

CMSI Monthly Update

News and stories during the Covid-19 crisis



cmsireland
equipping the church in mission

April 2020

Spring Greetings...

..from the CMSI Staff Team - currently scattered across our various homes during this lockdown period.

You are receiving this update as someone who is either a CMSI Star (member) or who has signed up to receive general updates from CMSI - but for whom we have no working email address.

Since the Covid-19 lockdown began, we have been sharing regular news and stories from our partners and the staff team, via the CMSI website, our Facebook page and a weekly Friday Update, sent by email.

As you will appreciate, remote working and a temporary reduction in the size of our staff team (see below) make it harder

to send regular postal updates. But we don't want you to miss out! We're keen to keep you abreast of recent news and to give you a flavour of the things we have been sharing electronically.

We hope that this new monthly 'highlights' update will help keep you in touch and informed as you continue praying for CMSI and our partners.

If you do have an email address, please send it to us at info@cmsireland.org so we can include you in the weekly updates. You can also leave a message for us on the Belfast office phone: **02890775020 (NI); 04890775020 (RoI)**. And if you have access to the internet, please visit our website to see all the blogs, videos, news and stories that we share each week.

CMSI Team News Snippets

A quick update on developments with the CMSI Staff Team and the Belfast Office move

Meeting Megan



At the start of April, the CMSI staff team welcomed its newest member. **Megan Totten** has joined the team as the new Administration Coordinator, taking up the reins from Jen Christie.

To help introduce Megan, we shared a video interview with her on the CMSI website. Here are some extracts from that interview.

"My name is Megan, I'm married to Richard - we've been married for nearly three years - and we live in Rivarnet in Lisburn. We're members of Lisburn Cathedral, where I was born and bred - baptised, confirmed and married.

"Just after we got married, Richard was offered a secondment in Australia, so [after a year of visa processes] we spent about 13 months between Sydney and Brisbane, and got to visit New Zealand.

"My skill set really lies in the organisational side of things - I enjoy administration! So, when the opportunity [with CMSI] came up, I was really excited to use those skills in an organisation that puts mission and God at its heart.

"I really hope I can be an asset to the team. I'd love to learn more about global mission, which I've never been involved in much before. I also think this job will really nourish my faith.

"I'd asked for prayer that I can feel part of the team and get to know the team from a distance and that I'll be able to learn effectively [during lockdown] and get up to speed with what I'll need to be doing when we get back into the office."

Megan was appointed to the role just before the current Covid-19 measures were introduced, so it hasn't been the easiest time for her to start work and get to know the rest of the team. She is working ten hours a week during the current period of 'lockdown' and home-working - she's learning fast!

Moving Story

The long saga of our Belfast Office move continues! Our transfer to the new offices in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park was scheduled for 24th-26th March. The UK Government announced its lockdown on 23rd March - the worst possible timing for us!



Our furniture and crates remain ready to go and we have delayed the completion of the sale of Dargan Road. We reinstalled the comms at Dargan Road to receive phone messages and to enable staff to work remotely. So, for a short period of time, we have two offices, with minimal staff presence at either one.

With the possible relaxation of restrictions and our removal company hoping to resume work in the coming weeks, we are hopeful of a move before the end of May.

Please pray for a smooth, safe move to happen soon and continue praying for the staff team during this period of disruption.

Furloughed Staff

Since the start of April, two of the CMSI Staff Team - **Roger Thompson** and **Rachel Brittain** - have been on 'furlough' as part of the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This arrangement is being reviewed each month, but for now - Roger's work responsibilities are being covered by Jenny, Linda and Gillian; Rachel's responsibilities are being covered by Roger Cooke.

Please do pray for Roger and Rachel at this time.



Cancellations, Postponements & Signs Of Hope



Voices of Hope

A Special Series Of Blogs And Updates



In addition to cancelling the *Shine* event and postponing our *AGM*, we have had to postpone the *Voices Of Hope* programme. This had been planned for the beginning of August, following the Lambeth Conference in England - and was to have seen 16 of our Global Partner bishops and their wives joining us for a programme of events and parish visits. We now hope to host the programme in the summer of 2021.

