

Mission Group Spotlights Major Health Crisis That Opens Door to Demonstrate Christ's Love

Missionary organization GFA (Gospel for Asia,) is calling attention to a usually ignored, delicate subject at the heart of much of its caring work—a lack of toilets.

In the first of a new series of major articles tackling big social issues, GFA has drawn back the curtain on the widespread health problems caused by lack of adequate sanitation—and the opportunity that provides for sharing about God's love.

Around 2.3 billion people globally do not have access to good sanitation facilities, reports Karen Mains, while almost 900 million are forced into open defecation—a practice which is, she notes, “hardly a dinner-table topic or a mission committee agenda item.”

But such practices cannot be ignored, because they create all sorts of health problems—with about 1.5 million people around the world each year dying from polluted-water diseases. Nor are the dangers limited directly to sickness—women are often at risk of assault when they look for somewhere sheltered to relieve themselves.

Governments and organizations have responded to the need, with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation offering \$40 million in prize money for innovative approaches to new toilet technologies.

Among the innovations are a solar-powered toilet that converts waste into charcoal, which can then be used as fertilizer;

portable rickshaw toilets; and a bio-digester toilet designed to convert human waste into gases and compost.

In addition, Mains says, “hundreds of concerned social entrepreneurs, engineers with altruistic motivations, East Asian water initiatives and countless faith-based organizations are tackling the seemingly intractable worldwide dilemma of toilets, sanitation systems and sullied water.”

Inadequate sanitation is a big concern in India in particular, where the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, campaigned for office with the slogan “Toilets Before Temples.”

For the past several years, GFA has also had a heightened focus on the issue throughout Asia. In 2016, the organization constructed more than 10,000 latrines with dual-tank sanitation systems.

In addition, GFA teams constructed almost 7,000 “Jesus Wells” providing communities with fresh drinking water, distributed almost 15,000 water filters to purify drinking water and provided thousands with free healthcare and education about the importance of personal hygiene.

Such efforts have made a big impact. “This saved the lives of people from illness,” said one villager. The results have been spiritual as well as physical, with people experiencing God’s love through the GFA representatives.

“Christianity has everything to do with sanitation,” Mains writes. “We serve a God who is expecting us to help restore the world he created to its original design. That is a world, among many other things, without rampaging diseases.”

The special report, “Saving Lives at Risk From Open Defecation: using outdoor toilets to improve sanitation,” has been published at GFA’s website (*en-defecation-outdoor-toilets--improve-sanitation*). Other topics to be addressed in the series include social justice, illiteracy, community

development and violence against women.

Commenting on Mains' article, GFA founder Dr. K.P. Yohannan, said: "God is desperately concerned about the poor and suffering, and even more so the helpless and vulnerable... Now God has given us the opportunity to show the world what he looks like through our mercy and compassion, which can be shown through something as simple as noticing and seeing these people who are without a safe, working toilet" ([4/sharing-gods-heart-poor-helpless/](#)).

He added: "Helping those who are vulnerable and in need is not a burden or an obligation, but an opportunity to be like Christ by entering into their pain and then choosing to do something about it."

From free health care to fresh water and sanitation projects—providing an outdoor toilet for a family costs just \$160—much of GFA's community-based work is centered in improving living conditions and inspiring people to live fuller lives as a result.