

Bangladesh and The Leprosy Mission

I'm recently back from just over a week in Bangladesh on behalf of The Leprosy Mission. Bangladesh is not an easy place to visit, to live in, or in which to suffer serious illness. It is a place of desperate and extreme poverty.

The people, at least those I met – ranging from the poorest city slum-dwellers and isolated rural people, to senior government officials – were unfailingly polite and courteous, warm and welcoming. The religious tolerance was remarkable for anywhere, not least that region of the world: Bangladesh is 90+% Muslim, but Hindus and Christians were fully accepted and respected.

The climate is quite extreme, with a long hot rainy season bringing flooding, increasing year on year, and a very dry cooler winter, but not quite cold enough to kill off the ubiquitous mosquitos. (I was fortunate to share my very basic guest house room – and even my bed – with a small family of geckos: they don't hurt people, but they do eat mozzies.) The river delta in the south, where millions live, is at serious risk of being submerged if sea levels rise.

Leprosy has been fully curable, if caught in the early stages, since the early 1980s. A simple drug treatment, provided free to patients by the manufacturers Novartis, and distributed by the World Health Organisation, does the trick. The problems lie in catching it early (really difficult when there is not much fear of it and ignorance of the cure), in treating the horrible complications of the more advanced cases, and in



Bishop Donald at a 'pop-up' skin clinic in Dhaka

overcoming the stigma attached to those affected by leprosy. There are still 4,000 new cases diagnosed in Bangladesh every year, and one every two seconds across the poorest areas of the world.

That is where The Leprosy Mission comes in. It was so impressive to see their doctors, researchers, nurses (all Bangladeshi but funded mainly from this country) and a growing number of volunteer workers doing such a wonderful and sacrificial job. I had the privilege of preaching three times to very different groups, as well as of meeting all sorts of people. I know that our interest and support are succeeding in getting the Bangladeshi government, and the churches there, more involved in the great and achievable aim of eradicating leprosy in their country.

Please pray for Bangladesh, and for The Leprosy Mission.

With best wishes

+ Donald

+Donald
Bishop of Peterborough

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Produced by the Diocesan Office, The Palace, Peterborough, PE1 1YB
Tel: 01733 887000 Email: communications@peterborough-diocese.org.uk
www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk