

mission matters

Church Growth

PRAY FOR MISSION - GIVE TO MISSION - SUPPORT GOD'S MISSION

A man in a white suit is standing and speaking to a group of people sitting on the ground in front of a stone wall with a large cross. The scene is outdoors, with trees in the background. The man is gesturing with his right hand raised. The people are mostly men, some wearing white shirts, and some women in colorful saris. The stone wall is made of rough-hewn stones and has a large, simple wooden cross mounted on it. The overall atmosphere is one of a community gathering or a church service.

Church
without
walls!

Editorial

Because you're worth it

My grandpa's hallway has a china pot into which people drop small change as they pass by. When the pot is full, a heavy bag of coins is taken to the bank and a crisp note is presented to a grandchild or a charity. As a well known supermarket chain tells us, every little helps! Apparently not everyone agrees, though; the Royal Canadian Mint is phasing out the penny so prices will be rounded up or down to the nearest five cents.

I was at a meeting recently where we spoke about the core truths that we believe. One that came up was "People are worth it". Reading the articles in this magazine (and mourning the demise of the Canadian penny), it strikes me that **church growth is really about knowing that every person matters – even those some might view as worthless. God doesn't round up or down, he knows the hairs on the head of every person.**

I want to see the Church growing because I long for more people to find a home and to feel valued. I long for every person on this earth to know that God thinks they matter. The stories we have here remind us of our responsibility to demonstrate to people that God loves them. From the refurbishment of the Village Centre in Surrey to the after-school programme for children in Latvia who would otherwise spend their time ignored, I am thrilled to hear of the Church striving to show the world the truth that we know through the life and death of Jesus – God says you're worth it.

I hope these stories encourage and challenge you as they have me, because you're worth it!



Guest editorial
Hayley Moss
(youth president)



Photograph: © TMCP

No water: they prayed and began to dig...

There is no shortage of inspiring testimonies of church growth when the Methodist Church in Cuba's 600 local mission partners (or 'misioneros') get together.

Pastor Geordelis Marzo Rodriguez was sent to plant a church in the Pinar del Rio province, about 250km from Havana City, in the town of Santa Maria de Mantua, where there was previously no Methodist church.

His arrival was a blessing to the people because he prayed in his own back garden that God would allow him to dig a well, despite everyone else saying it was impossible in this area where access to water is a major challenge. After praying he began to dig, and at seven metres deep he struck a water source!

Thanks to this testimony of incredible provision, many people have come to know Christ and the mission is prospering. The community has not only benefited from the natural water source but also from the streams of living water from salvation.

Mission is truly at the heart of this church, which declares proudly that although some missionaries have very scant resources, "this will not be an obstacle to continue the work of evangelism ... Larger churches support smaller ones and their missionaries so that the work can continue".

In a recent report, the Church in Cuba wrote:

"The Methodist Church in Cuba is grateful to the Methodist Church in Britain who has made mission work in Cuba possible. Our evangelistic task continues for the kingdom of God that is growing in our nation."

Above: Collecting water from the well
Below: Pastor Geordelis Marzo Rodriguez with his family by the well



Photograph: © Methodist Church in Cuba

8,766

hours of prayer (and counting!)

Beacon house, which has been supported by the Mission in Britain Fund since its inception in 2009, started with a big vision:

"To pray for spiritual transformation in our city and nation and to help people explore prayer and the spiritual dimension to life by creating a dedicated 24/7 regional prayer facility with a range of outreach ministries."

And it didn't disappoint! Membership of the Beacon Christian fellowship now numbers 70 adults and 20 children and young people. The house regularly hosts a further 12 local congregations and welcomed over 400 individuals in 2012.

"Individuals keep coming back, describing how the Beacon helps them to pray and engage with God. Church groups tell us how coming to the Beacon envisions them and brings spiritual renewal."
The Revd William Porter, team leader

The young people in the fellowship have developed special retreat sessions to be used by schools as part of their RE provision. It has been very popular and has seen great success in revealing the love and compassion of God to many young people, and their teachers.

In the last hour of 2012, the Beacon House of Prayer in Stoke-on-Trent celebrated a whole year of continuous prayer!

