

REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2015

INTRODUCTION

The work of the Committee over the past year has been marked by some considerable frustration. Issues have arisen as the Committee seeks to support vital grassroots work while addressing important governance matters.

As has repeatedly been stated, working with partners from different cultural norms is a balance of rewards and challenges. We continue to give thanks to God for the life giving work of a number of partners. Their dedication to and trust in God is an encouragement to us all. Political, economic and gender issues continue to create testing environments within which partners seek to provide feeding, education and health programmes to thousands of people in response to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The reverse side of the coin is that the Committee is required to work within the legal and cultural framework of our society. This requires a particular sensitivity and insight that balances Scottish requirements with the cultural norms and traditions of partners' societies. Our respective historical understandings and experiences continue to exert an influence on today's partnerships. We may see ourselves as being a relatively fair and just society, we may also be convinced of our understanding that we are working with one another on a basis of equality. Sadly, a number of countries we work with are still very conscious of the many negative influences of our colonial past and receive our requests for documentation or explanations from that perspective.

All of the above, and a number of other factors, have influenced further discussion on the future direction of the Committee. New areas of work have opened up over recent years e.g. human trafficking and gender issues. It is, therefore, always good practice to periodically review current work and partnerships to assess their continued relevance to criteria and funding and to reflect on the direction of the Denomination and Committee.

As always, the Committee has viewed its work as a two-way process of giving and receiving which has great potential to enrich the witness of the United Free Church of Scotland in our local communities.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Over the past year the Overseas Committee has been looking at the recommendations it would wish to bring to the General Assembly with regard to the future direction of the Committee. In our discussions we have considered how to maximise the impact the United Free Church can have with limited financial resources and personnel. Do we wish to continue working bilaterally or in partnership with another agency? It was recognised that if we continued working directly with overseas partners this would severely limit our options as the United Free Church does not have the personnel who can dedicate the time required to establishing new partnerships. Should this fact alone direct us towards working with other UK based agencies?

Consideration has also been given to the kind of work in which the Overseas Committee feels called to become involved. Some of the areas being looked at are: human trafficking, slave trade, sex trafficking, rights for women and girls, caring for the whole person and spreading the good news of Jesus.

After extensive discussion the Committee came to the conclusion that maximum impact would be achieved by working with another agency or church. This would provide the

benefit of the other agency/church either already having established partnerships that we may like to become involved with or having the staff who can carry out the relationship building work required to establish a new project.

Information was gathered from a number of sources and the Committee has agreed to focus on potential future partnerships with Christian Aid or Tear Fund. A small working group is now going to explore these options further with a view to a recommendation coming to a future General Assembly.

Some of the issues to be explored with each agency are:

- What are their charitable objectives?
- Where do they work?
- How do they carry out their work?
- What are some of the key areas of their work?
- What percentage of funds are used for core costs?
- If they are interested in being in partnership with us?
- That the Gospel is central to the work carried out?

The Committee hopes to have met with representatives of each of these agencies in the coming months and bring more structured recommendations to the General Assembly in the Verbal Report.

FLYING MISSION

In 2014 we reported on the ongoing difficulties being faced by Flying Mission. In 2015 the general picture has not changed greatly but there does appear to be some stability and a clearer sense of direction. Saralee Molodi continues to be Acting International Director and under her leadership the organisation does seem to be moving forward with renewed vision and vigour. Some of the planes are now airworthy which is a major step forward from 2013. Paul Tanner has been reappointed as PR Manager / Capacity Building Coordinator and it is hoped his extensive experience and knowledge will be of great benefit to Flying Mission.

There are still major issues to be resolved. The appointment of a permanent CEO; balancing the complex needs of living out their Christian witness of bringing medical assistance to the most remote communities in Botswana with the need to be commercially viable and finally the day to day challenges of living by the Gospel in a country that is rapidly changing. The Overseas Committee remains committed to Flying Mission, offering faithful prayer support and financial assistance where possible.

BIBLE DISTRIBUTION

A grant of £1,500 was sent to Flying Mission to assist with the purchase of 600 Bibles, some in English others in Setswana. These Bibles were distributed among prisoners and patients in Anti Retro Viral (ARV) Clinics, which provide specialist treatment for patients with HIV and AIDS. In Moshupa Young Offenders Prison 145 Bibles were distributed in conjunction with a Team from 'Alpha Botswana'. This has been a strategic decision by Flying Mission as it ensures that there are people working with the prisoners, helping them to understand Scriptures.

REROTHE

The Committee is very grateful to both Paul Tanner and Saralee Molodi for regular and informative updates on the work being carried out in Rerothle. It continues to provide care and support to the children of 6 remote settlements including a day care feeding programme for pre-schoolers. In addition there have been workshops which address the

prevention of HIV/AIDS through behaviour changes; counselling services; health and hygiene care givers workshops and training on governance for Board Members.

In October 2014 a UN Peace Corp Volunteer, Charlie Gebhardt, took up post for a 2 year appointment. One of the key roles of the Peace Corp Volunteer is to look at income generating projects. This is very encouraging for the Committee as it has long been a concern that the Overseas Committee is the principal funder to the extent that without our Grant the Centre closes. With a view to the long term sustainability of Rerothle the Committee has been seeking to encourage those with oversight to seek alternative sources of funding.

It has now been confirmed that Paul Tanner will be in the UK between April and August 2015. It is always encouraging to hear first hand accounts of work being carried out by partners so the Committee look forward to meeting with Paul and hearing the latest news on Flying Mission and Rerothle. The Committee would also like to discuss with Paul possible joint cooperation with the UN Peace Corp Volunteer on income generating programmes for Rerothle.

BONGANI ORPHAN CARE PROJECT

The Report on the Bongani Project really needs to be separated into two distinct sections, the project work itself and the Synod oversight.

PROJECT WORK

With regard to the project we continue to give thanks to God for His faithfulness to this work. Under the leadership of Thelma Simela the project continues to support thousands of children whose lives have been devastated by HIV and AIDS. That this vital work of education, healthcare, feeding and spiritual nourishment continues in the face of ongoing political and economic difficulties speaks of the commitment of Thelma and her volunteers. No matter what they face they seek to witness to a loving and faithful God.

While we give thanks for the work being done it remains a concern of the Committee that Thelma is still leading this project on her own. Since Gastina's retirement in 2012 there has been no permanent appointment to assist Thelma. Appointments have been made but, for reasons which have not been made clear to the Committee, the new staff member has never remained in post for more than a few months. That such a huge piece of work thrived under the leadership of just two people was always a source of wonder and thanksgiving. How much more is that the case as Thelma continues to lead Bongani forward on her own?

MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

In 2014 the Committee reported that 2 students, who had received support from the Scholarship, had not yet completed their studies due to health issues. Despite repeated requests for updates none has been received. This is extremely disappointing.

The Committee has been led to believe that Botswana has a number of students awaiting an opportunity to study but required funding to enable this to happen. The Committee has indicated its willingness to consider further funding for the Scholarship but in order for us to make an informed decision we need a full update on the status of current students and a financial statement. None of this has been forthcoming. Until it does there can be no further commitment to the Scholarship.

KURUMAN HOUSE OF MINISTERIAL FORMATION (KHMF)

The report on Kuruman to the 2014 General Assembly was one of a positive, strong

Kuruman House of Ministerial Formation which was central to the formation of candidates for ministry within the UCCSA. The Overseas Committee was pleased to provide support for this vital work in the life and witness of the churches. Sadly, the picture in 2015 could not be more different.

In late 2014 updates from Kuruman indicated that there had been no new students in 2014 and no prospective students in 2015. 4 out of 7 S African students would be studying at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal (UKZN), one student in Zimbabwe would study at United Theological College. The situation within Botswana seems to be focusing on why there has been a high number of student dropouts. There were no new students from Mozambique or Namibia. Disappointing as this news was further conversations with Kuruman indicated that this was not causing great concern within UCCSA as it is not unusual to have 'a famine or a feast' cycle when it comes to students coming forward for training. There was, of course, the ongoing issue of funding but that is always going to be there and just something that needs to be worked at. With that update the Overseas Committee remained confident of the role of Kuruman House of Ministerial Formation. So it was with a sense of not only sadness but also some surprise that we received an email from Rev Alistair Arends, UCCSA General Secretary informing the Overseas Committee that *'We are not continuing with this institution as a place of study but rather as a institution focusing on enriching ordained ministers and lay persons through short courses and other educational opportunities. Ministerial training would now be done at other places of which UKZN is one.'*

With appropriate sensitivity, the Overseas Committee is seeking further clarification on this as it will need to take a decision on its funding commitment. In 2014 the Committee agreed a 3 year funding commitment for the work of Ministerial Formation in Kuruman. Does the new work of Kuruman, as it relates to ordained ministers and lay people, still meet the funding criteria? If it does, do we give permission for the 2015/2016 grants to be used for this work, in which case what about student training? S Africa Synod can fund some of its own students, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe cannot. If the Overseas Committee no longer feels Kuruman is carrying out the work for which the grants were given, should they be switched to supporting students in UKZN and will that be of any benefit to Synods other than S Africa? Clarification is being sought on these issues and it is hoped that further details will be given in the Verbal Report.

YOUTH VISIT

The Committee has been pleased to hear of the continued preparations for the Visit to Ethiopia. Following discussions with Youth Committee officials the Overseas Committee has provided financial support for the 2 pre-departure preparation/orientation weekends, which are central to a successful visit, and the post visit debriefing.

SHORT TERM PLACEMENTS

The Committee has previously offered financial support for Short Term Placements and was pleased to be able to do so again on two occasions during this past year.

Jennifer and Martin Paterson (Uddingston: Park): Jennifer and Martin undertook a 6 month placement with OMF, based in Malaysia and Thailand. They were involved in working with the children of illegal immigrants and the children of Mission Partners.

Rebecca Tait (Darnley): Rebecca has been selected, from over 100 applicants, to be part of a small group of 27 who will travel to Malawi in November 2015. The Group will be based in Dambo Village, about an hour's drive from Lilongwe. While in Malawi the Group will include of the construction of new school buildings and painting existing ones. There will also be an opportunity to work with local families and children. This project is being carried out in

conjunction with the Betty Cunningham Trust. Participants have to raise £2,500 to fund the trip.

POLLOCK MEMORIAL MISSIONARY TRUST (PMMT)

Over the past year the Pollock Memorial Missionary Trust have been very generous in the support they have given. Martin and Jennifer Paterson received funding towards their 6 month placement with OMF while the SCCG received a contribution towards a project with the China Christian Council. In the coming months a further funding request will be submitted in support of the Youth Visit trip to Ethiopia.

RUBY OLIPHANT

It was with a sense of thanksgiving, as well as sadness, that we learned of the death of Ruby Oliphant on 2nd January 2015 at the age of 94.

Ruby was born in Glasgow, the youngest of three. She was connected with Pollokshaws West UF Church in Glasgow and, after it closed, with Langside & Shawlands.

Ruby completed her training as a nurse, becoming a State Certified Midwife in 1944. In 1948 she graduated from Faith Mission Bible College, having responded to the call to mission. After graduation she joined the European Christian Mission and was soon asked to lead their work in Australia.

Her main focus was on immigrants. She longed not only that they, personally, would come to know the Lord, but that they would then reach out to their own communities in Australia and Europe.

Central to everything Ruby did was prayer. It was what she grounded her life in and sought to share with anyone whom she came into contact. Her life was a labour of love for Jesus and the spread of the Gospel with over 60 years of it dedicated to service in Australia.

Ruby was an inspiration to all who seek to serve the Lord by serving His people. Her commitment, dedication and faithfulness to living out the Gospel is an encouragement in 'wilderness' times. We give thanks for her faith shown in every aspect of her life and witness and to God be the glory.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

The Committee decided, once again, to give a Christmas Gift of £500 to Mission Partners associated with the Denomination. We appreciate that this is not a huge amount of money but we would wish to show our appreciation of the work being done.

MISSION SECRETARY

In early 2014 a conversation was begun with Mrs Moira Currie on the role and remit of the Mission Secretary. This was continued with both Mrs Currie and Mrs Famie Crawford, on Mrs Crawford's return from the United States.

That the role of the Mission Secretary is an important one within the Denomination is not in question however it was felt that some areas need to be looked at for example, the work of the Overseas Committee does not naturally lend itself to the short 'bullet point' prayer letter currently being sent out. Without giving a wider context the requests for specific prayer sometimes do not make sense or are unfocussed. A new format will now be adopted whereby, after each Overseas Committee Meeting, a short update on one or two pieces of work or partners will be sent out with prayer requests that relate only to those items. These more focused updates will provide the wider context so aiding understanding and insight.

Another question being considered is the present format of Mission Sunday. Consideration is being given as to whether it has run its course in its present form. The Overseas Committee would wish to emphasise that the idea of having a 'Mission Sunday' is not in question, simply its format. Further consideration will be given to this and reported upon in due course.

The Committee would like to thank the Mission Secretaries for their work in this very important area. We would especially like to thank Mrs Moira Currie for maintaining the work on her own in 2014.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES' CHINA GROUP (SCCG)

The SCCG has had a number of successful projects in the past year, particularly in the development of Spiritual Care being seen as central to providing person centered care within a Hospital setting. Consideration is now being given to providing Spiritual Care training for staff working in the community.

Care of the elderly is now a major area of concern within China. With the change, in the cities, to the make up of the traditional family and the mass migration from the countryside, statutory and voluntary agencies are now required to provide a much wider range of services. The SCCG is currently working with 3 partners, China Christian Council, Shanghai Diocese and The Amity Foundation, on providing capacity building for staff involved in the care of the elderly, especially people with dementia.

The SCCG is also encouraged by the ever increasing recognition given by the Chinese authorities to faith based organisations. They are seen as being a major source of skills, knowledge, compassion and stability and more responsibility is being given to them in providing a range of services in the community.

In autumn 2015 the SCCG will make a presentation on their work to the Scottish Cross Party Parliamentary Committee on China.

OVERSEAS COMMITTEE FINANCES

In recent years the Overseas Committee has been using up its funds, as per the request of the 1999 General Assembly. Project work has been supported in Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa and China as well as a capital building project in Botswana.

The Committee has kept its expenditure under review. Current financial support has been committed until 2016 after which consideration will be given to ongoing backing for Bongani and Rerothle.

As financial resources diminish the Overseas Committee will enter a new era. This will have its challenges but can also be an exciting opportunity to engage with the wider Denomination and external agencies as it seeks to maximise its contribution to international development through its Christian witness.

CONCLUSION

Although there have been a number of frustrations during the past year it has, nevertheless, been a rewarding year. The Committee is greatly encouraged by the work being done by a number of partners. Witnessing to their faith and trust in God, in often very difficult circumstances, is a source of inspiration and a challenge to us all. We are part of a world wide family and have much to offer and to learn from our brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they serve.

As always, much of the work would be left undone were it not for the commitment of

the General Secretary and Mrs Helena Jarvis and the Committee would wish to record their grateful thanks to them.

In the name of the Committee:

| | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| PATRICIA A. JOHNSTON | Convener |
| GARY J. A. BARCLAY | Vice-convener |
| JOHN O. FULTON | Secretary |