

**REPORT OF THE OVERSEAS COMMITTEE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018**

**INTRODUCTION**

The United Free Church today faces a new challenge. The Overseas Committee has for many years been in the enviable position of having substantial funds to use in the support of overseas mission. In 1999 the 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.' The Overseas Committee held at that time funds amounting to £442,000. Since then the Committee has supported a number of projects in Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, China and Cambodia, as well as funding the building of the Merriweather Memorial Church.

The challenge that faces the Committee in 2018 is how we can continue to support overseas projects when the current balance of Committees funds is under £15,000. This has an obvious effect on the number and type of projects the Committee can continue to support and the way in which that support is given. It does however present a clear opportunity for congregations to become more closely involved in God's global mission by helping to support the work and witness of our overseas partners and projects and to highlight areas in which we could be involved. This means that a different approach to how we support the work of overseas partners and projects is now needed. As you will see in the body of this report, the Committee is able to continue our support of current projects until the end of 2019 through the help of the Women's Home and Overseas Committee and a grant from the Souter Charitable Trust.

Local mission is a priority for the church and as such is always at the forefront of our thinking, but Christ's call is not only to our local situation but to the world. As Jesus said prior to his ascension, "...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). How can we as the United Free Church fulfil that commission of Christ to his followers? Throughout the next twelve months the Committee will seek to address this question and would ask each congregation to do likewise. Our mission is local and it is global. Now is the time to prayerfully and considerately join the conversation as to how and where we as a denomination turn our attention and focus our resources in the task of being a witness for Christ 'to the ends of the earth.'

**TEARFUND / CAMBODIA**

The Vision that International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC) seeks to fulfil states their desire... 'to see the least served communities in Cambodia transformed by God's love... to experience restored relationships, sustainable livelihoods, competence to make wise decisions and sustainable gospel witness.'

Unlike other development projects which often provide resources from outside agencies which do not necessarily change the underlying issues or challenges and can leave communities actually in a worse condition once that aid is no longer there, ICC aims to bring about sustainable change by inspiring and equipping local people with a vision for determining their own future with their own resources.

Through their 'Church Community and Mobilisation Project' which uses a process called Umoja, ICC helps churches, particularly those in rural areas, to engage with scripture, discover their value, and identify their resources and skills. The programme encourages them to use their resources to help provide for their own needs as well as the needs of others around them, while reducing their dependency on resources from outside their villages.

Through their 'Village Integrated Development Project' (VIDP) team, ICC continue to build links with local churches, equipping and supporting facilitators to implement Umoja in their church and community. Co-ordinator Kagna Sorn regularly posts updates on Tearfund's 'Connected Church' website. In one of these updates, Kagna shares some of the challenges and encouragements in their work and gives some pointers for prayer.

At ICC we are so thankful for your love, prayers and financial support. They make our work possible here in Cambodia. We are blessed to call you our brothers and sisters in Christ: it is a joy to care for each other as Jesus asked.

#### TRANSFORMING MINDSETS

By 2020 we hope that the church and communities we work with will be able to stand by themselves to work together addressing community needs. One of the people whose community is already involved said, Umoja is changing mindsets. I now realise what my community is capable of if we put our minds together! It really is a great tool that is changing lives all across the world.

People are complex. Once Umoja is introduced into a community, people begin down its path and start realising the truth about their value, strength and capacity; all flowing from their identity in Christ. However this process isn't always simple. People are complex, and whilst that complexity is what makes us human and unique, it also means Umoja must be tailored to these complex and unique settings. This means it takes longer, but taking time to get this right is essential for long-term and sustainable change.

Since our last report, we have been working hard to try and refine this process, balancing effectiveness with recognising individuality. Through field visits and conducting face-to-face research, we found that a common stumbling block for community transformation was the lack of understanding behind *why* it's important for people to work together to change their community. This meant people became demotivated and disengaged quickly. We are working to come up with solutions and are excited to work together with communities on the ground to improve our work. Please pray for us as we work to improve this.