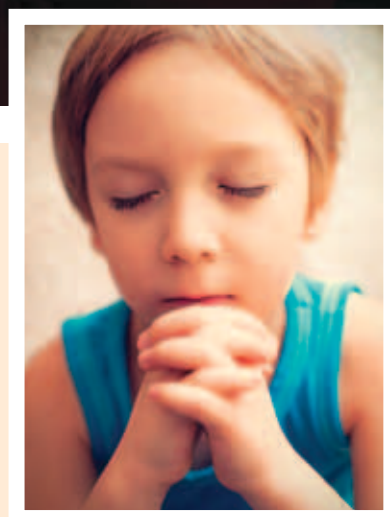


Photograph below: © 2013 Photos.com a division of Getty Images. Photograph left: © Beacon Christian fellowship

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"On one particular visit a child stopped by a large cross in the basement creative space, where the focus was on burdens. He shared about his father dying and that group of children had a profound moment together about laying burdens down before God who cares. At that same visit, the key teacher was in tears; so aware of God's presence around her and wanting to renew her personal church commitment from the past."

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Ready for service and sacrifice

Sri Lanka has been scarred by a bitter 25-year civil war, during which more than 70,000 people were killed. It is nearly four years since the conflict ended, but the legacy of war is still prominent, particularly in the north where most of the fighting took place.

The physical evidence is all around: piles of wrecked vehicles, bombed or shelled in the final weeks. There are many women in Kilinochi and elsewhere in the north and east who have lost children and husbands. Some still do not know if their men are dead or held by the government.

The country is full of needs; the number of traumatised children is distressing. Many families have no house and their villages have no water. People need to find ways to make a living. Children need schools.

International development charities are forced to work through the government and the Presidential Task Force (the arm of the military from which all NGO and voluntary projects must have permission), whereby the ability to work in specific areas is tightly controlled. And so many international development charities are pulling out of Sri Lanka unwilling to work in this way.

In contrast, the Church is unique in its ability to work without seeking permission from the Presidential Task Force as it is classified as "existing local activity" and last year the Methodist Church in Britain was honoured to accept the invitation to partner with the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka.



Service of dedication in the ruined church

Photograph: © TMCP

Church without walls!

After a grant from the World Mission Fund enabled the manse to be rebuilt during 2012, the service of dedication, led by the President, took place in the ruined church where regular Sunday services now take place although there is only one wall and no roof!

The local minister who has lived courageously through all these troubles, the Revd Prinsan leads worship here at 8am each week. He says, "The local Methodists are determined to worship here regularly again." The church motto echoes the

Covenant service and stands tall in front of the ruins, "Ready for both service and sacrifice".

Navajeevanam

Early in 2013, Steve Pearce, World Church partnership coordinator for Asia & the Pacific, travelled to Sri Lanka. On his return, Steve shared a story of the Navajeevanam project in northern Sri Lanka. The project's name means 'New Life', which is exactly what is needed in this area.

Steve explained: "Navajeevanam was founded by Methodist missionaries 60 years ago, who, frustrated by the caste system which denied opportunities to some, built this Christian community where young people could learn practical skills such as farming. It was a great success and developed rapidly to include a children's home, a rice mill and a church.

"They encountered difficult times through the civil war. Five years ago, the front line of the fighting was so close, the children had to be moved to safety and the whole community fled. The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) occupied Navajeevanam and then, when they were driven north in the final phase of the war they destroyed all the buildings to prevent their use by the Sri Lankan army.

"A grant from the World Mission Fund was given last year to begin rehabilitation of the centre. The Revd Nishante was



Photograph: © TMCP

appointed as director for the project. He has just returned from organic farming and leadership training at the Asian Rural Institute (where he was funded by a World Mission Fund SALT scholarship) and is full of enthusiasm to rebuild the centre. As soon as the current rice crop is harvested in March, rebuilding work will begin.

"There is an enormous need to offer vocational training here. There are no jobs and nothing to do – but there is plenty of unused land, so courses in organic farming will soon be on offer. Students will be drawn from both the Tamil and Sinhala communities, who are in need of activity, hope and livelihood; new life, in fact!"

Right: The Revd Nishante planting paddy fields



Photograph: © Asian Rural Institute

Turning to Christ brought my children home

Urs Schweizer, manager of the Fund for Mission in Europe, shares a story from Latvia.



"As a single mother, Sofija* lived with her three children in the small city of Liepa in Latvia. But there came a day of shock: she had done some bad things, which were – according to the responsible Social Services – sufficient reason for the removal of custody of her children.

