

**REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017**

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul encouraged the church in Colossae to, '*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*' (Colossians 4:2-4).

Paul valued the prayer support of the church, knowing from personal experience how indispensable it is to the task of Mission. As we see and appreciate what God is doing, our faith is strengthened and our prayerful support of our Mission Partners is an encouragement to them. Within this report there is much for which we can pray, give thanks and find encouragement. Paul also asked the church to pray that God would open doors for the gospel and through our new partnership with International Cooperation Cambodia we can give our support to them by praying for open doors in churches and communities.

TEARFUND / CAMBODIA

Tearfund's 'Connected Church' project links UK churches with church based projects overseas. In August 2016, a team consisting of Fiona Morrison (Tearfund), Gary Barclay, Famie Crawford, Nancy Cowan, Ruth Fulton, Catherine McKenzie, Ross McNaughton and Rhoda Patterson visited Cambodia to learn of the work being done by Tearfund Partner 'International Cooperation Cambodia' (ICC) particularly through their Church Community and Mobilisation Project led by their Village Integrated Development Project (VIDP) team. ICC have a vision to see a growing church reaching into communities bringing life and hope wherever it goes. ICC believe that the Cambodian church is ideally placed to bring hope to the most vulnerable in society but also to resource them with training.

The VIDP team use a project named Umoja, which is a Swahili word meaning 'Togetherness' or 'Unity'. The aim of Umoja is to help churches and communities become united and self-resourced. It first teaches pastors and facilitators within churches, who then use Umoja to teach through a series of Bible studies about God's heart for the poor; then about the resources God has already given them, encouraging them to use these resources to help themselves and the people around them by initiating small projects. This helps break down barriers while building up people in faith and resources. Once these projects are up and running they then begin to think about the wider community. In many instances there is opposition or scepticism within the community, but some churches have seen barriers between them and their community falling as community members learn from and apply the strategies they have seen the church use to benefit the local community.

The team that visited Cambodia heard stories of the way local churches involved in the Umoja process were seeing spiritual growth within the church as people studied and reflected upon God's Word; material growth as they learned to identify and use the resources they had to overcome the challenges they face; and growth in mission as they learn to work with their community to bring about spiritual and material transformation.

Many of the stories were wonderfully encouraging – saving schemes, crop planting, chicken, fish and cricket farming, and other businesses that would help to provide financial stability – but the stories were also grounded and realistic. When the team met with representatives from the churches they heard about some of the tough challenges they face, such as, overcoming the cultural legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime, developing fellowship (not just attending church and going away), overcoming a deep lack of trust, learning to work together and share their resources (financial and material), the persecution they suffer from family members and the community in which they live, and the migration of young men and women to cities and overseas which leaves elderly and very young behind in rural areas.

In the midst of all this, the reality of the people's faith, their joy at seeing God at work, their desire to reach their community by sharing their faith in practical ways that provide opportunities for them to share the gospel, were such an encouragement and a lesson from which we can all learn.

The denomination has made a commitment of £30,000 over three years to support ICC as they train facilitators and local coordinators, equipping them to go back to their churches and communities with the skills they need. The committee would commend and encourage you to support this partnership both prayerfully and financially.

The Committee recognises that communication and information is vital to the success of our partnership with ICC. Quarterly updates will be circulated to congregations as they become available. There is also information and stories available which could be used for congregational, small group, prayer group, and personal use. These can be found on Tearfund's website. You can access these at <http://connected.tearfund.org/en/partners/icc/> or <http://connected.tearfund.org/en/partners/icc/blog/>

The team are available to share their stories about the trip and the partnership with ICC. If you have not yet had a visit from some of the team we can arrange one if you contact the church office.

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. Flying Mission comprises the following departments:

- i) Flying Mission Services (FMS) in Botswana delivers medical and chartered flights and aviation maintenance through its not-for-profit commercial arm. This department has been undergoing some cash flow challenges in the past year due to the changes in the commercial aviation environment in which they are operating. This has prompted them to develop a new business strategy intended to give new direction to their scope of operations.
- ii) Flying Mission Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Training School (FM-AMETS) provides aircraft maintenance training to around 10-15 students per year in Botswana. This school has been operational since 2010 and the students are funded by the Ministry of Education. Since inception, the department has graduated 64 aircraft maintenance engineers. The school currently has 24 students (10 first year and 14 second year) with a new intake expected to start in July 2017. In addition to the technical component the school is delivering a more holistic education including life-skills teaching and the Alpha Course. The school is developing new strategies towards expansion of the school through delivery of additional courses.
- iii) Flying Mission Care (FMC) Ministries department in Botswana performs activities to bring about health improvement, empowerment, and poverty alleviation for the benefit of the vulnerable and marginalised in Botswana. In addition to its ongoing support to Rerotlthe Day Care Centre and its Bible Distribution activities, FMC continues to partner with different donors for delivery of its programmes which currently include:
 - Providing Early Childhood Development (ECD) training to equip unqualified day care assistants. This programme has been running since 2009 providing an accredited level 3 Certificate in ECD. To date it has graduated 177 ECD trainees. In 2017 the expectation is to train and graduate 35 more.
 - Providing support to other community programmes involved in discipleship, health improvement, empowerment and poverty alleviation activities.
 - Providing opportunities and facilitating short-term missionary voluntary placements.

iv) Flying Mission Zambia (FMZ) delivers medical and chartered flights, aviation maintenance, and community outreach initiatives in Zambia. FMZ continues to be busy providing flight services to mission hospitals and Christian ministries operating in Zambia, as well as running a guest house. In addition to this they are involved in community outreach activities (such as the 'Rainbow Kids' children's ministry). They are currently busy completing construction of offices in their hangar premises. FMZ also provides opportunities for short-term missionary voluntary placements.

BIBLE MOBILISATION AND DISTRIBUTION IN BOTSWANA

Flying Mission continues to work in partnership with "Alpha Botswana" who have an 'open door' into every prison in Botswana. This enables the distribution of Bibles to inmates during the course and puts the word of God in the hands of some of the most vulnerable, needy and marginalised people

In February 2017, 45 Bibles were distributed at the Women's Prison and 45 to inmate graduates of a Christian Leaders course run by the Bible Training Institute of Botswana held at the Boys Prison. Alpha will be running a further 10 Alpha courses in prisons in Botswana in 2017 requiring an estimated 885 Bibles to be distributed. This means that in addition to the stock of Bibles Flying Mission currently holds, a further 320 Bibles will be required at an estimated cost of £2050 (about £6.40 per Bible). In October 2016 the Women's Home & Overseas Committee agreed to make a gift of £500 towards the distribution of Bibles.

Please continue to pray for the Bible mobilisation efforts, for the great impact of Alpha Botswana and for those receiving the Bibles.

REROTHE

The Rerothle Day Care Centre was set up in 2004 to reach out to orphaned and vulnerable children and their families living in remote cattle-posts. Today, the centre continues to provide care and support for 60 children from Seherela and the surrounding cattle post communities through provision of early childhood education, safety, love and nutrition (serving breakfast and lunch every day).

In 2015 funding was secured for a new preschool building which would provide two new classrooms, two storage rooms and a toilet block with five flushable toilets. The existing playground equipment is to be relocated to the new site and covered to provide shade. Plans were also underway for a combined office building and kitchen which would hugely benefit the children and kitchen staff as food is currently prepared and served at the neighbouring school which is a fifteen minute walk each way.

The pre-school build has attracted scrutiny from social services to check that the pre-school facilities comply with legislation. The existing preschool facility is not compliant but there has always been 'grace' in that it is a small community based project with limited resources and no alternatives for the children in the community. Unfortunately, Social Services advised that the pre-school should only reopen in 2017 in the new facility once it is completed. The goal was to have the new facility ready in time for the new academic year but delays in getting building materials supplied, unavailability of contractors over the Christmas/New Year break and heavy rains has delayed progress.

