



Link Letter No.20 May 2012



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David and Sarah Hall are working as ecumenical mission partners with the Church of Bangladesh, in the country where they first met in 1997. David works as development consultant to the church's social development programme (CBSDP) and Sarah provides training and advice for the church's education programmes.

Dear friends,

Extreme weather...

In February, I (David) led some sessions at another organisation's staff training workshop on climate change. As I prepared for this by thinking about changing climate and extreme weather in Bangladesh, much of the UK was suffering extreme cold – a memory no doubt still fresh (and freezing!) in the mind of many readers. In fact, in many areas where our supporters live there has been extreme weather over the past few months, from extreme

storms in Scotland before Christmas to flooding in Dublin and parts of Northern Ireland in January, and the highest ever wave recorded in Irish coastal waters. No one event can point to a changing climate, but all of them together in the space of a few months point to the fact that something is changing.

The bible study I led on climate change looked at the cause of climate change, and saw that no individual cause can be said to be 'wrong' – travel, industrialisation, farming is good – but it is just the way we do it that has grave consequences, often as a result of human greed. As Isaiah put it: *"the earth suffers for the sins of its people"* (Isaiah 24: 5).

Raising awareness...

However, the Bangladeshi contribution to greenhouse gases is negligible, and so we in Bangladesh can do little ourselves to prevent global warming. Our focus is on helping people to adapt to a changing climate, and advocacy to encourage others to take actions.

One key aspect is raising awareness of climate change and helping people realise that the weather is not just a 'one-off' and is unlikely to return to 'normal', as it was when they were younger. Our work includes raising tube wells to above the flood level so they can still be used in



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A raised tubewell



Vegetables grown on floating gardens

times of flooding, and training and encouraging people to use floating gardens, so that floods do not destroy their vegetables. These are made from water-hyacinth, which is chosen because it is widely available, and people can make organic fertiliser from this and therefore it is very useful for the various crop productions.

The bible study discussed how scary climate change is. We have many real fears over what might happen in years to come. For example, the retired bishop of Dhaka used to talk of his fear that the village he grew up in would be under water by the time his grandchildren grew up, and if so, where would their children live. There are many real fears to this very real issue. But the study went on to focus on how our God is, to use the title of the song, a Great Big God, and can be trusted to support us in hard times (looking at passages in 1 Kings 17:1-24, Joel 2:25 and Philippians 4:19 among others).

Moving on...

That same theme of trusting in God in our uncertain future has been true for us as a family. Having worked for the Church of Bangladesh for nearly seven years, we felt some months ago that it was right to consider moving on to new challenges. However, we both felt strongly that we should remain in Bangladesh, and have been investigating possible work that we could do.

It has been difficult to know when we should let you know this. When we took our decision in the middle of last year we really thought we would have much more clarity by now as we started on a period of UK service at the end of March. However, we have been taken on a journey of faith over these last few months. We

realise that we have a gracious and faithful God. At times we have felt very despondent, wondering what are we to do when the future looks so bleak, but at such times there have been little possible openings that have come along.

At the time of writing, just after we have arrived back in the UK, there are clear possibilities, although nothing is definite yet. We now start four months of UK service and return to Bangladesh in August. We feel that God is taking us to a different level of faith – one that is scary and where it is easy to be afraid of an uncertain future. But in this journey of faith we know that we have a God we can trust and rely on. In many ways the climate change Bible study was a great encouragement to us as a family, being reminded that in uncertain and difficult times we can trust in God.

We hope you will join us in this journey of faith by praying

Vegetables grown on floating gardens





Hills - on the Indian border

that blocks would fall into place, that some clarity would emerge and that it will become clear how we can continue to serve God in Bangladesh in the months and years to come.

The last few months...

The last few months have been very busy but have also highlighted much of what we have enjoyed while being part of the Church of Bangladesh community. David went on the annual church picnic – this time a two-day trip to Jaflong in the north on the boarder with India (as it was over 10 hours travelling over a school day Sarah and the children stayed in Dhaka). Two coach



Saris on sports day

loads of office staff and their families travelled together, stopping for one or two snacks on the way... a very enjoyable time!

Sarah accompanied the community school to Dhaka zoo for their annual picnic, but it was an invite not just for Sarah but also for the children. Rebecca came along and enjoyed seeing the teachers again, as this is where she went to school when she came with us to the church compound three years ago before she went to Grace School. We had a great time, and even had a fantastic show of the peacock's fan! Apparently, so we were told, it was everyone clapping that encouraged the

Party lights



Sports day



peacock to display his feathers.

Last year we mentioned the new school, St Thomas Primary School, which had opened in the old development offices on the cathedral compound. This year the number of pupils has grown to over 130 and it was great to see so many parents, all from the local community, attending the first sports day. Even better, they all took a very active, competitive part in the parents' games.

In February teachers from this school, the community school and St Andrews school all attended a joint teacher training event with Grace International School (where Rebecca and Reuben go). It was a great opportunity for learning but also to begin to build links. Later this month, Grace School are holding a sponsored read and will be raising money for books for a library in the community school.

Sarah also had the opportunity to lead another spoken English course at the Theological College. This time a mixture of priests, catechists and students attended. It was quite ironic that on their first day they attended the English service which David, with his strong Northern Irish accent, was leading! (They understood some of it, so they politely said!). They were a really motivated group who were keen to practice their speaking and listening skills, so a delight to teach.

In our apartment block, we had a great chance to share with others at the apartment 'Family night' in February. This was a fun evening of games (for young and old alike!), great food and a live band. Our children were delighted that the decorative lights signalling the party were hung from our balcony, and they went to sleep (much later than normal) with the flashing lights, giving a disco feel in their bedroom!

We are so grateful to so many churches and supporters who remember us in prayer. We hope to see many of you when we are in the UK and Ireland in the spring and summer

Praise and prayer

Join us in thanking God for...

- His protection, and that He can be trusted to support us in hard times.

- The work of CBSDP in many remote areas of Bangladesh.
- The wide variety of work that we have both been involved with.
- The opportunity Sarah had to run the spoken English Courses.
- The good relationships which we have with so many colleagues and friends.
- Our children's friendships with those around them.
- Safety when travelling on the roads in Bangladesh.
- Grace International School, which Rebecca and Reuben attend.
- Rebecca and Reuben have the opportunity to attend school in Portstewart for six weeks.
- The opportunity to spend a few months with family and friends.
- The freedom and security of the church within the country at the present time.
- The effectiveness of the work of the Church of Bangladesh, particularly in this time of change.

Please pray...

- For the continuing reorganisation process within CBSDP, and for wisdom and courage for the CBSDP Director and other senior staff.
- For wisdom and unity amongst the leaders of C of B.
- For the new focus of evangelism and that it will continue (five new churches established in the past year).
- For success of the strategy to make the Church of Bangladesh financially self-sufficient in the next two years.
- For safety and energy as we travel around the country speaking about Bangladesh.
- That we might be able to give a true reflection of life in Bangladesh and be able to encourage many people to take an interest in what God is doing globally.
- For our future roles and that they might be clarified, and that we might have time to prepare for these before returning to Bangladesh in August.

With love from the five of us...

*David, Sarah,
Rebecca, Reuben
& Matthew*

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