

## REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2013

#### INTRODUCTION

*“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life” John 3:16*

With the communications' options now available to us, we cannot but be aware of the daily joys and challenges faced by our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world. The unequal distribution of the resources provided by God and decisions of governments that are based on national interests rather than the good of all people lead to a world of injustice and inequality. As always, God has provided for everyone's needs but too many people have not yet shown themselves to be ready or willing to accept this.

It seems that the Report of the Overseas Committee always includes a recounting of the joys and frustrations of overseas work. Such is the reality of this field of work and 2012/13 has been no different. While communication with some partners is very open and constructive with others it remains a source of frustration and disappointment as e-mails, phone calls and letters go unanswered. As Scottish Charity Law continues to evolve the lack of communication from some partners raises issues of compliance for the Committee.

As always the vast majority of the projects and programmes supported by the Committee are with church based, historical partners. Many receive recurring annual grants. This is the preferred method of working as it allows for longer term planning by partners.

#### UCCSA ASSEMBLY

The biennial UCCSA Assembly will be held in Mafeking, S Africa in September 2013. As has been our practice the Overseas Committee will fund two representatives to attend. It has always been our hope that of those two representatives one would come from another General Assembly Committee that compliments the work of the Overseas Committee. The thinking behind this is that the work of a number of General Assembly Committees are informed by events in other parts of the world. Sadly, to date that has not happened but it remains our hope for 2013.

#### UCCSA DIALOGUE

As reported at the 2012 General Assembly, a very open and honest discussion was held with the General Secretary of UCCSA during which the importance of the partnership was re-affirmed by both Denominations and a number of new initiatives were discussed. The current situation with these new initiatives is as follows:

- We had hoped that the Rev Dr Prince Dibeela, General Secretary and the Rev Basil Manning, President of UCCSA, would attend the General Assembly in May. This would also have given an opportunity for meetings to take place with a view to developing a greater understanding, by both denominations, of the issues facing the work and witness of the churches in our respective countries.

Unfortunately we were informed in April that difficulties had arisen with the funding of this visit and we were also informed that Dr Dibeela would shortly complete his term as General Secretary. We were also aware that Rev Basil Manning will complete his term as President in September at the UCCSA Assembly. In the light of this information it was decided not to go ahead with the visit this year but

to consider a possible visit in the future following the appointment of a new General Secretary.

- There has been no further progress on creating time and a space for the leadership of both the UF and the UCCSA to spend time with each other in their respective countries and cultures. While this would be extremely useful the logistics of working out a programme that fits in with key individuals schedules is going to be very difficult. It will remain a goal to be aimed for.
- Due to their own personal commitments over the summer it has proved impossible to send any of the UF students to the biennial Student Convocation being held by UCCSA. It will remain a hope of the Committee that this opportunity will be taken up by future UF students.
- It is a similar situation with a student placement within one of the UCCSA Synods.
- A more detailed update on the next Youth Exchange Visit will be given in the Report of the Youth Committee.

### **MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP**

The Scholarship is up and running and we do know that a number of students from Botswana are studying at the House of Formation in S Africa. Unfortunately, what we do not know are any further specific details. Repeated requests to the Synod of Botswana for detailed information on the use of the Scholarship have gone unheeded. This is an ongoing source of frustration for the Committee. While the Committee recognises that the Synod staff are carrying significant workloads, and are sympathetic to this, two way communication is central to a continuing, dynamic partnership. Ways need to be explored in which we can engage with the Synod. Failure to do this will result in the partnership dying.

### **FLYING MISSION**

This continues to be a time of reflection and re-adjustment for Flying Mission. The Committee's understanding is that a new Chief Executive Officer has not yet been appointed. We would, again, encourage continued prayer support for all those in Flying Mission as they seek the way forward. Despite this situation the Committee has offered support in two areas of work. At short notice the Committee funded the purchase and distribution of Bibles in the Princess Marina Hospital, Gaborone. We have also sent further boxes of clothes and knitwear for distribution by Flying Mission staff and we are grateful to Miss Mary Macintyre for co-ordinating this project.

