

Report on the Trip to Zambia

By Rev. Ian D. Henderson

I would like to thank the Methodist Church in Britain for the opportunity of visiting the UCZ in August 2011. I spent five days there, travelling from the World Methodist Conference in Durban to Lusaka on the 9th. I arrived in the late evening of the 9th and remained in Lusaka until the 12th. I then went on to Choma to visit Rev. David Nixon from 13th to 15th, returning to Lusaka and leaving in the early morning of the 16th to return to Ireland.

Meeting the General Secretary of UCZ

My first engagement was on Wednesday 10th to meet the new General Secretary of UCZ, Rev. Peggy Kabonde, who had been recently appointed. I was driven from my accommodation to the Synod Office and met with her for an hour in the morning in private conversation. She was very welcoming.

We spoke about the work of Rev. David Nixon. She expressed the deep appreciation of UCZ for the work he is doing in Chodart Training Centre. In fact the Synod Bishop and three other bishops were currently doing training courses in computers at Chodart at that time. I would meet the three bishops there when I visited the Centre but sadly did not meet the Synod Bishop as he had family crisis to attend to and had to leave the course before I arrived.

I indicated to the General Secretary that Rev. David Nixon was due to return to Ireland in July 2012 for an appointment in Ireland. I asked her if she was aware of this and would the UCZ be in a position to appoint a successor to Rev. Nixon to ensure that the work in the Training Centre would continue to develop. I expressed the view that the Methodist Church in Ireland would wish to see the work at the centre being supported and sustained by the UCZ to ensure that the achievements and the benefits of the Centre be continued.

The General Secretary indicated to me very clearly that she and the UCZ shared that desire. She asked me if there was anyone available in Ireland who would be able to take over the running of the Centre after Rev. Nixon. I indicated that we had just commissioned Rev. Mervyn Kilpatrick and Mrs. Claudette Kilpatrick as Mission Partners in June 2012 for work in Sri Lanka. I also indicated that we did have one application from a minister to serve as a Mission Partner from July 2012, but I thought that that minister had already been earmarked for service elsewhere. I told her I was not aware of any other applicants within our ministry who were seeking an appointment as a Mission Partner at present.

The indication from the General Secretary was that the UCZ were looking for a Mission Partner from the U.K. or Ireland to succeed Rev. Nixon, rather than appointing an indigenous minister. My response was that any such possible appointment from the U.K. or Ireland would be a matter of consultation with the World Church Office in London, as British and Irish Methodism worked closely together with regard to the appointment of Mission Partners from Ireland. We, as a Church, did not appoint our own.

I also told her that Bunmi had told me she intended to visit Zambia in the near future and that she should raise the matter with her as a matter of urgency and make contact with the World Church Office at the earliest possible moment.

The General Secretary also asked about the challenges facing the Church in Ireland. I mentioned the problem of dealing with the reports on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. I also mentioned the continuing progress on the Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland and the exploration into inter-changeability of ministry.

In terms of the challenges facing the UCZ, the General Secretary spoke about the work on a new Constitution for the Church; on the need to make worship more structured in the Circuits and for more lay involvement in the work of Mission. There was also a need to find ways of ensuring that Synod decisions were implemented at Circuit level.

She spoke of her own role as General Secretary. Having been appointed after difficult circumstances, she felt that she had to work all the harder to prove herself because of her gender. She had been appointed to complete her predecessor's term of office and would have to stand for re-election at that point. She was also in the process of studying for a Ph.D. and was only part way through it and hoped to complete it.

We also spoke about the various elements that make up the UCZ, among them French Pentecostal, Scottish Presbyterians, Methodists and others. As far as possible, ministers from the different traditions are stationed in Circuits where that tradition has been established in the past. There is an effort to teach the young people the background history of the Churches that make up the UCZ so that they will appreciate where the UCZ has come from and in the hopes of discouraging young people from leaving the Church because it doesn't reflect the ecclesiological background in which they have been raised. So there is an attempt to standardise worship in areas like the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Meeting the Heads of Departments in UCZ

On Thursday 11th I met with five Department Heads in the morning – Rev. Rodgers Ng'ambi (Administrative Secretary), Rev. L. Sitali (Health Secretary), Mrs. Margaret Mwiing (Education Secretary), Rev. B.S. Kasovu (Projects Secretary) and Mr. Moses Nyaboue (Financial Secretary), a Mission Partner from the Cameroon.

Rev. Kasovu spoke of a number of projects run by the UCZ, one of which was beekeeping. These are used to raise money for the Church. He is responsible for the maintenance, building and development of new premises and also of land owned by the UCZ. Some projects are initiated and run by individual congregations and Presbyters and Rev. Kasovu vets these projects, makes suggestions and offers advice and expertise. He works at a consultative level for local projects to ensure that building regulations are adhered to and projects are viable.

