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Commitment  
for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

2021 | 22 Update



Ariana Blandon holding cocoa pods on her family's farm in Santa Rosa, Nicaragua.

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**Heroes of resilience and hope**  
**Inside: inspiring stories, news, and updates to help you pray, act, and give.**

# Welcome



Warm Greetings! We are grateful to God that 2021 has already proved to be a productive year for *Commitment for Life*, despite the many challenges facing all of us. We want to thank each *Commitment for Life* congregation and supporter for your prayers, energy and enthusiasm – ensuring the ‘fair rollout of justice for all’ at a time of incredible hardship.

We’ve had many messages of thanks from our partners. So much good has come out of our efforts. Sometimes we think we ought to be doing more, but let us take a moment to appreciate how good can come from even the smallest actions, like the flap of butterfly wings bringing rains to the parched places. We’ve helped women in Zimbabwe, children in Bangladesh, farmers in Nicaragua, and peace activists in Israel and Palestine. We’ve helped communities with limited access to Covid-19 vaccines and are challenging unfair trade and patent laws preventing the distribution of vaccines to the vulnerable. None of this would be possible without your ongoing support and commitment.

We want to give a special *Commitment for Life* shout-out and thank you to Charlotte and Helen over at Christian Aid. Thank you also to Sandra, Nick, Heidi and Dorothy over at Global Justice Now – your efforts for justice are deeply appreciated.

## Some things to do this year:

### Prayer

Have a look at the lovely daily devotions from Christian Aid [christianaid.org.uk/pray/daily-bible-readings](http://christianaid.org.uk/pray/daily-bible-readings)

### Environment

Make your voices heard! Follow the youth pilgrimage from Carbis Bay to Glasgow here: [yccn.uk](http://yccn.uk)

### Vaccine Justice

Make your voice heard for a just rollout of Covid-19 vaccines, particularly to our partners in the global South. Support the Global Justice Now campaign [globaljustice.org.uk/2021/04/vaccine-apartheid-a-threat-to-an-inclusive-cop26](http://globaljustice.org.uk/2021/04/vaccine-apartheid-a-threat-to-an-inclusive-cop26)

Yours in the Uprising of Jesus,

**Kevin and Suzanne**

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# Theology of the Land: A Bible Study by Munther Isaac



**A presentation given to *Kairos Ireland* on 2 Feb 2021. Edited. Used with permission. There are multiple theological approaches to the question of the Land, and Munther’s position should**

**not be seen as reflecting the stance of Christian Aid to this question.**

The question I want to ask is whether the Hebrew scriptures are a threat to Palestinians. Many Christians feel they have a mandate to bless Israel, to support it financially and politically, based on Genesis 12:1–3. Today, some people believe that they have to support and bless not only the Jewish people but also the modern state of Israel.

Some who sympathise with Palestinians say to us: ‘We feel your pain, we want to help but the Bible tells us that this is Israel’s land.’ I would like to challenge the assumptions and interpretations of Christian Zionists from within the boundaries of the Hebrew scripture that God would support a movement (Zionism) that is exclusive, inflicts oppression, discriminates against non-Jews, and militarily occupies about five million Palestinians.

To me, the Bible is clear that everything belongs to God. Lev. 25:23 says, ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, **for the land is mine**. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.’ God makes it clear that the land itself comes within the context of the Jubilee laws. These

laws state that even if we trade land and people and slaves, expanding wealth, at the year 50 everything returns to the families. Everything is redistributed again.

The language used in Leviticus 18:24–28 is very clear – if there is no justice in the land, God says, ‘the land will vomit you’. In this verse, God also makes it clear that Israelites who dwell in the land are no different from those other inhabitants who also live in the land. The land is part of a covenant in which God holds everyone accountable for what they do within the land.

The core principle I hope we get from the Bible is that this is God’s land. As such we have to share it and use it for the good of our two peoples, as opposed to divide and fight and conquer. That is why I want to read this quote from Kairos: ‘We believe that through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one.’

In other words, this is not a call to eliminate either Israel or the Jewish people but to end the occupation. In another quote from the Kairos document: ‘We say we truly believe that we can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of love and the power of love, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.’

As Christians here in Palestine, we are motivated and empowered by this reading of the Bible. We call Christians to help us spread this message of a shared land and an end to the occupation.

