



ALL WE CAN

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AIMEE NOTT EXPLORES THE UNIQUE WAY IN WHICH THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO ENGAGE WITH GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

When asked to consider the theme of the Church and global development, my mind immediately began to rove through the many and varied ways in which the Church has shaped the world that we inhabit today. Since its inception, the Church has played a key role in bringing about positive change in the lives of some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our world. Through Sunday school sessions and history lessons, my eyes were opened to men and women of God who fought for a more socially just world - people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and William Wilberforce, to name but two. When I went on to study history at university, I looked further back in time, exploring how monasteries were key in establishing and running some of the earliest infirmaries in Western Europe. In more recent years, it has been impossible to miss how instrumental churches in the UK have been in providing and managing the foodbanks which ever more people have come to rely on. The imprint of the Church upon our world is undeniable.

Similarly, when exploring the Methodist tradition, it is clear that the Wesleys were passionate advocates of social change - including (but not limited to) prison reform and the abolition of slavery. Susanna Wesley has been recognised

as a pioneer in education. Her legacy continues to this day, as thousands of children in the UK attend Methodist schools - their futures made brighter by the Methodist Church's commitment to the development of the whole person. We know our current society has much to thank the Church for - but what happens when we turn our attention overseas, and explore the role of the Church in global development today?

I joined All We Can, the official relief and development agency of the Methodist Church in Britain, in 2017 - and in the two years since I walked through its doors, I have learnt more than I could possibly have imagined about how uniquely well placed the Church is to bring about positive, lasting change in some of the world's poorest communities. While the language of development and the language of the Church may be different, at the heart of both is a concern to respond to unmet needs, to restore human dignity, and to enable people, especially those who are marginalised or struggling with hardships, to live life to the full and in doing so bring glory to God. Walking with people in their struggles is central to how the Church responds to God's love and grace.

Issues like poverty and global development can seem daunting, and too large for us to tackle as individuals - but as Christians, we are compelled to act, and do all that we can to help others fulfil their God-given potential. It is this attitude that leads me to believe that the Church is called to

be a key player in global development. This is not simply because it is good, or 'the right thing to do' - but because we are commanded to: 'Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow' (Isaiah 1:17). The world might look a little different today, but our imperative to act compassionately towards those who are oppressed remains the same. In 2019, those that we consider oppressed could be the homeless man you walk past on your way to work in the morning; it could be the communities in rural Ethiopia unable to grow enough food to eat amidst a rapidly changing climate. There are always those for whom society has not dealt a fair hand.

A few years ago, as a student living in Australia, I remember discovering a Bible verse that I had not paid much heed to before. I was interning in an office which played host to the Australian arm of the Micah Challenge, and as such I came to see the following verse on a near daily basis around the building: 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). For me, this verse distils the essence of how I want to live my life as a Christian. But the challenge of these words can extend far wider than just a personal mantra. It is a call to action for the entire Church - a command to be front and centre when it comes to seeking justice in our world. It is a rallying cry to stand hand in hand with those prevented from fulfilling their God-given potential by poverty, war, slavery

and oppression - and to be instrumental in seeking to remedy this injustice.

In Jesus, we see someone who spent his life walking alongside the vulnerable and marginalised. The poor, the leper, the widow, the Samaritan - all were welcome at his table. All were valued, celebrated, and loved. In the same way, the Church, the body of Christ, must seek to imitate Jesus' radical love for those cast aside by society. It must be at the forefront of helping people impacted by changing climates, of protecting indigenous land rights, of developing sustainable livelihoods for those struggling to make ends meet; in short, it must play a central role in global development.

What is it that makes churches so uniquely well placed to engage with global development? Perhaps first and foremost is their physical and social position within a community. Churches around the globe are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, putting them in a pertinent position to help people in those communities seek the fulfilment God desires for them.

