

World Church Background Paper: Grant Making

This paper is set in the context that our grant making must serve our development of partnerships world wide and is therefore a reflection of our theology, ecclesiology and philosophy.

- 1.1 The Methodist Church in Britain has had a long heritage of supporting mission overseas through its grants programme.

In 1947 the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) joined with the Church of Scotland, USPG, CMS EMS (Germany) in the formation of the Church of South India. Money that had been used to support missionary programmes; churches, schools, hospitals etc, was packaged into an annual grant.

This process of grant allocations continued through the second half of the 20th Century as each former district of the MCB became autonomous. It was a very important manifestation of our commitment to partnership in mission that support of emerging churches and those that struggled in sometimes inhospitable situations (such as Burma) would be constant and not subject to the vagaries of mission personnel being present in any particular place for money to flow.

Indeed, it was our policy that mission personnel would be separate from funding and thus ensure a measure of impartiality. Mission personnel were actively discouraged from asking 'home churches' for financial support for projects or programmes that they were involved with in order that all project proposals and grant requests came from the respective Head of Church and were established by the autonomous church's priorities and not MCB priorities. Mission personnel are still discouraged from so acting.

Clearly there are conversations and negotiations between respective churches and institutions and MCB through the subsequent manifestations of MMS; Methodist Church Overseas Division 1971 - 1996; World Church Office 1996- 2008; and currently the World Church Relationships sub cluster within the Christian Communication, Evangelism and Advocacy cluster of the MCB Connexional Team.

- 1.2 In addition to the Methodist Church in Ireland giving money to MCB for grant making and support of mission programmes, the Methodist Church Hong Kong has for the last nine years been sending a grant in support of Chinese ministry in the British Isles and a further annual allocation of not less than £10,000 for general grants.
- 1.3 It is clear that the annual grant programme needs to be reviewed for a number of pressing reasons. Quite apart from financial constraints, UK Charity Law, and public mood, there needs to be consideration given to what we believe our theological imperative for resource sharing should be.
- 1.4 In June 2010 we are having a consultation entitled 'Re-imagining Future Mission'. We have invited the Heads of all our Partner Churches to attend this event (or someone actively engaged in the leadership of their respective churches), where we will look at what it means to be in partnership with the world wide church, moving beyond the former patterns of the Methodist Missionary Society to 're-imagine' the MMS for the 21st century. Naturally this consultation will look at what the new order needs to be,

what the MCB's priorities are – or need to be. Our finances and how we allocate money given for World Mission are part of resource sharing. We need to be clear ourselves what our understanding, theology and commitment is, and must be.

Grants, Aid and Dependency

- 1.5 There is increasing evidence that Aid does not work in the secular world. The situation in Africa draws attention to the fact that in the period following WWII up until the present time the continent has become significantly poorer despite the huge influx of aid. Some analysts claim that it is the aid that has exacerbated the situation it has tried to ameliorate, often because the aid managed to be thoroughly caught up in corruption throughout the continent. That in itself is a huge debate but the question we need to address is, has the church colluded with some form of dependency through our grant making?
 - 1.6 A former Africa secretary cites the fact that in 1962 Zambia and South Korea had the same GDP. Forty years later the comparison was striking as Korea's infrastructure, economy, and social structure contrasted starkly with that faced by Zambians. Again, while this is not a simple case of how much or how little aid was granted to each country it never-the-less raises important questions for us.
 - 1.7 How can MCB engage with the question of how we share resources with Partner Churches in order to play its part in God's mission throughout the world?
 - 1.8 The Methodist Church was born in mission, we were a missionary society long before we became a church (in fact we have had several missionary societies!) and in that sense it is in our life blood and DNA to be part of the wider world as the JMA promise puts it; *'I promise to learn pray and serve with the world-wide church of Jesus Christ'*.
 - 1.9 We live in a world where individuals and individual congregations find it more congenial to support single projects where it is possible to have closer involvement through personal links and knowledge. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. In the first instance, the advantages include closer relationships and an identification with and knowledge of another's situation. These links lead to personal commitment and motivation. The downside or disadvantages include a potentially paternalistic view and an undermining of the national church's priorities which will include programmes and projects unseen or unheard of because they don't have advocates known to churches in the UK.
 - 1.10 Some of our partners say that the mission of the church only gains momentum once western/northern churches and their money cease to have influence. For example the Christian Church in China operates the three self principle - self promoting, self propagating, self determining - and has grown exponentially year on year. One recent estimate reckons on 100 million members. The Methodist Church in Brazil has more than doubled its membership in the past 10 years.
 - 1.11 When we witness other countries and their needs, we have no doubt we are wealthy and have resources to share, and we want to share. What is our responsibility in the 21st century when we want to be part of the world church and not continue to act as though we are the hub? How can we work alongside our partners in a healthy and constructive way sharing our resources, some of these financial, but we also have other gifts to share and this is our joy and our duty. The challenge of duty and the obligation to share resources as Christian people is our desire to witness to the gospel and the transforming power of God's love and the call of responding to God's mission in the world.
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Therefore some questions we need to consider are:

- How can we best support partner churches?
- What does obligation mean for us with regard to sharing resources?
- What is the obligation of wealth?
- Is there an obligation of poverty?

If we are to move away from our current practice of grant making how can we remain responsible with the wealth we do have?

- What measure of support is it wise for us to offer?
- Who dictates the grant making?
- What of seed funding?
- How about solidarity grants for disasters or crises?
- Should we be seriously considering using our resources for more people to people movement?
- How can we capitalize on local churches needs to support projects and still work with partner church priorities in ways that ensure a measure of mutuality, building ways to minimize dependency, include exit strategies, understanding that the church is not a project but a way of life and therefore ever but that external funding isn't healthy for the recipient nor the giver.
- How can we embody contextual differences with respect and delight, challenge and learning?

1.12 There are sure to more questions but this is a starter so that when we work on this further with partners in June 2010 at the All Partners Consultation 're-imagining Future Mission' we will have had time to reflect think theologically about our role in God's mission in the world

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