

Partnership visit to MC Southern Africa 21 March – 2nd April

I attended a Safeguarding workshop organised by MCSA Childcare desk for District Safeguarding officers from the six countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland; as well as observers from the Gambia, Ghana and Cameroon. There were thirty nine participants including Rev Alison McDonald – a British Methodist minister, a legal practitioner as well as the District Safeguarding Officer for York and Hull who took a day's session on the legal issues. The workshop was sponsored by the Scholarship and Leadership Training grant.

Bishop Mike Voster opened the meeting with devotion focusing on Mark 10:13 and emphasised the need to prevent children from living in fear rather they should be reassured to live in a safe and child friendly environment. In the days of Jesus children were of little value but Jesus changed the ideas of them being objects to becoming subjects. They were considered gifts of God made in the image of God! Therefore the need for justice for the 'invisible children' is paramount.

Bishop Mallinga shared the theological framework supporting Safeguarding policy. South Africa has the highest rape rate as statistic states a child is raped every 3 minutes. What kind of people have we become? Safeguarding is taking action to promote children's welfare – it takes the village to promote children's welfare. Getting involved is imperative – Lev 20¹⁻³ and Isaiah 53⁵. The church has to address difficult issues such as teenage pregnancies. Is the South African Church hypocritical in handling teenage pregnancies? Are the young people subjected to judgement before questions are asked? Are the young women stressed about what the church does to them for falling pregnant? Who teaches the children and what are they taught? Is there someone children or youths can share their painful experiences with in the church?



Bishop Mallinga



Participants at the Safeguarding training

Meeting with MCSA leadership – Presiding Bishop – Zipho, Vido and KK

The meeting started with payers and Zipho was congratulated as the new Head of SA Church council and Sharman joined later.

- Sharman to represent MCSA at MCB 2014 conference. She wishes to meet with the Days and see a MCB Fresh expression in the UK
- MCSA thanked MCB for the partnership and grants to support programmes
- MCSA to consider supporting Rev Arlindo in Mozambique if MCB offers NMA grant for him as a Mission Adviser working alongside UMC missionaries

- Zipho requests for SALT grant assistance to visit Brazil for cross-culture exposure for Mozambique
- KK to consider spending sabbatical in the UK?
- MCSA asked for formal requests for placements for UK volunteers or mission personnel to help identify opportunities
- MCSA requested reciprocal visits to the UK by mission personnel and volunteers
- Good opportunity to visit TEE SA

On day two of the workshop, *the state of children in South Africa* was the focus. 40% grow in abject poverty and neglect and 68% in households with R 1,200.00 per month (i.e. \$120). Urban-rural inequalities as well as racial inequalities contribute to the problem however the greatest problem as a result in children is stunted growth. Many children exhibit lack of attention and/ or discipline as a result of malnutrition. Out of 1.2 million children that start formal education, 50% drop out by the end of secondary education and only a third moves into tertiary education.

A big challenge for the church is to bridge the gap between haves and have-nots and it hopes to help address this by working closely with the government to provide child care for all through the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme. This is also an effective means of disseminating its values for children, scriptures, compassion, advocacy etc i.e. the church influencing the society. ECD is delivered through community based; home based or well established pre-school facilities. The purpose is for (i) stimulation (ii) child safety and protection (iii) income generation. The curriculum addresses three groups

- 0-2 years (toddlers) – **Intervention:**- play, safety, social skills, language development, some sort of stimulation
- 3-5 years - **Imitation:** – signs of independence, role play, fantasy group, exploratory phase, implement corrective issues if required and children start experiencing the importance of identity.
- 5-6 years – **Stimulation:** – children are more independent by exhibiting personal responsibilities such personal hygiene, feeding themselves, pick up after each other etc. Cognitive development is crucial at this stage. Parent participation is important and children are encouraged to ask questions, give their opinion, listen to readings and learn as they play.



MCSA Presiding Bishop – Rev Zipho Siwa



Safeguarding training session

I led the devotions and spoke of the importance on investing in children based on 2 Kings 5¹⁻⁷. The girl with no name shared her testimony and declared the healing power of Jehovah to Naaman in spite of her being a refugee in a strange land with no family member with her. Someone must have

invested time and resources, imparted knowledge and took time to talk about God to this young girl as indicated in Deuteronomy 6⁴⁻⁹. We were encouraged to take time to read scriptures and share our Christian values and faith with our children no matter how young they are.

The ECD process addresses the Children, Adult and the Programme. However is not compulsory for all children. The session was taken by Leonard Saul. The Children's Act is about pursuing the best interest of the child in all circumstances. The rights and the responsibilities of the child were recorded, parental responsibilities and parental plans. The Act also covers Child protection, maintain register of offenders and provide guidelines for managing Child and Youth Centres. This session was handled by Crystal Theron.

