



## Regional Plan for the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden Mission Partnership with Asia for 2008-2012

### Guidelines and Goals for the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden

The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (MCCS) work is characterized by a holistic view of the World, of Man and of the Great Commission. This holistic view is expressed in the MCCS Constitution where it says, among other things, "It is in the nature of the Church to live in mission work and always to be on its way beyond itself towards the whole Creation."

The MCCS does not draw a sharp line between mission work in Sweden and mission work in other parts of the world. Joint responsibility, mutual dependence and mutual learning within the Universal Church are central concepts.

In the policy document "Good News For All" the MCCS comprehension of its international assignment is described in detail.

Some main points:

*The theological basis* is that it is in the nature of the Church to live in mission work. The missionary assignment is a whole made up of three dimensions:

- through evangelism the Church witnesses to Christ
- through diaconal/social work it serves fellow human beings and the whole Creation
- through fellowship people are rehabilitated and encouraged to make use of their manifold gifts

Together with all good forces the Church wants to be a prophetic voice in society, working in favour of maintaining justice, freedom, democracy and human rights. All this is based on the conviction of the value and dignity of Man being endowed with his/her own capacity to assume responsibility and to adopt a standpoint.

On the basis of these three dimensions of the Missionary assignment, four *areas of work* have been given priority within the international work:

- **Evangelism** – in areas with a limited Christian presence, normally in collaboration with local or regional Sister Churches and partners.
- **Church Development** – among other things through support of education and organisational development.
- **Peace and Reconciliation** – an active work of reconciliation in areas of war and open conflicts, especially where there is ethnic and religious opposition

and where a religious dialogue is an important means for a peaceful coexistence.

- **Community Building** – through education, health care and other social work and through maintaining human rights and supporting people's efforts to get organized, to develop democracy and to create possibilities for earning their living.

In all fields of collaboration the following criteria should be observed:

Reciprocity, Ecumenism, Justice, Equality, Democratic Participation, Care for the Environment and concern about HIV/Aids problems.

For a more detailed study of the MCCS goals and visions please consult the document "Goals and Visions for 2010" and the annual activity plans.

## **Goals for the MCCS Partnership with Asia for 2008-12**

### **- Building Bridges with Asia**

*Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 8:11*

The MCCS partnership with Asia aims at supporting God's Mission in Asia and at listening to challenges from our sisters and brothers in and from Asia concerning the work in Sweden.

### **Background – A Brief Mission History**

One of the reasons for the founding of our Church was the worldwide assignment for mission work and shortly after the founding of the MCCS in 1878, missionaries were sent to Russia among other places. The Swedish missionaries to Russia were e.g. Lars Erik Högberg, Nils Fredrik Højjer and Wilhelm Sarwe, who worked there and who gradually came to give important impulses for the work in Asia. At the outset work was done only in Russia (in and around St. Petersburg), but preaching tours were also made to other places in Russia and after some time mission work was taken up among the Bashkiris of Ural, among different ethnic groups in the Caucasus and in Iran and other places in Asia. In 1892 the missionary Højjer visited Kashgar and after that he inspired the MCCS Board to take up mission work in what was then known as Eastern Turkestan (today Xinjiang in China).

However, already before that, in 1890, what was to be known as the MCCS China Mission had started in the Hubei Province in Central China, which could be reached by river boat on the Yangtze River via Shanghai. The China Mission was inspired by Hudson Taylor who visited Sweden towards the end of the 1880s.

Because of unrest and political change the missionaries had to leave these two areas and the regular mission work ceased in 1938 in Eastern Turkestan and in 1951 in China. The missionaries who left Eastern Turkestan continued working as missionaries, but now in India starting in 1940, and those who were forced to leave China, started mission work in Japan in 1949. The MCCS Mission gave rise to national churches founded in 1963: the Hindustani Covenant Church and the Nippon Seiyaku Kirisuto Kyoodan (the Japanese Covenant Church).

Contacts with China were taken up again in the 1980s but it was not until 1995 that the MCCS once again started more regular mission partnership in the Hubei Province. From 1998 contacts with Christians in Xinjiang have been taken on a more regular basis, even though certain contacts were made already towards the end of the 1960s when Tornisa started to write letters to Sweden. She also visited Sweden in 1985-86.

In 1978 the MCCS Board decided to start mission partnership with the Church of Pakistan together with the Church of Sweden.

During the winter/spring of 2008 Gerard Willemsen made an assessment of the MCCS Asian Partnership. The work was assessed partly on the basis of the goals presented for the work in China for 2000-2004, a document which had been presented at the MCCS General Conference of 1999 which was based in its turn on the report "China – Mission and Renewed Contacts". The assessment was also made on the basis of the MCCS mission policy as presented in "Good News For All", "Goals and Visions for 2010", the work done in connection with the project "We Want to Grow" and a number of interviews and written statements from persons involved in the MCCS partnership with Asia. This assessment has provided valuable insight for the elaboration the present plan.

## **Strategy**

The MCCS strives for a clear relation to the Church in the areas where it works. This is the case in India (HCC) and in Japan (NSKK). In Pakistan we want to work in favour of a closer relationship between the MCCS, the Church of Sweden and the Church of Pakistan with regular contacts and exchanges on different levels (congregation visits, annual conferences, staff exchange, etc.) There is a more project oriented partnership going on with the Hubei Christian Council and other organizations in China. This partnership should be formalized during the period in question.

For the time being the MCCS has well functioning, regular, multilateral and bilateral negotiations with Sister Churches and partners in Asia within the framework of the Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC) and other partner relationships.

The mission partnership with Asia is characterized by reciprocity within many fields such as theological reflection, intercession, exchange of staff and visits. Reciprocity should be present on all levels: congregations, church members (from all age groups), theologians, pastors, deacons, evangelists, students, etc.

The mission partnership should also be marked by responsibility for the Creation, for the work with HIV/Aids, for equality and democracy.

The MCCS wants to work with a number of ethnical, linguistic and social groups not only in Asia but also in Sweden and in other countries. This is valid for among other groups Uighurs, Han Chinese, Urdu speakers, Karenes, Arabic speakers, Persian speakers and marginalized groups like the Dalites and others. The relationships between indigenous peoples in different countries should be promoted.

Mission work in new areas is performed in collaboration with Sister Churches and/or Ecumenical Partners on an international level or in Sweden. It is of particular importance not to forget contacts via the IFFEC, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and other ecumenical organisations and the Baptist Union/the Methodist Church/ Diakonia and the Stockholm School of Theology. The partnership agreement with the Evangelical Covenant Church, USA and Canada, decided upon in 2007, should be applied and developed concerning the partnership in Asia.

The MCCA wants to encourage and create possibilities for an exchange between Sister Churches and partners in Asia, but also between them and MCCA partners in other parts of the world.

## **Activities within the four areas of priority**

### ***Evangelism***

It is the wish of the MCCA to

- Evangelize with joy and conviction while showing respect for other convictions and faiths
- Make use of lessons in evangelism and church planting learnt elsewhere for the same work in Sweden
- Collaborate with the HCC as to staff and financial support concerning mission work in new places in India and in other countries
- Give support to evangelism in China in new places and among new groups of people
- Increase the collaboration with the NSKK in Japan, for instance via exchange of pastors, where we could learn from one another about the work done in a secularized context
- Investigate the conditions for support of evangelism in Pakistan.

### ***Church Development***

It is the wish of the MCCA to

- Give support to theological training in China and India
- Support the development of worship service and congregational life in Sweden through exchange of theologians and students of theology in Asia and from the Stockholm School of Theology and of collaborators and laymen in the congregations
- Increase the contacts of "Friendship Congregations" and "Friendship Districts" with Asia
- Increase the number of missionaries/volunteers/trainees in all directions, between the churches in Asia and other countries, including Sweden
- Give support to organisational development.

### ***Peace and Reconciliation***

It is the wish of the MCCS to

- Encourage the Religious Dialogue in India and Pakistan and in contact with immigrant groups in Sweden
- Emphasize different minorities and their rights (language, culture, religion) and work for dialogue between different groups, both in Sweden and in the partner churches in the countries where we are working
- Maintain the friendship ties with Uighurs in different parts of the world.

### ***Community Building***

It is the wish of the MCCS to

- Focus upon the fight against poverty with a special emphasis on particularly vulnerable groups in our development partnership with India and Pakistan
- Strengthen the quality of reports and follow up of development work in order to learn lessons for the future
- Challenge our Sister Churches to be more engaged in issues concerning environmental influence, HIV and Aids, equality and democracy in their development work and strengthen the competence within these areas
- Phase out project support to some of the institutions/centres having received support for a long time. The MCCS will still be assisting in the creating of strategies for the future planning of the work
- Support educational work focusing upon democracy and human rights
- Receive support concerning our integration work in Sweden
- Provide support of humanitarian work according to a special policy.

### **Partners**

The Nippon Seiyaku Kirisuto Kyoodan (NSKK) (The Japanese Covenant Church).

The Hubei Christian Council with related institutions like the Zhong Nan Theological Seminary, the Ark Training Centre, etc

The China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation.

The Hindustani Covenant Church (HCC) with related institutions like St Luke's Medical Society, Covenant Social Service, etc.

The Church of Pakistan, the Raiwind Diocese, with related institutions like Talitha Kumi Welfare Centre, the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, etc.

The Evangelical Covenant Church (in the US and Canada) and their church partners/partner organisations in Asia.

International ecumenical bodies and Sister Churches within the World Council of Churches (WCC), the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)

Swedish Churches and organisations like Sida, the Swedish Mission Council, the Church of Sweden, the Baptist Union of Sweden, the Methodist Church in Sweden, the Stockholm School of Theology, Diakonia, etc.

## **Partnership Agreement**

Today the MCCS has a partnership agreement with the Sister Churches of Japan (NSKK) and of India (HCC).

An agreement concerning partnership with the Church of Pakistan was signed together with the Church of Sweden in 1980.

## **Coordination**

### ***The International Unit of the Missions Department***

The international unity coordinates the MCCS Asian partnership via the Secretary for Asia and the Project Administrator for Asia.

During the present period a post as Coordinator for Asia, living in Asia, i.e. a collaborator/missionary whose main task is to be near the Sister Churches and partners of the MCCS and give support on the spot and meet local challenges, which could be useful for the work in Sweden.

The MCCS Mission Director has the overall responsibility for the MCCS Asian partnership and he will also be reporting to the Church Board.

### ***The Asia Group***

The Asia Group is a group of reference contributing with knowledge and support to those persons responsible for the MCCS work in Asia at the Missions Department. It is made up of persons having a special knowledge of the MCCS priority regions, thematically and geographically speaking, and of representatives for local congregations, districts and SMU/equemenia in Sweden.

### ***The Swedish Pakistan Committee***

The Swedish Pakistan Committee is a group of cooperation between the Church of Sweden and the MCCS concerning their joint work in Pakistan. The Committee works as a group of reference contributing with knowledge and support to the persons responsible for the work in Asia at the MCCS head quarters. It is made up of representatives of the Church of Sweden and the MCCS.

The Committee works as a reference group contributing with knowledge and support for the persons responsible for the MCCS work in Asia at the MCCS Office. It is made up of representatives from the Church of Sweden and the MCCS having expert knowledge concerning the partnership with the Church of Pakistan and within areas like religious dialogue and work in favour of peace and reconciliation.

When strategies for the partnership in Pakistan are elaborated this is done in near collaboration between the Church of Pakistan, the MCCS and the Church of Sweden.

Regional Plan for Asia adopted by the MCCS Church Board on 15 November, 1008.