



Winter story was “born” in the snow....

By Greg Jackson, CWS media coordinator.

Snow provided a fittingly wintry backdrop for the creation of the first winter story from Christian World Service.

That week Christchurch's quake battered streets and buildings were shrouded in June snow.

In this reflective setting it becomes easier to look both back and forward.

Traditionally mid-winter has been the time for telling of tales while the earth lay fallow and awaiting renewal. It seems it still is.

When we asked you earlier in autumn's @world what you wanted in the way of information, by far the most popular picks in a huge response were the combination of the Christmas Appeal and a winter story.

It's not often that a new idea wins out over tradition and so we will try and rise to your challenge and trust.

Trust. It can be an overworked word that in the end is best backed up by evidence.

When we open the mail at CWS we see that evidence of trust, of a shared journey that we find humbling.

Sometimes donations are large, sometimes so small you can almost sense the cakes not bought, the concert unheard that made this gift possible.

As CWS has struggled with Government funding cuts and reverted to a donor supported base we have talked a lot amongst ourselves about this spirit of supporter generosity.

For CWS, here and with our partners, it is these moments of connection; the sense of sharing in something bigger

than ourselves that makes the animating grace of God most visible in our work.

Within winter, whether of nature, or the winter of our own time on earth also comes times of questioning and evaluating our lives. What we do, what we have done, what perhaps we feel is undone.

This winter story asks: "What value are we and are we still relevant?"

First to relevance. When the world's government's representatives met in Busan last year to shape the modern face of aid and development they adopted the idea that it should come from the people.

Community first development is an idea CWS helped pioneer, perfect and propagate. Now it is a central player on the world's aid and development stage.



The 70 year old Indian Dalit woman who told a meeting “ I now know what its like to be a human being” is centre of this photo with a red marking just above her eyes. We don't know her name but cannot forget her simple ,profound testimony.





"Mama George" Bouvais of Haiti. Thanks to: "help from you people from far away we are still alive." Photo Magnus Aronson ACT Alliance.

It's not the first time great ideas have been part shaped in New Zealand/Aotearoa, it won't be the last.

Now, to the first question, that of value, and the lives that we touch and touch us in return.

I'll tell my own story first based on a startling secondment within months of first starting with CWS.

In this journey I went to Haiti offering diplomatic and political advice to ACT Alliance Secretary General, John Nduna. The trip was paid for by ACT Alliance.

We went to Haiti after their earthquake on a fact finding trip to see how we could best help as a global group. ACT Alliance is a huge global giant of which we are the southernmost members.

Haiti was harrowing, inspiring and a huge lesson into the innate wisdom of "the least of the brethren."

Near Leogane which had the misfortune to be the earthquake epicentre we met the unique and charming, Mama George Bouvais, aged 90.

When we met Mama George she was sitting as befits the matriarch of many generations under her rule in the prime shade near her ruined house.

Her lieutenant in the matriarchy, Miss Edner had a heart attack during the quake and was still away at the hospital. Both women are widows and nobody in the extended family of 16 had work at the time.

We asked via the translator if she had got any help from her Government.

"I am an old woman now who has never met or got anything from my government," she said.

Then she answered my own questions about relevance for all time.

"All of my family were in need of help and it is only thanks to the help from you people from far away that we are still alive," she said.

Mama George also gave us a lesson in active faith when we were told that she was at least 90 and I replied in very bad French that she was far too pretty to be 90.

"I'm so pretty because God loves me for my missionary work" she said with what sounded awfully like a giggle.

For CWS national director, Pauline McKay the most

moving evidence of what we do came on her first trip in the director's role when she visited the Developer's scheme in the Philippines on an evaluation trip.

"There I witnessed the enormous power of an individual when they are doing what reflects the real needs of their community when I met Teresa (Tet) Naraval who with her late husband, Bert, had been the catalyst for the Developer's scheme.

Through this one powerful connection had come a development scheme that had moved thousands from poverty into self-empowerment and real economic and individual control of their lives.

In fact Developer's has been so hugely successful that they are now mentoring other similar schemes while their need for support from CWS has nearly reached the end.

For International Programmes Co-ordinator, Trish Murray the impact of what CWS does came during a meeting in India where people talked about what empowerment had done for them.

"I had noticed an older woman sitting very upright and proud through the meeting, not so much for her stunning smile at times as for her presence," said Trish.

Toward the end of the meeting of stories the older woman finally put up her hand and indicated that she wanted to speak.

"She said I now know what it's like to be a human being," said Trish.

"I never thought in all my 70 years that I would be able to make decisions for myself," she said.

As a member of the Dalit caste she had lived her life until then always feeling that she was under the control of the caste system and others.

Thanks to the CWS aided teaching she now felt as if she was of value, was part of something larger than herself and now felt she would have many fulfilling years to live.

We hope that answers the question of the value we collectively still provide.

We have 20 partner programmes – some nearly complete, some new like Maridi in South Sudan where we support young people in charge of change in their very new country. A new generation building new life free of conflict and stressing education.

We believe CWS and you are still both providing both value and relevance, but also that our work together is still far from done.

It's important in communications like the winter story to reflect on our mutual achievements and renew our commitment to helping build lives of dignity and hope for thousands of men, women and children.

Help us to help them.....



The power of the community driven individual to create positive change is summed up by Developer's co-founder Teresa (Tet) Naraval of the Philippines.



"I now know what its like to be a human being."