#### MEETING FOR CHANGE

Coming to the end of the year we have lots of meetings to attend to help ensure that we are always working to the best of ICC's potential. One of the meetings had all our Umoja facilitator's in one room to hear about what is happening in their churches. We know it is not easy to transform communities: breaking the cycle of poverty in these places usually feels like an uphill battle. But at these meetings we get the chance to pray for and encourage each other, and return to our communities refreshed.

During the latest facilitators meeting our new staff member Mr. Lao led a Bible study on Nehemiah. After the bible study, they discussed together how they could improve their sessions in the community. The group also shared what members of their communities had been saying about Umoja:

'Umoja helps me to understand about the purposes of God and his love for our community. I am learning that we need to be united with God's Holy Spirit to transform our lives', says one pastor.

A local church facilitator also shares, Umoja has helped me know how to reflect the bible into my everyday life. I have learnt to value myself'.

Finally Sou tells us, Since being a part of this group I have learnt how to communicate better with my community and build good relationships. It has helped me learn to love and forgive. It has also helped me start with the small things I already have that I have never thought about before'.

What a joy to hear these things!

## PRAY WITH US

Please pray for God to help ICC staff as they write report and build strategies for the coming year. It is a really important time of year for ensuring we are working efficiently and to the best of our ability.

Please pray for the facilitators working in the villages. They are the hands and feet of our work - ask for God's strength, wisdom and patience for them.

Finally please also pray for people in communities who are new to Umoja. Pray for their hearts to be open to Umoja.

The Committee would like to thank all individuals and congregations who have prayerfully and financially supported our partnership with ICC. We have 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. As you can see from Kagna's update, our funding helps co-ordinators train and equip facilitators within their churches to run Umoja, and it is making a real, practical sustainable difference in the lives of many.

As Kagna says in her update. '*Umoja*... really is a great tool that is changing lives all across the world. So what can we learn from our overseas partners who use Umoja? Graeme McMeekin Head of Church Development at Tearfund Scotland, has visited presbyteries where he has shared ways in which the Discovery Course which is a version of Umoja adapted for use in our setting here in the UK could help congregations engage with their communities. The Committee would like to see a few pilot churches engage with the discovery course and Graeme has agreed to facilitate the course in those congregations. If you would be interested in being a pilot church or would like more information about this please contact the General Secretary.

The Committee greatly appreciates the opportunities given to members of the team who visited Cambodia to speak in Churches about their visit and would encourage any congregation who has not yet had a visit to consider requesting one.

To help you keep up to date with information and stories from ICC which can be used by churches, small groups, prayer groups, or personally Tearfund posts these on their website and they can be accessed by going to <http://connected.tearfund.org/en/partners/icc/>

## 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.

In Botswana, Flying Mission Services (FMS) are no longer required due to the development of better roads and the rise of private air charter companies providing the Ministry of Health with mercy flights and the transport of personnel. The Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Training School, however, continues to provide aircraft maintenance training to around 10-15 students per year, and Flying Mission's Care Ministry continues to support programmes such as Early Childhood Development, Teacher Training, Day Care Centres, such as that in Rerothle, Bible Distribution, and running Alpha Courses..

In Zambia, Flying Mission continues to deliver medical and chartered flights with four planes which are all capable of doing emergency medical evacuations. They are also involved in a number of community outreach initiatives. The Committee give thanks for the work of Flying Mission and for the vision and ministry of Malcolm and Gudrun McArthur which led to the founding of Flying Mission Botswana in 1980, and Flying Mission Zambia in 2007, and continue to pray God's continued blessing on Flying Mission as they continue to support their partners living and working in the rural communities of Zambia.

## **REROTHE**

The Rerothle Day Care Centre serves the community of Seherelela and its surrounding cattle posts located in one of the poorest areas of Botswana. Set up in 2004 to reach out to orphaned and vulnerable children and families who have been affected mainly by HIV/Aids the centre continues to provide vital care and support for around 50 pre-school children aged 3 to 6 years, providing them with opportunities for education, health and life skills development, and enabling them to reach their full potential. The children are supported in their holistic development and have a safe and healthy place where they can play, discover, sing songs, and learn the alphabet and numbers as well as some basic English which is a crucial precondition for a smooth integration into primary school.

