

The Global Mission Office

Recently there have been some changes affecting the Global Mission Office (GMO). There has been speculation as to the reason for these changes, so it is the purpose of this letter to provide some background information and answer some of the questions we have heard.

What has happened?

In July this year the Council of Assembly received a report from the leader of our Global Mission team telling us that the GMO, as it was currently operating was no longer financially sustainable. Two main financial issues supported this conclusion: 1. The dramatic reduction in interest returns from the investments that the GMO relied on to fund its internal operations. 2. Decisions made since about 2005 that the General Assembly would not fund through Assembly Assessment the functions of the GMO. This latter decision reflected to some degree the fact that many congregations were increasingly engaged in their own overseas mission endeavours and that, in general terms, congregations saw it as preferable that national functions should be more limited. However, the GMO's work was affirmed by the Assembly in 2006 and the Resource Committee made a commitment to fund the Office in this year's budget, contributing \$25,000 of the GMO's approximately \$200,000 annual operational costs.

The GMO could have continued to function, drawing on investments for its operational costs, but eventually these would have been exhausted. The GMO staff have been effective in raising considerable funding for a range of overseas mission engagements but none of the money given for this overseas work by current donors could be used to fund the operational costs of the GMO. Part of the operational cost of the GMO is the work that staff carry out with congregations, presbyteries and schools.

How has this present situation come about?

The resignation of the leader of our Global Mission Office in July set in place a review of the operational structure of GMO, as dictated by the terms of his contract. This review confirmed his earlier conclusion that there were real issues in the sustainability of the current form of the GMO. The review process, because it involved the work and lives of the three remaining, dedicated staff, was difficult. The staff were told about the purpose of the review and the issues it would look at. The staff members then provided significant input into this process, and were given further opportunity to comment on the Council of Assembly's provisional decision to relocate the GMO to the Assembly Office in Wellington. (Resource sub-committee convenor Cunny Atcheson recorded his dissent from this Council decision). The Council of Assembly was in the process of evaluating their response when they tendered their resignations. Many of us know the people involved, have felt deeply concerned about their welfare and encouraged the Council of Assembly to acknowledge the immense contribution they have made to the Church's international mission engagement. This we have sought to do.

What happens now?

For the future, there is no doubt that our Church will maintain its commitment to support a range of overseas mission activities. For now, we are putting in place interim arrangements to ensure that current commitments are maintained. We are also involved in a planning process that will allow us time to consult with the wider Church about the ways in which our national commitment to overseas mission relates to other national functions and to the work and engagement with congregations in their overseas mission work.

We will appoint an interim GMO leader who will ensure that our current commitments to partner churches are honoured and affirmed, that the families we currently support will continue to receive assistance and that donors who support our overseas commitments are assured of the on-going importance of their gifts. This interim appointment will be the contact person for all enquiries regarding our overseas mission work, and part of their role will be to make contact with those who have a special involvement with our historical engagements in Vanuatu, Jaghardri and the Church of North India as well as our more recent work in Myanmar.

We will also seek to ensure the overseas mission commitments made by congregations are highlighted and affirmed in *Spanz* and in other communications to congregations.

A planning process, which is being led by Council member the Rev Wayne Matheson, will give congregations opportunity to provide some further input into the nature of our national overseas mission commitments and the type of role we might need in the future.

Please be assured that there is much listening and talking yet to do before we determine the final shape of the job description for our Overseas Mission Coordinator.

You will appreciate that this has not been an easy time for the GMO staff. These changes are significant for them. They also effect many other people, directly and indirectly. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who are most affected at this time. If you would like to discuss any of the matters referred to in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

The Rev Emma Keown
Convenor
Council of Assembly