Never ones to miss a chance of using a good title and graphics, we adopted 'Voices Of Hope' for our special series of blogs and website stories, which share examples of God's people throughout the world bringing light in the darkness.

Another consequence of Covid-19 has been the postponement of all our 2020 *Teams* and *Short-Term Experience Placements*. A teams' training day had been scheduled for Saturday 25th April, so a different gathering took place instead. 15 members from the

four postponed teams met, by video, with Jenny, Gillian and Linda for a time of sharing and prayer together.

In her blog post about the gathering, Gillian wrote:

Despite being connected remotely, there was a real sense of God's presence and a shared love and genuine concern for our Global Partners as lockdown in many of their nations is causing severe hardship.



Covid-19 Response Appeal

In early April, we launched our Covid-19 Appeal. Here's the news item that we shared on the website on 9th April.

CMSI Covid-19 Response Appeal

Help the global Church respond to the crisis

www.cmsireland.org

As the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic begin to take hold in Africa and South Asia, CMSI has launched a special Response Appeal. We would ask churches and individuals to stand with our Global Partners through prayer and financial giving.

On launching the appeal, CMSI's Mission Director Jenny Smyth had this to say:

The impact of the virus for our partners is even more devastating than in countries with strong economies, borrowing power, well established structures and health services.

Through their local churches, our Global Partners want to respond the needs of their communities, to bring comfort from God's word and practical help. Inspired by faith, in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit they have lots

of good plans. Their congregations are willing to help but financial resources are needed.

This is a time for generosity. A time for the Church to work as the family of God to share what we have and to support each other in prayer and giving.

You can view Jenny's full message in the video below, which includes with greetings from some of our Global Partner leaders, who each share one, simple message:

We are one Church. We are one family. Let us support one another as we bring hope to our communities

Whether or not you are able to provide financial support, we would urge you to continue praying for CMSI's Global Partners as they respond to the unfolding effects of this crisis.

A Call To Stay With Our Partners

Last week, Linda Abwa shared the following blog reflection on the CMSI website. We think it's worth sharing in its entirety.

Staying - to close the gap

April 22, 2020 | Linda Abwa

Yesterday, the head of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) issued a stark warning about the impact of Covid-19 on food shortages in some of the world's poorest countries.

David Beasley was speaking following the publication of an annual report on Global Food Crises. The report includes some very dire predictions around increases in food shortages and famine, highlighting 10 countries where starvation is likely to be widespread. On that list were South Sudan and DR Congo.

Two pictures came to my mind when I heard this news.

The first was this photograph taken after a worship service in Rhino refugee camp Northern Uganda in October 2018.



We were in an area of the camp populated by people from DR Congo, their self-built, UNHCR tarpaulin homes were right beside the church. I wondered why they were so urgently piling onto the back of such a little truck after service. Someone explained that today was food distribution day, and that food could only be collected in person. These folks whose homes and livelihoods were far away in DR Congo were anxious to get to the food distribution point over ten miles away to receive their rations.

I wondered what the scene would look like if Covid-19 has an impact on the availability and provision of these already sparse rations. I thought of the empty pasta and toilet roll shelves in my local shop; incomparable scenes, incomprehensible inequality.

When there were previous reductions in rations at the camps, the UN stated that the most vulnerable people in the camps would continue to receive a full ration.

As I contemplate what the current crisis might mean for those who are old, sick or suffering from disabilities, I was immediately reminded of another photo also taken in Rhino refugee camp.



Rev. Donna Steckline and some others from the 2018 CMSI Peace and Reconciliation Team were visiting parishioners of Bethlehem Parish in a South Sudanese part of the camp. We prayed with this elderly lady and her daughter. It was just the two of them together in their camp family, and Mama was weak with age and joint pain. They live twelve miles from the food distribution centre; they have no means of transport. Mama has no way to get there to collect her food ration, so they live on only one ration between them.

