

## REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010

#### INTRODUCTION

*God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power in action everywhere; but God Himself behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:*

*wise counsel*

*miraculous acts*

*clear understanding*

*proclamation*

*simple trust*

*distinguishing between spirits*

*healing the sick*

*tongues*

*interpretation of tongues*

*All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what and when.*

*You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of His one Spirit, we all say good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large integrated life in which He has the final say in everything, (That is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now part of His resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain - His Spirit - where we all come to drink.*

*The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.*

1 Cor. 12 vs 4-13; 25-26 (The Message)

As always it is a privilege to serve on the Overseas Committee. Work with overseas partners continues to be a joy as well as a challenge, full of encouragements and frustrations. Over the past year the committee has seen progress on some projects while other remain fairly static. Such is the nature of international development work.

As Churches in the west, ourselves included, struggle with falling numbers it has been said that we should look less to outreach overseas and focus more on our home communities. While that perspective is understandable the committee do not think it is the most productive way forward. We are one part of the world wide Body of Christ. To retreat into ourselves and loose contact with other parts of that Body is to diminish who and what we are as individual Christians and as a denomination. We have much to offer and much to learn - but we cannot do that in isolation. Rather, let us embrace God's call to us to take our place in his world wide Body and let us be uplifted by the knowledge that, "*Each of us is now part of His resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain - His Spirit - where we all come to drink.*"

## **UCCSA GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009**

In August 2009 the Convener and the Vice Convener attended the UCCSA General Assembly in Molepolole, Botswana as delegates. It was a great privilege to be able to join in this gathering, a mixture of worship, study and business. As delegates we were very warmly welcomed by officials and delegates alike and encouraged to be part of all workshops and discussion groups. In his welcoming comments to the United Free Church delegates, Andre September, the retiring President of UCCSA, spoke about the value of the partnership with the United Free Church to all the Synods within the UCCSA. This is a key point for the Overseas Committee and the denomination in general. Although we have an important historical link with Botswana and it will always hold a special place in United Free Church hearts, the denomination are in partnership with 5 Synods some of which would welcome project partnership. For example, the Synod of Mozambique was speaking about the need for English language study to enable their staff to participate more fully in wider discussions.

The lack of trained clergy within a number of the Synods was, again, a topic for discussion. While congregational numbers may be growing the funds to maintain a trained clergy are not. Some Synods have candidates ready for training but no funds to offer them while others have trained clergy who are having to undertake paid work outside the Church in order to sustain an unpaid ministry. To see and hear of the commitment to serve God in the midst of these difficulties was both humbling and inspiring.

As before, music played a central part in the Assembly, as did drama. On a number of occasions drama was used to emphasize a key component of a particular subject. For example, a group of young people performed a short play looking at the issue of peer pressure, particularly on young women, to have pre-marital sex and the threat of HIV and AIDS. It was a very powerful way of reminding people of some of the main concerns facing many societies.

From the perspective of a small Denomination within a small country it was very interesting to hear of the problems faced by UCCSA when they are trying to keep open the communication channels across 5 Synods in 5 countries. Apart from the problem of the congregational structures there is the distance, differing languages and cultures which cause a number of challenges. The next Assembly will be held in 2011 in Mozambique. The committee has a structure in place whereby two representatives will attend the Assembly.

## **MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL CHURCH – HERITAGE ROOM**

The committee would have liked to have been able to report that this project is now completed; however, this is not the case. As reported to last year's General Assembly the committee has a vision for there to be a larger display of Dr Merriweather's life and work, set within the wider context of Christian mission to that region. It was envisaged that this display may be set within the Kgari Sechelle Museum in Molepolole.

During the visit the Convener and Vice Convener met with Mrs Joy Crosbie (nee Merriweather), Power Kawina (Museum Curator) and Rev Segola Keimetswe (Synod Secretary) to seek their views on the viability of such a Project. It would be fair to say opinion was divided. The Synod would prefer the major display to remain at the Gabane Church. This raises some concerns:

- the existing room is quite small
- who would be the "audience" for a display in the church?
- there are concerns over the security of original documents within the church setting
- the church has been opened for more than 2 years and no progress has been made in setting up the display despite assurances that funds were available

- access to the church is restricted unless someone is employed to be on duty during the week. Who would fund this post?