The remaining work required to enable compliance is the completion of the toilet block with the installation of a septic tank and the relocating and covering of the playground. Once completed the school can reopen as soon as Social Services have confirmed the required standards have been met. The need for the school to reopen as soon as possible is vital as the children who should be attending are losing out on valuable developmental opportunities and input and will be less well prepared for when they move to Primary School.

In a new development the US Embassy has asked The Rerothle Trust to submit a proposal to complete the Kitchen and Office structure (the foundation for these has already been built) which if approved, will greatly improve the Day Care Centre's ability to provide

quality ECD care and nutrition. The project is also looking at the possibility of being connected to the neighbouring primary school's electricity supply (from recently installed Solar Panels) which would be of great benefit to the school, providing ability to power a fridge, TV, computer and light bulbs.

Please pray for the Rerotthe Board and project coordinator as they seek to get the build completed and the school reopened as soon as possible and for the children who will attend once the school reopens.

Charlie Gebhardt, the Peace Corps volunteer who was key to the production of the proposal to the US Embassy completed his 2 year placement in October 2016. The Peace Corps are considering placing a volunteer there again at some time in the future.

BONGANI ORPHAN CARE PROGRAMME

The Bongani Orphan Care Programme started in 1998 as a response from the church in Zimbabwe to the devastating effect of HIV /AIDS, and their desire to show love and care to the growing numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children and elderly caregivers within the church and community who are orphaned by HIV and by other means.

Bongani is a community home based programme that is in keeping with the African culture of supporting the family, which means the children remain in the community with extended family.

The programme which began in Bulawayo, now runs in seven regions – Bulawayo, Hope Fountain, Dombodema, Lupane, Maphisa, Invathi and Zinvangeni and has 1481 children in the programme which aims to provide a holistic ministry of caring for and empowering orphans in the church and community. Education and early childhood development are key to fulfilling their vision of caring, loving, training, and educating the children with whom they have contact.

The programme provides help by way of:

- The DAY CARE CENTRE which serves children who are under five. The centre is non-profit making and helps children experience learning and play. There are currently fifty seven children benefitting from the centre.
- EDUCATION ASSISTANCE provides children with school fees, uniforms and stationery.
- TRAINING and WORKSHOPS in a variety of life skills are offered to children, youths, young adults, volunteers and caregivers or guardians. The training covers areas such as first aid, gardening, leadership, sexual reproductive health and home based care.
- The PASS A GOAT PROJECT is a new venture where children are given a goat and when the goat has a kid he /she passes it on to another family. They would like all families to have their own goats which would provide milk and perhaps could be sold to help with fees or whatever is needed. In Zimbabwe culture if you have animals like goats, sheep and cows, you are considered rich.
- LEGAL ASSISTANCE helps and empowers caregivers / guardians, children and youths in legal issues such as how to obtain legal documents, resolving inheritance issues, and writing their own wills.
- INCOME GENERATING PROJECTS empower children, youths and young adults to be able to sustain themselves. Training is provided on different ways of raising money by gardening, tree planting, sewing, baking, sweet making etc.
- FUNDRAISING varies from region to region such as fetes or market sales whereby they sell vegetables from their gardens.

This year the Day Care Centre celebrate having a fenced and gated play area; a good working relationship with neighbouring schools; 40 early learning students graduating to formal school; 1 youth graduating in Psychology at University; 25 passing their 'O' Level and

proceeding to 'A'Level; 1 youth graduating in English and Communication; 10 graduating in home nursing; 4 young adults who got married.

Some of the ongoing challenges are to electrify the play centre and purchase a stove and fridge; the country's economic and political situation; transport to regularly visit the regions; and lack of donor funding.

