



The Methodist Church

Area Secretary visit to Argentina, October 18th – 22nd. 2007.

Purposes To meet with other international agencies and Churches in a Round Table process in order to understand, share insights and agree support for the Methodist Church In Argentina.

To meet with and support the Mission Partner Sue Jansen.

Before arriving in Latin America I took the opportunity of stopping overnight in New York and meeting with colleagues at The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) on October 17th. This visit had been planned well ahead of the recent changes that had taken place in the leadership of GBGM but provided an opportunity to understand the transitional arrangements that the organisation had put in place. The past three years have seen significant changes take place in the staff responsible for Latin America and Caribbean Staff at GBGM, the visit provided an opportunity to further get to know the new staff members, share face to face the significant changes taking place within GBGM and British Methodist Church (BMC) and discuss how we may cooperate together in the Latin America and Caribbean context.

I met with Jorge Dominguez (Interim Deputy General Secretary/Mission Contexts & Relationships & Latin/Central America and Caribbean relationships), Edgar Avitia (Area executive for Latin America and the Caribbean), Dakin Cook & Sara Flores (Latin America and Caribbean Mission Personnel).

Our discussion focused on,

Emerging Churches

where there had been no long historical involvement of GBGM mission activity and support. El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras & Venezuela.

Transition Churches

where there has been recent and growing mission activity and support. Ecuador, Guatemala and Colombia.

Concordat Churches

BMC, Methodist Church in Puerto Rico and Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA).

The United Methodist Church is having to tighten its budget and focus its work, “after months of reviewing a proposed budget that does not keep pace with inflation, the chief executives

of the United Methodist Church's programme agencies, have pledged to preserve ministries that address four areas — leadership development, congregational growth, global health and poverty".

In recent years, the establishment of very good relationships between personnel at GBGM and the BMC responsible for Latin America and the Caribbean has enabled sharing of insights, perceptions and understanding to take place about our work. This has limited duplication, strengthened cooperation and deepened understanding of strategies for resources being used in the Americas and Caribbean. Particularly with emerging churches (mostly in Central America), there is an opportunity to develop greater cooperation in support for Mission. There is a genuine desire within GBGM that it and the BMC should work more closely together in all areas of the world where we share in mission and once the common period of transition that both organisations are undergoing has settled, it may be wise to meet and consult together. An opportunity will be provided in 2009 when the executive of the World Methodist Council is due to meet in Santiago, Chile.

Proposed. That from September 2008 discussions be initiated between staff responsible for International Mission Relationships of the British Methodist Church and the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, with the aim of strengthening cooperation in World Mission.

Argentina. October 18th - 21st.

I travelled from New York to Rio Gallegos in southern Argentina with a break in Buenos Aires where I had lunch with Bishop Nelly Ritchie, Andreas Staempfli and Rev Daniel Nussbaumer from Conexio in Switzerland.

The visit to Rio Gallegos was recommended by Bishop Nelly in order for me to understand the



context in which the Evangelical Methodist Church in Argentina (IEMA) is seeking to establish a mission initiative that the BMC has been supporting through the National's In Mission Programme. The NMA Jorge Ostapczuk, is working in an environment where he has to cope with isolation created by the geographic distances between communities in Patagonia. Rio Gallegos is a large provincial capital that has grown as a result of the exploitation of mineral and natural gas resources. It is a transient community where many people

stay for only a few years as they develop their careers. It physically resembles and faces the challenges and joys of living in the Shetland Islands.

Round Table Meeting with IEMA.



The IEMA's presence is very small and has the sense of a pioneering mission where a small congregation of 15 – 25 adults is trying to establish itself and develop work with children and families. The growth of the city has led to large land cost inflation and the Church is trying to build premises that will enable it to be a permanent witness. Currently the congregation meets in the house that is rented for the pastor but tenancy agreements prevent it from putting up a sign identifying the location as a Methodist Church. Sandy, as the NMA is known, currently has to endure long separations from his wife and children who are living several hundreds of miles away

because of children's education. Though we walked and talked together for a long time around the city and visited the large hospital where Sandy makes visits, with the exception of meeting with two leaders of the congregation, I noted that we were not able to meet or visit the homes of any families that were part of the community. Whilst the BMC has been approached for support to buy a piece of land on which to build a permanent church and pastor's home, I did not get a clear impression that the work was sustainable in the long term in view of the uncertainties and challenges that face establishing a church in Rio Gallegos.