Searching for help, Sofija got in touch with Liepa United Methodist Church where she was warmly received. After this surprising experience of love and openness, she kept in touch with the people of this local church. Deep in her heart, Sofija realised that it would help her to turn her eyes upon Jesus and to have fellowship with these Christians.

As a result, her attitude slowly changed and something new grew in her life. Spending much time with the responsible Social Services, Sofija could credibly prove these changes and follow up her words with deeds. Finally she received custody for her children again.

This is more than a touching story with a happy ending. In Liepa, many children and youth hang out on the streets because there is nobody at home waiting for them. Drugs and crime are just two of the dangers threatening their lives. Leaders of Liepa UMC have therefore established an after-school programme – a safe place for children and youth where they are given help with their homework, where they find people who make time for their questions and worries, where they can learn a different kind of social engagement with their peers, or where they just receive a hot meal.

This programme is faith and love in action; however the Gospel is also purposely the subject of many stories, conversations and discussions. Sofija often comes to the

after-school programme with her children. She is a very committed volunteer, helping wherever she is needed, and she is very good with all of the children".

* Not her real name



A family finishing their day at the after-school programme

Photograph: © Fund for Mission in Europe

Closing one door opens so many more

Village Centre

There are many inspiring stories emerging from the Village Centre in Surrey – including stories of separated parents whom the centre has helped maintain contact with their children. Accredited as one of the 270 child contact centres in the UK, the Village Centre provides a neutral place for children to enjoy time with the parent who no longer lives at home with them.

Englefield Green Methodist church, where the Village Centre is based, was not always a growth story. Back in 2002, the small congregation decided to cease worshipping in the Methodist church



The painting class for people with dementia and their carers, photo from the Village Centre.

Photograph: © Village Centre



Photograph: © Village Centre

Christmas Day, serving 70 people with a free 3 course dinner, photo from the Village Centre.

and to unite with the local Anglican parish church. Paradoxically, this allowed a new, clearer vision and purpose for the Methodist church building to be conceived, in the spirit of John Wesley's outward-looking faith.

The building was refurbished and developed into a Christian hub for the community. With part-funding from the Mission in Britain Fund the church has been refurbished to provide a range of facilities that serve the whole community in inspiring ways:

- a community café open six days a week
- a computer room
- a 'wet room' for disabled and homeless people
- a prayer room
- a hall that hosts more than 17 community activities including 'Music with Mummy', adoption support, craft workshops, film nights, dementia support, family counselling and dance classes.

One of the most successful aspects of the village centre is its recognition as a family friendly location that welcome parents and children.

Over 300 people make use of the centre and some have taken steps to explore their faith by attending the *Christianity Explored* course – not to mention the numerous opportunities to share hope with individuals on a day-to-day basis.

Find out more at: www.villagecentre.org.uk

Some highlights from the feedback received

"A lady, who has been using our computer room to do after school tuition, was going to be homeless and through our contacts and much prayer we have found her a place to live."

"A young mum recently asked how the project was going and was it making money? She was so relieved when she was told it was doing very well, she said, 'I can't imagine not having this place here; it's become such a part of my life.'"

Children praying for a better future

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Yet many churches still wrestle with how to embrace and engage children in Sunday worship.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is mindful that the care and nurture of children is an important part of holistic growth in the Church and is seeking to ensure that children are at the centre of transformation.

Victoria Sikhakane is the MCSA's childcare coordinator, covering Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa, responsible for developing and implementing childcare policies for the Church.

"Many of our societies are increasingly becoming aware of the need to embrace children as part of worship," Victoria says. "There's a young man in our church who was a Sunday school child, and is now a youth member leading a Sunday school class. In 2012 he mentored young boys who were part of the confirmation class. Childcare does ensure a continuum of spiritual growth and development of character."

Victoria believes that children can lead their parents to faith through their enthusiasm for Church. "In many local communities the Church is there to serve not only those who call themselves Methodists, but all who seek a place to worship, or spiritual nourishment, acceptance and fellowship," she says. "This is even more so with children who attend church with their friends regardless of whether their parents are associated with a church or not. Some of these children end up making the church their permanent spiritual home and sometimes their parents become members of the same church."



Photograph: © MCSA

At this church in Southern Africa the minister calls them forward for prayer and always asks them to state what they would like prayer for. The children make prayer requests such as play, passing exams, and even parents respecting them by not talking badly about each other.



Photograph: © MCSA

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is also learning and taking inspiration from other countries. This photograph was taken during a visit of some of the leadership of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to The Wesleyan Methodist Church in Angola. In one service, they witnessed a large number of children who had come to join in worship and were right at the heart of the service. "Truly Christ is entrusting the growth and future of his Church in their hands as well!" says Victoria.

Challenge and commitment to mission in Brazil

One of the remarkable statistics about Brazilian Methodism is that in the last 20 years its membership has grown by 286% to approximately 214,000 members.

It is against this backdrop that the Methodist Church Council of 2011 discussed a new National Missionary Plan. The proposals included producing new teaching materials for all levels of the Church, changing the organisational structure in order that every state in Brazil would have its own Conference (26 in total), compared with the present 6 Conferences and 2 missionary Conferences. The plan was agreed to great acclaim.

Channel Islands Chair of District, the Revd David Hinchliffe was attending the Council meeting in Brazil and reflected afterwards, "In one of the debates concerning the National Missionary Plan, one of the delegates commented that 'a declining Church is a sick Church!'



Photograph: © Methodist Church in Brazil

Mass baptism by the sea as the church in Brazil grows by 286%

"My immediate response was one of annoyance and defensiveness. I wanted to say how difficult it was to be a Christian in a secular and secularising society like the UK! But the comment has remained with me as a personal challenge, but also a challenge to British Methodism as a whole: do we too easily accept decline as inevitable?"

"In a recent BBC *Songs of Praise* programme introducing *Singing the Faith*, John Bell of the Iona Community remarked that 'Methodists sing well because they believe they can sing; Anglicans only believe the choir can sing!'

"The analogy is that Brazilian Methodism is growing because it believes it can grow because it sees God at work. I have little doubt that the Brazilian missionary plan will radically affect the Church, and facilitate its continuing growth. I am challenged to reflect on that experience in the light of my own ministry and context."

The Church itself continues to reflect on its growth, and attempts to offer some analysis of its success in the Methodist Church in Brazil's *Christian Exhibitor* magazine, an extract from which is translated for us below:

The Revd Rogério da Silva Oliveira, minister of one of the largest churches in Brazilian Methodism in Macaé, teaches that church planting means hard work. "It takes sweat, training, education, preparation and discipleship. The church needs to make plans and strategies to bring about results in church growth, the growing part of which belong to God. Simply opening a door and leading services will not achieve this end," he says.

"God gives agricultural growth when humans work hard to create conditions for harvest. By the same token, as mysterious as it may seem, God acts in a similar way as regards the

evangelisation of the world. However, this is not in order to unduly glorify individuals who create the conditions, because they are only servants and instruments of God for the work," adds North American theologian, Peter Wagner.

This is how the Methodist Church differs from others, in the opinion of the Revd Deonísio Agnelo dos Santos. He states that Methodists must not be influenced by theological trends that focus solely on numerical growth. "When we try to grow at any cost, we lose our identity. By taking the whole gospel into account, there will be better Christians which will in turn lead to quality and quantity," he stresses.

Deacons: Standing in the doorway of the Church



Photograph: © 2013 Photos.com a division of Getty Images

St Jude's project, as has Prayer for Healing on the Streets in Kettering, both involving Christians working together across denominations.

Fiona, who is now also a trustee of St Jude's says, "It is so encouraging working with Christians from all walks of life and varying theological views who are nevertheless united in their love for Jesus and their passion to show God's love in so many practical ways. Praying together across denominations is so powerful, and Tony and I have become even more aware of belonging to the Body of Christ. The Methodist Church is just one part of that, but nevertheless significant, often bringing social justice to the fore."



The Methodist Diaconal Order is a ministry that has been growing in recent years. It now numbers 280 deacons whose roles (organised at circuit level) focus on bridging the gap between the Church and the world.

Deacons are often described as "standing in the doorway of the Church", keeping the door open both ways.

Fiona de Boltz is one deacon whose story illustrates this open door and a wonderful sense of God's love rippling out through it. Fiona began her diaconal ministry in 2009 by coordinating the setting up of Corby Street Pastors in the Kettering & Corby Circuit. A team of 23 street pastors took to the streets in July 2010, with support from a team of prayer pastors.