You can watch Munther speaking to the URC’s 2019 Educational trip members here: [youtu.be/1p2VfosGSds](https://youtu.be/1p2VfosGSds)

# Crab farming to tackle climate change

**In the Sundarbans of Bangladesh, a cluster of islands and mangrove forests, climate change is already changing the traditional ways of farming and fishing. Agriculture is no longer a viable option because of the salinity of the soil and the lack of fresh water available. Populations of shrimp, crab and fish are also declining.**

Christian Aid partner, the Nowabnki Gonomukhi Foundation (NGF), is working with people living in poverty and those who are often excluded, especially women, to develop sustainable livelihoods and to help people become economically resilient and improve their lives.

The project aims to support farmers with training, skills development and resources to

set up their own crab fattening business. An initial investment of 10,000 taka (around £90) can pay for fencing, boxes, labour to make the pond and crablets. Women make up 60% of those supported by this project, meaning these crab farmers are earning their own income and no longer having to ask their husbands for money. They can now take part in deciding how to spend the household money and feel more independent.

Shikha has two children: a daughter who is 15 and a son who is 11. Shikha and her husband used to collect fish and shrimp from the river to fatten up and sell at the market. Because of the depleting fish population they had to go into deeper waters to catch enough and risked encountering sharks and crocodiles.



Shikha Rani tending to the crab farm she started with the help of Christian Aid partners.



Shikha and her family have a much safer and more secure income thanks to the crab farming business.

Shikha says, 'We were always scared to go to the river but we had to. So, we tried not to go too deep into the river because it is riskier.'

Now with the help from NGF Shikha is able to run her own crab farming business and has a much more reliable and regular income. Shikha explains, 'Previously whatever we earned we would give it to our husbands but now we keep our earnings. We are spending our money the way we want to, spending it on our children's education. And if the children need something, we don't have to wait for our husbands' approval, we can directly provide it. If our crab farm needs any improvement or any gear, I can go directly to the market and buy it myself.'

Shakhi enjoys the independence and decision making which comes with running her own business.

'Before we earned our own income, the husbands would work as they pleased and they wouldn't listen to their wives. Now the husbands consult with their wives

**'Previously whatever we earned we would give it to our husbands but now we keep our earnings.'**

before taking any decision because now we are involved with many projects and we know how the world works. So, the husbands now think that consulting with the wives gives them a better result.'

The crab farming communities have experienced challenges in the last year due to Covid-19 as lockdown measures stopped the export and selling of crabs. NGF quickly responded to help with alternative opportunities such as duck rearing, mask manufacturing and vegetable gardening as well as continuing crab farming training. Now that the lockdown measures are lifting and crab farming is viable again families have restarted their businesses.



Members of the savings and lending group sharing fertilisers purchased using the group funds.

# Business skills to overcome poverty

**In Mutoko Ward in Zimbabwe women farmers struggle to access finance to help them improve their income and businesses. This means it's very difficult to be resilient to the challenges they face such as hyperinflation, unpredictable dry spells, economic crisis and Covid-19.**

A group of people in Tafunga was offered the chance to participate in training through a project aiming to build resilience. Initially, people were sceptical. 'At the beginning of the training, we did not notice the value in it, however, we started receiving training about internal savings and lending (ISALs), farming as a business,

growing small grains and rearing small livestock,' says Longina Chimbadzo.

The group has maximised the potential of their land through planning crop planting, dealing with pests early, and using savings to invest in small livestock. In 2018 the group formed a savings group of nine women and one man. They started with strong principles of book-keeping and governance.

The savings group and additional cash transfers that boost their monthly contributions have helped the community through the challenges of drought, inflation and Covid-19, which have come their way in the last year.

Using money from the savings and loans, the group has invested in kitchen utensils for every member, goats to rear and pass on kids to other members, and bakery and confection training. With this training and additional income they are now providing bread to sell in the surrounding areas.

The group also supports local young people who borrowed money to start an income-generating project growing beans, which has been a success.

The women have seen a change in their standing in the community. 'Before, men did not want to hear us speak – three years ago we would only hear from them but now things have changed,' said Josephine Kagoro, the group's Chairperson. Women and men have been making decisions together about planting crops and spending money.