In a recent update from Thelma Simela, the programme coordinator, she commented "In our rural locations, one finds a clear example of the entire community involved in the care of the children. All stakeholders tend to work together and one finds churches /communities joining together for the benefit of a given family. Children in Zimbabwe are greatly affected, partly because HIV is still prevalent. There are cultural restraints that make it very difficult to talk about sex and sexuality. The young groups have taken it upon themselves to form groups and discuss about sex education. We would like to thank the United Free Church of Scotland for enabling Bongani to continue helping the children to be better citizens, they are so confident and able to conduct themselves in a dignified manner. Thank you once more, may God bless you all."

PROJECT FUNDING

This year the committee has given donations of £6,000 to Bongani; £6,500 to Rerothle; £3,500 to Scottish Churches China Group; and £2,500 to Christmas Gifts to Mission Partners. To help continue our financial support of Bongani and Rerothle the Committee is exploring the possibility of other organisations who would be sympathetic to giving financial assistance, but would encourage congregations who are interested in continuing to offer prayerful and financial support to any of these projects to contact the General Secretary.

MERRIWEATHER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Committee has been very disappointed that there has been no communication from the Botswana Synod regarding the Merriweather Memorial Scholarship or the Merriweather Memorial Church. The display room at the church which was to have marked the life of Rev Dr A M Merriweather has not been set up but has been used as a storage room.

Following repeated requests for updates on how many students are receiving support from the Scholarship it is disappointing to report once again that no updates have been received. As the Kuruman House of Ministerial Formation is no longer being used for training and there are no students in training for the ministry who would meet the criteria for the Scholarship, the committee have again requested information on who had been awarded grants, how much had they received, and whether the recipients had completed their training. If the money is no longer needed for the purpose it was intended which was, "*to provide financial assistance to students for the Ministry of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa who come from rural parts of Botswana*", the Synod has been asked to suggest another project which would be a fitting memorial to Dr Merriweather and agreeable to the Committee.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES' CHINA GROUP (SCCG)

Project Trust provides gap year experiences for young people in Scotland. The SCCG was pleased to offer financial support to Ms Lisa Burns, who was going to teach English to primary school pupils in Jiangxi Province.

Following a request from the President of Shengjing Hospital, Shenyang Ms Yang Yan, Vice Director of Nursing and Dr Zhang Lixin, senior doctor in the Rehabilitation Unit, were invited to Scotland to look at the different roles of nurses and rehabilitation services. During their visit they were based at Hairmyres Hospital and Strathcarron Hospice.

Currently China has no primary care system. The Chinese Government is seeking to change this by setting up a GP system in the coming years. The SCCG was asked by Shengjing Hospital to provide assistance as it works to set up a GP system within the hospital.

A meeting is planned with Dr Liz Grant, Director of Global Medicine, Edinburgh University to discuss how the SCCG can progress the development of the GP system in Shengjing Hospital, Shenyang. Shengjing Hospital is affiliated to China Medical University and the long term goal would be to Institute formal GP training within the medical curriculum.

The Caritas Social Service Centre of Liaoning Diocese was given a grant to enable a community-based Spiritual Care Service to be set up. It will provide Spiritual Care in the homes of patients who are terminally ill. This is a new development.

The Amity Foundation Social Service Division, Nanjing are long time partners of the SCCG. Once again a grant was sent to the Amity Home of Blessings (a small day care unit for young adults with learning difficulties) as a contribution towards the salary of their Social Worker.

Volunteers are used to assist staff in both the care of the elderly services and the Amity Foundation Children's Development Centre, a training centre for preschool children with autism. In both of these situations the service users are particularly vulnerable, therefore volunteers need to have a very clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In November the SCCG sent Mrs Nicola Hanssen, General Manager of Connections for Life - ROAR, to Nanjing to run an intensive training course with Amity staff on how to recruit, select and train volunteers.

Professional development coaching has been provided for Ms Wang Wanxin. Ms Wang is Director of The Amity Home of Blessings in the Amity Children's Development Centre. Coaching is a new approach, in China, involving reflective practice.