I wondered how these two people would survive on their shared portion if food supplies dwindle further. I thought of the shopping I deliver weekly to my parents staying safe in their home. Daughters with the same responsibility and love, but the gap so wide it is hard to see how it might ever be closed.

These pictures are likely to be repeated throughout many part of the countries where our Global Partners live and minister. This is therefore where I should write the 'neat and tidy' closing lines: asking you to pray and to give.

But my own hands are too dirty and all simple solutions are too simple. Yes, this requires an emergency response, but it also requires a long-term, Global Church response. It requires true partnership that doesn't dissipate when our horror at world events passes.

So, if I was to ask you to pray or give today, I would also ask you then to stay. Stay with the Global Church as they help their communities develop resilience after this crisis and before the next. Stay in prayer and in an attitude of humility with a passion to close the gap. Stay as an active part of the worldwide Body Of Christ.

It's not neat and tidy and there is no clear exit strategy, but staying is the only way to bring real transformation for all of us.

Resourcing The Church In Lockdown

April also saw us make some of our resources available as free downloads from the CMSI website, include the Discover series and some of our recent Children's Resource Material.



In one of the news items, Roger Cooke (Mission Resource Manager) explained why we took these steps:

"At a time when church communities aren't able to meet together and most people are confined to their homes, high quality online resources have become increasingly important. In CMSI, we are keen to do whatever we can to continue equipping and resourcing churches and individuals. Sharing some of our resources online is a simple way to do this."

The material, which includes films, study guides and activity workbooks can be viewed and downloaded for free from the Resources pages of the website or you can find out more by emailing Roger via resources@cmsireland.org.

Global Partners' News

Throughout April, we've shared news, video greetings and prayer requests from our Global Partners. Here's a snapshot of just some of the things we've posted on the CMSI website.

Partner greetings & updates

Bishop Mouneeer (Diocese Of Egypt) shared a video reflection on the story of Jesus calming the storm, assuring of us of God's presence and comfort. In the midst of our current storm, 'He is here'.



Bishop Emmanuel (Kibungo Diocese, Rwanda) sent video greetings and provided an update on how the Church is using TV and radio broadcasts to share Bible teaching and messages of encouragement. Bishop Emmanuel wrote:

We really thank God for the opportunity we have to communicate to all Christians and others... Our homes have become our churches and people have really appreciated having the opportunity to join our services from a distance.



Bishop Eridard (Luweero Diocese, Uganda) shared video greetings in which he assured of us his love and prayers and urged us all to follow Paul's advice in 1 Thessalonians 5:11,

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.



Archdeacon Joseph (Shyogwe Diocese, Rwanda) sent Easter Greetings by video and also provided an update from his own part of the diocese:

As in other parts of Rwanda, many people only get food when they have been able to carry out their daily job. Because of the lockdown, many families within our diocese are facing serious food shortages. The future is uncertain for all of us, and we want to thank CMSI for bringing awareness to the challenges poor communities are facing through your special Covid-19 fundraising appeal.

Bishop Hilary (Yei Diocese, South Sudan) sent a letter of encouragement and thanks to CMSI and the wider Church in Ireland, that finished with these words:

To all the partners of CMS Ireland throughout the world, let's pray that all of you be under the Lord's guiding hands to receive his divine protection and to gain resilience to fight C-19 and that you remain safe and blessed.



Other news from our partners

In addition to receiving the above greetings, we shared news of:

- ❖ The official opening of a new building (supported by CMSI link parishes) at the Compassion For Children In Distress programme in **North Kivu Diocese, DR Congo**



- ❖ **Devastating floods in Eastern DR Congo** that is currently a much more pressing concern than the beginnings of Covid-19 cases and the recent upturn in Ebola cases.



- ❖ **Human Development Community Services in Nepal** training and preparing in remote, rural hospitals for the arrival of Covid-19.



Look out for further news and prayer requests in our Global Partner Updates - which we hope to distribute in the next couple of weeks.



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