of my success."

In future, Shimu plans to build a house in brick and wants to expand her tea garden. She also wants to buy two cows and save money for her children's higher education.

### **From tea to university**

Asiya Khatun proves that Shimu's story isn't a one-off. Asiya was only eight years old when her mother died and, as the eldest child, responsibility for her siblings fell on her. After she finished school, she got married and carried on trying to support her family, but having enough was always a struggle.

**"I look into my garden and I feel like this is my heaven. I have a long way to go and many dreams to fulfil."**

Asiya received saplings, a small investment and training to get started. "Without that training, nothing was possible", she said. "Training made me capable of making this tea garden."

The garden is thriving. Asiya harvested over £1,000 of leaves last year and has also started selling saplings and rearing cattle and goats. She has become a role model in the village and encourages other women to start working in the tea business.

The money is paying for her sons' university education. She is hoping that her youngest child will get into a good university in Dhaka.

There's real pride in Asiya's voice as she reflects on what she has achieved. "My life has changed since I started working in my garden. I poured my heart and soul into producing tea. I never thought I would get such a chance in my life to prove my capacity."





Sikhanyisiwe's daughter demonstrates their family borehole.

# Village banks help to build small businesses

**In Masendu, change is happening. In this district of southern Zimbabwe, near the border with Botswana, the villages are remote; with limited access to markets and banks, running a business is difficult. Now, one of Christian Aid's partners is making it easier to become a business owner.**

## **From savings and loans to village banks**

Many women in the villages around Masendu have long been members of a savings and loans group. This was a success for them, but they could only lend small amounts, and only within the group. Now, the Institute for Rural Technologies (IRT) has backed their skills – and trained them to run a village bank.

With a starter fund of \$3,000, the bank lends money to local people to help them start businesses. The bank's founders have learned what makes a good business plan; they know how to make loan decisions and how to monitor the business. If someone defaults, the traditional courts of the village decide whether it was due to unexpected circumstances (and the loan is written off) or lack of effort – in which case the person must repay the amount through community work.

Because access to cash is a problem in Zimbabwe, IRT has helped to provide mobile banking kiosks so that running a business doesn't mean a long journey to the local town.

## **Chickens, guinea fowl and a borehole**

Sikhanyisiwe Ndlovu's journey to being a businesswoman has been hard. As a widow with three children, Sikhanyisiwe struggled to pay for food and school fees. She saw other women starting projects through loans from the village bank and decided to try it herself.

Raising chickens allows Sikhanyisiwe to have an income every six weeks. She has branched out into rearing guinea fowl which roam around her homestead. It's a smart choice - guinea fowl need less water than chickens.

**"In Masendu, water is a big challenge. During the dry season most people wake up at 4am to fetch water."**

**"There are huge queues. Some people come back from the water points after 10am, having gone there at 5am."**

With another small loan, and some money from selling grain, Sikhanyisiwe now has her own borehole. It has allowed her to start a market garden, grow more crops and keep some goats.

The income from these businesses has enabled Sikhanyisiwe to send her daughters to school so they can complete their secondary education – something which is unusual in Masendu. Providing food for the family is no longer the challenge it was.



Sikhanyisiwe raises chicks in one of her outhouses and then sells them at the market after six weeks.





From left to right: chocolatiers Evertz Altamirano, Haris López and Heydi Espino making their chocolates.

# Supporting young chocolatiers in rural Nicaragua

## From coffee to chocolate

In the past decade, climate change has caused uncertainty to small coffee producers from the Jinotega region of Nicaragua. Being so remote, and with limited resources and infrastructure, they are particularly vulnerable. Christian Aid's partner Soppexcca has been promoting a switch to producing cocoa – it's a more resistant crop than coffee and requires less labour to harvest.

In 2010, Soppexcca founded a small chocolate factory, which provided an opportunity for the children of coffee

co-operative members to start a new business. Since then, they have achieved more than they ever thought possible.

## Youthful energy pays off

Haris Lopez, Evertz Altamirano and Heydi Espino were founding members of the business – all three are children of coffee co-operative members.

Haris explains: "In 2010, we were invited to a training course. Soppexcca asked us if we wanted to develop a business idea. Our idea was to build a chocolate factory. We had zero experience, but our dreams were big!"





"In the beginning, it was 10 of us, but not all of us had the same level of interest. Little by little, the group was reduced until finally, it was only three of us."

The group faced challenges making chocolate in Jinotega, where there was little local demand. However, they continued to develop more popular products and test the market. With help from Christian Aid, they developed a brand – 'Rustikao' – and spoke to international experts who helped the group refine their production processes.

### **An award-winning chocolate**

In November 2017 Haris, Evertz and Heydi took their chocolate to the Regional Central American Competition of the International Chocolate Awards.

Evertz says: "We entered the competition as Rustikao, with samples of our orange-flavoured chocolate and our dark chocolate. There was an international jury, with experts from the United States, Guatemala and Argentina. Our two chocolates won bronze medals in each of their categories!"

It was a breakthrough for a factory that is about much more than making chocolate. The business is entirely local: from the crop to the processing, packaging and selling. The Rustikao brand represents their community on an international stage.

Haris says: "This project has helped us improve our quality of life, not only for ourselves, but also for our families. We have

steady jobs, we receive support to study and get training.

"It has given us an opportunity to excel, and to overcome hardships, as we come from low-income families.

**"We have proven that we are capable, we have learned and we have moved forward. And we will keep working hard, and see where all of this will take us."**

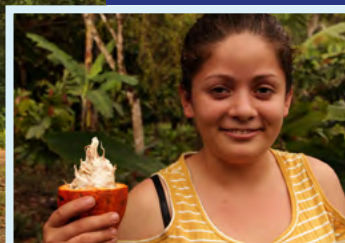
"The most important thing for me is that we are seen as role models for our communities, as we were part of a group of young people who received support to develop business ideas, and ours was the only one to get this far."

Heydi agrees that it has made a huge difference to her life. "When I began this journey I was only 16 years old; I was so young and I wasn't sure if all of this was going to work. But time has gone by and we have proven that we are capable, we have learned and we have moved forward. And we will keep working hard, and see where all of this will take us."

Their business success, training and skills have created opportunities that would have been unimaginable when the project started. Thanks to the awards, chocolate making in Jinotega is on the map. We hope their business goes from strength to strength.



Diversifying into cocoa production makes this traditional coffee-growing region more resilient to climate change.



# Power to the people

**Amina smiles as she remembers how she got involved with Christian Aid partner YMCA in Raboud, a village in the Hebron governorate of the West Bank.**

“We were passing by and decided to join a meeting with the YMCA because we thought that we might get water tanks [for our homes], or something else... But then we heard about the approach of the project – it’s different. It has a focus on the role of women, and the importance for women to speak up and participate.”

Amina joined a community protection group which involves women, men and young people. Amina is 27, she has a degree in business administration, she has four children and she wanted to see improvements in her community. The protection group discusses issues in the area; their aim is to address these issues through a community action plan that they develop together.



Amina in Raboud

**“Women in Raboud were usually housewives, at home with our children. Now we’re working on projects that benefit the whole community.”**

The work is part of Christian Aid’s Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessment approach with partners in the occupied Palestinian territory. The approach empowers communities by giving them confidence and skills to take collective action: if they understand the risks they face, they can identify

opportunities to make changes.

“I started becoming active and going to meetings’, says Amina. “And I realized... myself and other women were becoming more self-confident; we started sharing our thoughts and having an actual role in tackling issues in our community.”

## Communities solving problems

One issue that the Raboud protection group identified was that their rubbish wasn't being collected, and their local village council wasn't hearing their concerns about the associated health risks.

