

News from Vanuatu

20 March 2015



The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand affirms the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu as our primary mission relationship. We are partners in a number of projects in Vanuatu, all of which have been badly affected by Cyclone Pam. Here is an update of things as they currently stand.

Our Staff and Volunteers

- Shirley and Don Anton from Titirangi Presbyterian Church began serving on the staff at Talua Ministry Training Centre on Santo Island in January 2015. Shirley is an English teacher for theological students and Don assists with a variety of tasks on campus. We have just heard today that they are safe, and that Santo escaped most of the effects of the cyclone. However, they have had no communications outside their area for a week, and telephone and internet connections are still down. Power has just been restored to the nearby town of Luganville.

Two other Presbyterian Church couples were volunteering when the cyclone hit. Both couples arrived in February:

- Neville and Gloria Jones from Blenheim were based in Port Vila, serving in the church's community health programme and teaching in a Bible school.
- Graeme and Maebry Reid from Christchurch were on the staff of Onesua College.

Both couples are fine and are now staying together at Sutherland House, Port Vila. They will remain in the short term and assist the PCV with relief work.

PCV Assembly Office

The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu Assembly Office in Port Vila is functioning, although communications are not possible yet. They are working closely with the Vanuatu Government's National Disaster Management Committee to help with the relief effort.

Talua Ministry Training Centre

Our Church has a long history of partnering in mission at Talua. We are waiting for news about what extra assistance may be needed as a result of the cyclone.

Church-to-Church Projects

Hibiscus Coast parish has a partnership with the PWMU (Presbyterian Women) Project House and Skills Centre in Port Vila. The house has been damaged and needs repair. Highgate Church in Dunedin and Hawera Presbyterian Church in Taranaki are two congregations beginning new projects on Paama and Santo Islands. There is no news of conditions on either island.

Ambrym Island School Relocation

We are working with BuildAid Missions in Australia to rebuild a school on Ambrym Island. A building team from our Church was preparing to go in April. Initial reports indicate there is considerable damage in the area and throughout Ambrym.

Presbyterian Schools

Most, if not all, PCV schools will have been significantly hit. There is a long history of relationship with Onesua College where there has been major damage. Most teachers' houses have been destroyed. Many classrooms have lost roofs and suffered other damage. The school site itself is littered with debris and power lines are down.

Lenakel College on Tanna has hosted Going Global programmes for the last few years and we were helping with a new classroom block. We know the school has been damaged, but not the extent of the damage. Tanna itself has been decimated and the community will be in severe need.

St Columba and St Orans Colleges were planning school visits this year. These have been cancelled and they, along with other church schools here in New Zealand, are now helping with fundraising.

Students will not be attending classes at Onesua for at least a month and this is likely to be repeated all over Vanuatu. Given other anecdotal evidence, this is a conservative estimate of disruption to schools, some of which have lost everything.

Korvan Community Health Centre, Port Vila

Korvan trains healthcare workers to provide healthcare in their communities throughout Vanuatu. This is a partnership between the Presbyterian Churches of Korea and Vanuatu, with assistance from us, including Korean congregations within our Church. There has been damage to the building, including to a new roof.

Seasonal (RSE) Workers in New Zealand

Thousands of Ni-Vans come to New Zealand each year as seasonal workers on orchards and vineyards. Many are now distressed as a result of the cyclone. Congregations and communities in fruit picking areas are rallying to help the workers in their regions.

Our Response

Throughout Vanuatu people will be focused on getting their lives back together and returning to their home communities to help with the clean up. At this stage it is difficult to know exactly what long-term impact the cyclone is going to have. But we can be sure that the country has taken a severe blow and recovery will take years.

Our Moderator, the Rt Rev Andrew Norton, and I will be travelling to Vanuatu in April to meet with the leaders of the PCV, and visit our staff and volunteers who are still there. This will be a pastoral visit to show solidarity with the PCV, and to gather information about how we can best offer our help to the PCV, and to the nation of Vanuatu itself.

Pacific Vision Vanuatu Appeal

In the meantime, please give generously to emergency aid agencies, and to our Pacific Vision Vanuatu Appeal. The funds raised from this appeal will be gifted to the PCV to assist them as they play an important role in the long-term recovery effort. Please join us in praying for the PCV, the people of Vanuatu, and seasonal workers here. We want to stand alongside the PCV in their time of need. Please respond generously with donations and fundraising to support them and help restore hope to Vanuatu.

Fundraising for Tuvalu and Other Pacific Nations

We have also received an appeal for help from Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, (the Tuvalu Christian Church). Some congregations within our Church include members from Tuvalu and other Pacific island nations affected by the cyclone, for example, Kiribati. Congregations and individuals who would prefer to support the Tuvalu appeal, and churches in other islands are invited to do so, through donations to Global Mission.

Please give generously to the appeals that are supporting Pacific island nations to recover from this devastating cyclone, including the appeal from the Tuvalu Christian Church, the Vanuatu appeal from Christian Word Service or other aid agencies, and to our Pacific Vision Vanuatu Appeal.

Phil King
Global Mission Coordinator
March 20 2015