In her second year, Fiona established a second Street Pastors initiative in Kettering, with volunteers drawn from 20 local churches. These projects dovetail with Fiona's role as chaplain to the police in Corby and Kettering. In the autumn of 2010 Fiona heard that St Jude's drop-in centre for homeless and vulnerable people in Kettering was closing. Fiona helped raise awareness, funds and volunteers to keep the centre open. Today the centre is

managed and run by volunteers from local churches. Fiona then set up the Kettering Homelessness Forum, in partnership with her presbyter husband. The Forum brings together representatives from the local authority, churches, and local charities. Together they campaigned for local adoption of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), under which all rough sleepers are given overnight shelter whenever the temperature drops below zero.

The Kettering Food Bank is another initiative that has grown out of the

Fiona also serves in a local primary school and a residential home, runs a pastoral care course, acts as secretary for Churches Together in Corby, and assists in local Alpha courses. She speaks regularly on local radio and at a variety of community groups, giving her an opportunity to spread the good news of God's love for all people everywhere. Her ministry has helped encourage greater links between churches and built bridges with the community, the police and the local council, as Christians are seen to be active and living out Christ's love in practical ways.

Photograph: © TMCP



Deacon Fiona addresses police officers after the tragic death of two police officers in Manchester last year

100,000,000th

China

Bible in China

A first-hand account by Steve Pearce, partnership coordinator for Asia, of the moment that the Amity press printed its 100 millionth Bible.



Amity's 100 millionth Bible was produced

It was a very exciting occasion! On 8 November, I was present in the printing factory in Nanjing as Amity's 100 millionth Bible was produced.

Guests (including Party officials) had come from all over the world and all over China to make speeches giving their congratulations on this wonderful achievement.

Not long ago, Chinese Christians were lucky if they had even a few handwritten pages of the Bible. Then in 1986 Amity was formed and began printing Bibles. Now they come off the presses at the rate of one every second.

Official figures give the number of Christians as 23 million but it is likely to be far higher, maybe soon approaching 100 million. This is a huge number but a tiny proportion of China's population. Christianity is growing very quickly; so too are Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism. Providing adequate numbers of well-trained ministers is a priority

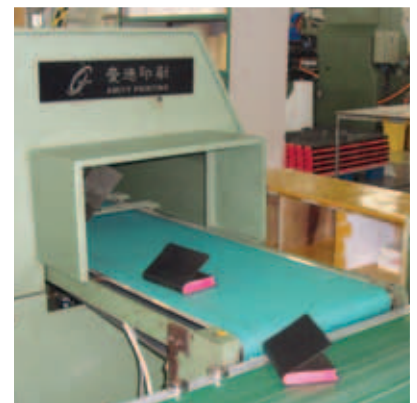


Many of the workers have been here since the work began 26 years ago

for the Church and current efforts are not keeping pace with the growth. Religions are now being seen by the government as useful agencies in building a harmonious society and addressing social problems.

In the 27 years since its foundation by Chinese Christian leaders as an independent Chinese voluntary organisation, Amity has built a reputation for excellence in social development programmes both within China and internationally. This was reflected in the range and seniority of the 200 guests at the anniversary celebrations.

Although the Central Committee of the Communist Party was in session electing the country's new leadership, Amity had been allowed to go ahead with the celebrations and national Party officials attended and spoke in praise of Amity's achievements, along with representatives from the provincial government, religious affairs department, universities, diplomats as well as church leaders and Bible societies.



Production of Bibles – one a second!

The Bible celebration took place at the new, high-tech printing works and the actual moment of seeing that 100 millionth Bible – which we all did on a video screen – was very moving. The book was passed in turn to several of the workers who told their story of working at Amity (some of them for the full 26 years), and finally to the oldest board member of the Amity Printing Press.

The Amity Foundation, in carrying out its activities, is consciously contributing to China's links with the rest of the world and this is true of its printing work too. Amity Printing Company is now the largest producer of Bibles in the world and of the 100 million produced so far, 60 million are being read in China and 40 million are for the world market, in many different languages. Amity is proud of this contribution to the rest of the World Church.

All photographs: © TMCP



Kings Cross
Photograph: © Kings Cross Methodist Church

Evangelism and Chow Mein in Kings Cross

Usually when people talk about the 'Olympic legacy', they think of sports. But for the Chinese congregation at Kings Cross Methodist church in London, the Olympic legacy has more to do with Chinese food than athletics.