"We decided that one of our group should run for the village council so that we would have more access," Amina recalls. "At the beginning, some people discouraged me. They were saying: 'you have children, a husband, you won't have time to be in the village council'. But then we sat together as women in the protection group; we were thinking that there were already seven men on the council and there needed to

be representation of women there. My husband has been very supportive too. He always encouraged me to be part of the group and active in the community."

With the support of the community protection group, Amina was nominated and then elected as the first female member of the local village council. Since then, she has been an important link between the council and the group.

Through the support of Christian Aid and the YMCA, the community in Raboud have improved their health clinic, where they can now carry out breast cancer screenings. They also built a culvert and bridge so that they can cross the stream of sewage running onto their

land from a nearby illegal Israeli settlement, which cuts off access to their olive and almond trees.

**"We transfer power to the people - we do not hold the control" - YMCA**

Mai, Director of the YMCA-East Jerusalem Women's Development Programme, revealed the secret to their success: "We do not do anything – we transfer the power to the people. We do not hold the control. That is the point of the approach that we have learned from Christian Aid."

Raboud Community Protection Group and Amina.





# The Big Shift UK

**So far, over 20,000 supporters have got involved in the Big Shift campaign, which calls on the UK's biggest banks - HSBC, Barclays, Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds - to stop financing fossil fuels.**

The campaign is making an impact: from emails and letters to the banks' chief executives, to supporters visiting local branches with giant 'piggy bank'-shaped petitions. Banks still rely on their reputation, and these good-natured visits to bank branches have made the senior staff and local media take notice.



Prudence the pig visited UK banks campaigning for cleaner cash.

HSBC even invited the Wolverhampton Christian Aid group to meet their Head of Global Sustainability, Daniel Klier, opening doors for Christian Aid that had previously been closed. We've since been able to positively influence their new energy policy.

We recently met their new Chief Executive, John Flint. We reminded him of the impact of climate change

on the poorest people in the world and encouraged him to ensure the banks' plans go further in limiting climate change.

Despite the positive steps, HSBC still finances vast amounts of fossil fuels. As one of the world's global banks, its sector influence is enormous. We are now working with other climate campaigners around the world to push HSBC further.

## Supporting displaced people



Two-thirds of people who are forced from home are still in their own country. Seeking safety but unwilling or unable to leave, they are denied the official protection given to refugees. Displaced people are torn from their homes, their families and their communities; they are among the most vulnerable to poverty and exploitation.

We believe each one of us deserves respect and care. This year, we're campaigning to ensure all people on the move are protected.

Recently, you've been raising the issue of displacement in your churches and communities, and hosting our 'Uprooted' photo exhibition. Many of you have also raised the issue with your MP.

Penny Mordaunt, the Secretary of State for International Development, recently promised to support the formation of a high-level international panel to examine the issue of internally displaced people. This sends an important signal that the UK is committed to addressing this problem. This would not have happened without the issue being raised by people like you.

From the summer, we'll be turning our attention to the Prime Minister, calling on her to speak up for internally displaced people at a special United Nations meeting in September.

# Global Justice Now campaigns

Global Justice Now has been a proud campaign partner of the URC's Commitment for Life programme for more than 25 years. We are extremely grateful for your continued support.

## **The Windrush scandal** – exposing a hostile environment for migrants

The Windrush scandal has been making headlines around the world. Thousands of people – 'the Windrush generation' – moved from the Caribbean to the UK on the government's invitation following the Second World War. Now, up to 50,000 of them face deportation, even though they arrived in the UK legally and have lived here for most of their lives. But while the treatment of the Windrush generation has rightly provoked outrage, it is only the most visible impact of a hostile environment policy towards migrants.

Enshrined in the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, the hostile environment requires employers, banks, hospitals and others to demand that people prove their immigration status or be barred from accessing the services they need. The legislation penalises those who rent accommodation to anyone without the 'correct' paperwork, and forces schools to share children's personal information with the Home Office. It has revoked driving licences and even closed bank accounts, leaving many without access to their own money to buy food or pay rent.

