Re-envisioned Newton-Nairobi Partnership

June 2017

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 22-year international mission partnership 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 (Nairobi East, Nairobi North and Nairobi Central), 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.

> "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"  
> Isaiah 43:19a (NRSV)

**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 that enable participants to give of and gain for themselves through service and Christian fellowship.

Cross-Cultural Visits and Congregational Interaction

Variety in Mission Experiences

Future travel will endeavor strongly to build upon those benefits while engaging in “hands-on” mission activity in each other’s homeland, confirming our common confession of the same Lord while carrying out his ministry within our respective cultures.

To that end, beginning in 2018 we envision such opportunities as:

- Individual and group correspondence
- Shared worship through audio and video
- Development of audio-visual resources
- Language training
- Work camps for youth (14-21 years)
- Women exchange
- Special days of prayer
- Pastors-in-residence
- U.S. medical personnel volunteering for special week-long “clinics” at KHC

- Congregation-to-congregation visits
- Exchange of delegations
- Special project support
- Men’s ministry
- Advocacy on related issues
- Establish a relationship with missionaries
- Deacons-in-residence

The cost of travel and accommodations will be borne by the participants, requiring the necessity of personal payment, sponsorship or congregational and other fundraising efforts. (Newton Presbytery has validated use of pastor’s continuing education funds as appropriate for his/her initial trip.)

In creating and executing such mission experiences:

1. Each Partner will solicit from among its congregations teams or individuals interested in traveling abroad, matching them to a suggested host mission or working with them to envision and craft their own unique plan for a mission visit.
2. The Partners must commit to and accept the concept of the mission visit at least four months prior to the day of travel. Within the four month period, the Partners will work with the visiting missionaries to arrange and confirm details of travel, accommodations, in-country-transport and mission tasks and schedule.

3. The sending Partner will consult directly with its mission visitors in planning the venture and be the coordinating voice with the receiving Partner.

4. No later than two weeks prior to departure, with a plan agreed to and arrangements discussed, the mission visitors will be put in direct contact via Skype calling with the receiving Partner’s representatives to learn of details and promote confidence in their forthcoming venture.

5. The receiving Partner will assign a representative to be the coordinator of the mission visit, and be the responsible point person for interaction with the mission visitor(s) in assuring all matters related to room and board, safety, travel and the mission task are carried through as planned by the Partners.

6. Upon return to the sending Partner, the mission visitors will give a full report to the NPB or NNPT, continue to sit with that body for one year consulting for future mission ventures by others, and be available to share their experience when requested by congregations or individuals.

7. After each mission visit and a report has been given to the sending Partner, the NNPT and NPB will jointly evaluate the mission venture, building upon learnings from its success and failure, to improve planning for future ventures. In addition, the Nairobi Partnership Board will maintain the option to explore mobilizing appropriate funding vehicles for potential special Mission purposes.

Mission Project Funding Prospects

There is yet a strong core of churches and individuals within Newton Presbytery that continue faithful financial support for Nairobi projects. Those churches and individuals are urged to continue contributing to primary school scholarships, the Soweto Presbyterian Education Centre (P.E.C.) and the Kasasule Health Centre. Full and timely accounting of the use these funds is to be forwarded quarterly by the NPB to the N-NPT.

N-NPT and Newton Presbytery will continue to administer distribution of funds in the Kasasule Health Centre Operating Account, with the hopeful expectation some Newton churches will continue to make donations together with the successful completion of the KHC Strategic Plan.

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

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 operating in the Kibwezi market and could be explored as a potential ministry.

Funds will be forwarded by N-NPT to NPB bi-annually, as available, to be expended upon causes as specified.

**Extending Our Partnership into the Future**

From January 2015 through May 2017, a renewal of the 22-year relationship between PCUSA Newton and PCEA Nairobi (E., C., & N.) has been mutually explored and thoroughly discussed. Our dialogue has resulted in this document. Here we have stated our intention to conduct our international partnership with openness to imaginative and new dimensions of collegial activity through which to experience the oneness of our faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrate his love and compassion to a world in need of his love and the hope our Lord offers. We anticipate that this metamorphosis will thrust our presbyteries into new dimensions of mission, building upon the success of our previous decades as partners in mission.

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

Isaiah 43:19b (NRSV)