This was the third meeting between IEMA and its international partners in mission in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Europe. A very positive spirit of "Compañeros en mision" (literally, people who share communion in Mission) was evident in the willingness to seriously listen and understand each other that all present engaged in. The IEMA had taken great trouble to prepare a substantial agenda allowing room for sharing of developments and devotion. It made excellent hospitality preparations and coordinated very well the complicated itineraries of the seven international partners that had gathered with the eight members of IEMA and British Mission Partner, Sue Jansen. A new and significant member of the Round Table was the participation of Rev Carlos Emilio Ham, regional secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at the World Council of Churches.

The Methodist Church in Argentina began the consultation by describing the current economic context of Argentina. Whilst the national economy has grown since the financial crisis it suffered in 2002 and unemployment has decreased, the level at which people are living in poverty in the country remains very high – currently at 27%. Because of this the biggest challenges facing the government remain the welfare of children living in poverty and a just distribution of income. In this context the IEMA maintains a mission in its congregations, which

meets the needs of children and develops the ministries of women from one of providing aid in the face of need to one of promoting development and mission. It is noted that the State has been addressing social needs and human rights in society, this has led the churches and human rights organizations, who for many years have been insisting these issues be addressed, to experience confusion and a need to redefine its strategies in relating to government.

Bishop Nelly Ritchie informed the Round table on the 20th General Assembly of IEMA that had recently taken place. The assembly had focused on three important areas of action for the next two years.

To put in place the Strategic Plan of the Church and the creation of a monitoring commission who would design a map for the congregations to follow. (The Strategic Plan seeks to match resources to mission priorities and challenges being addressed by the Church).

To declare an economic emergency, this would involve a review of the church's properties to match the effectiveness of the properties in realizing the church's mission alongside the strategic value of this resource in supporting the mission. The Church confronts this situation aware that there is a crisis of missionary vision within the Church, a crisis that obliges the IEMA to think about its institutional sustainability.

To strengthen the institution, the Bishop will be eligible for re-election for two periods of four years instead of three, this will enable a greater change in the generation that leads the church. Young people would be given greater participation in the leadership of the Church and programmes of Christian Education, Women's Work and Evangelism would be given national as well as local or regional budgets.

While since 2005 the local churches have met a greater proportion of the national budget of the Church, this has not yet reached 100% leading to a continued dependence on international support. Bishop Nelly, acknowledged also, that a centralized system has led to irresponsibility at local church level, congregations pay their local costs and make arrangements for investment ahead of national priorities. In the financial reporting of the Church, it was clear that the financial contribution made by international partners was accounted for separately but did not reflect the percentage dependence of the IEMA on its international partners.

The second important part of the Round Table process is the host Church listening to the context and priorities of the partner churches and agencies.

Representing the BMC, I explained some of the process of restructuring taking place within the Connexional Team and the future functioning of the World Church Office, this stressed the commitment to partnership but that in making world mission part of the whole Connexional Team, changes in how the relationship would be developed would take place. I stressed the need for the Church to respond to the consultation documents that would shortly be sent to Partner Churches from the BMC. The IEMA welcomed the consultation and stressed the need

for the BMC to be sensitive to the perception on the part of its international partner by the use of words such as “diplomat” and “officers” – the feeling being that these words belonged to a world of formal and political inter State relationships, rather than fraternal relationships between Churches.

Mark Hathaway, represented the United Church of Canada (UCC). He also spoke of a process of re-structuring taking place within the UCC, the process would take account of reviewing the theology and practice of partnership in the light of the present reality. The review would include an understanding of “Empire” in its current understanding. The UCC would seek to consult with its international partners on their understanding on the themes of Peace and Sexual Diversity. Alongside revising the UCC’s themes/policies there had been considerable restructuring of its budget and personnel commitments, this it was envisaged would have the impact of reducing the UCC’s commitment to the IEMA.