The Church is present for key milestones in people's lives, through births, deaths and marriages - meaning that it has a closeness to and legitimacy with those most in need. Being rooted in a local community means that churches can have a long-term presence, and are often able to utilise voluntary commitment from their members. This is particularly important in times of emergency, such as floods, famine or war, as the Church can quickly mobilise support and in doing so, save lives.

The local Church is present and active even in those areas typically deemed 'hard to reach' - which are often the areas where development interventions are needed most. Indeed, John Wesley famously stated in his journal that he looked 'upon the whole world as my parish'. In the same way, the Church acknowledges that no area, no matter how hard to reach, is beyond the love of God.

The Church can also be a powerful force for local and global advocacy, able to bring about real and tangible change. Leaders like the aforementioned Archbishop Desmond Tutu are testament to this; but equally on a smaller level, churches can advocate for the local issues happening on their doorstep.

Being a key advocate for the vulnerable and marginalised is just one of the ways that the Church can show God's love to his people in both word and deed.

As a faith-based organisation rooted in the Methodist Church in Britain, All We Can is well placed to partner with local churches as they seek to engage with development issues. Ever since All We Can emerged from a movement of compassionate Methodists responding to the refugee crisis during the Second World War, it has developed recognised expertise in global development - and can offer services to churches in the areas of relief, development, education and advocacy. It is that very same movement of generous, passionate Methodists that continues to bring about change and transformation in the lives of people living in some of the world's poorest communities today. One of the most exciting developments in recent years is All We Can's increasing commitment to work with overseas churches - precisely because of their position at the beating heart of communities.

That being said, working with churches does present some unique challenges. Churches cannot (and indeed, should not) function as quasi-NGOs. A church's mission and ministry go far beyond relief and development work, as they seek to administer to the spiritual needs of the community they serve. All We Can therefore takes the time to understand the vision and mission of the churches it works with in a holistic way, and identifies the particular areas and ministries of the church which align with All We Can's objectives: to engage with local people and organisations in some of the world's poorest communities to end the suffering caused by inequality and injustice.

But what does this look like in practice? As All We Can's Fundraising and Marketing Officer, I am lucky enough to hear regular stories of how people's lives have changed and their potential been fulfilled through our partnership with local churches. People like Peter.

After dropping out of school when his family were no longer able to afford his fees, 21-year-old Peter desperately needed a source of income to support his family. In Uganda, where Peter lives, 77% of the population are under the age of 30. Young people like Peter suffer disproportionately from unemployment

- making it ever more difficult for them to have happy, healthy, fulfilling lives.

To counter this alarming trend, with All We Can's support, the Methodist Church in Uganda has developed a youth entrepreneurship programme aimed at equipping young people with the skills, values and attitudes they need to succeed in gaining employment and securing a sustainable source of income. The scheme focuses on encouraging youth to start their own businesses and to lead initiatives which improve not only their own lives, but those of their wider communities as well.

Having shown a flair for tailoring, Peter was identified by the Methodist Church in Uganda to partake in this scheme. With their support, Peter was able to develop a business plan, and received a sewing machine and a sum of money to help kick-start his business. He now has a successful tailoring business set up in his own home - with plans to expand to a local trading centre in the near future. By recognising that youth are not merely passive recipients of support, but instead are active agents of change, All We Can together with the Methodist Church in Uganda are helping facilitate real transformation in the lives of Uganda's youth.

'In the past, we as a family barely managed to have an income' Peter revealed. 'With my earnings, I am now not only able to contribute to our family wellbeing, but I am also proud to be able to support my sister to get the opportunity for education that I never got.' The impact of the support given to Peter by the Methodist Church in Uganda and All We Can will not only transform his life, but that of his sister too.

At All We Can, we believe that relief and development should be considered an integral part of God's mission in his world, which the Church is invited to participate in.

Aimee Nott is All We Can's Fundraising and Marketing Officer. Born and raised on the London/Surrey border, she now lives in Reading and has worked for various charities since interning with TEAR Australia as a student in 2014. Aimee is passionate about the impact charities and the Church can have on confronting issues of global importance, including poverty and climate change.