



World Church Relationships

News Bulletin

29 September 2010

Asia-Pacific

Lamentations 3:22-24:

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' (NRSV)

Pakistan

The floods in Pakistan are the worst in living memory and the recovery will take months. The Methodist Church has made a further grant of £10,000 to the Diocese of Raiwind for work with flood victims in Punjab. This is in addition to an earlier grant of £15,000 made to the diocese of Peshawar in the north-west. Donations are also coming in via MRDF.



The Church World Service has been keeping us updated on progress with the relief effort in Pakistan. Here's an excerpt from one of their recent reports:

As the floodwaters have slowly started to recede in flood affected areas of Khairpur, other towns and villages in Sindh like Sujawal remain inundated. Reports indicate a huge loss of livestock in the flood affected areas. While local people share that at least 50% of their livestock have been affected, the remaining are in danger of a lack of fodder and maintenance. The FAO has estimated that some 200,000 cows, sheep, goats, buffalo, and donkeys have already been lost; however, the toll will possibly be in millions including poultry. Media sources state that fish farmers also express concerns over lower mark-up and the need for government grants because floodwaters have destroyed hundreds of fish farms across Punjab and Sindh.

In Pakistan, livestock comprises about half of agricultural output and in most cases managing livestock is a source of income for many poor farmers and their families. These animals are among the few assets they own and provide a means of subsistence for large families. If cattle and sheep are purchased at an early age,

they are usually reared until they can be sold for a higher price. As some families have started to return to their villages in other parts of the country, there is no doubt that many will find their animals missing along with their other belongings. Many farmers' crops were also washed away by the floods. In Sindh Province, about 80% of the population depends solely on agriculture as a means of income; in total, 45% of crop land is destroyed. The income earning potential for farming families is now almost non-existent.

Nepal

The Prison Fellowship in Nepal is one of our Asia-Pacific partners. The fellowship started a prison literacy programme as a pilot project at Pokhara jail in western Nepal, one of the country's 73 prisons.

In August, Dinesh Neupane (national director of the Prison Fellowship in Nepal) went to Pokhara to see the literacy programme running there. He discovered during his visit that there had been very significant progress made in the lives of inmates.

"Thanks to your support," says Dinesh, "20 male inmates are now able to read and write. They read the Bible in Nepali and are able to write letters. They say that they will now be able to see the world and travel within Nepal without the help of others. One inmate wrote a letter to his wife and she came to visit him to see him study. As a result, their relationship has grown for the better.



"The program has also been extended to the Women's section, after receiving a special request for this from them. Ten female inmates regularly participate in the study, and the course lasts for six months. After having studied for six months, they can now read and write in Nepali and read the Bible. The news of this was publicised by the local media and read by inmates in other prisons, who as such requested for this programme to be offered at their prison. However, we were not able to respond because of our limited resources. The programme in the Female Section has just begun and will finish in January. Please pray for them."

Fiji

The Fijian government has dropped most of the charges against leaders of the Methodist Church in Fiji. Fijian Methodists have made contact with the Methodist Church in Britain to thank people for their prayers and support.

All members of the Fiji Methodist Church Standing Committee were charged with attending an unauthorized meeting held in April 2009 and were held for questioning by police in July last year. Now all but four of them have had their charges dropped due to 'insufficient evidence'. This has been something that the MCB has been praying for ever since the arrests were made in 2009.

Mike King, Leader of World Church Relationships, said: "*The church leadership were keen to give us this heartening news and to thank the many Methodists in Britain who have prayed so faithfully for the Methodist Church in Fiji at this difficult time.*"

Methodists in Britain fasted in solidarity with the Methodist Church in Fiji in February after increasing pressure was put on the Church from the country's government led by Commodore Bainimarama. The Fijian government forced the Church to cancel its annual Conference and choir festivals until 2014 and prohibited local districts and circuits from carrying out their activities, including administrative meetings. The Church is hopeful that this sign of hope heralds a change of heart and a return to conversation instead of confrontation, which may in turn lead to further steps back towards normal functioning for the Church's governance structures.

However, charges remain outstanding against the General Secretary of the Church, Revd Tuikilakila Waqairatu, the current President, Revd Ame Tuague, and two former Presidents of the Church, Revd Manasa Lasaro and Revd Tomasi Kanailagi. Revd Tomasi was a senator in the previous government.

For more information on these stories, please contact Steve Pearce, Partnership Coordinator for Asia-Pacific, at wcr.asiapacific@methodistchurch.org.uk

Africa

Zambia

Zambia is one of the African countries leading a global decline in new HIV infections, according to a UN report published this month.