**'They hope that by keeping girls in school it will improve their future and reduce child marriage.'**

At a community level, having more income has meant that more girls are able to finish school. Josephine also mentioned that last year all the girls at Kaunye secondary school managed to finish Form 4. They hope that by keeping girls in school it will improve their future and reduce child marriage. Training and investment have given this community opportunities for the future.



Members of the Tafunga group with the first goats purchased through the savings and lending scheme.

# Chocolate to tackle climate change

**In Nicaragua climate change is having a devastating effect on agriculture as it becomes harder to make a living growing crops that used to thrive.**

In the farming community of Santa Rosa coffee has been grown for generations, but as the climate crisis continues it is getting harder to make a living from coffee.

Angela Zelaya has worked with Christian Aid partner Soppexcca growing Fairtrade coffee for eight years, but they have noticed problems. 'The weather was different 20 years ago. There were longer days of the rainy season and it used to start in May. Now you have no certainty when the rain is going to start. With climate change, the coffee suffers from many diseases and pests. The sun has scorched the coffee beans, we cannot sell them and we're losing more every year because of climate change.'

Angela is worried about providing for her daughters, Johaira (15) and Ariana (5), but she has hope through the Soppexcca co-operative. The community has come together through a number of projects from gender workshops to school vegetable gardens. They have also learned about growing cocoa, which is more climate resistant.



Angela with her daughters Johaira and Ariana.

The family now has 700 cocoa plants and planted saplings to provide them with necessary shade. 'The income from the cocoa crop is very important. It means we can buy clothes, medicines and food,' says Angela.

Angela's daughter, Johaira, says, 'All of us in the family were involved with the project. We all know it's very important for the family income. I am proud of my mum growing cocoa. She is an inspiration.'

Johaira has become a Soppexcca promotor, going to local farmers and recording information on crops and pests as well

**'We all know it's very important for the family income. I am proud of my mum growing cocoa. She is an inspiration.'**

as helping to estimate harvests and take part in co-operative meetings. She is also a young environmental champion and says, 'The environment is very important to me because it's my lifeline.'

As well as working on the farm and being a Soppexcca promotor, Johaira got a scholarship from Soppexcca to help finish her schooling. She is hoping to go to college and perhaps continue studying the environment.

The family is working with the co-operative to bring new hope to the neighbourhood and make lasting

change. Angela has plans for her land. 'I have many hopes and dreams for the future. My idea has always been to diversify the farm with cocoa and banana trees. I would like to have a piece of land for fruit trees and I would like to grow vegetables – because of the economic situation with the coffee prices, we have to look for other options to survive. We will keep working with the co-operative to see what happens in the future and hopefully a better coffee price.'



With climate change, 30% of the coffee crop now suffers from 'scorching' when it used to be 5%.



Members of the CREC with the new solar street lighting.

## Solar panels bring light in the darkness

**The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have an enormous impact on the lives of Palestinians, exacerbating human rights violations and affecting everything from access to healthcare to the economy, which has already contracted between 10 and 12 per cent in 2020. All of this continues to have knock-on effects for the most marginalised and vulnerable.**

Christian Aid partners have continued to respond to the situation and make progress despite the additional challenges of working within a pandemic. The Culture

and Free Thought Association (CFTA) in Gaza has been working on advocacy and training, enabling people to make positive changes in their own communities.

One such community is Abu Rashwan in Gaza, where its 9,000 residents now feel safer and are better connected to services as a result of the support and capacity building by CFTA and Christian Aid.

Abu Rashwan is an agricultural community where many families live hand to mouth – unemployment is high, and people often struggle with food insecurity.

The area falls between two governorates and so local authority involvement has largely been absent, there are no properly functioning sewage or water services and electricity shortages are common.

With support and training from CFTA to self-organise, identify and advocate for their needs, a community resilience enhancement committee (CREC) in Abu Rashwan was formed; it mobilised and coordinated with the private sector and municipal and local volunteers to purchase and install solar panel streetlights and secure the development of a newly paved road.

**‘I am living in Abu Rashwan area since 25 years, this is the first time I saw the road clearly while I’m returning home at night.’**

Through CFTA’s support, the community also grew in confidence and trust in their ability to identify and make changes by approaching the relevant authorities. CREC has been able to demand its fair share of services from the Khan Younis authority and is now also employing conflict resolution methods to address disputes within the community: for example, some residents were reticent to give up land to allow the new road but this was resolved through mediation and dialogue.

