



Margaret Russell, Missionary to Kenya Retires

Monday 31st May 2021 marked a historic date in the Free Presbyterian Church Mission Board with the official retirement of Miss Margaret Russell from the work in Kenya. Margaret is one of the longest serving missionaries under our Board, having completed just under thirty-eight years of faithful service for the Lord. She commenced after graduating from the first intake of students in the Whitefield College of the Bible and, having been accepted by the Mission Board, she arrived in Kenya in July 1983.

TRIALS AND TROUBLES

Those early years had many challenges. Bible Christian Faith Church (BCFC) operated initially without official government registration. During that time, the churches were physically closed by the authorities and the leaders arrested. It was a time of great uncertainty and testing. It was thirteen years before BCFC would obtain registration under the government. As her sponsor, this also impacted Margaret's work permit application to live and work in Kenya. God overruled wonderfully and the door was kept open for Margaret to continue her missionary work. Margaret acknowledges the encouragement she received, in those early days, from the Kenyan Christians and particularly from Rev Nathaniel Kendagor and his family. Lasting friendships were formed in those difficult days. In 1994, tragedy struck when Rev Kendagor's sister, Ruth, and his nephew, Biwott, were murdered in his home at Lityei. Their deaths were the catalyst for starting the Christian Academy at Lityei. Both young people are buried in ground adjacent to the school. Their graves are a constant reminder to the students of the brevity of life.

PROGRESS

The Lord burdened Margaret to establish a Sunday School ministry in BCFC. A curriculum of Bible lessons, memorisation and catechism was put together. This, together with annual training for the Sunday School teachers, saw thirty-six Sunday Schools established with some 2000 children in attendance. Margaret worked alone up to 1995 until Miss Gillian Gillespie joined her. Subsequently, the Harris family arrived, and, afterwards, Miss Noreen McAfee, Miss Kathy Walker, Rev David DiCanio and Rev and Mrs Malcolm Patterson. Over the years, many visitors were welcomed as were short-term workers. There is nothing quite like mission field work for meeting life in all of its wonderful variety.

BOOKSHOPS

Under the auspices of BCFC, Margaret was instrumental in opening the Armstrong Evangelical Bookshops which have had a definite influence in the lives of many in Kitale and Makutano over twenty-two years. Miss Cherry Dale managed the bookshops initially. The support received from Northern Ireland, via the Mission Board and Mr George McConnell,

who kept supplies of books coming, was a lifeline to this literature and book ministry. George was a regular visitor to Kenya, and a great encourager and supporter of the work.

Church Planting requires men to be trained for evangelism and the pastorate. Under the auspices of the Church Council of BCFC, a Bible College was established in which Margaret taught for some twenty-five years. It is heartening to see those who were trained still in the work of God and serving God in local churches.

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

In 1998, the work took a significant step with the establishment of the Christian Academy in Lityei. From a fledgling nursery school, the work grew into a fully operative Primary and Secondary School, with over 600 pupils enrolled at its peak. Margaret had the onerous task of managing the school for twenty years. The number of children and young people whose lives have been touched and influenced by the gospel in the Academy could not be estimated. Special prayer is requested that God would preserve the Christian Academy for future generations.

MISSIONARY VISION

Our own Mission Board registration in Kenya was eventually secured in 2014 with the establishment of the Free Presbyterian Mission Society Africa. Margaret has been the local Kenyan administrator of the Society until 2021. The Mission Board is indebted to her patience in processing all the legal paperwork and local administrative duties involved with FPMSA. We would not be where we are today without her involvement.

BATTLES

Missionaries, like all other believers, are soldiers in a spiritual battle for biblical truth. When asked about those major battles in Kenya, Margaret outlined some of the following major ones. They are a warning to the church at home which faces the same battles, as well as a training manual for would-be missionaries in the days ahead.

From her experience, Margaret advises that missionaries must learn to cope with the multi-layers of government bureaucracy in whatever country they serve. In dealing with government officials, grace and wisdom were needed daily in Kenya.

The spiritual battle to maintain a reformed and separated witness was a constant feature of her time in Kenya. It took constant vigilance on behalf of the church to maintain scriptural worship against the overpowering influences of contemporary and Pentecostal worship in schools and churches in Kenya. These issues also challenge us at home!

