

Aim:

To share information about how the partnership between the Ply & Ex Meth Dis and the Diocese of Cuttack, Orissa, North India came to be. The links between our two areas began as a friendship in 2012, and gradually over the last 10 years, has developed into a more formal, mutually supportive partnership.

Autumn 2011 a 'chance' meeting over breakfast between Rev Alison Richardson, and the then Bishop of Cuttack. During the conversation Alison was invited to visit the Diocese to 'encourage the women of the Diocese' about education generally, and raise confidence among women who wanted to explore ministry in the church, and encourage them to engage in theological education. Alison asked a friend Rev Deborah Kirk to accompany her.

Following a conversation with Steve Pearce, who was the Asia Co-ordinator of the World Church, the Methodist Church agreed to fund our flights as they were interested in establishing a link with the Church of North India

January 2012 Alison and Deborah first visit

January 2013 Alison and Deborah return visit and in October of that year, our District had the opportunity to send some financial support to the Diocese, in the aftermath of Cyclone Phailin, which inflicted severe damage around the coastal areas.

In 2014, with the support of the District World Church Committee, we arranged a visit for the Bishop of Cuttack and his wife to the Plymouth & Exeter District. This was a lengthy visit, (3+ weeks) hosted by various guests in different parts of the District, and culminating with the MWM Conference in Swanwick.

After this visit, significant issues were raised, there was a pause in the relationship, and a subsequent change of office holders in Cuttack.

Rev Graham Thompson joined the District as the District Chair.

In 2017, Alison and I decided to return to our previous hosts and dear friends we had stayed with in 2013 – the directors of a Children's Home in Puri. That was a more 'unofficial' visit, with a localised experience, and no opportunities for the wider travelling that had been a feature of our previous visits.

Also in 2017, the new Bishop of Cuttack, Bishop S K Nanda visited UK for a Conference, and stayed as the guest of our District Chair, Rev Graham Thompson. This proved to be a turning point. The Bishop and Reverend Graham were committed to reviving the fledgling relationship.

In April 2017, Rev Graham brought a proposal to the Spring Synod on behalf of the World Church Committee that we would form a partnership between the District and the Diocese of Cuttack, with a focus on **Prayer, Learning and Friendship,** and some ways were identified as to how we might take this forward:

- set aside one day each year in the District for each church to acknowledge and celebrate the partnership, offering worship resources and information to assist the leaders of worship – Cuttack Sunday, the Sunday before Lent was identified, and this has been marked variously across the District each subsequent year, even during lockdown. (you can see this on YouTube.)
- explore the possibility of exchange visits
- to establish a Cuttack fund – to resource exchange visits
- continue to nurture the links already established, and to support one another through informed prayer

- explore links between the English-medium schools in the Diocese and our Methodist Schools in this District

In 2018, there was a further visit to the Diocese, by Rev Graham Thompson, Mr David Clitheroe (Synod Secretary), Rev Alison and Rev Deborah which marked a more established and 'official' foundation for the partnership. Up to that point, we had been individuals meeting other individuals, making friends, laying foundations.

It had taken several years to build trust and relationship, to discover the best way to demonstrate partnership, and to work through the difficult issues of communication, expectation and process.

Now we wanted to support Bishop Nanda as he explored the openness of his Diocesan Officers to deeper partnership.

In 2020, there was another visit to the Diocese by a team of 6 from the District: Rev Graham Thompson, Rev Liz Singleton, Rev Stuart Innalls, Mrs Anne Browse (MWiB), Miss Shannon Beveridge and Rev Deborah Kirk. The aim was to embed the partnership in the life of the District and expand the team of those directly involved, for ongoing sustainability.

It was on this visit that we learned of the threat to the survival of the Christian Hospital.

The District World Church Committee felt that it would be appropriate to ask the Synod in September 2021 if the District would support a fundraising effort to help towards this significant but vital work among some of the most vulnerable people. Synod agreed, and we have been able to contribute towards the work. Block A has been completed, and work on Block B has begun.

The partnership with the Diocese of Cuttack is thriving, and **July/August 2022** saw a visit from the Bishop of the Diocese, Rev N K Nanda, and his wife Jyoti, to the UK to attend the Lambeth Conference. Following the Conference, the Bishop and his wife were able to meet with Rev Graham and Alison Thompson in London, and then spend 4 days in the District, hosted by Rev Alison Richardson in Crediton. Alison arranged a lunch in Exeter to enable them to meet with several friends from the District.

The Future

We are now in liminal post pandemic times, and have not been able to visit since 2020. Rev Dr Daniel Haylett is now the District Chair; over previous years, more people in the District have been able to meet our friends in Cuttack. The financial support for the Hospital will continue, but we recognise that it is important to deepen and expand our relationship, and for that to happen, there is a need to plan further exchange visits, both from the Diocese to the UK, and from the District to Orissa.

*Rev Deborah Kirk
October 2022
for MWM(SW) Conference*