

In times of crisis, love unites us all

Christ calls us to reach out to our neighbours with love. By being good neighbours, we can change the world.

When crisis arrived on our doorsteps this year, neighbourly love helped us through. We've all witnessed communities coming together to face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Across the world, this same neighbourly love is helping some of the most vulnerable communities overcome crisis.

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Mark 12:31

In Nicaragua, the farming community of Santa Rosa has grown coffee for generations. But now that could come to an end. The crop is struggling to grow as the climate crisis rages on. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America and one of the countries most affected by climate change. Around 80% of the population depend on agriculture for survival. Many grow coffee as their main source of income. Now, their future looks more and more uncertain.

But there is hope. Farming communities are coming together to share tools and knowledge. United, they can make the urgent changes needed to help their family farms last for generations.

Angela Zelaya is a farmer in Santa Rosa. She is married and has two daughters, Johaira and Ariana. Angela's coffee farm used to provide a good living for her family. But now she's facing a crisis. The changing climate in Nicaragua means her coffee harvests are shrinking every year. Coffee farmers used to lose only 5% of their crop. Now it is 30%.

Angela explains: 'With climate change, the coffee suffers from many diseases and pests. The sun has scorched the coffee beans, we cannot sell them and we're losing more every year because of climate change. When I was a kid, the weather was totally different. It's been changing a lot and we don't know when it's the rainy season or the dry season.'

At the same time, coffee prices have fallen globally. Angela is worried. 'It will be a total disaster and failure for us because as farmers, growing crops is how we survive. Where will we get our incomes?'

Facing this crisis has brought the community together to work as a local cooperative to share resources and knowledge and urgently protect their livelihoods.

'I feel proud to be part of a cooperative and we have the opportunity to share ideas and learn from each other,' Angela said.

The cooperative is supported by Christian Aid's local partner, Soppexcca. They help coffee farming communities with different initiatives and projects, from school vegetable gardens to gender workshops. One of the main ways they are helping farmers protect their livelihoods is by shifting from coffee production to climate-resistant cocoa, helping people like Angela to secure a better future.

Angela said: 'With the cocoa project, we received loans and cocoa plants. I received 700 cocoa plants. The technicians came and visited us and told us what to do. We also received tree saplings to help shade our crops.'



Cocoa is giving Angela, Ariana and Johaira hope for the future.

Johaira, Angela's teenage daughter, added: 'All of us in the family were involved with the project. We all know it's very important for the family income. I am proud of my mum growing cocoa. She is an inspiration.'

Angela's cocoa plants will be ready to harvest next year. She said: 'In my cooperative, there are 10 farmers growing cocoa, but I'm proud that I'm the only woman.'

'The income from the cocoa crop is very important. It means we can buy clothes, medicines and food. I think cocoa will be the only option in the future because of how climate change is affecting the coffee.'

While trained technicians show farmers how to improve their farms, youth promoters from the local community help to make it a success. They visit the farmers to record their progress and share knowhow. It's helped build trust between the generations.

Johaira is one of the youth promoters in Santa Rosa. She said: 'Sometimes I feel nervous about telling farmers what they need to do, but as a promoter I feel good and am always learning more.'

'The environment is very important to me because it's my lifeline. I've learnt about the environment in the workshops provided by Christian Aid and Soppexcca and from my mum.'

All these different initiatives are bringing Angela's community together, ensuring women and young people play an active role too.

When ordinary neighbourhoods come together, they can create lasting change. Just like during coronavirus and just like in Santa Rosa. Around the world, many of our global neighbours living in poverty continue to face crisis in its various forms. Love knows no distance.

This autumn, Christian Aid is asking supporters to reach out to our global neighbours and help more communities overcome crisis. The charity wants people to:

- **Give** to help communities around the world come together to overcome the crisis of poverty.
- **Act** by calling for the cancellation of debt repayments for low-income countries during the coronavirus crisis.
- **Pray** for our global neighbours facing crisis in all its forms.

Find out more about how your church can get involved at caid.org.uk/neighbours

'Encourage one another and build up each other.' 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Plenty of additional photos are available, please contact hello@christian-aid.org