In talks with Mrs Crosbie and the Museum Curator the following points emerged:

- there are two rooms available for a display. One would be for the wider Christian mission context, the second would be dedicated to Dr Merriweather, his mission, medical and political work
- draft plans have been drawn up by a specialist with expertise in mounting Museum exhibitions
- some work will require to be carried out on the rooms to make them secure. Who will pay for this?
- there were concerns on the part of the Convener and Vice Convener that the Government and officials of Botswana were not recognizing Dr Merriweather's contribution to the country through practical support for this project. A further meeting with a Government official was arranged and while sympathetic to the committee's request, no firm commitment was made.

At the time of the visit Mrs Mary Merriweather was in Hospital in South Africa so the delegates were unable to have extended conversations with her; however she has expressed her support for a major display in the Museum and a smaller, simpler one in Gabane and this is the recommendation which is supported by to the Overseas Committee.

Since the visit, there have been a number of attempts to further progress this project without much success. Projected costs have been received but have had to be returned for further clarification, although it does appear the Museum has now taken responsibility for the cost of roof repairs. The committee officials will continue to seek the completion of this long outstanding project.

### **MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL CHURCH, GABANE**

The delegates enjoyed attending Sunday Worship at the Merriweather Memorial Church. There is a small but enthusiastic congregation, the majority of whom are under the age of 50. Rev Tom Ireland was invited to preach at this Service.

The church is well maintained and the Committee Rooms are used for mid-week church related activities.

### **OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

Little progress has been made with this Scheme. Before any invitations are extended to southern Africa, the Overseas Partnership Group will need to determine how many charges, capable of calling a full time minister, would be interested in participating in this Scheme. Within the denomination we now have many charges which are only seeking a part time ministry and, at the moment, they are not being considered for inclusion in this project.

The Guidelines, however, have been re-written and are ready if any new ministers are invited from southern Africa.

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

2009 was a tumultuous year for the SCCG resulting in the charity relocating out with the Church of Scotland main offices at 121 George St. Despite the upheavals the SCCG continues to work positively with Chinese partners.

In October Chu Chaoyu, the Director of The Amity Social Services Centre and Wang Jing, a Special Needs Teacher from the Amity Centre for Children were funded to come to Scotland and visit a range of specialist services for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). They returned to Nanjing on Saturday 14th November accompanied by Alison Ross, a Speech and Language Therapist specializing in work with pre-school and primary age children with ASD. During her two weeks in Nanjing she offered training to students, staff and parents on a range of communication issues. This was a particularly successful placement and Alison has been asked to return to Nanjing in October 2010 to speak at a Conference being organised by The Amity Foundation.

In January and February preparations were made for 5 specialist to leave for China in late March and April. The Overseas Committee is delighted that two of these specialist are United Free Church members. Rev Margery Collin and Elaine McManus left for Shenyang on April 3rd. They were based at Shengjing Hospital and offered training on the spiritual/emotional and psychological needs of the dying patient and their family. Staff from the Catholic Social Services Centre who specialise in working with people with HIV and AIDS also attended the training.

On 9th April Sally Boa and Joan Murphy, Speech and Language Therapists, travelled to Shenyang to work for 2 weeks with rehabilitation staff in the Hua Xiang Branch Hospital offering training in Talking Mats. This will be a new field of work in China and the SCCG are pleased to be able to support this initiative.

Prior to the Shenyang placements Shirley Paterson travelled to Nanjing on 27th March. Shirley, an Educational Psychologist, spent 2 weeks working with students, staff and families on behavioural issues.

The SCCG was very grateful to all of these specialists and their work places, Lanarkshire and Forth Valley NHS Trusts and Stirling University for contributing their time at no cost to the SCCG.