Edgar Avitia and Matt Morgan represented GBGM. Edgar also spoke of significant restructuring that was taking place within the UMC. The impact of the changes would mean that in future, IEMA should develop its relationship with the UMC through the other General Boards and Annual Conferences of the Church. Over the next four years the UMC would develop its connexionality with its international partners by creating a permanent programme to enable more direct communication with local churches, Annual Conferences and meetings of Bishops in the United States. Matt Morgan, representing the “ADVANCE programme” of the UMC spoke about the revision of this programme that was taking place as a way of encouraging the flow of financial resources to partner churches from the UMC. The ADVANCE programme is a “second mile” series of projects encouraging direct giving to missionaries and overseas churches.

Breaking the note of changes being brought about as a result of restructuring that begun to dominate the proceedings thus far, Andreas Staempli and Daniel Nassbaumer from CONNEXIO in Switzerland and France stressed that its objectives would remain unchanged. It would continue to develop its limited partnerships in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Through understanding partnership, fund raising and visits between its partners and local congregations, twinning links with people and projects would be established. Its commitment to IEMA would continue unchanged in all areas.

From the World Council of Churches, Carlos Emilio Ham spoke of the programmes of the WCC and its willingness to support IEMA in its ecumenical commitments. The Methodist Church in Argentina welcomed this and stressed that it had been a leader in ecumenism in Argentina, it was concerned about the growing regional trend for pastoral formation and training to take place in denominational institutions rather than ecumenical ones.

The above conversations resulted in a package of proposals being agreed upon that would be taken back to the International Partner Churches represented.

The BMC was asked to consider strengthening its partnership through the NMA programme, providing short-term personnel with experience of church buildings transformation in line with mission and maintenance of its Block Grant for three years.

Connexio would consider whether it was able to designate “emergency” funds from its budget.

GBGM would consider how the ADVANCE, Persons in Mission and Leadership Development programmes could be better used to support IEMA in its mission. It would also consider IEMA’s need for Wesleyan formation that had been identified during its general assembly.

World Council of Churches would consider supporting IEMA in its contributions to ecumenical bodies in Latin America including CIEMAL. It would also seek to respond to IEMA’s programmes for leadership development and projects associated with the development of Human Rights, Community Service.

The UCC would consider linking a congregation in Canada with a service project of a congregation in Argentina.

The IEMA would continue to strengthen its partnership through welcoming visits, exchanging prayer and theological insights, sending personnel and improving transparency and accountability and the sending of information on how resources are used.

The Round Table was evaluated in the light of the understandings reached at the previous meeting in 2005, it was felt that everything hoped for had been achieved. International partners welcomed the transparency that had taken place in recent years and the careful attention that had been paid to the arrangements and reporting for this meeting. IEMA had also appreciated the contribution towards a greater world vision that partnership with the churches and agencies present had encouraged in the Methodist Church in Argentina. The Round Table resolved to gather again in October 2009 with an agenda that would be prepared with international partners having previously visited local churches and projects.

Meeting with Mission Partner Sue Jansen.

Accommodation in Buenos Aires and participation in the Round Table had taken account of time needed to consult with Sue about her present circumstances and future ministry within the Methodist Church in Argentina. Sue continues to offer a unique pastoral ministry to the IEMA, she is valued by the Church who takes into account her personal needs. Being a Minister in Bahia Blanca has challenged Sue with facing the problems of isolation that is a reality for all IEMA’s Pastors and Ministers in Southern Argentina through which she is very well supported in regular meetings and conversations with her Superintendent and Bishop. Sue has also found great companionship that relieves the sense of isolation with her pet dog Catalina. Much of the time that was planned to be with Sue was taken up with confidential and pastoral conversations that were intended to support her in meeting the challenges she faces, offering

counsel and reflection upon her local church ministry. Sue's commitment to her work is very clear and she is fully supportive of the Church's leadership.

Her involvement in the Round Table affirmed the special role she has in creating partnership between the BMC and IEMA, it also provided an opportunity for social contact with an international group of people and sharing in the social and devotional activities that had been arranged.

I thank the British Methodist Church for the support and resources that made this visit possible and for the affirmation of vocation and ministry that results in the development that has been achieved in strengthening the Partnership with the Church in Argentina and my colleagues throughout the world who work with me.

Tom Quenet. November 2007.