A member of the community, Wael Al Laham, commented, ‘I am living in Abu Rashwan area since 25 years, this is the first time I saw the road clearly while I’m returning home at night.’

Other CREC groups have also seen community improvements. In Al Mawassi

the committee secured safe spaces to host health services helping 500 women, men, and children. This training and forming of local groups allows communities to advocate for themselves and make improvements, which builds confidence and brings people together.

CFTA’s work with these CRECs is also designed to help communities to respond rapidly to future crises. This is because in humanitarian crisis situations, such as escalating violence, it is the local community who are the first responders. With training from CFTA these community groups have assessed the needs of different groups in their local area and have plans to respond when needed.

The escalation of violence in May 2021 and its impacts in Gaza means these communities may need to put these plans into action. Please do pray for peace and look online for current updates about Christian Aid’s work in the region during this emerging situation.



One of the solar street lights helping residents returning home in the dark.

## The struggle for climate justice. This year, every moment matters!



Rosalia is wearing her 'Climate Change Champion' sash to raise awareness in her community.

**It matters for all of us, but especially for Naomi, Rosalia and the millions of others on the frontline of the climate crisis. Naomi and Rosalia live in Kyeng'e village in Kitui, where the women have worked with Christian Aid partner, Anglican Development Services – Eastern (ADSE), to set up a Climate Change Advocacy Group. The impacts of the crisis are plain to see in this part of Kenya.**

'We have gone almost seven years without experiencing reliable rainfall, and the drought has hit the area for about two years. I am worried,' says Rosalia.

Alongside ADSE, the community built an earth dam to increase their access to water, which has made a dramatic difference to daily life.

But the fear of drought has not gone away, so the women are raising their voices to tackle climate change in their community and beyond. As well as planting trees, they attend meetings with government officials.

'We sing and create awareness of climate change among people. I have known the importance of climate change – that's why we are telling people through singing,' says Naomi.

Naomi and Rosalia are doing what they can to tackle the climate crisis, even though they have done nothing to cause it. The only way to solve the crisis is for rich countries like the UK to urgently reduce their emissions, and to support communities that are living with the impacts.

This year the UK Government has a unique opportunity to effect change as they host the crucial UN climate talks, COP26. One of the most critical issues on the table at COP26 is 'climate finance' – the idea that the countries that caused the climate crisis must financially support those facing its worst impacts.

Christian Aid is calling for the UK (historically the sixth largest emitter of greenhouse gases) to lead the way by making more money available to tackle this crisis; to help communities who have already lost so much; to help people adapt farming methods; to ensure everyone has access to clean energy; to restore natural habitats that also protect against further damage.

Without this money, we cannot achieve climate justice.

Find out more and take action at [christianaid.org.uk/climate](http://christianaid.org.uk/climate)

## Global Justice Now campaigns

**Covid-19 vaccines are here. But billions of people will miss out unless we act.**

**Our campaign on access to medicines challenges the systemic injustice that allows large pharmaceutical corporations to charge extortionate prices to patients and health services, despite research being publicly funded.**

No one company can produce enough Covid-19 vaccine doses to satisfy global demand. Sharing technological know-how and the rights to make vaccine will increase global supply so more people have access to it.

Although the World Health Organisation launched the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool to facilitate the sharing of know-how and intellectual property, it has yet to receive a single contribution from one of the current vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies, despite vaccine development having benefitted from billions of pounds in public funding.



Doing the right thing in the face of a global pandemic shouldn't be optional. That's why the governments of South Africa and India have proposed a suspension of patents on Covid-19 vaccines and treatments to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) until widespread vaccination is in place. If approved, this could be a real turning point in the pandemic.

Countries of the global South have welcomed the proposal while rich countries including the UK are opposing it. The WTO is continuing to discuss South Africa and India's proposal over the coming months. And in June, the UK will host the G7, a meeting of powerful countries, in Cornwall. Both these political spaces are a chance to build the pressure for the world to choose a different path.

For the last year Global Justice Now has been raising awareness about the stark inequality in access to Covid-19 vaccines. From widespread media coverage, mobilising supporters to take part in two global days of action, to launching our report, *The Horrible History of Big Pharma*, we've campaigned tirelessly to take on the power of big pharma and put pressure on the UK to stop blocking the proposal to suspend patents for Covid-19 vaccines at the WTO.

Thank you for supporting our work. To join our campaign please visit [globaljustice.org.uk/pharma](http://globaljustice.org.uk/pharma)

You can read our latest report at [globaljustice.org.uk/resource/horrible-history-big-pharma](http://globaljustice.org.uk/resource/horrible-history-big-pharma) or our supporter briefing at [globaljustice.org.uk/resource/fighting-for-a-peoples-vaccine](http://globaljustice.org.uk/resource/fighting-for-a-peoples-vaccine)

# An interview with Helen Howe



Helen Howe is Christian Aid's British Church Relations Manager and works with Kevin and others to develop the long-standing partnership between Christian Aid and the United Reformed Church.

## How did you come to work at Christian Aid and what's been your journey as a member of staff?

I've worked for Christian Aid for over six years now and it's been a huge privilege. Although I spent the early part of my career as a management consultant, I've always had a real passion to help those at the margins and speak out about injustice so when a role came up at Christian Aid, I knew I had to apply. Since joining, I've worked in our regional teams (speaking and preaching in churches across Cheshire and Manchester), I've developed our business network, Salt, worked in corporate partnerships and now have the pleasure of working with our key denominations to explore how we can best partner to tackle the global injustices we see today.

**'I've always had a real passion to help those at the margins and speak out about injustice.'**

## Have you had any especially inspiring experiences during your time working at Christian Aid?

I think the most notable time would be my first time visiting Christian Aid partners in Kenya in 2016. I was bowled over by the professionalism and skill of our partners there. They were excellent project managers and communicators and put the community at the heart of everything they did. Meeting those whose lives had been transformed by the generosity of our supporters will stay with me forever.

## Could you explain a little about your work with the URC?

My role with the URC is centred around partnership – looking at how we can work together to change the world and tackle injustice. I'm spending time getting to know a little bit more about your priorities and passions and exploring new and different ways we can work together. For example, this year we are exploring whether our new contextual bible study approach, Just Scripture, could help connect *Commitment for Life* supporters with the lived reality of those in the global South and how looking at a global context through the lens of scripture can help unlock a new and deeper understanding of the issues they are facing and what we can all do to make a difference.



# Greta says Bee a Hero!



**Many people think that bees are annoying or are just buzzy yellow and black insects found in the warmer months. Bees, in fact, have a particularly important role in maintaining life on our planet. Where trees and woods are essential to filter our air, bees are vital to both pollinate the food we need to survive and pollinate many of the trees and flowers that provide habitats for wildlife.**

Did you know that bees are in decline on a global scale as they face many threats? Climate disruption and extreme weather are just one of the causes in the decline of the bee population. It can disrupt the nesting behaviour and can alter the seasonal timings when flowers bloom.

In Nicaragua, Soppexcca is helping farmers to start bee projects as part of a strategy to diversify farms. They make honey products that help coughs, shampoo and honey chocolate, creamy honey mixed with chocolate and honey and peanuts.

**Proverbs 24:13** 'My child, eat honey because it is good. Honey from the honeycomb tastes sweet.'

Have you ever tasted the sweetness of honey? Why not try some on hot buttered toast!

## How to be a bee hero!

Fortunately, it is not too late to help save the bees and there are lots of things you can do to help protect these important creatures:

- There are several sites on the internet that you can look up about the importance of bees. Why not make a 'Bee Scrapbook'?
- Arrange to visit an apiary and chat to the beekeeper.
- Watch the 'Bee Movie' (2007), which helps show the importance of bees for the environment.
- Plant lots of bee-friendly flowers in your garden. Packets of wild-flower seeds are available from *Commitment for Life*. Why not use them to make seed bombs – **you will need** wildflower seeds, soil, flour or powdered clay, water and a mixing bowl. For instructions in how to make them see [nationaltrust.org.uk/features/how-to-make-wildflower-seed-balls](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/features/how-to-make-wildflower-seed-balls)
- Don't be a villain – avoid using pesticides and herbicides in your garden as they are one of the key threats to bees.
- Help a bee in need. If you spot a bee sitting unmoving on the ground, don't assume it is dead or dying; it could just be exhausted. You can help the bee by mixing two tablespoons of white granulated sugar with one tablespoon of water and placing it near the bee so it can help itself to this energy drink. Then watch and see if it recovers!