The "Exploring China" Education Pack continues to sell with two Education Authorities equipping every Primary School in their area with a Pack. The SCCG has also undertaken a number of visits to schools to offer further training to staff and pupils.

Once again support was given to the Dongzhou Village Children's Home, near Xi'an. This Home looks after the children of prisoners. Often these children are traumatised and very vulnerable. Thanks to the congregation of Polwarth Parish Church and the Barbour Trust the SCCG was able to send educational materials to the Home.

The SCCG was delighted to be put in contact with a new funder. A meeting has taken place with the Chairperson of The Blackford Trust.

## **MINISTERIAL TRAINING**

As indicated in the report from the UCCSA General Assembly, a number of Synods are struggling to find funding for ministerial training. Botswana Synod has a number of candidates awaiting training but no funds available. The preference for the Synod is to have candidates go to S Africa as the training received there will be of a higher standard. This, obviously, increase costs.

The Overseas Committee has expressed its interest in this situation and is currently seeking confirmation from UCCSA leadership about the situation in the 5 Synods. This will include receiving a breakdown in costs for ministerial training which will assist in leadership

training. The committee will continue to pursue this information as we would like to be able to offer some assistance as trained clergy are vital to a growing church.

### **REROTLHE CARE CENTRE**

The Convener and Vice Convener during their time in Botswana were able to visit Rerotlhe. The first thing which was apparent was how isolated the location is and all the problems that creates for the Flying Mission in terms of oversight. We drove on main roads from Gaborone for over 2 hours and then turned onto an unmade road for a further 30 minutes. There had been no rains for 2 - 3 months so the road surface was firm, if dusty. The situation is very different during the rainy season.

On the visit we were accompanied by Saralee Molodi and Mercy Leshomo from the Flying Mission. Saralee oversees a number of projects while Mercy is involved in training for project staff and volunteers.

The Project is run from the Village Hall, a small single story building with a "main" hall and a small committee room. Children of all ages from 6 neighbouring villages come to the Project at different times of the week. For the pre-school children there are games and stories and plans to develop a feeding programme. For primary age children there are games and assistance with school work. For the Youth Group a considerable amount of work revolves around discussion and "training" on key issues such as pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancies, unemployment and alcohol abuse.

There are plans to set up a vegetable garden to help improve the quality of the diet of the local population. This requires a regular water supply and although talks have taken place with the utility company there is the question of who meets the costs of installation and monthly water bills.

During our time at Rerotlhe we became very aware of the challenges faced by Flying Mission staff in training volunteers to take on the task of becoming an effective Board of Management. Apart from issues of literacy and numeracy there is the problem of volunteers being unable to attend meetings when there are good rains. During that period the villagers are required to work in their fields to take advantage of the rains. This is not a problem we have in Scotland but it is a very real one in Africa, especially when people have no alternative source of income.

Due to the isolated location of Rerotlhe, Flying Mission sought to appoint a local Coordinator who would be on site to help the project to develop. An appointment was made but unfortunately that person had to resign due to ill health. The Overseas Committee has not increased its contribution but has indicated it is happy for the 2nd instalment of the grant to be used for staff costs.

### **APPOINTMENT OF MISSIONARY SECRETARIES**

Since last year's Assembly we have been able to announce the appointment of Mrs Moira Currie and Mrs Famie Crawford as the denominational Missionary Secretaries. They are looking forward to building upon the foundation set down by Helen Sunter as well as developing their own particular features.

The Missionary Secretaries are keen that these posts provide a link between the mission partners overseas and congregations here in Scotland. If there is something your congregation has a particular interest in please let the Missionary Secretaries know.

## **MISSIONARY RESOURCE & MISSIONARY SUNDAY**

Missionary Sunday was set for either 21st or 28th February 2010. The Missionary Secretaries worked with a number of volunteers to draw up the material based on the theme "O Come". The committee is very grateful for their commitment to this valuable denominational resource.

