Adella’s Post

As I write this post I am in Auckland, in the first week of a 6 Week programme called A New Face, organised by the Council of World Mission in partnership with Trinity Theological College, New Zealand.

The theme of this year’s programme is Disability, Mission & Transformation.

As CRCWs we are committed to seeking transformation within the local church and the community in which it is located. We do this by engaging with the members of the congregation and by being involved in a range of community activities or projects that are formed using community development principles. This transformation process is a component of engaging in urban mission.

In Auckland, two of my fellow participants are from the United Church of Zambia. I was interested to know how UCZ is involved in church related community work and so as well as talking to my colleagues; as most people today, I looked on the church’s website to find out more and I share below UCZ’s approach to Community Development and how the church has moved to a way of recognising that church’s who engage with their communities are being seen as Missional Congregations.

I share with you (summarised) some of the points made which have been prepared by: Deaconess M.K. Sichali.

“UCZ follows a concept of Umoja which means togetherness or oneness. Umoja is about giving the local church a vision for its community. Through Bible studies and interactive activities, Umoja is about enthusing and empowering the church to go out into the community helping people identify and address their needs with their own resources. This is the underlying principle of the Missional Congregations Concept.

What are the benefits of Missional Congregations?
It builds on the strengths and hopes of a church group that want to make a difference in their community. There are a number of benefits to the church and community of doing Missional Congregations.

Benefits to the church are that it grows as a positive influence within the community; helps the church to reflect on the Bible and its role to meet the needs of others; helps identify resources in the church; builds relationships within the congregation, confidence is built among church members in these
relationships/teams and the church is helped to become a growing community, sharing experiences and achievements.

Benefits to the community are: self-reliance, a sense of purpose, an increase in self-esteem; there is sustainable change; a sense of hope and well-being; greater ability by community members to adjust to changes in culture and the environment and improved community relationships.

Briefly the key stages of Missional Congregations are:
Envisioning and equipping the church; envisioning the community; agreement: taking action and evaluation.

Conclusion
In conclusion all the various projects the church is now undertaking are as a result of being missional as a church. As a department we work tirelessly to ensure that there is community organization, social justice and community development in the community in which the church is situated. The idea behind this concept is to make the church functional and visible in our communities."

In one of our lectures entitled Engaging Mission from the Margins we have also been considering Missional Congregations. The comments made here included the point that in Missional Congregations, it is the action of the church members that is the focus not the decision-making of the church leadership, ie a bottom up activity instead of a top down programme and that the action of the local church’s engagement with its community, is seen as engagement with a purpose .... the purpose being to transform – the church and the community.

So where do I see CRCWs in all this? I see that we are the people encouraging the church congregation in is action; helping the congregation to engage with its community; assisting in the formation and for a time, the delivery of the community project and we are the people who steer the theological reflection and project evaluating. Put simply we are the people that journey with missional congregations and who embrace the community members.

I believe that by the end of my time in Auckland I will have seen many examples of missional churches. It will be good to reflect on what I see here in New Zealand and what I will be doing once back in the UK.