Margaret also highlighted the need for the church in Kenya to maintain scriptural church leadership and exercise proper spiritual governance. The complex strands of maintaining good relationships with the national church was also emphasised.

ENCOURAGEMENTS

Over the years, there have been many disappointments for Margaret, especially seeing those, who once professed faith, turn back and walk no

more. This was the hurt of the Apostle Paul, when he spoke of Demas having forsaken him, and of the Saviour, when He asked His disciples, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). Despite those times of trial and disappointment, Margaret records some of the many encouragements of being involved in the Lord’s work in Kenya: souls which have been reached with the gospel and brought to saving faith in Christ; many youths taught in the ways of truth and who have gone on to become adult members of the church in Kenya; and, souls persevering in godliness, even though they battle with difficult circumstances in life.

Reflecting on her years of service under the Mission Board, Margaret was quick to acknowledge that anything accomplished was not done alone, but in conjunction with many others who worked with her as a team.

FAMILY

Missionaries on the field can be burdened greatly, particularly due to ageing parents at home which can result in a feeling of guilt or divided loyalties between work and family responsibilities. Margaret did not experience that to any great degree and acknowledges the sacrificial spirit displayed by her late mother, in that, while she looked forward to her visits home, she never asked or intimated that she should come home or not return to the field. Margaret has always enjoyed the support of her siblings and their families, but she did experience, what she classes as, the “phone call that missionaries dread,” when she received tragic news of the untimely death of her late brother, Jim.

APPRECIATION

Special appreciation is given to all her faithful supporters and to the Mission Board for sending her to Kenya, and prayerfully and financially supporting her. The loyalty, fellowship, and friendship of Margaret’s home church in Tandragee have been such

a blessing. Tribute is paid by Margaret to all the Kenyan national Christians. On the field she said anything that was accomplished could not have been achieved without the Kenyan ministers, pastors, elders and Sunday School teachers in the BCFC and, latterly, in the Glory Bible Church.

FINAL REMARKS

The final remarks I leave for Margaret: *“All my thanks go to God, who saved me, called me, gave me the health, strength and safety to live and work in Kenya for 37 years. Apart from bouts of malaria and typhoid, particularly in the earlier years, I have enjoyed good health, though over this last year and a half, I have struggled after an injury sustained in January 2020. But God has been so gracious to me. I trust I have been a good ambassador for Christ in Kenya and, even as I retire, I will seek to still be so, especially for the teaching of the truth to the children in Kenya. Having lived nine years longer in Kenya than I did in Ulster I can’t imagine that I will ever forget the life and the people of Kenya. I value your continued prayers for this new chapter of my life that I have now commenced – that God will still use me and that I would see my own family circle won for the Saviour.”*

The Mission Board places on record its gratitude to Almighty God for all that Margaret has been enabled to accomplish for the Lord in Kenya. She has been a faithful ambassador for Christ, and a powerful advocate for the work in Kenya. We wish her God’s richest blessing in her retirement. We are glad she had agreed to continue in a supervisory, voluntary role in continuing to finish her update of the Sunday School curriculum.

Acts 26:22: “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” ■

✉ **Rev Ian Harris,**
Chairman of FPC Mission Board.

Memorial Service for Rev Wesley Graham

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant!”



✉ Above : (L to R) Rev J Moffat, Rev J Creane, Rev I Harris, Mrs C Graham, Rev D Park and Rev M McCaughey



✉ Above: Members of the Graham family who attended the memorial service

Just over a year ago, on Tuesday 17th May 2020, the Lord in His sovereign mercy called our dear brother, Rev Wesley Graham, into His immediate presence. On that day, his fight for the cause of the Gospel was completed. He had finished his course and kept the faith. He went home to his eternal reward in Heaven to be with Christ, which is far better.

Two days before he passed away, Rev Graham wrote his final entry in his diary: *“We are justified by free grace. All our merits before salvation count for nothing. All our merits since salvation count for nothing.... We have Christ’s merit until we die – praise His name. We never die, but we begin to live when we die (John 1:26; John 13:1; Philippians 1:21). To die is gain - what a gain!”*

A memorial service was held on Friday 28th May 2021 in his home congregation of Bangor Free Presbyterian Church. His life and ministry were celebrated by family and friends, as honour and praise were given to God, who made him an able minister of the Gospel and missionary of Christ. In the last ten years of his life, after a faithful ministry in Bristol, Wesley served the Lord, with his dear wife, Carol, as a pioneer missionary in Nepal.