The report, titled *Six Things You Need to Know About the AIDS Response Today*, states: "*As new HIV infections are steadily declining around most of the world, 22 of the most affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa have reduced HIV incidence by more than 25%. Leading the drop or stabilization of new HIV infections are countries with some of the largest epidemics—Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.*"

Methodist mission partners in Zambia who work in the area of HIV/Aids care agree that the figures are dropping, but say there is still a lot to be done.

"I think the spread of HIV is officially on the decrease," said mission partner Jenny Featherstone. *"I believe the figures say that it's slowing down. Also, there's a lot of*

HIV sensitisation, in that people know that they're supposed to use condoms and things like that. However, that goes against the grain culturally, very strongly. And so you often find that the percentage of women with HIV is much higher than that of men – partly because of these cultural norms that still exist rather strongly."

"If you ask people questions about HIV and Aids, they will answer 100% correctly," said Ida Waddell, another mission partner based in Zambia. *"But if you scrape the surface, you'll find a lot of the behaviour hasn't altered."*

Elsewhere in Africa – in Kenya – mission partner Claire Smithson had good news regarding the HIV epidemic. *"In the past, it was really a problem,"* she said. *"In our area, at one time we were told that 36% of the adult population was HIV-positive. Current statistics are around eight percent. So we've done well."*

Sierra Leone

Here's a recent blog post from Peter and Janice Clark, mission partners serving in Sierra Leone:

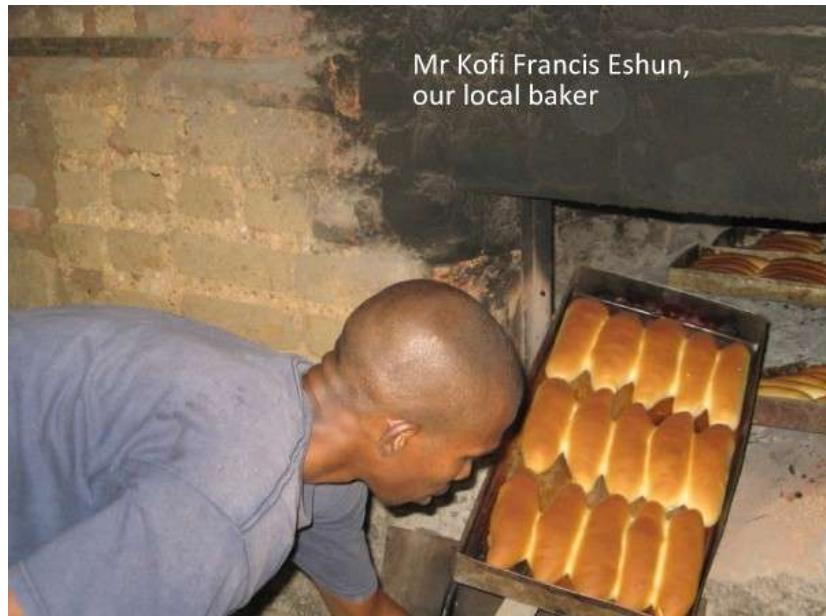
On a day when Janice arrived home in state of delight, having found wholemeal flour in a local supermarket, the rioting over price increases for bread continued in Maputo, for the third day. The Mozambique government, having held an emergency session, appealed for calm, as reports of seven people killed and 280 injured in the protests. The army were then called in to clean the city of barricades and restore order and public security.



The rioting had been prompted principally by increase in the price of bread, in one of the world's poorest countries, which has yet to fully recover from protracted colonial and civil wars, and with a current unemployment rate of 54%. The government had imposed a price rise of 30%, for the cost of bread, part of the staple diet for Mozambicans, who earn on average about US\$37 / £22 a month. The fall of the local currency, the Metical, by approx 43% in one year against South Africa's Rand, its principle trading partner, also exacerbated the plight of the urban poor. Added to this was the recent increase in both the cost of electricity and water.

Here in Freetown during the last month we have read in The New African and The Africa Report of Mozambique's economic success with growth rates of above 6%

7% for three consecutive years, a figure above the 5% threshold considered necessary to make real improvements in standards of living. Foreign investment in Mozambique has increased by approximately 44% between 2007 and 2009 but nevertheless, 40% of the nation's budget is dependent upon foreign aid, as the country remains 175th (close to the bottom) of the United Nations Human Development Index.



It would appear that, following the outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, the attention that was then being given to the alarming increase of the cost of food on the world markets, had been largely ignored, as multi-national finance houses and western governments were desperate to establish their own economic survival. That is, until the fires which scorched Russia and much of its grain harvest caused President Putin to ban the export of wheat which, in turn, reduced the global supply of wheat by 8%. This has raised the profile of the talks called for by the African Green Revolution Forum held in Accra this past week on the production of food on the continent of Africa.

