

Stinky feet

Jonathan Krause

The charity sector in Australia is worth around \$155 billion. It employs one in every ten employed Australians. As the impact of Covid-19 hits deep into Australian society, *Social Ventures Australia* estimates a 20% drop in revenue for charities, with potentially one in six closing within six months. Yet ALWS, the overseas aid agency of LCA/NZ, is seeing a continued commitment from supporters, and flourishing kindness despite the challenges.

What's going on?

Meanwhile, back in Israel 2,000 years ago, Jesus was busy breaking all the Covid-19 guidelines we are required to follow to protect our health.

Social-distancing? Not when a bleeding woman touches your cloak in sure hope of healing.

Clean hands? Not when a man blind from birth has Jesus spit in the dirt and rub mud on his eyes.

No crowds? Not when people living with leprosy, demons, death, and depression flock to Jesus desperately seeking whatever miracle it takes so they can have some kind of life.

Jesus' ministry was hands on.

Literally.

In John 13 we see Jesus get down on his hands and knees, pick up the sweaty, stinky, donkey-poo-plastered feet of his disciples, and tenderly wash them.

Then say to the disciples, and to us:

And if your Lord and teacher has washed your feet,
you should do the same for each other.
I have set the example,
and you should do for each other
exactly what I have done for you.
(John 13:14,15 CEV)

What's going on?

ALWS strives to enable people, especially our extended Lutheran family, to be the hands of Jesus in places where people hurt most:

Burundi and South Sudan—two of the least developed countries on the planet; overcrowded under-funded refugee camps in Kenya and Jordan and Bangladesh; camps for people displaced by danger and oppression in Somalia and Myanmar; communities where

a disability or gender or leftover hangover of caste leaves people powerless, rejected and abandoned.

Here we see our Lutheran family getting their hands dirty, ‘washing the feet’ of others. And loving it. (Maxwell Smart—circa 1966)

What’s going on?

In a world of Covid confusion, it seems the spirit of service can flame brighter.

Perhaps our own sense of isolation, loss of comfort, and fear of the unknown make us more attuned to the needs of others. We’ve certainly seen any number of ‘feel good’ messages on our screens. Celebrities have delighted in reminding us ‘we’re all in this together’. Companies coasting on Covid’s high media profile have reminded us how caring they want us to think they are.

Yet why then are so many charities struggling? And why is our church’s agency ALWS holding its own, even as some of our churches face what feels like an existential crisis?

Here at ALWS we are constantly humbled by people’s kindness and generosity. Through Covid-19 what we have also seen is innovation, flexibility, and a commitment to keep caring even when a frightened mind might suggest it’s smarter to simply care about oneself.

Walk My Way became Walk *Your* Way.

A retired pastor climbed aboard a treadmill until he was too tired to stand. A young mum fitted out her 15-month-old in a Walk My Way T-shirt and counted her steps for 26 kilometres over just as many days. Students from Lutheran schools sold African bracelets and walked the school oval lap after lap. Wheelchairs. Dogs. Prams. One big burst, or an effort in stages.

People found a way to Walk My Way.

As they did, others partnered through ALWS with Czech Republic Humanitarian Aid to care for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; with the Australian Government to provide Covid care in Nepal, Indonesia, Cambodia and Somalia; and with German agency Brot für die Welt to welcome home refugees returning to South Sudan.

Our people want to help—and they quite like bang for buck as they do so!

What’s going on?

Looking at our extended Lutheran family through the little peephole of ALWS, we see God has blessed our people to be:

- kind and generous;
- hands-on in their helping;
- keen to make tangible things happen;
- motivated by real life stories; \
- concerned about those in danger of being forgotten;
- welcoming of all;

- creative and innovative;
- unhindered by age or youth;
- passionate and energetic;
- committed in their caring;
- inspired by seeing results;
- humble and hard-working.

What a rich array of gifts God has blessed us with to be His church in whatever this 'new normal' turns out to be. Perhaps we have seen these gifts in our local congregation too?

What can go on?

As church alive, we want to 'do stuff'.

Get our hands dirty.

Be where we are needed.

We like action. Impact. Value for money.

We are inspired by stories, perhaps not so much by sermons.

Which leads us all the way back to the stinky feet of the disciples...Jesus' command to wash the feet of others...and, as we scrub off the dirt and donkey poo, Jesus' neighbour story of the good Samaritan.

Yes, we understand we are called to do as the good Samaritan did.

Yet consider that story *without* the donkey.

Without the donkey, the Samaritan, good or not, would not have arrived in time to find the beaten traveller. Would he have been able to carry the olive oil and wine and bandages he used to treat the man's wounds? Certainly the wounded man could not have been carried back to safety. Likely his life would be lost.

While the world lauds its 'good Samaritans', (Australian of the Year, Queen's Birthday Honours), could we be called to simply be the donkey?

Doing the dirty work of carrying the load.

Often weary. Sometimes ridiculed.

Humble, not the hero.

Is our blessing to be called to be on our knees amid the world's stinky feet?

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