The committee would request General Assembly to encourage congregations to be active participants in this Sunday by:

- seeking volunteers to be part of the team which prepares the material
- involving their chosen missionary contact person
- indicate if there is a particular aspect of mission they have an interest in which they would like to see the material focus on
- be active participants by setting aside one of the designated Sunday's to focus on mission
- complete and return the Feedback Form included with the Pack. In order to tailor the material to congregational needs the Missionary Secretaries need to know people's views

## **SHORT TERM PLACEMENTS**

The committee is delighted to have been able to offer some support to the two United Free Church members going to China on short term placements. We hope this will be the start of many more such requests.

Having said that, one of the difficulties the committee has encountered is trying to put on paper information on what placements are available and what kind of support the committee may be able to offer. There are so many variables it has proved almost impossible to set out firm details with enough flexibility to be as inclusive as possible. The committee will continue to work on this paper, but in the meantime would encourage anyone contemplating a short term placement to contact the committee to discuss possible options.

## **ZIMBABWE**

It was with great pleasure that the Convener was able to spend time with Thelma and Gastina after Ladies' Day at the UCCSA Assembly. It was distressing to hear of the situation they are living with in Zimbabwe. The health care system has collapsed, as did the education system, although this has partially been restored. At one point they were having to travel to the border with Botswana to buy food for the children. Food supplies have now been restored but they require hard currency with which to buy it. In 2008 and early 2009 there was a very bad drought. Subsequently the rains came and harvests have been very good. It was a truly humbling experience to listen to the two ladies speak so graciously of their work and their situation.

Generally life in Zimbabwe remains very difficult and it is our duty to support the people of this country in prayer. Only God can bring reconciliation and healing into such a distressing situation. Many of the churches continue to be a beacon of light and hope and it is important that they know they are being supported in prayer by their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ world-wide.

## **BONGANI ORPHAN CARE PROJECT**

Thelma and Gastina now run a project for over 13,000 children - a staggering fact which is hard to take in! They now have over 7 centres, most of them in the countryside, run

by teams of volunteers. In the face of overwhelming obstacles they continue to trust in God to provide for them and their charges. At the time when the health service collapsed a number of children did die as medical care could not be gotten for them. This was a particularly distressing time.

Thelma and Gastina are rightly proud of the achievements of many of their "children". A number have grown up to become nurses and teachers. One young man won a scholarship to study in London. These are remarkable successes in circumstances we cannot begin to imagine.

One strand of the Project has been to develop as many income generating initiatives as possible. Thelma and Gastina do not want the Centres to be entirely dependent upon external funding, however, this is proving very difficult. With so many people in the country being unemployed many families and villages are setting up their own little cottage industries to try and generate an income. This means that Bongani is now having to compete with a huge number of other little businesses all targeting a limited market. Their previously very successful soap and candle making industries are now struggling.

The Overseas Committee will review its commitment to the Bongani Orphan Care Project; however, it is difficult to see how this can be reduced while the situation remains so unstable.

### **FLYING MISSION**

The Flying Mission is now under new "leadership". Mike Webb, from America, took over as Director in September 2009. We pray that he will know God's guiding hand upon him as he leads this wonderful project forward. Under the headings "Serving Because People are Precious" and "Providing Hope Through Christ-like Intervention" the Flying Mission reaches out to remote communities in both Botswana and Zambia. The Flying Mission is hoping to be able to buy another plane as services are seriously reduced when a plane requires to be serviced.

Although John and Yvonne Lubbe have retired they will remain in Gaborone and continue their involvement in the Flying Mission as required.

### **PRAYER LETTER**

The Missionary Secretaries have now taken on the responsibility of issuing a Prayer Letter following each Overseas Committee meeting. The purpose is to inform the denomination of the work of the Committee and to bring to everyone's attention to specific prayer points. We hope this will be a useful prayer resource for the denomination.

### **YOUTH VISIT 2011**

The Overseas Committee look forward to supporting the Youth Committee in bringing to fruition the exchange visit planned for August 2011.

In the name of the Committee

PATRICIA A. JOHNSTON	Convener
THOMAS IRELAND	Vice Convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary