

## REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016

#### INTRODUCTION

*“Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

In some of his last moments with his disciples, Jesus establishes God’s Mission as both local and global. The Overseas Committee has the role of supporting individuals and organisations working in various areas of the world as they engage in this commission to transform lives through the Gospel. We provide prayerful and financial support to our Mission partners as together we seek to share the Good News of Jesus in word and deed.

In 1999, General Assembly requested the ‘Committee on Overseas and Inter-Church Affairs to take steps to substantially reduce the capital within the Overseas Funds by identifying projects that could be initiated or supported in Southern Africa and beyond.’ At that time the Overseas Committee had funds amounting to £442,000. Since then the Committee has supported a number of projects in Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa and China, as well as funding the building of the Merriweather Memorial Church. As a result, by the end of 2016 the balance of Committee funds will be under £20,000.

This will have an obvious effect on the number of projects the Committee can continue to support and the way in which that support is given. It does however provide an opportunity for congregations to get more closely involved in God’s global mission by helping to support our Overseas Partners. Our aim this year is to encourage congregations who are already supporting folks in the work of mission and to raise awareness of the ways in which others can get involved.

#### FUTURE DIRECTION

During the last few years the Committee has been reflecting on how we can be involved in what God is doing in different places in the world while exploring the opportunities of developing new projects that would enable people to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and make a real difference in people’s lives.

Consideration was given as to how we can maximise the impact the United Free Church can have with limited finances and personnel. Following extensive discussion the Committee came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial to work in partnership with another agency which would have the staff to carry out the relationship building work required to establish a new project. Having considered a number of options the committee were impressed by Tearfund’s ‘Connected Church’ project which links UK churches with church based projects overseas through sharing, forming friendships, visiting, giving, and hosting.

Having met with Fiona Morrison, Church Relationship Manager for Tearfund in Scotland, we considered a number of projects and were drawn to ‘International Cooperation Cambodia’ (ICC).

Rural Cambodia has thousands of people living in material and spiritual poverty. According to the World Bank, rural poverty remains a big challenge in Cambodia, with 90 per cent of the country’s poor living in the countryside.

The church in Cambodia is young and growing with the opportunity to bring hope and transformation to the most vulnerable in their communities, but it lacks resources and many of the church leaders are uneducated or lack theological training. ICC wants to help local churches and their communities see the lives of the poor and vulnerable transformed

The work supported by Tearfund is the Village Integrated Development Project (VIDP) which uses the Umoja initiative (which is a Swahili word meaning 'Togetherness' or 'Unity'). In the Khmer language it is called 'Chet Tai Muay' which means 'being of one heart'. 'Chet Tai Muay' helps equip local people and church leaders as facilitators through a series of Bible studies looking at God's heart for the poor; valuing the resources God has already given them and the people around them. The facilitators then go into their communities and begin teaching others what they have learned. It has proven to be an effective way of empowering people through encouraging them to begin savings and credit groups where each member gives a small amount every week, which can then be taken as a loan by group members so they can start a small business.

Our partnership with ICC would help train facilitators and local coordinators, equipping them to go back to their communities with the skills they need to bring change. We would be helping to empower local churches to transform lives spiritually and materially. Our commitment would be to raise £10,000 annually for a period of three years.

To develop this partnership, a group of seven people will accompany Fiona Morrison in a visit to Cambodia from Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August to Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016. The team members are: Gary Barclay, Famie Crawford, Nancy Cowan, Ruth Fulton, Cat McKenzie, Ross McNaughton, and Rhoda Patterson. The aim will be to visit some of the partners in Cambodia and see first-hand how the project works.

The intention is to launch this new partnership at 'Dunblane' on 27<sup>th</sup> August. Following this, the team will then be available to share news of the project with presbyteries and congregations. It is hoped that through congregations being well informed they would also be encouraged to become involved in this partnership and in building relationships with the churches and partners in Cambodia through regular updates, prayer and giving.

## **FLYING MISSION**

Flying Mission's motto is to 'serve by facilitating the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through aviation, training and care ministries', which they continue to fulfil in Botswana and Zambia. The Committee are grateful to Acting International Director, Saralee Molodi for her latest update thanking the Committee for the ongoing prayer and financial support received.

A grant of £1,500 was sent to Flying Mission to assist with the purchase of 700 Bibles which were to be distributed to HIV and AIDS patients, to a mission hospital (Molepolole or Mochudi), and in conjunction with Alpha Botswana to prisons throughout Botswana.

Dr Howard Moffat from the FM-UK Board is due to visit Gaborone for two weeks. The Committee hope to arrange a meeting with Dr Moffat following his visit to discuss how the work is progressing and in what ways we can best continue to support the work of Flying Mission.

## **REROTHLE**

The Rerothle Day Care Centre was initially set up in 2004 to reach out to 300 orphaned and vulnerable children and their families living in remote cattle-posts. Today, the centre continues to provide care and support for 54 children aged 2-6 years of age, 24 of whom were ready to start at Seherelela Primary School in January 2016. During the past three years the Committee has continued to support the work of the centre with grants amounting to £23,100.

The Committee was encouraged to hear that Peace Corps volunteer Charles Gebhardt, who is based in Seherelela, and has been working with Rerothle and the neighbouring primary school since October 2014, has secured a grant from the US Embassy to build a new pre-school building. The building will house two extra classrooms, an office, kitchen, bathrooms and shaded play area. Work began early in 2016 and it is hoped to complete the building by October 2016. This will allow for the care of an additional 60 children.

### **BONGANI ORPHAN CARE PROGRAMME**

The Bongani Orphan Care Programme in Zimbabwe has been supporting children and elderly caregivers whose lives have been devastated by HIV and AIDS since October 1998. Bongani's Vision is a commitment to personal involvement in a holistic ministry of caring for and empowering orphans in the church and community. Its objectives are:-

1. To create awareness in the congregations and community of the need for community based care in urban and rural locations.
2. To strengthen the extended family to care for their orphans.
3. To promote and provide loving and Christian care for orphaned and vulnerable children.
4. To establish programmes for the orphaned and vulnerable children particularly the school leaver.
5. To network with other orphaned and vulnerable children related organisations. The activities of the programme include: Educational Assistance; Psycho Social Support Training; Training and Workshops; Skills training and Livelihoods and Income Generating Projects. Bongani continues to help children with school fees, uniforms and stationery, and has started a Day Care Centre for children under five.

The number of children helped by Bongani is around 2,500 and the Committee has continued to support this valuable work of education, healthcare, feeding and spiritual nourishment by providing £6,000 annually to fund the salary for Thelma Simela. As reported to General Assembly 2015, the Committee was concerned as to how the funding for Thelma's salary was being handled. Since then a new account has been opened and all monies previously sent have been accounted for.

### **MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP**

The Committee has made repeated requests for updates on how many students are receiving support from the Scholarship. As of yet, no updates have been received.

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

During 2015 the SCCG welcomed 5 Chinese partners to Scotland for training. In May Dr Gao Xiaofang, a Palliative Care doctor from Shenyang and Father Joseph Zhang from Liaoning Diocese were in Scotland to make observational visits and undertake further training in the delivery of Spiritual Care Services. Father Zhang was particularly interested in the role of Spiritual Care in a community mental health setting. Mental health services in China are very under-developed so this would be a major new initiative.

In June, 3 members of staff from The Amity Foundation, Social Services Division Care of the Elderly Team spent two weeks in Scotland looking at statutory and voluntary sector services for the elderly, in particular people with Dementia. They were also looking at services that support carers. This is a completely new area of work in China.

In September Rev Ian Stirling, Chaplain at Ayrshire Hospice made a return visit to Shenyang to conduct further Spiritual Care Training for hospital and Diocesan staff. Ian was again accompanied by his wife Mandy who is a GP. This proved very useful as the Vice

President of Shengjing Hospital has the task of setting up GP services in Shenyang by 2020 so some very useful conversations were able to take place.

In October Mrs Lucy Chetty, Principal Teacher at New Struan School, Alloa spent time in Nanjing as the SCCG sponsored expert speaker at an international conference on autism. This is part of an ongoing long term partnership between the SCCG/ New Struan School and the Amity Children's Development Centre.

In November the SCCG were invited to make a presentation to the Parliamentary Cross Party Group on China. The charity was also offered a platform for its work by Generation UK: China Network based in the British Council offices in Beijing.

New partnerships between the SCCG and the Eric Liddell Centre are being developed as well as with St Gemma's Hospice in Leeds.

As the work the SCCG is being asked to be involved in increases so a decision has been made to seek funding for a part-time staff member. It is hoped the appointment will be made in Spring 2016.

### **CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

The Committee decided, once again, to give a Christmas Gift of £500 to Mission Partners associated with the Denomination in appreciation of the work in which they are involved.

### **MISSION SECRETARY**

Since 2010, Mrs Moira Currie and Mrs Famie Crawford have served as Mission Secretaries, building relationships with Mission Partners through personal contact and raising awareness of their work through regular updates, while seeking to foster and develop links between them and local congregations. Mrs Currie stepped down from this role in 2015 and the Committee is grateful to her for her valuable contribution and to Mrs Crawford for her continued and greatly appreciated work as Mission Secretary.

Mission Sunday was once again observed and feedback on how the materials were used is always appreciated. A review of Mission Sunday is currently being undertaken, exploring the value of continuing with the current format and how we can improve the way in which resources are made available to congregations to help them in their support of our Mission Partners.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Committee would express its grateful thanks to both the General Secretary and to Mrs Helena Jarvis for the amount of work they carry out on its behalf throughout the year. Their input and guidance is much appreciated.

In the name of the Committee:-

GARY BARCLAY	Convener
ADRIAN ROOTES	Vice-convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary