

APRIL 2020

## El Ministry in the time of COVID-19

*In Ezekiel 22:30, the Lord is looking for someone to build up the wall, to stand in the gap. In this unprecedented world-wide situation, this is what our EI family around the world is doing, standing in the gap, helping people address the pandemic. It has been immensely encouraging to see the creative ways missionaries and staff in each country, with their partner churches, are reaching out to support their communities. Each week, we gather together through Zoom to give updates and to pray together. Thank you for upholding our EI family in your prayers.*

Paul Jones, EI International Director

### Brazil

EI Brazil is helping partner churches provide food packages to poor people who cannot earn any money because of social isolation. The 7<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church is distributing food packages to 100 waste and paper pickers. Fourteen women, who attend the Sewing Classes at the Águas Formosas PROPAC Day

Care Center, started to sew 5,000 masks, according to the models provided by the Health Department, to be distributed at no cost to the local hospital staff, health centres and the people in general. PROPAC will provide food packages to them in return for their labour.

The Terena Bible School is locked down, as the Brazilian Health Department says there is a special concern with indigenous people. The 15 students and the people and teachers who live in the premises are fine and trying to keep up with the classes.

Tarcisio Porto is participating in an initiative to have a coronavirus diagnosis laboratory in Montes Claros. One of his church members is a Biologist with large experience in the area. The lab was approved to be part of the national health system to diagnose COVID-19 and will provide 120 analyses per day.



One of the women sewing masks

## Haiti

In Haiti, there is the appearance that the government is on top of the situation and that things are in place to protect people from COVID-19. However, in reality, if the spread should increase rapidly, Haiti's medical system is very fragile and they don't truly have the necessary equipment to handle very many cases. To date there have been 72 cases and 5 deaths. The EI schools in Haiti and partner churches are closed by government directive. The girls in the girls's home have remained in place but the boys have gone back to relatives/caregivers for the duration. Daniel Jovin is in daily contact with Phanell for updates on the situation. Martinez Jovin, EI Haiti Country Director for many years is in Florida with his wife, Emma. Martinez celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 24.

## Philippines

In Bacolod, where Shem and Fleur Catanus reside, a neighbour passed away from coronavirus. Their subdivision was classified as a high-risk area, and the city was placed under Enhanced Community Quarantine.

Their ministry has been affected as mass gatherings must be avoided and so they have no worship service, no prayer meetings or cluster fellowship meetings.

The local government is distributing food packs to the poor residents of the city.

Ken and Ruth Copsey, in Davao City, are on very strict quarantine but have people who help them buy groceries. They were also able to help 16 families from a very poor community not very far from them by repacking a sack of rice and eggs and dropping off to a member of their small group for house to house distribution.

No one who is not from their area is allowed to enter. They meet once a week for prayer with their SALT team through Zoom.

## Malawi

In Malawi, COVID-19 has affected many business operations. Most of EI Malawi's partners are working from home. This is making collaboration on projects a little more challenging, considering that internet connection is generally slow. Gatherings have been limited to no more than 100 people. As such, many churches have had to make adjustments to their programs. It also means that no outreach gatherings are possible. There is need to support churches to still reach out to people with the Gospel in a cost effective manner without calling people together.

Scott and Lorilee MacLean say the story of coronavirus is gaining momentum in the villages around them. They are limited in their capacity to make a big difference around them, but what they do is share information with pastors, village leaders and chiefs, talk about ways to prevent the spread with everyone they meet, and practice these same preventions every time someone comes to visit. They all wash their hands at their wash station before they begin chatting or buying and selling. They have helped make three videos in Chichewa, Chitumbuka and Chiyao which share the



importance of physical distancing and staying home and these are circulating on WhatsApp. Church is still going on but with new measures in place. They wash hands before and after the service, sit at least a metre apart, and have split into two services to ensure the numbers are manageable at each service. One outcome they are privileged to be part of is the total reliance on prayer. Everyone knows that, apart from God's mercy limiting the scope of this virus here, Malawi cannot match its vehemence. While they practice preventive measures, there is a collective sense that only God can ultimately rescue Malawi from this threat. So, as a good Kenyan friend says, "We wash and pray."

## South Africa

The Safe Homes had been well stocked with food, electricity credit, and money in case there was a shortage of something. Then a 2 week extension to the lockdown was announced, which was not planned for in the shopping and preparation but Don Sayers was able to make more deliveries as the children's homes were declared an essential service.

'Lockdown' isn't really working very well in the informal settlements. Social distancing is impossible when 3m x 3m shacks housing 4 people are built with no space to the next one. Up to 8 families share 1 toilet and 1 water point. Many families do not have refrigeration so they typically walk to the store every other day for fresh protein and vegetables... if they have the money. Life in the informal townships looks nearly like any other day except that desperation is setting in as more people are going hungry.

Living Hope Bible Church has been utilizing Zoom with pretty good success.

The church has committed to buying data for those who have run out so they can participate in the Bible studies and Sunday service. There are families in the church that have lost their jobs and the church is helping where they can to support them until the lockdown is over.

The Sayers family use the time to catch up on reading, playing board games and DIY projects.

## Tanzania

### Mwanza

Numbers of reported COVID-19 cases have started to rise more rapidly now in Tanzania, including in Mwanza. Schools remain closed, however there is no lockdown and business is continuing almost as normal. We have been working hard to make sure that we as an EI team are clear on procedures and working in line with government guidelines. Victoria has been doing a course through the London School of Tropical Medicine on COVID-19 and sharing that information. We are now set up for Zoom team meetings which can also involve the EI Iringa team.



**Handwashing buckets being distributed to communities**

We have been strategizing how best to help the local churches at this time. We are continuing with and scaling up teaching on COVID prevention and distribution of the handwashing buckets, soap and posters through our partner churches and through the groups in the villages where we have projects. Last week we developed a pamphlet (“Corona and Faith”) and are distributing 10,000 of them to the 350 Tanzania Assemblies of God churches in our area. Churches are continuing to meet and we are doing all we can to encourage churches to practice social distancing and good handwashing. We also use the opportunity to teach pastors about the virus, how people can protect themselves and strengthen their faith and witness during this time.

Upendo wa Mama group women are working on sewing fabric face masks which are being sold locally and distributed through other NGO’s. They



**Prayer time at Mafuluto village after the COVID-19 seminar**

have also taught others to make them as there is a shortage of masks.

## **Iringa**

The Iringa team had the great blessing to educate people in the rural areas about the coronavirus. Mid-April they went to educate people at Mafuluto village and found that many people in rural areas do not have accurate information on the coronavirus and how to protect themselves. They will continue to educate other communities they work with, though at the moment, the staff of EI in Iringa are working from home. The number of patients in Tanzania is increasing day to day.

## **Uganda**

Uganda implemented strict physical distancing laws on March 18<sup>th</sup>, which forced us to halt all field activities. The office is still open for minimal administrative activities, but there is little which EI can do at this time other than continuing to use the radio to share health information and to remind everyone that God is still sovereign in this situation.

There are less than 100 cases of COVID-19 in Uganda, and no cases in the areas where we work, but people are still being impacted as many basic food staples have tripled in price. This is particularly bad timing, as this is also when people are waiting for their first harvests (usually in June/July). Please pray for our staff, and for the churches and communities we partner with, during this time.

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## **EIUK Annual General Meeting and Summer Event**

13 June 2020 at Trinity Church, Harrow

Given the current situation around COVID-19, it may be that we'll have to make alternative arrangements and hold the AGM remotely.