"This is the time", Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, insisted, "to invest in the thousands of small scale farmers that exist in all countries". The appeal coincided with announcement of Standard Bank Africa's support of 100 million \$US for 750,000 small scale growers of cash crops, including cocoa and cashew nuts in Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda. The African continent possesses 60% of the world's land available for agricultural development and over the last decade food production in Africa in general has shown significant improvements in a number of countries, with the exception being those regions where conflict still persists. But the rise in level of food production in Africa has not protected those on the lowest incomes, who do not have the money to buy food, or have access to land to grow what they need to eat. Across the continent the increase in national populations and the rate of urbanisation have both contributed to the phenomena of poverty, made even worse by a fall in the world's grain supply.



Mr and Mrs Brimah our local bread sellers

In Sierra Leone, we have noticed and have commented upon the rise of the cost of living caused by the introduction of a sales tax at the beginning of the year. Now in September, we are reaching the end (if the predictions are correct) of the heaviest rain-falls for the year, when the effect of the wet season creates food scarcity and increases costs. People in Freetown are never heard to complain about excess rainfall, knowing how much they will need in the dry season and those with land have been planting in earnest for while. Living as we do on a compound with gardening land available, we ought to be growing wheat. However in the wettest part of West Africa that is not an option and we shall continue to have to buy bread locally made from imported grain. But with the departure of the goat herd, we have planted sweet potatoes and cassava, for their leaves as well as their roots, spring onions, pineapple, okra, a variety of fruit trees including bananas, pawpaws, oranges, lemons and guava, as well as nursery of herbs. There are still various seeds to go in, such as corn and beans, and as we sit on our veranda at dusk, and wait for the owls to come out, we call to mind the words " Give bread to those who are hungry and a hunger for justice to those who are fed."

For more information on these stories, please contact Olubunmi Olayisade, Partnership Coordinator for Africa, at wcr.africa@methodistchurch.org.uk

Latin America and the Caribbean

Cuba

Pastor Onay Lopez, Superintendant of the Methodist Church in Cuba (Pinar del Rio District), sent us this report on the Bible School the church ran this summer:

Our Summer Bible School took place between 21 and 23 August. There were three classes: one for children aged one to six years old, a class for children aged between six and 11, and thirdly a class for teenagers aged 12 to 17. The theme of the three days was based around the life of Queen Esther. The classes were lead by teachers from the Sunday School (of the Pinar del Rio District of the Methodist Church in Cuba) and the activity was planned by the Christian Education Department of our Church.



The classes consisted of theatre, singing and puppet shows. Many of the resources that we used were produced by the Sunday School teachers. An average of 80 children attended each day, and on the last day we put on a great party. There were prizes for the children who had participated the most actively and for the adults who brought the most children.

During the last nine years we have hosted the Bible School every summer, and many children who are not believers have attended. Through the Bible School, many children have come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and they are now active members of our Church.

Colombia

The Methodist Church Colombia continues to grow through the consistent support and encouragement that its international partners have provided.

During the past six years, having started with 14 churches, the church now reports to having grown 32 church communities as it concludes the current period of a three year strategic plan. The church reports that it has exceeded all the initial expectation of the previous strategic plan. The church, which ministers to Afro-Caribbean, indigenous, displaced and marginalised members of Colombian society wherever it establishes a presence, has also managed to meet the goal from its membership of meeting 20% of its pastoral salary costs and has projected that it should be able to maintain a 5% yearly growth in this area in the years ahead.

As the church continues to grow it continues to keep self-sustainability as a significant goal. The next general assembly takes place in this context of growth; its theme is “A new heaven and a new earth where justice reigns” and it takes place from 15–20 October.

**For more information on these stories, please contact Thomas Quenét,
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Europe

Italy

Mission partner Alison Walker lives and works in the historic centre of Florence with her husband Robin. Over the summer, Alison was involved in setting up two new initiatives which aim to reach out to the English speaking communities in Firenze and hopefully provide places where English speakers and Italians can meet and chat. One of these was a worship service conducted in the English language, which was held in the historic centre of Florence. This was launched on Tuesday 7 September.

On her blog, *The (Methodist) Italian Job*, Alison writes:

It is fair to say that the summer has been frustrating because the Italian church simply disappears up mountains and to the coast – leaving the poor pastor to sweat it out in the city! (Actually we did well by taking holiday in July and going to Sinodo in August) It means that I have barely spoken to the congregation for two months, and not seen some of them for three months. Hopefully September brings us another fresh start, a new way of working and being in contact.

Latvia

A 17-strong team of Methodists from the East Anglia District recently travelled to Latvia to do some building work at the Hope Centre – A Methodist facility for single mothers who suffer from various forms of mental illness. Team member Elizabeth Morris sent this report:

At 5.30 am on Saturday 3 July, 17 men and women from across the District travelled to Stansted Airport to assemble at Terminal J, as instructed by our leader, Rev Frank Aichele.