Rerotlhe's feeding programme of breakfast and lunch ensures that the children get at least one healthy and nutritious meal a day as the majority of the benefiting families live in poverty. These meals are provided in the primary school which is about a 15 minute walk from the Day Care Centre. There are plans to build a kitchen and office on Rerotlhe's plot and the foundations have been laid but due to a lack of funding the building remains unfinished.

As donor funding has decreased other forms of income generating projects are being explored. The Rerotlhe Board decided to implement school fees which unfortunately puts an additional financial strain on some families. Flying Mission Care Ministry is encouraging the project coordinator and Board to explore other sources of income generating activities (e.g. renting out the big cooking pots for weddings, funerals; raising and selling chickens etc.)

This year, the Committee has been pleased to be able to continue providing financial support for the feeding programme and would hope to continue with this if funding allows. Following a funding application to the Souter Charitable Trust to support the work at Rerotlhe, a 'one off' grant of £3,000 was awarded. The Committee is grateful to Rev Patricia Johnston for her work in securing this grant.

## **BONGANI ORPHAN CARE PROGRAMME**

At the time writing this report, the Committee awaits an update from Thelma Simela, the programme coordinator of the Bongani Orphan Care Programme at Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. The Committee has continued to support this valuable work of education, healthcare, feeding and spiritual nourishment for orphaned and vulnerable children and elderly caregivers within the church and community. Our annual contribution of £7,000 funds the salary for Thelma Simela. The Committee are grateful to the Women's Home and Overseas Committee who this year have generously given a grant of £3,000 towards Thelma's salary.

## **EVALUATION PROCESS**

We give thanks for the work being done at the Rerothle Day Care Centre and Bongani Orphan Care Programme both of which have received long term funding from the Committee. Our partnership with ICC is of a shorter term, covering a period of three years. With the change in resources available to the Committee an evaluation of these three projects is currently underway. Whether our support continues and to what extent will depend upon the outcome of that evaluation. The Committee would however encourage any congregation interested in continuing to offer prayerful and financial support to either of these projects to contact the General Secretary.

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

The Committee receives regular updates on the work of the SCCG and continues to uphold in prayer Rev Patricia Johnston and the work of the SCCG. The following is a summary of their recent work.

GP Training, Shengjing Hospital – In 2016 the Scottish Churches' China Group (SCCG) was asked by Shengjing Hospital to provide assistance as it works towards setting up a General Practice (GP) system within the hospital. Opportunities for Shengjing Hospital staff to undertake academic study in Edinburgh University have emerged. These are currently being explored.

Gao Xuan, Shengjing Hospital – Gao Xuan was supported by the SCCG to undertake one month's language study, in Edinburgh in February 2017. Upon her return to Shenyang she was contacted by staff from the Municipal Archive of Shenyang to hear about Dugald Christie, the Scottish Medical Missionary who set up the hospital in 1883. They want to build up their archive.

Hospital and Community Based End of Life Spiritual Care, Caritas Social Service Centre (CSSC), Shenyang – This project, under the overall leadership of Father Joseph Zhang, has a number of distinct strands.

1. The provision of Spiritual Care to cancer patients who are coming to the end of their life. This service is mainly provided to patients in Shengjing Hospital Palliative Care Ward, Shenyang Sixth Hospital, Shenyang Fifth Hospital and Shenyang Cancer Rehabilitation Association.
2. Community based Spiritual Care services.
3. Community based education sessions along the lines of the NHS's Anticipatory Care Planning. The aim of these sessions is to encourage people, of all ages, to talk about death and what they would want their families and friends to do for them at the end of life/following death.
4. Spiritual Care awareness raising through conference presentations.

