



Rev. Steve Maina

Celebrating 2014 in mission-style

Malcolm Falloon spoke with NZCMS National Director, Steve Maina, about their plans to bring teams of evangelists from Africa, Asia and the Pacific to New Zealand this year.

Steve, why is celebrating 2014 so important to NZCMS?

It is absolutely significant for us because it's about the gospel and about mission. Many people don't seem to realise that the whole history of New Zealand is founded on the history of the missions to this country. It was the Gospel that brought those first CMS missionaries here, in 1814.

So, what plans does NZCMS have for the coming year?

We asked ourselves the question, as an organisation still involved in sending out missionaries to different parts of the world what does it mean to celebrate the Gospel? And we thought, what better way to celebrate those first seeds of Gospel mission that came here 200 years ago than by proclaiming that Gospel with people from around the world who are the fruit of that same Gospel? So, we had this dream of bringing into New Zealand 200 missionaries to celebrate 200 years. OK, 200 was probably a little ambitious, but we do hope to have over 30 evangelists come to New Zealand during 2014. The first team actually arrives at the end of March and will be based in Dunedin. And we have teams coming in June, in August, and in October—right through the year.

What is the vision for these evangelistic teams?

We hope that they will partner with the local churches to do a number of things. Firstly, to share their testimonies of how the Gospel has impacted them—something of how God has worked in their lives. Some of them have stories of personal brokenness, some have lived and worked in very poor contexts, and yet the Gospel has changed their lives. Our hope is that in telling these stories, from another part of the world, New Zealanders might hear the Gospel in a fresh way.

Secondly, we pray that they will be in some sense prophetic to the church in New Zealand. That they will be able to come with fresh eyes to actually

look at our context and to say, you know, maybe you have lost confidence in the Gospel. Sometimes someone coming from the outside who doesn't actually fit the 'box' is free to speak into a situation in a fresh way.

Thirdly, we also hope there will be a way in which the New Zealand church will be enlivened and encouraged in its mission. Sometimes I think we have become a bit apathetic. Sometimes I think we have lost confidence in the Gospel because we haven't seen, perhaps, great successes from some of our strategies and our models of mission. Having people come here, who are seeing people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ almost on a daily basis, who believe that this Gospel actually works, is a good thing!

And it's going to be in partnership with the local church?

Yes, absolutely! Our hope is that they won't come to do it for us, but that they will come to do it with us. Imagine Kiwis and Africans journeying together, celebrating the Gospel together—that in itself is something powerful for a watching world. People will be asking the question, why are these Africans here? Why have you come here? It gives the opportunity to respond—we have come here because of the Good News! Because we wish to celebrate with New Zealanders their story. Because we too are part of that story as well. And then they can go on and tell something of the history of Christianity in East Africa.

When CMS made its invitation to the Kenyan Church, how was it received?

Oh, boy, it was mind-boggling. I've been here as a missionary for five years now and I explained to them that New Zealand is not the easiest place in the world to share the Gospel—I told them I need some reinforcements! They were very enthusiastic and the response was amazing. They said 'We are going to send you people who will support the work you are doing and to partner with the local churches there.'

I imagine that it will be quite a costly exercise for the volunteers involved in terms of their time and money.

Yes, but they realise that the Great Commission wasn't only given to the Western Church. The thing that is most amazing about these teams, as I have been working with them, is that they actually believe that they have been called by God to come to New Zealand, and are sacrificially raising funds to come here for two or three weeks to share the Gospel. A lot of people live hand to mouth in Africa and they are having to raise the money for their airfares, plus insurance, plus visa costs, and other expenses—it's a big ask! Yet, they are doing it willingly and joyfully because the Gospel has changed them. I know that right now many of the teams are praying together on regular basis in preparation for coming here.

What has been the response of the New Zealand churches to the vision?

There have been different responses but mostly positive. Some responses have been 'Well, we are not sure that Africans will understand the New Zealanders very much, so we are not too sure of that.' But most of the responses have been absolutely positive! So we are in the situation right now where we have more churches wishing to host African teams that we can deliver.

And it's keeping evangelism on the agenda of the New Zealand Church!

Yes, exactly. So it's from Dunedin all the way to Northland and there will be different methods that will be employed. The churches will be the ones organising the events, CMS is just supplying the evangelists. The teams will be working with Māori and Pasifika, as well as Pākehā. So it's across New Zealand and it's across denominations. But it's about the Gospel—sharing the Gospel, celebrating the Gospel.

What do you think will be the most challenging thing for the teams to face in coming here?

First of all for the Africans, I think they will be absolutely gob-smacked at how long it actually

takes to get to New Zealand—it will take them over 30 hours to get here from Kenya. So they will get a sense of the scope of God's world—at least geographically! But I would also say the same thing that confronted me five years ago, which was just the lack of confidence in the Gospel. I think they will know that in New Zealand there are a lot of people who don't believe in God and are not very interested in religion. But I think what will confront them most will be the apathy in the Church and the lack of Gospel confidence in the Church—I think this might be a cultural shock for them. We will need to prepare them well—but not too well—for I hope they will come with fresh eyes.

What happens after 2014? What does NZCMS hope to see as the on-going fruit of this mission?

We want to see the Gospel continue to grow! Initially, I hope that we can build lasting friendships with the team members by serving them, getting alongside them, and relating to them. By doing so, I hope that we might gain a greater understanding of what God is doing in the world and have a taste of what it means to engage in global mission. It may be that some churches might wish to consider receiving a missionary on a more long-term basis—as their pastor, youth worker, or community worker! Who knows what might happen.

And what might the impact be on the home churches when the teams return to their respective countries?

I hope that the teams might start to challenge their own churches in a prophetic way as well, and say 'If God has blessed you as a church with a wealth of resources in terms of young people, in terms of passion for the Gospel and everything, what are you doing about that? Don't keep it to yourselves! How can you share it much more widely?' So, hopefully the Kenyan church will recognise that perhaps the African church has a role in Global mission today as well. And that there are maybe some places where Kiwis are not able to go, but Kenyans can go—or places where maybe Kenyans and Kiwis can go together!