### **REROTLHE**

The precariousness of the projects we support was brought home to the Committee by successive reports from Rerotlhe. In November 2012 we received a report on the progress being made with the Project and were encouraged by the positive initiatives being taken in peer education and support and the pre-school feeding and early learning work. At the same time we were distressed to learn that a US Peace Corps Volunteer, attached to the Project, had been physically assaulted, on a visit to Kanye, resulting in her withdrawal from Rerotlhe. In January we received an update, with photographs, on the Christmas activities. Again the Committee was very encouraged to read of the work being done and the plans that were being made. However, just a few weeks later we learned that the Project had had to close down until the 2013 round of grants had been received. Further enquiries were made and we learned that, in the past, Flying Mission had been able to step in to help Rerotlhe until their funding for the year was received. This had not proved possible in 2013 as Flying Mission's own finances were at a particularly low level. On confirmation

from Flying Mission that the Project could restart on receipt of the Committee's 2013 grant it was agreed to send this plus an additional donation of £1,500. The matter will be reviewed on a regular basis.

## **BONGANI**

Following the meeting held with the Secretary of the Synod of Zimbabwe at the 2011 UCCSA Assembly, we now communicate with the Synod, rather than Thelma, on matters relating to Bongani. The reports and updates that we receive are more formal and this is to be commended but they do not necessarily give the Committee, or the Denomination, a flavour of the day to day work being done within the Project. As it is difficult for us to imagine the environment within which the Project works these insights are a great loss. Bongani works or networks with other organisations throughout the area. As a result of larger, better funded, organisations now being able to work with orphaned children the number of children helped by Bongani has fallen to around 6,702 children over seven regions; still a substantial responsibility.

## **TRAINING FOR MINISTRY**

To date we have had no further update on how the grants have been used, the number of students that have been supported and stage and status of training being undertaken. This is an on-going frustration and we continue to seek feedback.

## **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (Zimbabwe)**

The running of the Community Empowerment and Leadership Development Course is an exciting development within the churches of Zimbabwe which seeks to give a voice to women in what is still a very male dominated organisation and society.

A letter of thanks was received from Rev Sifiso Mpofu, Principal of United Theological College (UTC), Zimbabwe, for the grant from the Committee. He confirmed that the first stage of the Women's Leadership Development Workshop had taken place from 8<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> July and 27 women benefited from it. They came from The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, The United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, The United Methodist Church of Zimbabwe and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. The Committee was impressed by the wide range of topics which were included in the course and that they had managed to do so much within budget. There was a surplus of US\$1,960.50 which UTC indicated they would use to run the second phase of the Course. The Committee was concerned that if the second part of the Course was not completed the overall benefit to be gained by those attending would be greatly devalued. It was agreed to write to the Principal to thank him for his detailed report and to ask where the shortfall for the second course, to be run in December 2012, would be found and if the women who attended, their congregation or denomination, had made any financial commitment. A further report was received which indicated that a contribution of US\$50 was being asked for from churches that had sent participants. Once all of these contributions had been received there was still going to be a shortfall of £2500 and there were no other funders. The Committee felt that it was important that this Course was completed and agreed to send an additional grant.

The Committee will decide on further support once it has received final feedback on the first round of Courses and how the learning is being worked out in local churches and communities.

## **VISIT FROM TRINITY CHOIR**

When the 35 members of the Trinity Church Choir, Gaborone, first arrived in Scotland on 13<sup>th</sup> June, they were thrilled to see the rain as Botswana was in the middle of the dry season. When, 10 days later, it was still raining the novelty had somewhat worn off. However, that did not deter the Choir from undertaking a full programme of concerts and visits. We already knew that they were an extremely accomplished Choir and this was added to by their enthusiastic engagement with each audience, whether they were in St Giles Cathedral, a Glasgow pavement or a local restaurant.

As part of the visit Choir members went in small groups of 2 or 3 to participate in local worship. I think it would be fair to say that many of them were shocked and saddened at the decline in attendance at Sunday worship and encouraged congregations to be more confident and outgoing in their witness.

The Committee would like to thank the Rev John Fulton for all the additional work he took on in arranging the day to day practicalities of the visit.

## **MISSION SECRETARIES**

The Committee is very grateful to the Mission Secretaries for the work they continue to do in raising awareness within the Denomination of the work of associated mission partners in various locations overseas. As part of this work, it is hoped that Catherine Anwar will be running a workshop at the Dunblane Day. This will be a real opportunity to gain a better understanding of some of the work being undertaken by Mission Partners.

Positive feedback has been received on the Mission Sunday Pack. The Pack is a tool to help Congregations explore the work of overseas mission and to discern their individual and corporate role in this work. The Mission Secretaries and the Committee would welcome a greater degree of involvement from congregations in the preparation of the Pack – what do you want to know about; question; explore?

The Committee would like to thank Mrs Crawford and Mrs Currie for their commitment and hard work.

