

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
PWS&D Sunday, February 2, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“WHAT IS ABUNDANT LIFE?”

PWS AND D:

I have been involved since I began my work in ministry when it was called Inter-Church Aid.

I have never served on the national committee, but I have known many people who have, and we have hosted visitors from all over the world, in our home and in the congregations I have served.

Those congregations have responded to appeals of all sorts.

Service and Development

Emergency relief – drought, flood, famine, earthquake, working with Partners like Action by Churches Together, Kairos.

Development – Canadian Foodgrains Bank, micro-loans, cooperatives Farm and crop support.

Refugees

Also, every week it seems like there is a new story of refugee families who have been welcomed to Canada, and lovingly cared for by local congregations.

In 2019, 77 people were sponsored, supported, and welcomed to Canada by Presbyterian congregations.

Reflecting the love of God and responding to our call to love our neighbour, our work through PWS&D allows us to join in with God’s work in the world.

God loves those on the margins and provides for those in need.

When the Hebrew people who were wandering in the wilderness were thirsty, God provided water from a rock.

Later, when they were hungry, God provided food for all.

By doing our own part through PWS&D, we get to share God’s love with others, inviting them into this abundant life God desires for all.

However, inevitably, when we share these stories about PWS&D, there is an underlying question that lingers in the back of our minds: **why?**

Why are development programs necessary?

Even in our world of abundance, we know that there are many areas of the world where young girls, youth and women do not have access to the education or vocational training that will allow them to provide for their families.

Why do we need to provide food assistance?

Even in our world of abundance, when disasters hit, local governments and organizations are unable to respond to the needs of those effected.

Why are there refugees?

Even in our world of abundance, there are countries where people are forced to flee for their lives due to war, political pressures, or their ethnicity.

Why?

Even in our world of abundance, which is full of unfathomable wealth, **why** are people still going hungry, struggling to receive basic education and going without primary healthcare?

In our world of abundance, abundant life can seem so far away....

And yet, through our ongoing work of following God's call to be the salt of the earth and light to the world, God provides glimpses of the kingdom, where there is abundance for all.

In Northern Malawi, in a small village, Kaluhoro, there is a self-help group of women between the ages of 30 to 50 who have started a rural bakery.

Since 2018, with PWS&D support, this group of about 30 women had been trained in food preparation, received some grant money to construct an oil-drum oven in the yard of one of the leaders, and their bakery was born.

The women rotate responsibility for baking the bread, donuts and scones each day and sell their products at nearby villages.

Being a 45-minute drive from the nearest town where bread can be purchased, the women sell out of their delicious baked goods nearly every day.

This modest bakery operation is transforming their community and the surrounding communities.

Not only are villagers receiving access to affordable bread, but the self-help group is earning money.

Some of the profits go to the individuals to support the basic needs of their families, and some is invested in their business and community.

The women have their sights set on building a new well closer to their oven and buying a bicycle to sell their bread to further villages.

While life is still quite hard by North American standards, the small act of providing some training and capacity building has transformed the women and their community.

Abundant life is not about having enough money to live in abundance.

In God's economy, money is no good.

Abundant life, as God promises, is where whole lives are **transformed**, and people are able to delight in God's freely offered love.

When we turn to the biblical stories of Jesus, we find that when he healed people, such as the hemorrhaging woman, it wasn't only a physical healing.

Jesus, by restoring the woman to full membership and participation in the community, he healed her social network.

When Jesus was teaching a large crowd, he did not stop with nourishing their souls with his wisdom only but went on to feed the 5,000 with bread and fish.

Jesus cared for the widows, orphans and prisoners, but also spoke out against the political structures that kept people oppressed.

Through God's love, our lives are transformed so that we may live—tasting and seeing the life that God provides for us.

And we are called to share this abundant life with others.

We join in with God's Spirit, which is at work in the world, helping to share this abundant life.

Our work through PWS&D is just one way that we are able to join in, helping to transform lives.

Through your support of PWS&D, we continue Jesus' work of caring for the most vulnerable.

In Malawi and Afghanistan, we are able to provide health care and healing for pregnant women and young infants.

In Ghana, we support the social restoration and integration of women accused of witchcraft and forced from their homes.

We speak out against oppressive structures by empowering indigenous women in Guatemala to advocate for their personal and collective rights in Guatemala.

Through all of these programs and initiatives, peoples' lives are being transformed and they are invited into God's promise of abundant life.

The amazing thing about by participating in God's work of welcoming other's into abundant life, we are also welcomed into abundant life.

God's transforming love is infectious and when we join in, even from our pews, our lives are also changed.

We are invited to delight ourselves in rich food, which we cannot buy with money.

After returning from a monitoring trip to Malawi, one of the members of PWS&D's national committee, shared the following story:

"One day we took a trip to small village.

While there we had the opportunity to meet with a village safe motherhood committee.

Working with an interpreter we talked to the women, asking what parts of the program were helping keep pregnant women healthy and what could be improved.

During the conversation one woman said that she was just so thankful for Canadians who supported them.

Now I'm not convinced that she could have picked out Canada on a map, but that didn't actually matter to her.

What mattered was that there were people who cared about her, about her family and about her country.

And it wasn't just about the money that was donated.

She knew that peopled cared, not because they opened their wallets, but because people were praying for her, that there were congregations who held them up with love to our God.

It was that knowledge that sustained her and gave her hope."

God's invitation to **abundant life** is here for each and every one of us.

As we step in and join with God in this work of transforming lives, we are also transformed by God's love.

May we join in with our sisters and brothers around the world giving thanks and celebrating this promise of **abundant life**.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST OUR LORD, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT...AMEN