I later met with Mozambican delegates whose main challenge was no translation into Portuguese and out of three delegates, only one had fair understanding in English. All leaflets and publications were in English and the documents need to be translated into Portuguese to benefit the Mozambican church, One of the delegates was a youth leader and he asked few about four youths could come over to South Africa to study English to help at various safeguarding, youth and children events and activities back home. The youths also asked for skills acquisition to make ministers stoles and related products as a form of income generation. I advised the delegates to discuss with MCSA and their Bishop to confirm if it is a mission priority. I await response and guidance from the mission unit.



On day four of the workshop Presiding Bishop Zipho Siwa led the devotions exhorting us not to focus on difficulties of life – it is given; however God has given us resources to cope and where possible to enjoy life. Therefore as Safeguard Officers and Child care practitioners, we may feel 'burnt out' from time to time and take out time to refresh but we should not 'black out' and lose consciousness of which we are. We should create safe spaces and love for children in our churches and community.

Rev Alison McDonald who is also a Solicitor with the Local Government shared the Code of Good Practice she co-authored with Victoria; we discussed child protection scenarios, various case studies and feedback. The necessary points for safeguarding children are Premises, People and Policies. We later considered the training requirements, types of abuse, referrals, Biblical perspective of safeguarding.

Partnership visit to MC Matshobeni, Swaziland

I travelled for over seven hours from Johannesburg to Swaziland with Vicky, Pearl and Yoli. We visited the primary school and church building on the same premise. We met with the Society Minister, the Church elders and Church stewards. The Church supports people affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the communities. Health motivators were trained and the church developed a garden project for the school from which three families benefited receiving vegetables, beetroot and maize supplies. A water tank was constructed to help irrigate the farm. The Church also adopted a child minded by his grandparents and provided uniform plus other related needs to the 14 year old boy. The Church is liaising with the local government to have one of the teachers trained on site to counsel affected children and have a chance to speak to them outside class. The Church workers have helped improve HIV awareness in the community and promote nutritional intake of the children by providing meals twice a day using vegetable garden produce and poultry raised on site. We later visited Rev Malinga at the Central City Mission in Pretoria where several community initiatives take place e.g. free HIV/Aids testing & sex education, youth skills centre, Childcare and After School club, residential accommodation for short term stays etc. Afterwards we visited a residential Hospice run by retired nurses for their community and surrounding environ. The programme started with the vision and support from the church – no other financial assistance available. Now there are ten beds for hospice patients and referrals from Teaching and State hospitals.



MC Swaziland church leaders



MC Matshobeni primary school, Swaziland

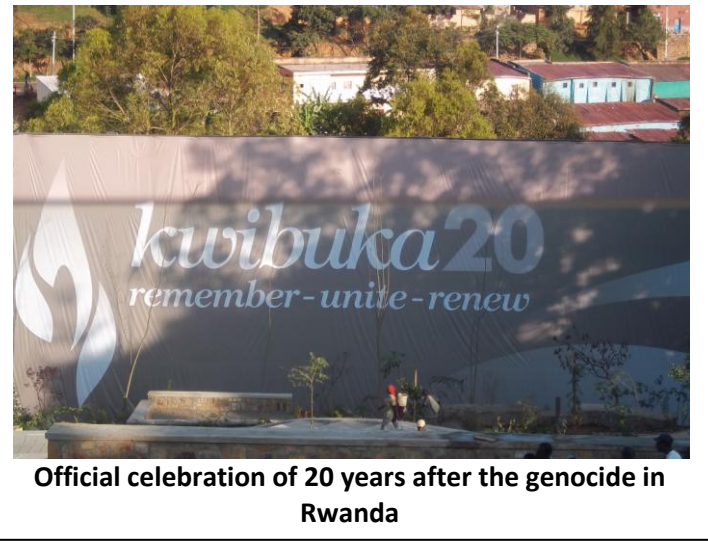
Partnership visit to Free Methodist Church, Rwanda 2nd – 6th April 2014

Arrived at Kigali and visited Amizero Special Needs School, Kigali. The school has 52 pupils, 42 attend everyday and ten have very severe disabilities and are therefore visited at home. The school is run by the Free Methodist Church with no subvention from the government. Parents are ashamed of children with mental disability and consider it a waste of time to spend money of them due to little future prospect. Therefore the Church funds the community outreach as well as feeding the children. The School Principal is Pastor Ernste and commended the support and hard work by staff. Children had to be accompanied to and from school in the school bus because the public refuses to ride with them and often the cost of fuelling the bus was said to be an ongoing challenge. The special needs pupils I met were fed and happy. The support staff received meagre salaries when compared to colleagues in main stream school but that was all FMC could offer. The school secretary is also disabled but works tirelessly both during and after holidays to keep the school running. The requested support are itemised below:

Fund the study and data collation on autistic children in Rwanda. There were currently five autistic children at the school and more cases encountered during outreaches. A comparative study with Zimbabwe and South Africa might help develop an appropriate management scheme for Rwanda. Conduct a 'Special needs and Street kids care workshop in Rwanda to sensitize the government and help train more teachers in this field. The workshop could invite a Professor of Special Needs from Kenya Methodist University, a child care specialist from Action for Children and experts from other African Methodist Conferences with Special needs schools and/ or Street kids' programmes. Bishop Samuel confirmed that FMC would gladly host the Pan-African workshop in Rwanda and request information sharing with parents and care givers afterwards.



Special needs students in Rwanda



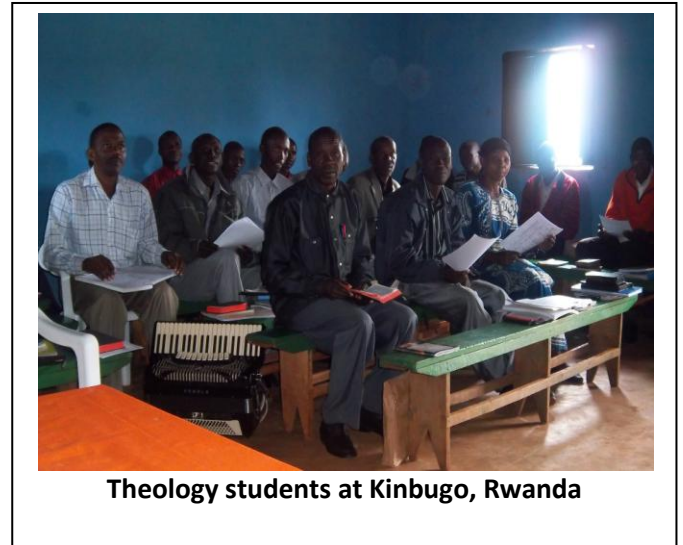
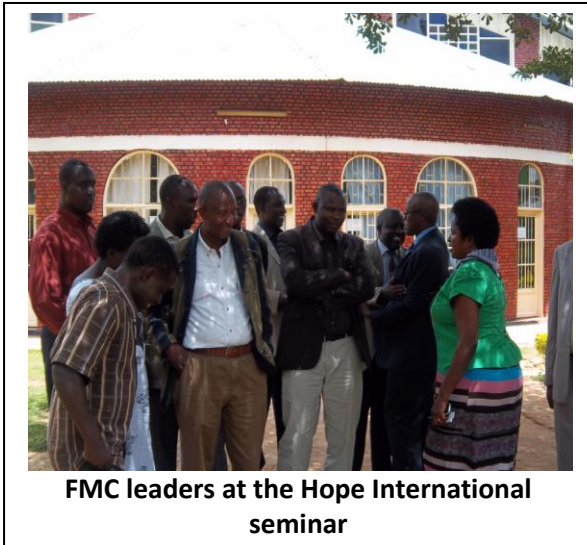
Official celebration of 20 years after the genocide in Rwanda

I later attended workshop organised by HOPE international – a NGO equipping FMC spiritually, socially through community leadership and economically by developing its business skills. Its key principles were spiritual integration, training of trainers, no external capital injection, leadership development, local ownership, independent group management and decision making and reporting. The NGO's role, Partner's role and group's roles were identified. Consultations and recommendations followed.

In the evening I met with five SALT students, three had started their Masters programme in Uganda. They were all grateful for their sponsorships and they shared the aspirations to promote development, lecture at the Theological College, liaise with Social Services and work with youth and women. One of their greatest challenges is studying in English and there was the need for language lessons to support research and report writing. I later visited the Genocide museum – what a tragedy! However Rwanda is rising from its ashes and doing a great job at it – it has a lot to teach other countries.

Next day we travelled to Kibongo in the East province to meet Isaac – the NMA grant recipient as the Director of studies. I had the privilege of meeting the students on their last day of term and listened to the positive impact of training pastors, catechists and evangelists working in the community. Isaac mentioned a dire need for resources such as bibles, bible commentaries in English and Ki-rwanda. The Bishop and I visited Rwanda Bible society and it was agreed to source some theological material through the organisation. FMC made a request for a minister as a mission partner to help in training pastors, teach English and minister in the conference because the NMA programme is coming to an end and FMC is unable to continue funding the post. A beautiful residence at Kigali is available to accommodate the mission partner with his or her family. I also visited the vocational school owned

by FMC at Kibongo that serves over 400 students between 16 – 22 years of age. The main courses were Accounting, ICT and Construction



Partnership meeting with FMC Church leaders

I met with Bishop Samuel, Rev Jeremiah – Executive Secretary and Rev Ernste – Principal of Amizero Special Needs Schools. They spelt out their mission priorities and made enquiries on the kinds of support they could get as well as the possibility of participating in reciprocal mission. Capacity building and income generation initiative to ensure self-sustainability ranked highest and I explained how the various grant forms should be completed. Assistance with translation into English and having English language studies were requested and people continually seek ways to improve their English. I assured the leadership of MCB's partnership plus the importance to promoting healing and progress after the genocide twenty years ago. Rev John Howard – District Chair of Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury would represent MCB at the official event taking place in Kigali from 7th – 12th April 2014.

The next day I attended the wonderful service focusing on God healing their pains and people sharing testimonies about God's healing, miraculous providence and protection.

Partnership visit to IM Equatorial Guinea from 13th to 16th April

I arrived in Lagos to obtain the elusive visa to visit IMEG partner in Malabo and it took visiting the consulate persistently from April 6 – 11 before I finally succeeded in getting the visa on Friday 11th April and I travelled immediately on Saturday 12th via Addis Ababa into Malabo on Sunday 13th April. Why the persistence in maintaining our partnership in Equatorial Guinea? It is the smallest conference in Africa made up of only three churches in a Catholic dominated country of about 1 million people. The church was built adjacent to Methodist Manse, nursery and primary schools. English was taught in schools offering students the advantage of learning English as a foreign language in addition to Spanish and French. The Barleycorn family offered the land to the missionaries and their family house still sits next to the Methodist Church compound and a descendant of the family – Jeremiah Barleycorn is one of the church leaders.

Obtaining visa into Equatorial Guinea is increasingly difficult due to high immigration because the country exports petroleum, gas, cocoa and lots of infrastructural development going on offering employment opportunities. However the wealth is not evenly distributed and access to foreign media and personnel has been highly restricted hence the difficulty to obtain visa for over two years.

Even though I arrived in the afternoon, church members still waited behind to receive me and I met with the youths, the women and the Church elders. I was picked up by Rev Prospero Sharpe – the Superintendent and his wife and later went to the church.



Rev Sharpe at Methodist School in Malabo – built around 1900 by first missionaries



Church building constructed since 1900 still in use for rural mission

Malabo has a big port and in the 19th century it witnessed the arrival of British Methodism in Central Africa and from the port - missionaries travelled in and out by sea spreading the good news and Methodism along the coast of West Africa. The church is the second oldest Methodist Church in Africa after Methodist Church Sierra Leone started by freed slaves. The Methodist Church sits next to the massive Catholic Cathedral next to the state house – hence the need to preserve this important historic link in comparison to the massive support from the Catholic Church.

I attended the evening service led by the youth today – day after Palm Sunday. Attendance was good and members stayed after service to meet and discuss with me. The elders were grateful to see the re-establishment of the partnership Between IRC Equatorial Guinea and asked for evangelism to be supported. The women’s leader pleaded for the restoration of the annual grant to assist with church programmes. The youths were excited that MC Nigeria has offered scholarships to train three youths in its seminary and asked to be educated on the link between MCB and Equatorial Guinea. Rev Prospero Sharpe asked for help with office equipment and internet connection for the church and schools on site. I shall meet with the church leaders tomorrow to discuss assistance with Agricultural project and other mission priorities.

According to oral history, Methodism was started by British Naval officers working at Fernando Po. The first house fellowship was hosted at a woman’s house and later the Church building and schools were built. In 1969, all the missionaries were ordered to leave and few leaders were asked to lead the church. The church building and schools in Malabo were blocked off and only reopened in 1979 after the former President was ousted. Most church records were destroyed and the Methodists, Presbyterian and Canadian Churches came together as the main protestant church in Equatorial Guinea. They recently separated when the All African Council of Churches guided them based on information held at the World Council of Churches.

I left Equatorial Guinea in high spirits with a lovely farewell fellowship and church members delighted for reconnection with the British Methodist Conference. I hope and pray that this visit builds on past relations on which to build future vision. It was a privilege to see the church moving on despite great challenges.



Church manse still in use but in a precarious state



Active rural mission in Equatorial Guinea

Thank you.

*Africa Partnership Coordinator
Dr Bunmi Olayisade
May 2014*