## **SHORT TERM PLACEMENTS:**

### **WEC Trek 2013**

It was noted that there had been no response from anyone in the UF Church regarding the possibility of going on this year's WEC Trek in Indonesia in July. The Committee was disappointed by this lack of response and the missed opportunity for firsthand, short term involvement in overseas work. We were encouraged, however, to learn that Mrs Famie Crawford will lead a group of 5 from the UK. In line with the Committee's policy to support approved short term placements, Mrs Crawford will receive financial assistance with the cost of this trip. It is hoped that on her return Mrs Crawford will be able to share her experiences with a number of congregations which may lead to future interest in such placements.

### **Teacher of English, Mozambique**

Due to issues around the use of English as the common language at UCCSA gatherings, members from the Synod of Mozambique often find themselves marginalised and unable to fully participate to the same degree as members from the other Synods. With that in mind the Committee was asked to look at sending a couple to Mozambique for a period of

a year to teach English to Synod and Church staff. As discussions with UCCSA continued it became clear that perhaps the most productive way to address this need was not by sending Scottish staff to undertake the teaching but by the Committee funding a local teacher to undertake the work. At present we are looking at:

- Clarifying how the work will be undertaken, for example, will staff be released for block teaching or will it be a weekly class?
- Who will these classes be open to?
- Will “students” contribute towards the cost?
- What specifically does the Synod of Mozambique want from this project?

Once these questions have been clarified the Committee will seek the assistance of UCCSA in identifying a suitable teacher. They will then be brought to Scotland for a period of 6-8 weeks to upgrade their English language level. During that time we would also hope that they would be attached to a local Congregation which would greatly enhance each others' understanding of issues currently facing our respective churches.

### **Archivist Placement, Johannesburg**

A request was received from UCCSA for assistance with archiving historical church documents, some of which are held in Johannesburg and some in Kurumann Mission House. The request was for 1 or 2 people to go to S Africa for a period of 3-6 months to work, with office staff, on this material. Costings have been obtained and the Committee felt that they were unable to commit themselves to both projects because of their funds reducing and agreed to pursue the appointment in Mozambique.

### **COMMITTEE FINANCES**

It was noted at a previous General Assembly that the Overseas Committee had access to a relatively significant amount of funding and the Committee was urged to use some of these funds on projects which met the aims of the Committee and the Denomination. The General Assembly will be pleased to note that the Committee has done exactly that! We have not taken on any other major capital projects since the building of the Merriweather Memorial Church. Rather, we have a number of smaller projects that receive 3 year funding commitments as well as other projects that receive single grants. This has resulted in the Committee reducing its funds to just over £100,000.00. Still a significant sum of money but greatly reduced from just a few years ago when the figure stood at over £450,000.00.

### **SCOTTISH CHURCHES CHINA GROUP (SCCG)**

Since the 2012 General Assembly, the SCCG has hosted 3 separate staff groups who have visited Scotland. In November 2 medical staff from Shengjing Hospital, Shenyang and 2 staff from the Diocesan Social Services Centre visited Scotland for further training in the role of spiritual care in palliative and HIV/AIDS work. The staff found the visit extremely useful and were able to share their observations with the Committee. This visit has led the Palliative Care Ward in Shengjing Hospital to consider appointing a chaplain.

In December the SCCG organised the UK Itinerary for senior staff from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Jiangsu Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). The purpose of the visit was to see how church and society can work together to address some of the issues faced by our wider society. Visits like this are very important as it enables Chinese officials to see how Christians can make a positive, challenging and outspoken contribution to any society without threatening the stability of the nation.

The third visit was by Palliative Care staff undergoing further training in this specialist area of work.

In October 2013 the SCCG will be leading a group visit to China to participate in the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of the founding of Shengjing Hospital by the Scottish Missionary, Dr Dugald Christie.

The question as to why the SCCG does not do more specific work with the China Christian Council (CCC) was discussed. The CCC would like more seminary staff to undertake Masters or PhD studies in UK universities. Costs for these kinds of studies are prohibitively high putting them beyond the means of the SCCG unless a major new source of funding is identified.

## **CONCLUSION**

Much valuable work has been carried out by the Committee over the past year and I would like to thank the Committee members for their commitment and skills. The Committee would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the Rev Ian Robertson during the short time he was Vice Convener. We were shaken to hear of his illness and continue to hold Ian, Margaret and all the family in our prayers. The Committee would also like to thank the General Secretary and Mrs Helena Jarvis for their unstinting support and encouragement, without which the task would be far harder.

In the name of the Committee:

PATRICIA A. JOHNSTON	Convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary