

Centenary



Lola Henderson and Puoj, 1957

Congratulations to the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship on reaching their centenary. One hundred years (and counting) of dedicated service!

Experienced cross-cultural workers with big hearts for Bangladesh, Ros Gooden and Chris Barnden, offer an overview of Australian Baptist's long partnership with the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) and why this is such an important milestone to celebrate.

In 1882, the first Australian Baptists, Ellen Arnold and Marie Gilbert, were sent out to serve among the predominantly Hindu Bengali communities of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). However, this is not the start of the story of Australian Baptist's heart for Bangladesh. The story actually began eighteen years earlier in 1864, when Rev Silas Mead of Flinders Street Baptist Church inspired the congregation with stories from William Carey and Bengali

believers, which prompted the forming of a society to support local preachers. Therefore, we are actually sharing a 155 year partnership!

1880 brought a Bengali preacher to Adelaide to speak of the great need for Bengalis to hear the Good News of Jesus and the need for Australians to go and share this Good News. Ellen Arnold and Marie Gilbert

attended and his message was instrumental in their discernment and response of God's call on their life.

Many, many others followed faithfully in the footsteps of those early pioneers and made their own contribution to the life of the Bengali Baptist churches and the growing maturity of the believers. We give thanks for all of them.



Ellen Arnold and Ethel Addison, Padna, late 1800s

Celebrations



Bertha Tuck, teaching in a village home, 1937

The decades that followed saw Australian Baptist cross-cultural workers establish a hospital, several dispensaries, pastoral training programs and community development work which are now entirely run by Bangladeshi nationals.

A conference in 1919 for all Baptist Churches in East Bengal was held to discuss the possibility of establishing a Union, and the delegates voted in favour of this. And here, one hundred years later, with over 500 faith communities, we look back with wonder and praise.

Global Interaction has learnt much from the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship that has shaped our theology of mission. Decades ago in 1929, Ellen Arnold was convinced that the Bengali church needed to hold increased responsibility for the work without the

involvement of foreign cross-cultural workers. Her cry to the Australian Baptist mission was, “You have trusted me, now trust the Bengalis.”

This centenary marks a significant milestone for Global Interaction and Australian Baptists to celebrate. This was the first location where our cross-cultural workers were sent and it has formed a strong foundation for our ongoing ministry. **Our vision, to see growing, vibrant faith communities among the least-reached has come to fruition among this community however there are many other communities yet to be transformed by understanding the Gospel in their own cultural context and language. We praise God for His activity in this community... and pray for Him to do it again and again.**



Sarker (L) and Ian Hawley (R), Samernda

Over the decades, the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship has become increasingly self-sustaining and is completely locally led. Through the course of history more than 200 Australian Baptists have served in this location, and today Global Interaction's involvement continues through supporting and encouraging local leaders.

Here are reflections from some of those faithful workers.



Grace Brown crossing a bamboo bridge with others

“It is a thrill to hear that the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship will celebrate their centenary of the foundation of the Bengal Baptist Union in Mymensingh in 2019. We look to our time in Bangladesh with a number of great memories. We thank God that the Baptist Fellowship exists in a large populated country, where Christians are small in number compared to Muslims and Hindus. Yet, the faith communities and Fellowship continues by God's grace to grow. May God continue to bless the Baptist Fellowship as it is a beacon of light in Bangladesh.”

— Ian and Barbara Hawley, cross-cultural workers from 1968–1978



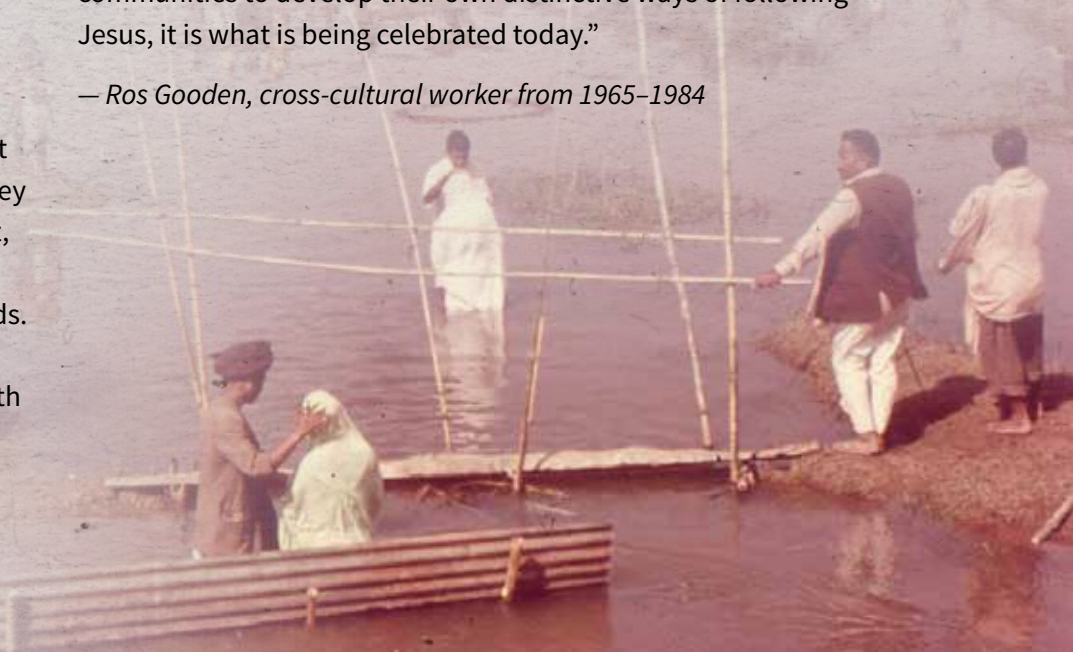
Australian Baptist cross-cultural workers, 1958

“In 1956 God gave me a specific call to a place called Mymensingh. I am deeply grateful for the local believers who warmly welcomed me, voluntarily assisted me with language learning and my first tentative steps in ministry. They were gracious in their support, generous in their hospitality and became my lifelong friends. I thank God for them. It has been a privilege to journey with them through many varying circumstances.”

— Grace Dodge, cross-cultural worker from 1959–1990

“If ever we had a story of what our vision is, of empowering communities to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus, it is what is being celebrated today.”

— Ros Gooden, cross-cultural worker from 1965–1984





John Peberdy, Global Interaction Board Chair, represented Australian Baptists at the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship centenary celebrations. Here, he reflects on his time at the celebrations.

Our tagline at Global Interaction is *empowering communities to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus*. When I talk with Morris who has been our Team Leader for many years, he always emphasises we are there to empower the local people. What I saw in Bangladesh was the result of empowerment way back in 1919 when BBCF was formed and the cross-cultural workers took a step back to allow the people to develop their own local church.

There are so many great leaders amongst the Baptist community in Bangladesh and they have provided strong leadership throughout the years. Rev Leor Sarkar is an inspirational leader for BBCF today. The peace of God is evident in this man who remained calm throughout the celebration and openly praised the teams of people that brought the occasion to life. He was at all times humble and took great care to ensure his guests were well looked after.

It was so encouraging to see so many young people actively involved in the celebration. They were encouraged to not think of themselves as the future of the church – they are an important part of the church today.

And lastly, BBCF has embraced the gifts women bring to the Church in a powerful way. Women are an important part of the leadership of BBCF and play an important role in the many programs offered. It was a privilege to represent Australian Baptists at the celebrations of this wonderful milestone.



Grace Dodge with local teachers



Prottasha sawmill project, Dhuldia, 2014