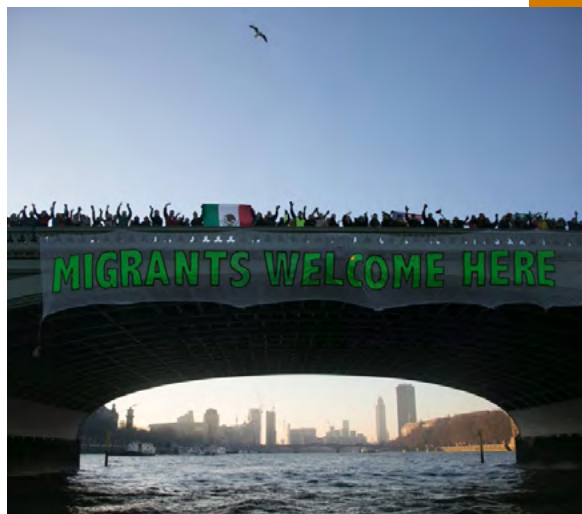
The goal is to create artificial barriers to essential services in order to make migrants' lives as difficult as possible. In this, at least, it's working: Doctors of the World, which runs health clinics for undocumented migrants, says that 94%

of its patients didn't access NHS services. Many, including pregnant women, are too scared to access the care they need. The hostile environment has been shown to disproportionately affect people from black and minority ethnic communities. This unjust approach makes the UK a more hostile place for everyone.

## **Migrants welcome here**

It's time to take action. Two parliamentary select committees have criticised the policy. According to the Home Affairs Committee, it puts people at risk by discouraging them from accessing healthcare or reporting crimes, while the Health Committee is calling for an end to sharing NHS patients' personal information with the Home Office. Even by the policy's own terms, it isn't successful: there is little evidence that it makes a difference to migration figures.

The outcry shows that campaigning against the mistreatment of immigrants can work, and that the government is feeling the pressure. Read Global Justice Now's briefing on the hostile environment and take action to defend the rights of all migrants at <https://act.globaljustice.org.uk>



Protestors fly a banner declaring migrants welcome in the UK

# A message from Amanda



**Christian Aid's new Chief Executive, Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, will be addressing the URC General Assembly this summer. Joe Ware from Christian Aid helps us get to know her.**

## **What kind of experiences have you had of Christian Aid in the past?**

I first came across Christian Aid at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, as part of 'Make Poverty History'; I was very impressed with the credibility that they brought to the whole movement. My next encounter was when I joined the board. The experience had a profound impact on me. I always looked forward to the meetings - the respect, openness and thoroughness with which the trustees approached their responsibilities was very inspiring. Above all was the freedom I felt to openly combine my faith and my love for development work.

## **Who inspires you?**

I think the people who have really shaped my views have to be my mother and my late grandfather.

My mother is such a strong and truly amazing woman. Sometimes I look at her and just wonder. From very early on, when I was in primary school, I remember her talking to me about working hard at school. Even when I didn't do so well, she was still encouraging and supportive. Through the tough years and the good ones, she has been on my side. Her faith is strong at so many different levels.

Her father was way ahead of his time: he believed in the education of girls and women's empowerment. He made sure his daughters had similar opportunities, despite never having been to school himself.

From these two people, I have learned to be true to myself, work hard and know there is a purpose for me being here. The women in Scripture also provide great inspiration: my two favourites are Deborah and Esther.

## **What have been your biggest achievements?**

Being able to pick myself up when I stumbled, looking ahead and with one step at a time, quietly but decidedly, pursuing my quest for social justice in my own way.

## **What are the principles that guide you?**

There is a lovely quote by Maya Angelou: "My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humour and some style."