'Chicken Chow Mein for Our Neighbours' was inspired by the outreach work the church did during the Olympic and Paralympic Games last summer. This included serving refreshments to visitors around the Kings Cross area, broadcasting the Games live and playing Christian DVDs on a big screen. The church hosted 501 visitors during this period. Some of these were homeless people who later came back to visit the church again because they had felt so welcomed and cared for by church members.

Mein for Our Neighbours' project in September."

The project provides lunch and community space for people living locally and travellers passing through the area. At present, the project only runs once a week (between 11am and 1.30pm on Wednesdays), but the church believes that this could increase to two days a week.

"In November and December, we welcomed and served a total of 204 visitors," says the Revd Kong Ching Hii. "We hope to see a larger impact on the Kings Cross community and possibly grow our congregation through this outreach in the coming years."

The outreach also resulted in some unexpected media coverage for the church. "Two Chinese radio broadcasting companies observed people coming into our church," says the Revd Kong Ching Hii, who has been minister at the church since 2011. "They followed, came in and interviewed us!

"Many members of the church who participated in the Olympic outreach were amazed at how much we could do to serve our neighbours, and voiced strong desire to continue the outreach. And so we started the 'Chicken Chow

With a large transient congregation at Kings Cross, due to the large numbers of overseas students making up the regular worshippers the emphasis on local mission is felt to be particularly important to the identity and community feel of the church.



Photograph: © 2013 Photos.com a division of Getty Images



Beyond the Harbour Wall

Victoria Ireland, our fundraising manager, interviewed Alison Judd from Methodist Women in Britain, about the history and significance of the Easter Offering service.



Photograph: © 2013 Photos.com a division of Getty Images

VICTORIA: How did Easter Offering begin?

ALISON: The Easter Offering dates back to 1883 when women in Manchester collected £32 from 'Christmas pennies' at family gatherings on Christmas Day at lunch for Missionary work overseas. In March 1884, the London districts distributed Easter envelopes and collecting bags asking for a penny a head. Over £100 was collected.

From this success, the idea grew and in 1903 Easter offerings were extended to all country chapels. "Let us bear in mind," they wrote, "the importance of the 'Littles'."

Through gifts great and small, the Easter Offering has become a significant feature of the World Church. In 1986, the Bicentenary year, it totalled nearly £200,000.

VICTORIA: Can you tell us about this year's theme "Beyond the Harbour Wall"?

ALISON: During her presidential visit to Ireland in 2011, Julie Hulme was struck by the stories of ancient Celtic saints who ventured "beyond the harbour wall" to spread the gospel, some setting sail with no oars or rudders simply letting God's wind take them where he desired.

In the same way, Methodists who go overseas today as mission partners are

stepping out in faith into the unknown. Mission partners, and their work, are just one of the areas of work supported by the Easter Offering.

VICTORIA: Could you share a story from the work of the World Mission Fund that has special meaning for you?

ALISON: I was delighted to discover that a grant from the WMF had been allocated for a request from the Methodist women of Upper Myanmar for six women to attend the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church area seminar in Bangalore, South India this January. This was a significant time of learning and sharing between the women of South Asia, and empowering and encouraging for the women of Upper Myanmar.

VICTORIA: And how can people get involved in the Easter Offering?

ALISON: It's very simple and we're always welcoming new churches and circuits to join the Offering.

All the resources to run a service are available online at www.methodist.org.uk/easteroffering or from Methodist Publishing on 01733 235962

Most churches collect donations during the Easter period and then these gifts are dedicated at a circuit-wide Easter Offering service some time after Easter.

The Easter Offering dedication service is a valuable resource that can inspire us to give in the context of worship. It contains more stories showing how the fund is used and the powerpoint presentation contains photos to accompany the stories. This year, Julie's beautiful prayers and reflective meditation mean that an additional sermon is not essential.

All the money raised through the Easter Offering goes into the World Mission Fund, to be used for work that contributes to God's mission in 65 Partner Churches around the world. This includes:

- grants for particular requests from Partner Churches
- training and support of mission partners to work with Partner Churches
- nationals in mission appointments in Partner Churches
- scholarship and leadership training (SALT) requested by overseas ministers.

You can give directly to the WMF online at www.justgiving/mcfworldmission