Newton-Nairobi Partnership Future

19 I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
Isaiah 43:19 (NRSV)

Introduction

The inception of the 21-year international mission project between Newton Presbytery (Presbyterian Church USA) and the North, East, and Central Presbyteries of Nairobi Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) occurred through the effort of a former Newton Presbytery pastor, Rev. Keith Barclay. Returning to Kenya in 1986, he led a poor rural community’s residents in the construction of a five-kilometer pipeline to enable safe water delivery to their Kibwezi area village centers. Several Newton congregations, inspired by the need and by Rev. Barclay’s commitment, undertook the funding efforts necessary to realize the completion of this project by 1993. It also inspired Newton individuals to travel to see the work first hand and meet the Kenyan villagers.

Tangentially in 1994, the Newton Presbytery Mission Committee obtained PCUSA approval for a formal partnership with the Nairobi Presbytery, with Kibwezi’s Bethel Church, being an “outreach,” associated with Nairobi Presbytery. Within the year, Newton Presbytery congregations had expanded involvement to include primary school scholarships for village children. Pursuit of the dream of a community health clinic was also initiated at that time. The Stated Clerk of the Newton Presbytery, Rev. Charles Ringe, spent six months of 1996 in Kenya working to solidify and acculturate a formal partnership for the relationship. Nairobi Presbytery accepted Newton’s request to manage the scholarship and clinic projects on behalf of the new partnership.

Within a decade, the rapid growth of the PCEA required division of Nairobi Presbytery into three new ones, each of which desired a continuation of the Partnership with Newton. To accommodate this change, a cooperative Partnership Board was created by the PCEA participants.
Annual cross-Atlantic visits were made by both PCUSA and PCEA members to better understand one another within their respective environments. By 2006 Newton was contributing close to $85,000 annually to the Kasasule Health Centre and additional projects, with Nairobi Presbyteries providing an additional 10%.

However, the 2008-9 Great Recession and its lingering effects have severely hampered Newton’s ability to sustain that degree of support. A bold effort has been underway to gain funding for the Kasasule Health Centre by the Kenyan government and/or other Non-Governmental Organizations. The scholarship program is dissipating for lack of sufficient contributions. Structural changes in Newton Presbytery have led to a lessened awareness of the Partnership among newer presbyters. After 21 years of encouraging successes, some voices within presbytery leadership have called for either termination or extreme change of the Partnership.

Change and Continuity: Moving Forward

Despite the challenges we now face, we and our Kenyan counterparts recognize that change in both the manner of our interactions and the kinds of commitments we can make to each other is essential for the survival of the Partnership. Recent re-evaluation of the 21-year relationship by representatives of both the Newton-Nairobi Partnership Team (PCUSA) and the Nairobi Partnership Board (PCEA) has reinforced our mutually strong desire to continue our mission work into the future, if it be the will of God. We recognize that we cannot and should not expect the level of financial and presbytery-wide support of the past that sustained the various projects and functions that affected so many on both continents. The benefits gained, by individuals and congregations, through shared Christian fellowship, increased cross-cultural awareness, and experiencing the joy of making a difference in lives, are the invaluable rewards felt by all who have been touched and lifted up by the Holy Spirit at work through the Partnership.

While our future partnership may move forward in a significantly different format from what has been, those engaged in it remain passionately committed to it. We continue to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us. The international partners, therefore, remain working within a September 2016 - May 2017 time frame to redefine the shape and activities of a renewed and continued engagement.

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Benefits Beyond Monetary

Two decades of cooperative engagement supporting material benefit and hope for communities and individuals in need have offered Newton Presbyterians insight into the value of bonding for improvement and for appreciation of one another’s personal gifts. Deep impressions have been created through cultural experiences and personal engagement among participants. Partnership projects’ benefits have enabled Newton participants to understand the nature of the hardship of African life as well as the hope nurtured by their involvement.

Cross-Atlantic introductions to Christian people with unfamiliar names and ways of living have reinforced each partner’s members’ ability to experience the common bond of our faith and the mutual conviction of God’s servants engaging as His messengers working together for good.

Our past experiences have allowed us to understand the degree to which sharing exceeds monetary consideration, providing richness in faith, fellowship and the future. We perceive that our future will focus on the creation of experiences which enable participants to give of and gain for themselves through service and Christian fellowship.

Variety of Experiences with Cross-Cultural Visits

Those of Newton and Nairobi who have made the long journey to one another’s homelands have come away with broadened awareness and appreciation of the differences and challenges we live with. These experiences have also confirmed our common confession of the same Lord while carrying out his ministry within our respective cultures. Future travel will endeavor strongly to build upon those benefits while engaging in “hands-on” mission activity in each other’s homeland.

We envision pursuing the creation of opportunities such as:

- Youth-to-youth visit to Kenya (reciprocal)
- Congregation-to-congregation hosting of youth, PCUSA Presbyterian Women/PCEA Womans Guild and/or other
- Pastor-in-Residence (4wks - 3mos) PCUSA to Kenya
- Elder/Deacon-in-residence in Kenya
  - learning PCEA model of lay service, while also engaged in employed activity
- Kenyan women visiting Newton/engaged in PW work
- U.S. Medical personnel participating in KHC special week-long “clinics”
The cost of such Newton travel will be borne by the participants, with the necessity for personal payment, sponsorship or congregational and other fundraising efforts. Newton Presbytery has validated use of pastor’s continuing education funds as appropriate. Nairobi partners retain the possibility of their presbyteries funding their travel.

**Mission Project Funding Prospects**

Newton Presbytery’s annual budget in recent years has become stressed to the point of inability to continue subsidizing administration and travel for the Partnership and overall giving by churches and individuals to projects has diminished. There is yet a strong core of churches and individuals that continue faithful financial support. Those churches and individuals, despite the Partnership’s retreat from major funding of projects, may wish to continue contributing to primary, secondary school and/or college scholarships. A possible means for doing so can be explored with NPB cooperation for that to continue.

N-NPT and Newton Presbytery will continue to administer the remaining funds in the Kasasule Health Centre Operating Budget until it is exhausted, with the hopeful expectation that other funding means will have been guaranteed prior to that moment through the successful completion of the KHC Strategic Plan and its adoption by another entity.

Though the original water line and, soon, the KHC have been discontinued as recipients of regular Newton cash contributions, we retain an interest in the benefits of their continued operation and sustainability. Their status will be watched for any moments when Newton’s advocacy and potential monetary contributions might help guarantee continued delivery of service. Help will be given consideration at such time.

New projects may be considered by participating partnership supporters. In mind are:

- Teaching knitting skills for fundraising and livelihood, as well as supporting the growth of prayer shawl ministries among the Woman Guild.
- Micro-financing of Kenyans’ efforts to grow small businesses already is operating in the Kibwezi market and could be explored as a potential ministry.

Any new projects will have separate memorandums that state goals and activity together with beginning and ending dates.

**Guidance for a Continuing Partnership**

The renewed relationship between PCUSA Newton and PCEA Nairobi (E., C., & N.) will require us to state, in some written form, our collegial understanding of who we are and what we intend to accomplish together in international partnership as Presbyterian
Christians. The form of the new relationship is currently being explored, and may possibly engage additional new partners.

We will first seek writing both Statements of Vision and Mission with the PCEA prior to writing a document expressing our mutual acceptance of Partnership functioning.

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Isaiah 43:19b (NRSV)