The sun was shining on our arrival at Riga Airport; we were met by Pastor Gita Mednis, District Superintendent, and Kristine Vainovska, her assistant. Gita welcomed us in a traditional way, telling us that Latvia did not have much material wealth but had a lot of nature. We were all given a spray of chrysanthemums, then piled into two mini-buses heading for Hotel Hanza. We settled into our hotel and had a few hours free time until our evening meal. The variety of food on offer was excellent; we ate our fill and then returned to the hotel.

On Sunday morning we set off to Riga 2nd Church for a 10.00am service. We had an impromptu choir practice on the front steps of the church (eat your heart out, Gareth Malone!); the words of ‘Be Still’ and ‘Spirit of the Living God’ wafted out melodiously across the street.

The service was a great blessing to us all. It was led by an 86-year-old lady pastor who had recently come out of hospital but was determined to be in church because of our visit. It was at this service that we met our Latvian guide and interpreter, Janis (John in English). He is a youth pastor and what a gem he proved to be, with a sense of humour and a depth of spirituality. Rev Robert Soanes preached on the topic ‘We share in the nature of Jesus’. We sang our two songs and did some drama and a few action songs with the children. At the end of the

service, everyone was invited to share in some chocolates which seemed a hospitable way to end the morning.

The evening communion service was held at Riga First Methodist Church. We arrived at 6.00pm to rehearse the songs we were to sing during the service. Pastor Gita had put much thought into the service, having arranged to have the hymns in Latvian and English on Power Point. We sang one verse in Latvian (at least we tried to!) and the next verse in English; it sounded beautiful. It's hard to describe the 'special' dimension which was part of the communion service, as Pastor Gita gave each one at the communion rail a personal blessing. We all felt very humbled and special by this. A candle was lit and prayers offered for Britain and Northern Ireland (this happens every week). We remember Latvia on the 26th of every month if we use the Methodist Prayer Handbook; but how many within our churches do? The service took two hours (sometimes it can be three!) but what a blessing we all received.

Monday morning dawned and we were ready to be off by 9.15am. The journey to the Hope Centre took several hours, as we were first taken to Sigulde, Cese and Liepa to do some sight-seeing and have lunch. Gita is not only passionate about mission and the Gospel; she is also passionate about her country. The Latvian Methodist Church is very poor, but they still give to the poor, trusting that God will meet their needs. We stopped at a supermarket to purchase supplies for the week, then continued our journey to the Hope Centre which was four to five kilometres away on a dirt road.

Tuesday dawned and we were raring to go. The task we were asked to do was to remove all the old tiles that were halfway up the walls, plaster the walls, cover pipes in the ceiling and then prepare cradle for a false ceiling in the large room. We also had to remove old steps at the front of the building and dig a trench around the building in preparation for a building inspection (they had concerns about the foundations of the building). The power drills, wheelbarrow and spades were put into action and there was a hive of activity wherever you looked. The team members in the kitchen kept all the workers replenished with cold and hot drinks. By the end of the first day much had been accomplished – beyond our Latvian friends' expectations.

The pace continued on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. On Friday afternoon, we left the Hope Centre and our new found Latvian friends, and headed back to Riga. We had all given of our time and talents and felt that we had accomplished much, but we had received many blessings in return.

Our thanks go to each person who contributed to this project; be assured that your gift whether financial or in kind has been much appreciated. It was estimated that the project would cost £2,000. The amount raised within the District to date is £7,196.21 – far beyond expectations. Gifts of baby clothes and baby food were also donated and were received with joy. As the East Anglia District is twinned with the Latvian Methodist Church, we didn't just travel as a team of people, we travelled on behalf of every Church Member in the East Anglia District, which we felt privileged to have done.

Prayer Points

- ⊗ Please pray for the ongoing relief work going on in all the places that have been hit by natural disasters recently: Pakistan and China, and also Guatemala, Chile and Haiti.
- ⊗ Praise God for the Nepali prison inmates whose lives are being transformed through the work of the Prison Fellowship.
- ⊗ Praise God for the charges against the church leaders in Fiji being dropped, and pray that the one outstanding charge also gets dropped.
- ⊗ Please pray for all of our mission partners in Africa who are involved in HIV/Aids related work.
- ⊗ Please pray for the Clarks as they continue to serve in Sierra Leone.
- ⊗ Praise God for all the children who attended the summer Bible school in Cuba, and pray for Pastor Onay Lopez and the church.
- ⊗ Praise God for the growth of the Methodist Church in Colombia, and pray for its efforts in becoming self-sustaining.
- ⊗ Please pray for the international church services Alison and Robin have launched in Florence, that they will be a source of support for all the English and Italian-speaking Christians who attend.
- ⊗ Pray for the work of the Hope Centre in Latvia, and praise God for all the support it has received from the East Anglia District.