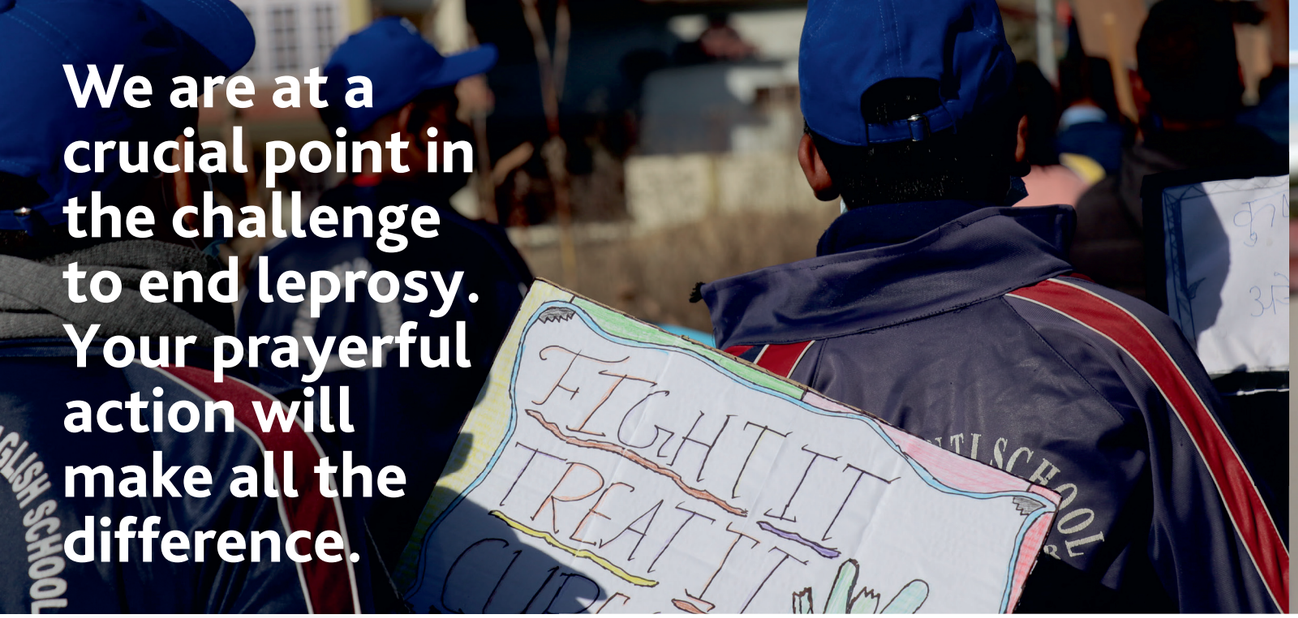


We are at a crucial point in the challenge to end leprosy. Your prayerful action will make all the difference.

Will you hold a World Leprosy Day event in 2024?

When Wellesley Bailey first saw the conditions leprosy sufferers in India were living in during the late 1860s, he knew that "if there was ever a Christlike work in the world it was to go amongst these poor sufferers and bring them the consolation of the gospel." So began the great work of what would become The Leprosy Mission.

For 150 years The Leprosy Mission has been helping people affected by leprosy to meet their physical, inner well-being, educational and vocational needs. Through all that time people like you have been bringing these needs before God. God has answered in powerful ways, using willing people to bring breakthroughs in medication, wound treatment, self-care, discrimination, surgical advances, and so much more.

In 1954 the last Sunday in January was established as **World Leprosy Day (WLD)** by French philanthropist Raoul Follereau who wanted to raise awareness of the disease and its consequences. Many people, then and now, are shocked to learn that leprosy still exists, mistakenly believing that it has been eradicated.

In the 1980s, the discovery of Multi-Drug Therapy meant that no-one should have to suffer the consequences of untreated leprosy. This cure was a turning point, breaking transmission of the bacteria and bringing hope to millions of people. Back then, more than 5 million people were diagnosed with leprosy each year, compared to around 200,000 today.

While this is good news, there is still so much more to do. People still fear discrimination from their communities, and even their families. People still suffer horrific wounds and life-long disabilities, including amputations, because of delayed diagnosis due to fear, or lack of understanding about the disease. People still believe that leprosy is a thing of the past.

You can help change all of this.

By holding a World Leprosy Day event anytime in 2024 you, your church, or group can make a significant contribution to breaking transmission, reducing disabilities, and ensuring people with leprosy can live with dignity and respect.

Give part (or all) of your church service, group meeting, or special event, to become informed about leprosy, discrimination, and disability. We can make your World Leprosy Day event a success through providing a speaker, videos, information, and more.

Will you and your community join us in this 150th year of The Leprosy Mission and truly help make leprosy a thing of the past?

For more information, to register your event, request a speaker or other resources contact the Engagement team by emailing engage@leprosymission.org.au

You can take action and provide a cure for someone with leprosy today. Follow the link or scan the https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/tlc-children

202401

The Leprosy Mission Australia

Your prayers help dreams come true.

Keeping in Touch • Issue 1, 2024

By Glen Coleman
Church Engagement Coordinator.

Do you remember as a child dreaming of what you might become when you grew up? My dream was to play cricket for Australia - how about you?

Rhitik, from Nepal, has even bigger dreams. He wants to become a scientist… or maybe an engineer…or perhaps a doctor…the dream changes as quick as you can ask him!

Sadly, these dreams may just remain that – a dream. Rhitik has missed a lot of school due to being sick. At 13 he should be in Year 7; however, he is still making his way through Year 5, just one year ahead of his 10-year-old sister.

Around 4 years ago, Rhitik developed an ulcer on his right big toe. When the wound didn't heal, he was taken to a hospital. The wound went right down to the bone. To save his foot, doctors cut the top off his big toe.

For a while, this seemed to have fixed the problem. But a year later another ulcer appeared on the same spot. Doctors gave him antibiotics to treat the ulcer, but this did not work. Another year later a dermatologist finally confirmed a diagnosis of leprosy, and Rhitik was started on Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT).

Apart from the ulcer, Rhitik has no other symptoms, and no negative side effects. Still, he does not want to tell anyone at school in case they react badly. Already some students tease him, calling him "Tung katta" (a person with an amputated leg). This makes Rhitik feel sad.

Rhitik visited The Leprosy Mission Hospital in Anandaban for the first time two months ago. His mother brought him there as a severe infection in the bone prevented the ulcer from healing. This required further surgery and Rhitik has now lost most of the big toe. Rhitik is still at Anandaban, and his family are now waiting to hear from the doctors if further surgery is needed. This may mean even more school missed for Rhitik.

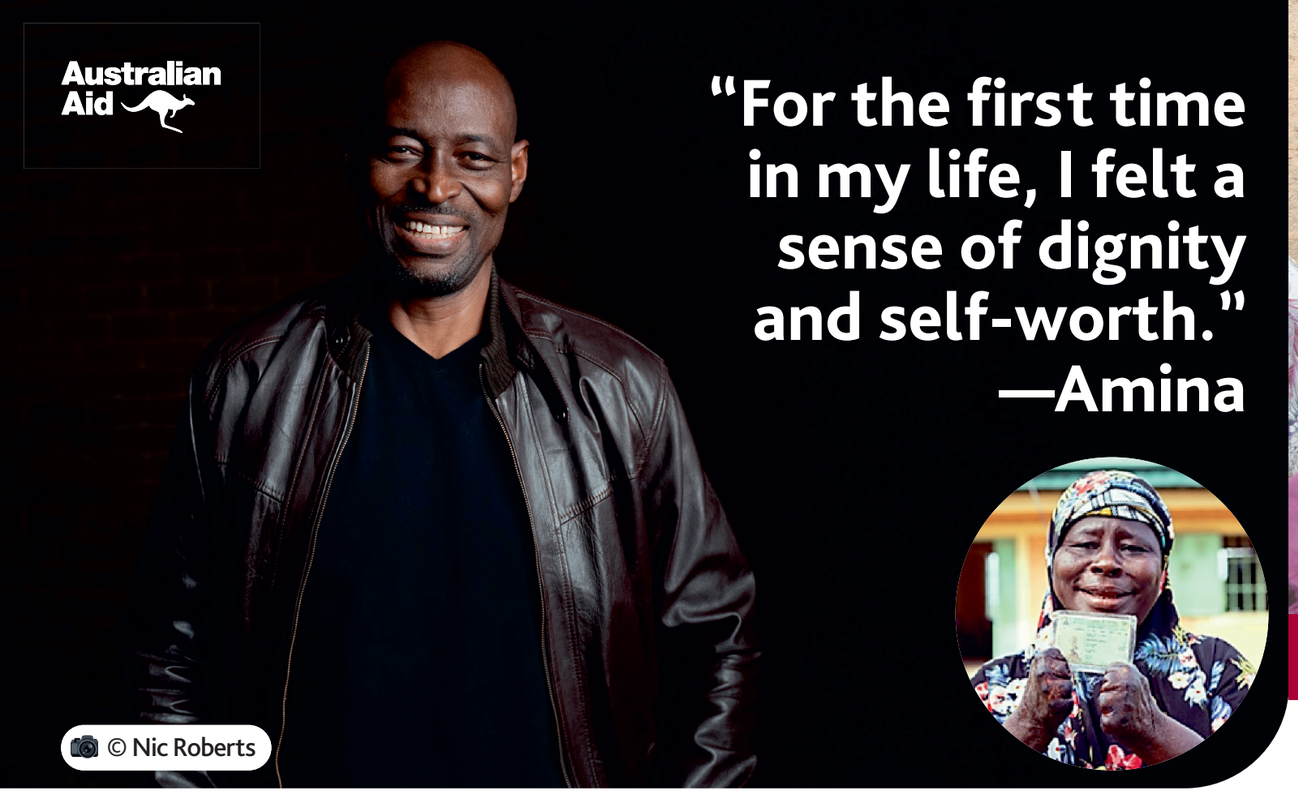
I never played cricket for Australia, turns out I wasn't that good a cricketer! Tragically, Rhitik might miss out on becoming a scientist, not because he's not good enough but because leprosy has taken the dream away.

Pray for Rhitik and children like him to be able to complete their education and reach for their dreams.

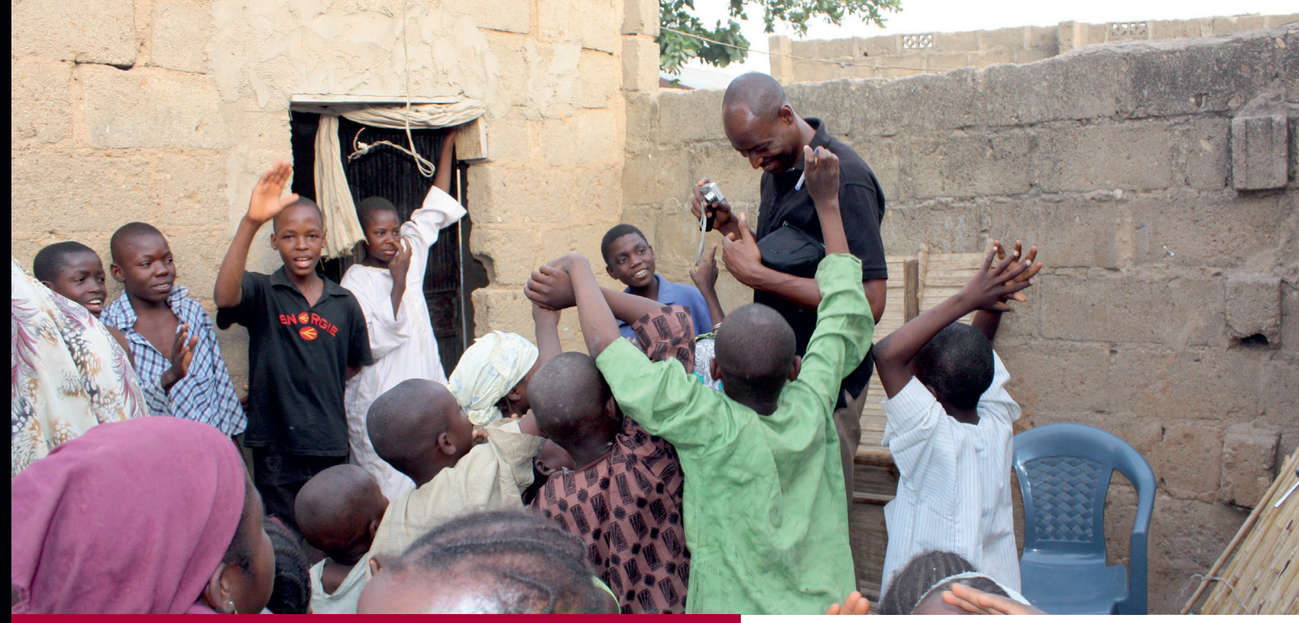
Pray for schools and teachers to be supportive of students with leprosy and disabilities to continue and complete their education. Pray for students to be inclusive and accepting of others.