## **What has your Christian journey been like?**

I was born and raised as a Catholic. While at university, I joined the Seventh Day Adventist church. However, it was when I first moved to the UK that my journey truly started. Alone and without the comfort and the familiar fellowship and community, it was quite an experience. But I found a home in Coventry Central SDA.



## **“The United Reformed Church’s long-term support is so precious to Christian Aid”**

It has been a journey of learning to lean on God and depend on Him for everything. I have experienced the joy of answered prayer. It is still a journey - of knowing that our lives and activities can help draw more people to the Christian faith or they can cause God to be ridiculed. I am still learning, making mistakes as I go, but knowing that my steps will remain steadfast on the road with Christ.

### **What are you looking forward to about working in partnership with churches?**

Partnership is a defining word for Christian Aid. From the partners we work with globally, to the communities in which they work, to the local churches who are our supporters, we all depend on one another. When we stand, speak out and act together, we bring the kingdom of God closer.

I’m looking forward to the very particular energy and inspiration that arise when people of faith work together on issues of justice. I am also looking forward to participating in the churches’ deeply rooted relationship with Christian Aid. We have worked together for decades and across the world – I am interested in forging even stronger links with churches internationally.

### **What do you think are the benefits of long-term partnerships like Commitment for Life?**

The United Reformed Church’s long-term support is so precious to Christian Aid. Commitment for Life has existed for 25 years and has enabled work that gives us so much to celebrate. I value the lasting relationships that have grown between Commitment for Life churches, our partner organisations and the Christian Aid staff

who work in Bangladesh, Central America, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and Zimbabwe. The churches have gained a better understanding of the work we all support. At the same time, we have built a movement of people who pray for and help local communities, as well as the Christian Aid partner organisations that work in them.

### **What is your favourite Bible passage?**

Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and an expected future.”

### **Do you have any hobbies or interests?**

Sometimes I walk and I like baking - nothing fancy.

I like to listen to gospel music. I have accomplished some of my most difficult tasks while listening to a whole range of gospel, from Lynda Randle’s *One Day at a Time*, to Donnie McClurkin’s *Days of Elijah*, South Africa’s acapella group Reality 7 and hymns like “And can it be” and “At the Cross”.

### **What’s your favourite place in the world?**

Whenever I arrive home, irrespective of which part of the world I am living in, it always feels like that is my favourite place in the world.

### **What’s your favourite food and drink?**

Sadza with fresh fish from the Kafue river in Zambia, with some green vegetables on the side! Suffice it to say, I only manage to eat this when I am visiting Zambia. Here in the UK, I like chicken and mushroom pie! I love cranberry juice.



**Commitment for Life has been working in partnership with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now since 1992. With the gospel message of 'good news for the poor' at its heart, it is part of the whole mission of the church.**

Today our partner areas are Bangladesh, Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua), Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (loPt) and Zimbabwe, all of whom struggle with environmental and political concerns that affect those living with poverty.

Once a congregation decides to become a Commitment for Life church, they choose the area on which they would like to receive information and resources, through three mailings a year. There are also monthly e-letters sharing stories and articles from our areas.

75% of the money raised by the churches goes to Christian Aid to be divided equally across the four areas, 5% to Global Justice Now for their work on tackling injustice and 20% for education, worship resources and administration of the programme.

Commitment for Life keeps churches informed of all major development campaigns as well as providing a significant Christian voice. Ecumenical work has included being part of One World Week and the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, as part of the World Council of Churches initiative.

Commitment for Life has been a wonderful way in which the URC has been committed to overcoming poverty and tackling injustice. We have been brave, over many years, in giving in a committed way, whilst campaigning for the life of the world. Our partner's work is still needed more than ever. We will continue to resource churches to show how their contributions are used and the difference it makes for the sake of those whose lives might be transformed.

**Can your church be part of that commitment and transformation?**

To find out more: contact [linda.mead@urc.org.uk](mailto:linda.mead@urc.org.uk) 01702 315981

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