

2nd SUNDAY of LENT 16th March

TOEFI from SAMOA

13-year-old Toefuata'iga (Toy-foo-ah-tah-ing-ah), a student in the Upolu region of Samoa, experienced water scarcity at her school. The absence of a reliable and hygienic water supply has not only affected students' education but also impacted their health. Despite being surrounded by water, many Samoans struggle with consistent access to clean drinking water, and resort to relying on rainwater or neighbours who have access to a water pipeline. Climate change is leading to longer, drier periods. The Samoan Water pipeline frequently shuts down due to natural disasters and maintenance. Additionally, it is often unsafe for consumption after heavy rains.



"School would finish early, when there wasn't any water, we wouldn't have classes," Toefuata'iga shared. Like many other students, her learning was frequently interrupted by school closures. The principal, Ada, explained the frequency of school closures: "about five to six times per term especially if the water stopped for quite some time particularly Terms 3 & 4, the dry months of the year." Compounding this, students would frequently fall ill with waterborne diseases like typhoid and suffer the effects of dehydration.

"Parents would tell us that their kids are sick. It was normally things like headaches caused by heat or dehydration, or stomach aches... or typhoid or whatever," said Ada. The resulting absence rate slowed down the curriculum for the entire school. Principal Ada explained: "Missing the curriculum for the students, if we have this issue, it's a major concern for us teachers... We have to go back. Like if it's two weeks, that's a lot of lessons to miss."

"Sometimes, if there is not enough water at our school, we would politely ask the parents at the back of our school building if they can go and bring us some water," Toefuata'iga explained. However, when parents weren't available, this additional pressure would fall on the teachers themselves. They would often have to drive their cars to nearby homes to fetch water using buckets. To relieve the burden on the nearby families who offered their tap water, the school would compensate them financially by withdrawing school committee funds. However, when these funds were unavailable, teachers would often resort to paying for water out of their own pockets. "Me, and the parents and teachers would gather money from our own pockets to support the water shortage on that particular day," said Principal Ada. On top of this, collecting this water took away from the time teachers needed for teaching activities.



Access to water is about more than convenience. It is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, and to helping students like Toefuata'iga fulfil her dreams: "I would like to become a good teacher. To teach the children so they will have a brighter future."

Toefuata'iga also told a personal story: "If the water we drink is dirty, we get sick." This was particularly hard on her family. "My grandmother needed water, so we went and got her some. We did not know it was dirty..." Three days later her grandmother fell ill.

According to a 2022 study (Asia Foundation, Aust Aid & Aust Water Partnership), only 30% of people across the Pacific region have access to basic drinking water. High concentrations of contaminants, such as toxic pesticides and E.coli in water have been recorded across Samoa. Like many countries in the Pacific, Samoa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including tropical cyclones, flooding, and prolonged droughts, which further exacerbate water scarcity.

Caritas Australia partners with Caritas Samoa through the Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) program. The installation of a 10,000 litre water tank at the school brought a significant change. “Now that we have the water tank, things are so much better,” said Toefuata'iga. “We can stay at school all day, and I get to spend more time learning and playing with my friends. I’m happy that we don’t have to go home early anymore.”

It is clear access to clean water, one of the most basic human needs, has a ripple effect on communities. Children can access their right to education and obtain opportunities that can help break the cycle of poverty.

With your support, Caritas Australia provides practical solutions for communities like Toefi’s, ensuring clean water and education are not just dreams but realities. Together, we are building resilient communities and creating lasting change.

REFLECTION for SECOND SUNDAY of LENT

Genesis 15:5–12. 17–18 | Ps 26:1. 7–9. 13–14 | Philippians 3:17 – 4:1 | Luke 9:28–36

Today’s Gospel brings us a wonderful moment in the education of Jesus’s friends.

Jesus was always trying to teach them about the mystery of life, and we can take heart from the fact that they were often slow learners. Peter, James and John see Jesus transfigured on the top of a mountain. But the vision doesn’t last long. Peter, always practical, wants to build tents so they can stay in the moment. But no, the journey to Calvary lies ahead where they will see Jesus disfigured. Eventually, they will put it together that transfiguration and disfigurement are two sides of the same coin.

This week, Caritas Australia’s Project Compassion shares another story of education. We visit a primary school in Samoa with 400 students and 11 teachers. Until 2023, the school had no reliable access to fresh water. At times, teachers had to fetch water from neighbouring families, and this took considerable time out of the day and limited classes. It also meant that each class had a single bucket of drinking water for everyone to share. Thanks to your generosity, this has now changed.

Education can continue uninterrupted. You might even say, that thanks to those who support Project Compassion, disfigured lives have been transfigured.

Samoa may seem a long way away but let us think for a moment of some of the words Jesus said on the night before he died. He prayed ‘may they all be one.’ We see the high price of division and conflict in so many places. People face each other with such hostility. As we Unite Against Poverty, we are slowly creating the solution. Our actions are teaching the world to see possibilities more than problems. Just as his friends saw Jesus in a brilliant new light, so too must we see the whole human family with its true dignity.

Your generous support this Lenten Season will enable Caritas Australia to provide life-changing support to vulnerable communities in need.

You can support Project Compassion via your donation box, envelopes or by scanning your parish’s QR code here and using the blue DONATE button.

Thank you for standing with us, as we *Unite Against Poverty this Lent*.