Between the 12th-13th December 2016, The Amity Foundation hosted the 'International Conference on Religions, Values, Ethics and Development'. The Conference, co-hosted with the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, brought together more than 200 participants from various sectors including government, academia, local religious leaders and faith-based NGOs. The SCCG was pleased to be able to offer funding towards the running of this Conference.

The CTBI China Forum UK Church Leaders trip to China will take place between 21stAugust-3rd September 2017. Delegates will visit Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Xi'an for meetings/conversation with Church leaders. The Moderator Designate, Rev Ian Boa, will represent the United Free Church of Scotland and ACTS. It is hoped the Scottish Delegates will be able to visit Shenyang where the SCCG has a long standing partnership with Shengjing Hospital and the Caritas Social Service Centre.

In September 2016 the Rev Patricia Johnston was appointed to a new part-time post with the SCCG. Ms. Johnston will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the charity and project management and development. The SCCG is very grateful to the Overseas Committee for its ongoing financial support.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

The Committee decided, once again, to give a Christmas Gift to Mission Partners associated with the Denomination in appreciation of the work in which they are involved. Regrettably, due to financial constraints, a gift of only £250 could be given in 2016.

MISSION SECRETARY

The contact Mrs Famie Crawford continues to have with our Mission Partners is very much appreciated. Our appreciation for and prayerful support of their work is enhanced through the regular updates which are made available to congregations.

This year, Mission Sunday focused on Cambodia and feedback on how the materials were used is always appreciated. A review of Mission Sunday is underway exploring how we can improve the way in which resources are made available to congregations to help them in their support of our Mission Partners. One option would be to focus each year on one Project

or Mission Partner with the inclusion of information on the others. It is hoped that when possible, a variety of resources including photographs, short video clips and powerpoint presentations would also be available.

MISSION QUESTIONNAIRE

In recent years, the committee has supported a number of mission projects and partners. While the Committee and General Assembly have been aware of these projects, congregations have had limited awareness and involvement in much of what has been taking place. Some congregations and individuals have contributed financially towards some of the projects but there has generally been a limited relationship with the partners who have benefited from these funds.

The committee is grateful for the many members and congregations who prayerfully and financially support the work of overseas mission. To learn the extent of congregational involvement a questionnaire was circulated to all congregational Mission Contacts. The committee thank the 36% of congregations who responded to the questionnaire. The responses received indicated that all 10 of our mission partners and 31 organisations are supported prayerfully, financially or practically. Interestingly, only one church indicated that it uses the Prayer Union booklet to pray for all mission partners.

While Mission Sunday is a helpful opportunity for the denomination to set aside time to think about and pray for our Mission Partners, the challenge is very much on how we can encourage and excite congregations to maintain their involvement throughout the year. Helpful suggestions for ways in which the committee could encourage congregations were:

- to highlight mission partners who are less well supported so congregations could become involved.
- to send regular interesting news about Mission Partners including what the committee are doing to support them and how congregations could contribute to that support.
- to enable face to face contact with Mission Partners and or mission organisations as congregations find it difficult to pray for those whom they have not met.
- to identify ways in which interest can be sustained beyond Mission Sunday.
- to provide updated information on mission agencies.
- to give more information and updates on activities of the committee to enable congregations to see the extent of UF involvement in other countries.

The committee was delighted to hear that Miss Rachel Tait of our Darnley congregation is taking part in a 3 week visit to Rwanda in association with Scripture Union Scotland and Urban Saints. She will be part of a team of 17 people running primary school age camps, high school aged bible studies and activities with orphans and vulnerable children. The Committee was pleased to award a grant of £200 to Rachel.

CONCLUSION

The committee expresses its grateful thanks to both the General Secretary and to Mrs Helena Jarvis for all the work they carry out on its behalf throughout the year. As always, their input and guidance are very much appreciated.

In the name of the Committee:

GARY J A BARCLAY Convener

ADRIAN J ROOTES Vice Convener

JOHN O FULTON Secretary