

PARTNERPLAN

An ecumenical appointment with

The **Methodist Church** 

Pat Jamison - Bangladesh December 2014

Apologies for the late arrival of this letter.

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Hello Everyone

As I look back on 2014 I am also thinking ahead to 2015 and how much I have to do. I am however constantly reminded by my yoga instructor to live in the moment, look around, breathe and see the beauty. So as I reflect on 2014 I am indeed doing just that and enjoying the wonderful world our God has created.

At the beginning of December I had the privilege to attend Grace Primary School Christmas performance and the choir I have been involved in sang two songs. The next day along with some friends I attended the 40th anniversary of the Church of Bangladesh at the Savar church and complex. This was a very special occasion indeed and I was so pleased to attend. Three Deacons were ordained as priests and I was delighted my driver James brother-in-law was one of them. This is him with his wife following the very special service at which all Bishops current and retired and all Deans and Priests attended.



In the afternoon the Grace Primary School choir took to the stage at the British High Commissioners Picnic in the Park. They were fantastic and following singing we asked the other children in attendance to join us as we sang several Christmas songs and carols together. It was a brilliant afternoon with demonstration of ice sculptures, bands, lovely food and of course great company as we enjoyed our picnic sitting on blankets in the garden. The evening finished off with us all dancing to Stone Free a brilliant local band who played a wide range of music and being from NI a few Van Morrison numbers were indeed very popular.

Unfortunately my church Christmas carol service this year clashed with the Church of Bangladesh anniversary service so this time I did not join in the choir.

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I was pleased to have the new HIV posters completed and printed on time to be displayed on 1st December 2014. I made red ribbons for all the staff and at central office prayers explained about my time at the World Aids Conference in Melbourne I attended in July, shared a little from Romans 5:1-11 and explained how the red ribbon was started and why. Stigma and discrimination are both dreadful in this land and people who are diagnosed HIV positive are often shunned by society and often lose their jobs. HIV figures are very low here, however it is increasing and although people can be tested in all areas of the country CD4 counts

and treatment regimes with anti-retroviral drugs are only available in Dhaka. Many people are still unaware of how HIV is transmitted. I have linked with several organisations to ascertain what else can be done to help those in rural areas and I am also very pleased a basic information booklet I have written is currently being printed and will be distributed and used in all project areas.

The Church of Scotland World Mission Council is supporting HIV work in CBSDP and we have concentrated the work in two areas, one urban and one rural. I visited the rural area of Meherpur in early December. I travelled first to Jobarpar to check out the Integrated Community Health Programme sponsored by Us and then on to Meherpur on a very cold foggy day. The main focus in the HIV programme is peer education and although the work is throughout the churches and community of Meherpur the emphasis is with the young adults of the area. The drop-in centre has opened with almost 90 young people, male and female, attending. We purchased sports equipment and a TV for the centre where they will meet each week for fun, fellowship and most importantly education on HIV/AIDS.



The Dean and Priest of Bollobhpur attended and he prayed over the equipment and then we all enjoyed tea and snacks together at his home. The young people are well organised with a secretary sorting out where all the items will be stored and how they will be used. The young people had a time of sharing, praying and singing as we arrived with the items. The Community Organiser is also in the photograph above on the far left front row. She will coordinate the education, meet with local and church people and liaise with the peer

educators and Project Manager Mr. Arun Mondol.

It was wonderful timing as my visit to Jobarpar to coincide with a special morning of prayer and blessing at the **Christo Sevika Sangha (The Handmaids of Christ) house**. The old accommodation has been demolished and the foundations for their new one laid. The Dean of Jobarpar District, local priest, all Sisters, CBSDP Manager, staff from the school and hostels, the architect and tradesmen working on the building all gathered. It was an emotional time for the Sisters and yet wonderful as they will have a new home to live in. The Sisters especially Sister Jhorna have always been so kind and cared for me making me feel part of them when I lived in Jobarpar so I was thrilled to be included in the very special occasion. I will be returning frequently to Jobarpar and so will see the ongoing work being carried out and look forward to see and visit the new building when completed.



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I was delighted to have Shefali my ayah, her two sisters, two sister-in-laws and six nieces and nephews for a Christmas party at my home. The youngest sister lives with her husband and two children in her in-laws village so we didn't get to celebrate Nasrim's first birthday so although I made the cake just as a treat they all wanted it to be her birthday cake. Here you will see Nasrim with the help of her older brother and cousins cutting and then enjoying her birthday cake. We had such fun as they opened Christmas gifts, ate cake, buns, and crisps, and drank juice and played football and badminton in my living and dining room.

The day before our party Shefali invited me and Sarah to a Christmas celebration organised for all the residents of their camp. Several hundred Muslim women and children gathered in the conference centre owned by the local Catholic Church. There was a separate children's programme where the children heard the Christmas story, made crafts and received Christmas gifts. The adults sang, heard scripture and a message from two people one male and one female. It was a pleasure to have been invited and even though everything was in Bangla it was lovely to be part of this celebration and to meet many familiar faces from Shefali's camp and surrounding area.

Just like last Christmas it was lovely to gather with the Coulter and Hall families for a Christmas dinner the Sunday before Christmas. This time Robin also came and we had fun playing games and singing carols to round off the night.

Christmas 2014 like others years in Bangladesh was very enjoyable. The Central Office party was held on 21st December and many staff and family members attended with lots of singing, dancing, magic by John, snacks, swapping of Christmas gifts, balloons, hats and toys for the children and finally ending with lunch together.



Christmas Day was busy with opening of presents and breakfast with the Hall family and Robin, attending church at DICC sitting in the sun and then a meal with ten adults and five children with each adult providing food items. A very traditional Christmas dinner with chicken replacing turkey and mince pies replacing Christmas pudding and added items of beautiful breads made by Nelleke's Father who along with her Mother visited for Christmas. The day finished off with snacks at the Halls and then I got the chance to Skype my Mum at my brother's house which was so lovely. They were all just about to watch Her Majesty then have their Christmas dinner.

Boxing Day evening David, Sarah, Rebecca, Reuben and Matthew came to my home and after another traditional Christmas meal we had fun playing charades. I really do feel the children were the winners as they guessed so quickly even with my poor acting skills, such fun.

The next morning my car was loaded with bicycles to visit the Botanical gardens. Altogether 14 adults and 11 children gathered and enjoyed a picnic with many of us then visiting Robin's home which is beside the gardens after for coffee and Christmas snacks. It was another great day. I visited the south with the Halls for New Year however I will keep the photos and stories about that until the end of January I think my very late December update is full enough.

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Thanks for

- A blessed and healthy month celebrating with wonderful friends the wonder of Christ's birth
- Many beautiful gifts, cards and letters sent and given to me at Christmas
- Being able to see and speak to Mum, Paul, Karen, Scott, Craig and Sian via Skype at Christmas

Prayers for

- The start of a new financial year in CBSDP and a lot of reports to be written and plans to sort
- The political situation as hortal last week and major disturbances have started this week
- Remon a young Christian man who has had a leg amputated and now recovering at home

Thank you all for your kindness and encouragement to me, until next month

Pat