Churches' Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) China Forum Delegation Visit to China, 19th August – 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2017. For most of the members of the CTBI delegation, this was their first visit to China, and their first introduction to the Chinese Church. It was also the first official visit from CTBI to China for eight years. While there was a certain familiarity between the two sides of the encounter, it was clearly also an opportunity to renew contacts and build bridges after an absence of some time, during which the situation on both sides has seen changes in personnel and on-going work. Further meetings are planned in the UK to consider how to build upon this visit. The Committee was delighted that our Moderator, Rev Ian Boa, was one of those who took part in this visit and gained an insight into the situation in China.

Coaching – Professional development coaching has been provided for Ms Wang Wanxin, Director of The Amity Home of Blessings in the Amity Children's Development Centre. Coaching is a new approach which involves reflective practice as opposed to the traditional teaching methods of a university-based business management course.

Spiritual Care Training, Shengjing Hospital, Shenyang – Paul Graham, Head of Spiritual Care and Well Being Department, NHS Lanarkshire, will continue the Spiritual Care training started by Rev Ian Stirling. This visit has been arranged for Spring 2018. Paul is one of the Scottish Leads for Values Based Reflective Practice (VBRP) as well as being Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) trained.

Community Health Services Training – Marie Graham is an experienced Health Visitor with NHS Glasgow. Marie will provide training on community based nursing services to Shengjing Hospital staff involved in developing GP and community based services.

Palliative Care Training – Gillian Thomson and Charline Martin, Specialist Macmillan Palliative Care Nurses in NHS Lanarkshire, were given 5 days paid leave by the Health Board to go to Hua Xiang Branch Hospital, Shenyang to work with the Palliative Care staff.

While there, Gillian and Charline dealt with clinical and support issues involved in providing palliative/end of life care.

Rehabilitation Training – The SCCG has been in discussion, with colleagues in Shenyang, about the potential benefits of having a Scottish physiotherapist placed in the Rehabilitation Unit, Shengjing Hospital. This Unit works with patients who may have had a spinal cord injury, brain trauma, road traffic accident but has no specialist rehabilitation staff.

### **CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

The Committee decided, once again, to give a Christmas Gift of £250 to Mission Partners associated with the Denomination. This is not a large amount of money but it is a visible sign of our appreciation for the work in which they have been involved.

### **MISSION SECRETARY**

The Committee is very grateful to our Mission Secretary, Mrs Famie Crawford for the work she faithfully fulfils in maintaining contact with our Mission Partners, ensuring that both the Committee and our congregations regularly receive prayer letters and updates on the work in which they are involved. If anyone would like to receive updates then please contact Famie and she can have these forwarded by email.

Mission Sunday gives us all an opportunity to support the work our Mission Partners are involved in, to pray for them personally and for the Lord's blessing on their work and witness, and to think about how we can partner with them throughout the year. This year, Mission Sunday focused on the work in Greece of our partners David and Wilma Lyttle of Mizpah Outreach and the Committee hopes that congregations found the information and powerpoint contained in the pack helpful. Feedback is always appreciated.

### **REFUGEE APPEAL**

David and Wilma had shared with the Committee the difficult and life threatening situation many refugees were facing in Greece during the winter months. An appeal went out to churches and items such as blankets, sleeping bags, foldable baby buggies, clothes, toiletries, and other useful items were donated. Generous donations enabled 50 'baby boxes' to be purchased. The Committee are deeply thankful for the overwhelming response to the appeal by congregations and particularly to those who helped collect, sort and pack the items into over one hundred boxes.

### **SAM PAUL**

The Committee was saddened to learn of the death of Sam Paul who was connected with Global Recordings in Australia for over 50 years. We give thanks to God for his life and work.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Committee is, as always, deeply indebted to both the General Secretary and to Mrs Helena Jarvis for all the work they carry out on its behalf throughout the year. Their input, guidance and contributions are invaluable and so very much appreciated.

In the name of the Committee:-

GARY J A BARCLAY	Convener
DUNCAN WHITTY	Vice Convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary