

MIDDLE EAST WORLD SECTOR



TO: The San Diego Church of Christ
FROM: Andy Fleming, *Evangelist & MEWS Missions Coordinator*
DATE: October 29, 2005
SUBJECT: MEWS's 2005 Grant Request & Financial Update

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let me first begin this letter with a sincere expression of gratitude for your sacrificial hearts – your generosity and willingness to give are well-known and have served as a great example to many congregations for more than two decades. Allow me to echo Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (**2 Corinthians 9:13-15**)

Although most of our brothers and sisters in places like the Middle East have never had the possibility to thank their benefactors personally and probably never will, I am excited to report to you that we have more than 400 faithful brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East who are very grateful and acknowledge your sacrifice and charity with respect, admiration and thanksgiving to God. On their behalf, 'Thank you for sharing God's grace with us!'.

HISTORIC OVERVIEW:

As all of you are aware, during recent years our worldwide fellowship of churches has been going through some painful processes of self-examination and reassessment. I think that most would agree that our structural model of regional governance had lost flexibility and was no longer adapting to the evolving needs and maturing character of the local congregations. Unfortunately, in many cases this 'disconnect' resulted in a dangerous lack of communication between leadership and membership, and also restricted too much planning and decision-making to a small sub-group of the paid staff in our fellowship. Our greatest resource, after our personal salvation, gift of God's Spirit and Scripture, is the maturity and experience of all disciples in every congregation – and this resource was being painfully underutilized.

In order to better understand the present status of mission support to the Middle East, please consider the following overview:

1. Historically the MEWS was supported by 3 regions of the LAICC, and the Southwest family of churches, as well as about \$175,000 from the ICOC overhead (these funds came from 2x multiple of Special Missions Contribution that was

forwarded by each World Sector to the ICOC). In 2002 this revenue to the MEWS amounted to almost \$3,000,000;

2. As was the practice at that time among the World Sectors, only about 50-55% of this amount (i.e., \$1,500,000) was actually directly supporting foreign missions and the remainder was used to support stateside components of the World Sectors like the WS Leader salary, WS Administrator salary, World Sector Office overhead, Geographic Sector Leaders, discretionary help to U.S.-based ministries like the South Central Region in Los Angeles, etc. Although this use of the funds was known in principle and legally defensible, it would seem that few members understood that such a large percentage was being spent in sustaining the WS organization locally. In practice this meant that home congregations to WS organizations benefited through the presence of 'salaried' ministers (i.e., Los Angeles) and to a limited extent home congregations to Geographic Sector organizations (i.e., San Diego).
3. In 2002, the NET WS (then part of the Pac Rim) was asking for financial independence to support Upcyberdown, so the Pac Rim WS approached Guillermo Adame about joining the Southwest family of churches to their Mission efforts – this proposal was based mostly on a longstanding friendship between the Adames and Kims, and a longstanding desire to work more closely together in the ministry.
4. Although the MEWS was supposed to be supported by part of the ICOC overhead in compensation for this changeover, in 2003 when many changes began to take place, this funding for the MEWS was never collected or distributed. Compounding the difficulty arising from this missing multiple was the overall lessening of contributions worldwide, so that the MEWS began desperately trying to make all the necessary reductions and streamline the organization.
5. As a result, we have reduced our annual budgets drastically while trying to keep some sense of stability in our mission work. Although we initially set our 2003 budget at \$1,377,000, we had to reduce it to about \$1,060,000 by the summer of that year. In 2004 our budget was \$960,000, and our current budget for 2005 is \$875,000 with a plan for 2006 to a further reduction of \$800,000.
6. These reductions have resulted in many material changes, the most significant of which was the repatriation of more than a dozen Americans from the Middle East. Of course, one of the first responses was to reduce stateside spending so that our current 'Administrative Support Costs' are now less than 10% of their former amounts in 2002. Also of note is our projection of reducing our 2006 budget by \$75,000 by repatriating our two remaining missionary couples (although one couple has stayed on the mission field determined to become self-supporting), and transitioning from a part-time administrator to simply paying a flat-fee for the necessary administrative services.
7. Any further cuts will mean either a collapse of our fragile 'Mission Society' support structure, or that some ME churches will no longer have facilities to meet in or full-time staff for preaching and teaching. Our annual training program has already been reduced from three conferences to two, and we are seeking to economize at every point possible.

8. Last year our total revenue was about \$510,000 and together with our carryover balance of \$100,000, our beginning 2005 balance was about \$610,000. This means that since we needed \$875,000 to operate normally this year, we began in a position that was \$265,000 short (about 30%). Consequently, this means that we were able to fund the ME mission work until September 1, and then needed to move our fiscal year ahead four months so that we would begin to operate from September to September with the funds already collected in 2005. Obviously, the MEWS Board is facing a some dire decisions of what cutbacks to make if we do not find the full commitment to our new 2006 operating budget of \$800,000 by December 1, this year.
9. The following list shows the breakdown of the \$510,000 support received in 2004:

<u>Church</u>	<u>Amount</u>
LAICC - West	\$ 272,846
LAICC - IER	\$ 114,000
LAICC - Metro Heights	\$ 5,085
CA-San Diego	\$ 43,800
AZ-Phoenix	\$ 35,000
AZ-Albuquerque	\$ 10,000
FL-Miami	\$ 10,000
AL-Anchorage	<u>\$ 18,000</u>
TOTAL:	\$ 508,731

Most of these groups have committed in kind for 2005 (except LAICC – Metro Heights) and in addition to them the Central New Jersey Church of Christ has committed \$55,000, the Austin International Church of Christ has committed \$60,000 and the Las Vegas Church of Christ has committed an unspecified amount. In other words, our potential revenue in 2005 (for 2006) presently stands at about \$620,000 and we are still lacking about \$180,000. We have presently collected about two thirds of this amount and are still waiting on San Diego, Albuquerque, Miami and Anchorage.

10. *Therefore, on behalf of the ME missions work I would like to make the following Grant Request to the San Diego Church of Christ in the amount of \$250,000 (\$43,800 as per last year; \$180,000 to cover our 2006 budget short fall, and \$26,200 to help cover the budget shortfall in these last 4 months of 2005). Thanks for your consideration of this request!*

CURRENT MISSION STRATEGY:

Of course, much more exciting than these important financial details is the actual plan and program for mission work in the Middle East. Currently we have 16 congregations in 15 countries and a membership of about 440 – last year more than half of the congregations experienced positive growth and as a group increased by about 4%. Unfortunately, things have proven to be little more challenging so far this year because of the accumulative effect of many repatriations, and the expulsion of our trained Egyptian leader from Sudan two years ago and our inability to find a replacement for him to work with the young congregation there.

We have been working hard these past few years to build a lot more consensus in the ME church

leaderships and promote unity in the various geographic regions. Over half of our congregations are being led by self-supporting leaders who must work serious and demanding jobs in order to receive the necessary visa support to even reside in their respective countries. Most of these leaders have not been extensively trained and were usually Bible talk leaders or House church leaders in their congregations of origin – they truly are heroes in the fullest sense! Currently, we have 17 nationals working fulltime in the ministry in 6 different countries, and an additional 6 part-time employees (2 of which help in administration).

During the past three years we have been conducting two yearly conferences to help better equip the churches: in January we have a 4-day Bible Teaching conference where we have had deep Biblical teaching like overviews of different books of the Bible (*Matthew* by Steve Kinnard in 2005, *Old Testament Overview* by Douglas Jacoby in 2004, and *Mark* by myself in 2003), and in the summers we have focused more on marriage and the family (Al and Gloria Baird did a great series on *Parenting and Training Other Parents* this year). Of course, considering the isolation factor of living in the Middle East, these conferences also supply a refreshing time of fellowship for all who are able to attend – invariably, someone is not able to either leave their own country or enter the one in which we have our conference.

For a number of years already, there has been an annual *Arabic-speaking Disciples Conference* in either Jordan or Egypt, with usually more than 100 disciples in attendance. These meetings have also proven to be very encouraging to the churches and are helping to forge unity in an otherwise very disunified part of the world – (in many ways, the Muslim world is no more unified than what is usually referred to as the ‘Christian world’). In general our ME congregations are very poor and they would not be able to meet together if it were not for the generosity and support of their first world brothers and sisters.

We have also seen the beginning of two new exciting programs this year. Firstly, the churches in Israel hosted an incredible month long campaign which included Bible study, visitation of historical sites, evangelism and worship. It was amazing to hear about 54 disciples (mostly singles) from at least 18 different countries raising the funds and participate in the 2005 Jerusalem Mission Trip. Aziz Sarah, our minister in Israel, is to be commended for organizing the whole event and also making it financially self-supporting! Secondly, the MEWS has begun to discuss ways to further involve the supporting congregations, and as a result there have been a number of independent visits made to the Middle East churches with plans for more in the near future. Jeff Wadstrom attended a brainstorming session in May on behalf of the SDCC, and it was there suggested that San Diego begin to build a special relationship with the church in Amman, Jordan. This congregation is presently led by Simon Hinn, who was converted in SD as a college student back in 1983.

A full break-down of our financial plan is available and a quick review will show that 65% of the monies collected goes directly to overseas support of mission congregations, 20% is spent on facilitating the overseas training conferences and mission visits, and the remaining 15% funds the stateside administrative costs and overhead. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thanks again for your heart for God’s kingdom.

In Him,
Andy Fleming