

## Love in Action: Overseas Aid

### Interview with Jonathan Krause

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**Tania:** Hi, this is *Messages of hope*, and I'm Tania Nelson. Today, I have Jonathan with me who is the Community Action Manager for Australian Lutheran World Service. Welcome, Jonathan.

**Jonathan:** Oh, it's lovely to be here, Tania, and good to talk with you.

**Tania:** So, tell me a little bit about your work in overseas aid.

**Jonathan:** I never planned to work in the aid agency kind of world. I did a degree in fiction writing, which is the stupidest degree in the world to do because you can't get a job with it. And then my first job was writing poems for greeting cards, which is, again, a ridiculous kind of thing to do. I saw a job for a writer at World Vision. I got the job, and three months later I was in a slum in Bangladesh where people thought I was Michael Jackson for some reason. Not quite sure what happened there, but I've been in those places ever since and my role is to bring the stories of people in the developing world into Australia. I used to think I had to tell their stories for them, but it's not about that. It's just being a channel to help amplify their voice so lots of people can hear about it.

So, I basically talk to the people in the poor countries and let them tell their stories to people here in Australia and New Zealand so that action can happen and they can help each other.

We say, "you'd like to help a farmer in Burundi?" Okay, we can set you up so you can train a group of 30 farmers, and they can learn how to do composting and mulching and making fertilizer out of goat poo and all of those kind of things. And they can triple or quadruple their harvest, because you in Australia or New Zealand said "yep I'm going to help and do something to care about them."

It's the dirty work behind the scenes that's really important. If you don't have proper sanitation, then sickness spreads really quickly, especially in a refugee camp. So, that's one of the first things you do. A lot of the work that we support might be digging holes in the ground so people have got a long drop loo. You spray for mosquitoes so they don't spread malaria, which kills little children really easily. You teach mothers and fathers about if your child's got diarrhea, you don't stop giving them water, which people do because they think, oh, there's too much fluid. No, you've got to rehydrate them.

So, really simple things that you can teach people, and that's what makes a lifesaving difference. So, forget about the big grand schemes and huge infrastructure and all that. If you do the basic stuff, then you make a difference in someone's life.

**Tania:** So Jonathan, how does your aid organisation make decisions about where and how you're going to best use your resources to give support?

**Jonathan:** It's kind of following the example of Jesus and going to find the people who get left behind and forgotten. Jesus went to people with leprosy, went to girls and women and crooks and the tax collectors, all of that. So, we try and do the same thing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

There's a couple of ways it happens. So, if an emergency happens and we have partners there, and they tell us "We need shelters, we need, tablets to make the water clean, we need blankets," and then we can get to work straight away to raise the money to pay for that.

So, we would often step out in faith and say, "alright, we're going to provide you for \$150,000 to do this work." And we won't have any idea at all where we will get that money from. So, it's a complete step of faith. Then I'll go to people and say, "here's your opportunity to help. I invite you to do so, here's what you can do. A hundred dollars can do this, \$50 can do that, and so on." So that's the start of the process.

And then when you go into those situations, it's about finding the people who are most vulnerable, and that will be people with disability, the elderly, the sick, children, girls and women are often overlooked and left behind.

**Tania:** I hear in the news sometimes that people question charities, giving to a charity, because, you know, they're concerned that a high percentage of what they give might go to making sure that the CEO flies business class or has an enormous executive salary. How do I know that an aid organization isn't really ripping me off with the donation that giving?

**Jonathan:** I think it's important you do your research. So, there's a group called Australian Council for International Development and aid agencies sign up to their code of conduct which requires a certain level of standards you have to meet.

For Australian Lutheran World Service, our overheads are 15 percent for fundraising and administration and accountability. Fundraising is important because if we don't do that, then we don't raise the money to help.

I've been to the field lots of times, I've seen it with my own eyes. So, I know it's fair dinkum and the accountability level is fantastic. So, hopefully, people trust that we try and do a good job like that.

But it's finding that right balance because I reckon you'd want your money to be used properly and effectively. You don't want it to be disappearing. So, you need accountants to make sure that it's used properly. When it gets to the field, you need people to monitor it to make sure it's used properly. So that costs a certain amount of money so bottom line is it's your decision. I think of it like a business: If my business was making 85 percent profit, I'd be thinking, "wow, I'm doing really good!" which is basically what a charity like ALWS is doing.

**Tania:** So, does a Christian aid organization only help Christians?

**Jonathan:** No, definitely not. ALWS is a Lutheran part of the Christian family but right now, we're working in Somalia where it's a completely Muslim community. We're working in Myanmar, where there's both Buddhist and Muslims. In Nepal, it's a Hindu community. You go to where people need help, and you don't judge the stuff on the outside. You see the need and you help.

And I'm always amazed that somehow God works in this situation and, you know, you don't preach with words, but somehow the power of love shines through.

And I reckon that's what it's all about. Being a witness to love. We can all do that.

Equipping is a really important part of it. It's not handouts, it's helping people to do the work. So rather than us doing something for people, we equip them to do things for themselves. So, it can be helped to start up a business; you provide training in setting up a savings and loan group. So, a group of 30 women can come together. They each make a contribution and they can make loans to each other to start up a business. But then you provide the chooks and the fencing wires so they can build a chicken coop and stuff and you train them in how to raise chickens well and then they can have their own business. But if we can get them to that starting point, that's the critical part of it.

In a refugee camp, put a focus on children and education because, you know, education is the one gift nobody can take it away. So, when you invest in a child at school, they've got that for life, and you never know where that will take them.

I was in a refugee camp in Kenya called Kakuma and I got the children to draw pictures of what they wanted to be when they grew up when they'd finished their education. And I think the four key things people wanted to be was pastor, teacher, doctor, and helicopter pilot. And you kind of think, helicopter pilot? What's going on there? But then I realized that when they were in their home country, it was the helicopters that brought in the aid to them. So, when you look at the things kids want to be, they all want to be things that help people.

And that's the really amazing thing that I see in our investment in education, that it's not for people to get rich and build a better career, but for these kids, the education is for them to help their communities. And they have that motivation, they know someone who doesn't know them helped them, and they want to pass that on.

We can turn off our TV and not look at what's going on in the world and feel safe and secure. But every time we do that, we're leaving people to suffer. So, I think we have to have the courage and the humility to look at the world and say, "well, I'm blessed, how can I bless someone who's in a different situation to me?"

I think you have to shrink a global issue down to individuals. All the evidence shows that if I ask you to help a thousand people, there'll be less response than if I ask you to help one person because we can understand one person, we can see one person's need, and we can make a difference like that.

And I think if we all do that, then that's when we can make a larger impact. And whether that's global or not, I don't know. But it makes a difference in the life of the person you help, and for them, it's a life changing, global event.

**Tania:** When I watch the news and I see conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar, and then those places that the media forgets pretty quickly, too quickly. Is there hope in these desperate places?

**Jonathan:** Whenever I talk to someone in one of those situations and sit down with them, when they know someone cares about them and they're not on their own, suddenly that sparks something and you see the hope there. There's courage and resilience and the willingness to go as far as it takes to make a difference because people are doing it for their children.

Women who've never had a say in the community before, they suddenly gain confidence. That's when things start to change. So, suddenly you've harnessed double the power that you've had before because you've done this training and equipping and you see major transformation in communities.

Like in Burundi, when you train a farmer with the goat poo manure and mulching and composting, all the stuff you and I take for granted, their crops literally triple and quadruple, and that creates enough money to pay for medical care. It creates enough money to put your children through school, so they can work their way out of poverty, and then you can start other businesses as well. Then the people in the community, they look at you and think, "oh wow, you're doing all right, I'm going to do what you did." And suddenly the impact spreads like that. And then the next community along sees it. So, you'd never underestimate how far your help goes. It's quite amazing.

**Tania:** And what I'm hearing is that the work that you do and aid organizations do empower all sorts of people – women, girls, leaders, the whole community. And that's what Jesus would want.

**Jonathan:** I think Jesus sets us a really powerful example. It's opposite to what the world sets for us. It's opposite to what social media tells you to do because it's about being a servant. It's about being humble.

Jesus tells the story of the guy walking along the road and he sees someone bashed up. And the religious people walk past and the Samaritan stops and helps. And we all say the Samaritan is a fantastic person, and we really call him the hero. But I think the real hero in that story is the donkey, because if it wasn't for the donkey, the Samaritan wouldn't have got to the spot. And if it wasn't for the donkey, the man who was bashed up wouldn't have been able to be carried to safety.

I think we have to be prepared to do the donkey work. We don't get to be the hero to get the headlines. We just do the work behind the scenes and make things happen. I think that's the kind of thing Jesus calls us to do.

**Tania:** Do you have a Bible verse or something that, gives you inspiration?

**Jonathan:** I'm always inspired by John 10:10 where Jesus says, "I've come that you might have life, life in all its fullness." And that's what I think about the work that we're privileged to do for others. It's not just to save lives, but it's to create a life that's better and that is full, where you can have hopes and dreams and make them come true. And you can be listened to in your community and you can feel special. It's richer and deeper than just saving a life, important as that is.

And you never know how far your help's going to go.

My dad sometimes gets grumpy about the number of charities that ask him for help. And I said, "Dad, if you feel grumpy when you're giving, you're giving to the wrong spot. Just do the bit that makes you feel happy in the heart because that's what it's all about."

Jesus challenges us to love others as much as you love yourselves. And we think, "oh, that's too hard, I've got to give away too much." But when you do it, you feel a joy that you don't get from anything else, and that's why I encourage people to give. And not just a dollar coin here and there and you feel like you've done your bit; give so it stretches you, and you think, "wow, it's worth it!" It's what world's about.

**Tania:** And bringing God to the marginalized.

**Jonathan:** That's right. Maybe not through words all the time, but through love brought to life, love in action.

**Tania:** Hi, I'm Tania Nelson, and you've been listening to *Messages of hope*. You can watch videos, listen to podcasts, and read free booklets on this topic and many other challenges we face in life to discover that there is hope at [messagesofhope.org.au](http://messagesofhope.org.au). And you can also subscribe for free to this weekly program at [messagesofhope.org.au](http://messagesofhope.org.au). or for a free booklet call 1800 353 350. That's 1800 353 350. Thank you for listening to *Messages of hope*.

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