There, in the shadow of the spectacular Himalayan mountains, with the summit of Everest towering in the distance, Wesley enjoyed mountain-top experiences with God. In the hands

of the Great Master, he was used as a father figure to establish the fledgling Nepali Free Presbyterian Church and to coordinate the ordination of over twenty pastors at an historic meeting in 2013. He saw many church buildings opened to the glory of God and the new Precious Children’s Home built. The Bible College, for the training of men for the ministry, was started and established under his leadership. He was a friend, mentor and encourager to the Moderator, Rev Paul Thapa, and all his colleagues. He organised the funding to train Sarita as a medical doctor, an outstanding young lady who was like a daughter to Wesley and Carol. Only eternity will reveal the full extent and impact of his ministry.

At the memorial service, Rev Joshua Moffatt, minister of Bangor, welcomed the congregation and many online listeners, and paid tribute to the life and service of Rev Graham. Rev David Park, chairman of the Missionary Council, led the service, reflecting on Wesley’s visits to the missionary weekend in Ballymoney and how he was a great inspiration and encouragement to those in attendance. Correspondence was read from Rev Gordon Ferguson and Rev Paul Thapa.

Close friends, Rev Jonathan Creane and Rev William McDermott, opened and closed the service with prayer. Hymns which emphasised Christ in His righteousness, sovereignty, mercy, and providence were chosen

specially by the family, culminating with Mrs Cousin’s hymn: “Immanuel’s Land”. The Brown family – Wesley’s grandchildren – sang and his son, Timothy, brought a fitting tribute. A video presentation, entitled, ‘A Memorial Tribute,’ narrated by his wife was shown, outlining highlights of Rev Graham’s ministry. Rev Maurice McCaughey, Wesley’s son-in-law, read the Scriptures before the preaching of the Word.

Hearts were warmed and stirred as Rev Ian Harris, chairman of the Mission Board, preached from Acts 13:36, “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption...” highlighting King David’s epitaph in the New Testament. Rev Harris likened this little review of David’s life to Wesley Graham’s life, drawing attention to David’s salvation, service, season, submission and sleep.

The memorial service was a wonderful time of reflection and challenge, when the presence of God was known and His Word applied with sweet blessing. We trust that the Lord will continue to uphold Carol and her family by His sufficient grace, and we know that Wesley “being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4) for His labours of love for Christ will live on and continue to bring forth fruit unto God. ■

✉ Rev D Park, Hebron Free Presbyterian Church, Ballymoney.

Emergency Aid Fund

Update

- 📷 **Below:** Aid distribution in India
- 📷 **Bottom:** Aid distribution in Pakistan



The humanitarian crisis that flows directly, and indirectly, from the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a severe impact on the lives of many Christians and church-connected families around the globe. When we launched the Emergency Aid Fund in 2020, we did so anticipating that we would provide support for those directly connected to our mission work for just a few months.

We were touched by the generosity of God’s people, as significant funds were raised and distributed to provide basic food essentials to thousands of families in Africa, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Philippines, Brazil, Lebanon, and Spain. A video of the work in 2020 can be viewed at the Gallery section of our website – www.fpcmission.org

However, with the impact of a second wave and more deadly variants in the past few months, we have all been touched by the fragile nature of the healthcare systems in some of our mission fields. We have also seen the financial difficulty that has flowed from the lockdowns in areas where there is no local support. For many, the loss of work has plunged families into great hardship, with many struggling to provide the basic daily food for survival.

We have therefore reopened the Emergency Aid Fund and ask for your help to again provide essential food supplies to the families connected to our missionary work around the world. We have already provided some support this year to those in Pakistan and India, where there are great challenges, and have received requests for help in other areas.

You can support this work by donating to the Emergency Aid Fund – by bank transfer to the Mission Board account, by cheque payable to FPC Mission Board, through your local church or by card online on the “Donate” tab of our website.

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble” Psalm 41:1. ■

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