

A Glimpse of the Work of Presbyterian Global Mission

Recently we were fortunate to spend two weeks in Vanuatu volunteering with PCANZ's Global Mission programme there. We spent our time assisting Graeme and Maebry Reid who are longer-term volunteers and who are assisting the Seaside Community School, a primary school, establish a new library. They also assist with remedial reading for some of the pupils at the school.

Seaside Community School is one of the schools run by the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu. It is located close to the centre of the capital, Port Vila and services an area where Ni-Vanuatu from other islands live in poor conditions. Houses are very basic, non-permanent and without proper sanitary facilities or running water. Although the school is doing its best it cannot cater to all the primary school age students.



Seaside Community School

The school's facilities are very basic by our standards. Classrooms are simple wooden buildings with galvanized iron roofs. Resources such as textbooks are in very short supply.

So Graeme and Maebry, with the help of various Australian and NZ Churches, have gathered together books and were cataloguing them for a new library. Two of their friends, John and Kay Wise from Christchurch, were also there volunteering for a month. John had built new shelves for the library, lined the ceiling and created a beautiful reception desk.

Before we went we wondered what we could do to contribute. We had met some of the members of the Vanuatu delegation at the PCANZ General Assembly last year. Like most New Zealanders we had been dismayed by the destruction wrought by Cyclone Pam in March.



An example of the damage caused by Cyclone Pam

So we thought that we might be able to help with teaching given Dawn's background or remedial reading, given Roy's. We certainly did some of that, as well as sorting and cataloguing a lot of books. Dawn developed a database to record the books and we were up to 2,500 by the time we left. Roy got behind a paintbrush and the library now has a shiny brown floor.



Giving excess books to other libraries

But our most interesting task was assisting the Principal with writing a strategic plan for the school – not something we had envisaged doing but a task that he asked us to help with.

Those of you who have been to Vanuatu will know how genuinely friendly the people are. Walking the kilometer or so to school every morning the locals would all say “Halo”. They may be poor in material possessions but they are spiritually rich. School starts

each morning with prayers and singing. Religion is a central part of the national fabric. We were there on Independence Day and after a few speeches most of the entertainment was various church groups singing religious songs.

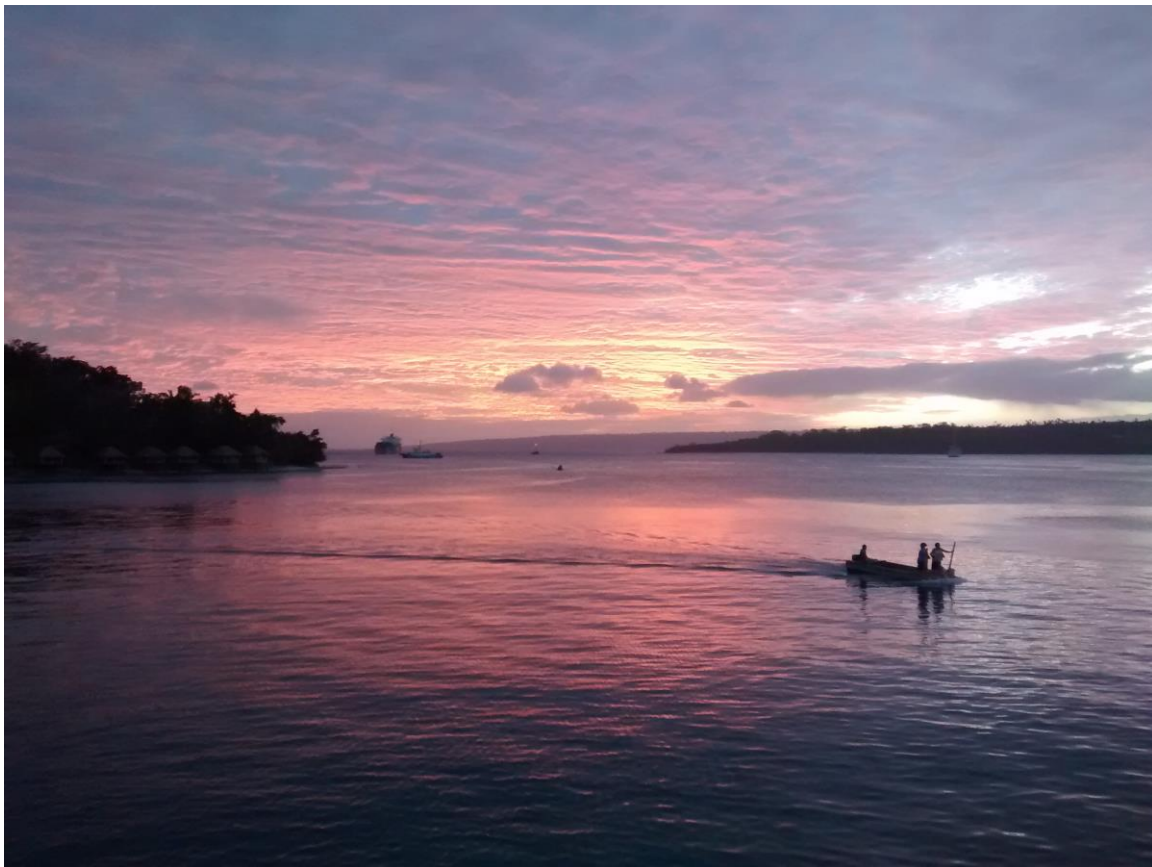
The Presbyterian Church has a large influence on society, not least through the schools it runs. We met Neville and Gloria Jones who are the local representatives of Global Mission in Vanuatu. Neville uses his logistics skills to organize a major building programme at Onesua College on the main island of Efate. Wherever possible he uses local labour, supplemented by volunteers from Australia and NZ. His wife Gloria is a dental nurse and works with the health arm of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu assisting local dental nurses take dental services all over Vanuatu. They are missionaries in Vanuatu for two years.



Neville Jones with Manu and his wife and Dawn

We came away from Vanuatu humbled by meeting so many devout Christians. We felt proud as members of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ when we saw the many worthwhile projects the Church is assisting with and the very cost-effective way they are doing this.

Dawn and Roy Ferguson



A Vanuatu sunset

The Fergusons went to Vanuatu in July 2015