Mrs Margaret Mwiinga spoke of the schools. The UCZ has fifteen schools, five primary schools and ten secondary schools (six boarding and four day). They try to

maintain a spiritual and moral ethos within the schools. Many of the buildings are old and there is a problem of maintenance and equipment. Some schools are run by the local Circuit and pay their teachers. School uniforms are worn.

Rev. Sitali spoke of two hospitals and clinics. He indicated that the main problems the Church faces are shortage of doctors, particularly in outlying areas and the shortage of medical supplies. The main health problems in the population are HIV/Aids and malaria.

Mr. Moses Nyaboue is a trained accountant by profession. He said that for the previous five years prior to his arrival the Church accounts had not been audited. This situation had now been re-dressed. Stringent measures had been introduced along with cuts in expenditure to reduce the deficit. Ministers' stipends were €40 per month. He spoke of the struggle involved in keeping a tight reign on expenditure. The UCZ had not sent representatives to the World Methodist Conference in Durban because of budgetary constraints even though those representatives had been chosen to go. Mr. Nyaboue expressed some frustration with his role to me privately after the meeting.

Finally, Rodgers Ng'ambi outlined his responsibilities as Administrator through which he provided support for the General Secretary. I was then returned to my accommodation for lunch.

Visits to Schools and Churches

On Friday 12th I was to go to Choma, but instead plans were changed and accompanied by Rev. Kasovu, I was taken to visit two of the local schools in the area. The first was St. Andrews Primary School and Church. I met the incumbent Methodist minister and toured the premises both the old Church (now used as a hall for meetings and youth work) and the new Church built in 2008 used exclusively for worship. I also visited the classrooms, the furnishings of which would have common in Ireland in the 1960's. The décor was also in need of touching up. Classes were on holiday but some extra classes were being held for some of the children and I visited that classroom and spoke to the children who were very polite and well behaved.

The second school I visited was St. Mark's Primary School. St. Mark's and St. Andrew's are both run by the local congregations who also are responsible for paying the teachers. So it is quite a commitment. They are independent of Synod Office and only make contact with Synod Office it seems when there is a problem. I was returned to my accommodation at lunchtime.

On Friday afternoon Rodgers Ng'ambi rang to say I would be leaving for Choma at 8.30.a.m. the next morning. However, it seems that my driver was not provided with fuel for the four hour drive to Choma and we had to call to Synod Office and wait for Moses Nyaboue to issue the payment of a credit note to the driver. So we did not leave Lusaka until after 10.00 a.m. and arrived in Choma after 2.30 p.m.

Visit to Kafue Clinic

On the way I visited Kafue Secondary School, Church and Clinic. I was particularly anxious to do so because Valerie Wright had worked in the clinic as a Mission Partner from Ireland in the 1980's and I know her father well. I had visited her father in Newtownards after the Irish Methodist Conference in June. He is now in his nineties and was so pleased to hear that I would have an opportunity of visiting Kafue. The school was not in session for the holidays but I met the head teacher. I also visited the clinic and spoke with the staff nurse who was working there.

Visit to Choma

On arrival in Choma I had a meal after which Rev. David Nixon brought to see the new nine-hectare site for the Training Centre. It is a very exciting venture and some of the houses that will provide necessary income as well as accommodation have already been started. Then we went to pay a brief courtesy call on Bishop Vincent Kageya.

On Sunday morning there was a united service St Stephen's Church at 9.00 a.m. at which five hundred people were present, including Bishop Vincent and the three other bishops currently doing the computer course at Chodart. I was honoured that I was invited to preach at the service and Bishop Vincent translated for me, though many understood English. Lunch was provided for the bishops, David and myself on the church premises after the service about 12 noon. Later that evening in the Manse, the local clergy and some Church workers came for a Bible Study led by Rev. David.

On Monday morning I visited Chodart and toured the different areas of both the training and production work. It was great to see the place so busy with students and workers, including my three bishops hard at work at their computer stations. I also revisited the new site to have an opportunity to see it in daylight as it had been getting dark on the Saturday night before I got there. I left Choma after lunch and was driven back to Lusaka arriving about 6.00 p.m. The following morning I was collected at 6.00 a.m. and brought to the airport for checking in at 7.00 a.m.

Overall it was a wonderful experience and I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to be there. If in the future the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland is to be given a similar opportunity, there are some observations about my experience that might be helpful to those responsible for the arrangements.

Ian D. Henderson