Show your compassion and support a child like Rhitik to reach their dream with tlc (total loving cure) https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/tlc-children

1800 537 767 • 37-39 Ellingworth Parade, Box Hill VIC 3128 • hello@leprosymission.org.au



"For the first time in my life, I felt a sense of dignity and self-worth." —Amina



Left photo: Pius Ogbu Sunday | Left inset photo: Amina
Right photo: Pius in Nigeria with a group of children.

During his recent trip to Australia Pius Ogbu Sunday, from The Leprosy Mission Nigeria (TLMN), had the opportunity to speak at several events. Pius was in Australia as a guest of The Leprosy Mission Australia (TLMA) but also to participate in the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) as a keynote speaker at their annual conference. On more than one occasion during his stay he was able to preach and draw out some wonderful encouragements from Scripture and reminders that God is at the heart of this work, and how we each play a unique, but important part.

By Andrew Newmarch
International Programs Manager

Using the story of Moses and Joshua fighting the Amalekites as found in Exodus 17, Pius talked about change and the transformation that can come about for individuals and society because of the work on the ground by TLMN but also the support from congregations and the public.

In this story, Joshua and the Israelite men were fighting down on the plain. But up on the mountain, Moses, as instructed by God, was holding his staff up above his head. As Moses tired, he was helped to keep his hands up by Aaron and Hur.

Pius likened this to TLMA being supported by churches like yours and by the grants TLMA received (e.g., from the Australian government). Pius explained: **"We need you to be holding up the support for leprosy work against the ámalek' of leprosy. As you raise support, we (TLMN) will do the fighting in the valley."**

For Pius and other leprosy mission partners around the world, there is a gratitude for the support and interest of the churches and public in Australia. It is through that support that there are shared victories and profound change in the lives of people affected by leprosy, discrimination, and disability.

One example of this shared victory and profound change is around electoral reform in Nigeria. Pius had observed a referendum polling booth in Melbourne and said: **"This could never happen in my country. Polling booths are vulnerable and volatile places, but you all just queue up calmly and even have barbecues to celebrate your vote. Here, you are all required to vote but that is not the case in my country; some are even excluded from voting."**

Pius went on to explain two barriers for people with leprosy and disability being able to vote. People in Nigeria must register to vote and get a voting card, but the first obstacle is that electoral commission staff are fearful of leprosy and won't go near people with leprosy attempting to register or worse, will prevent them from coming to the registration centre. Secondly, voter registration is by fingerprint and many people with leprosy do not have fingers. They are effectively disenfranchised.

Pius told us how TLMN and disability organisations lobbied the electoral commission (INEC) for change. TLMN offered to train staff and invited the Australian High Commissioner to launch the training. This elicited a very positive response from INEC. But the rules still needed to change.

"When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset."
—Exodus 17:12

A group of people from a leprosy community just outside the capital, Abuja, came and occupied the INEC offices. This propelled the changes to the Electoral Act which then allowed for facial recognition as an alternative to fingerprints to get a voting card. In the elections in February 2023, only about 25% of the population of Nigeria registered to vote but about 50% of the newly eligible population of people with leprosy and disability turned out. As one affected person said, this was a revolution: **"For the first time in my life I felt a sense of dignity and self-worth to know I was part of something very important."**

Pius concluded with this prayer from 1 Samuel 30:24, **"The share of the one who fights is the same as the share of the one who looks after the supplies. We all share equally."**

Pray for Pius and the staff of The Leprosy Mission Nigeria as they continue to "do the fighting in the valley." Pray for further opportunities to bring profound change for people affected by leprosy, disability, and discrimination.

Pray for your project in Zamfara state as they work to increase leprosy awareness, improve general health care needs of people with leprosy, and help create more inclusive communities by breaking down stigma.

You can help Pius and The Leprosy Mission Nigeria's work against the 'amalek' of leprosy here
https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/strengthening-integrated-

Australian Aid
Stories marked with this logo are part funded by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Thanks to ANCP and our supporters, these projects are able to help improve the well-being of people affected by leprosy and disability.