News Release

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**Over third of a million raised for Moderator’s Covid appeal**

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, has thanked Presbyterian congregations across the island for their ‘prayerful and sacrificial generosity of spirit in some of the hardest of times’ for raising over a third of a million pounds to provide support to people in fragile, vulnerable countries, suffering due to the ongoing effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Launched in December last year, the Moderator’s Special Christmas Appeal, which replaced the annual World Development Appeal for 2020, has to date raised £337,147 (€388,393). That money has now be distributed between PCI’s relief and development partners, Christian Aid and Tearfund, who are already engaged on the ground in longer term sustainable development work amongst those most affected by Covid-19. The final third has also gone to churches with which PCI partners directly to support relief efforts in seven countries on three continents - South Sudan, Malawi, Indonesia, Nepal, Lebanon, Syria and Romania.

Thanking congregations for their overwhelming generosity, Dr Bruce said, “When we launched the Appeal before Christmas, I said that the pandemic had had a major impact on our island home in so many different ways, and this included our congregations and our members. Its effect on the economies of the more fragile, low-income nations of the world, however, would be multiplied.”

Dr Bruce continued, “In the face of not being able to meet for long periods of time, and the unprecedented demands that the pandemic has placed on ordinary people who have lost loved ones, their jobs and livelihoods, the Irish Presbyterian family has shown a prayerful and sacrificial generosity of spirit. Along with others, in raising this significant sum of money they have demonstrated a deep compassion and practical concern for those in need beyond our shores, which is in and of itself, a powerful witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In terms of the allocation of appeal funding to PCI’s partner churches and organisations, in Malawi, for example, the funding will be directed to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian’s Livingstonia Synod in its support for its three hospitals in Ekwendeni, Embangweni and Livingstonia. In Lebanon, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria & Lebanon’s Compassionate Protestant Society, will use funding to support two Covid-19 projects. One focuses on food security, providing food boxes for 1000 of the poorest families of all faiths and none, while the other project focusses on providing hygiene kits for 1000 families in Syrian refugee camps.

Over 3,000 miles to the east, The United Mission to Nepal (UMN), PCI’s partner in the Himalayan nation, the Appeal will support UMN’s hospitals in Tansen and Okhaldhunga. In the early stages of the pandemic, non-Covid patients were fearful of attending hospitals and this had a severe impact on income required to pay day-to-day running costs. PCI funding has not only contributed to offsetting these day-to-day costs, but to equipping the hospitals to care more effectively for the growing numbers of Covid-related patients, including the purchase of PPE.

Dr Bruce concluded by saying, “I look forward to receiving reports of how the Appeal will be used by our relief and development partners to help and support some of the most vulnerable people on the planet. The pandemic is truly global, and has placed unprecedented demands on nations and peoples across the world, and I give thanks for the faithful response by Presbyterians across Ireland to the Appeal.

“We hope there is light at the end of the tunnel, and it comes in the form of the various vaccination programmes that are being rolled out across the country. I will receive my second jab in May. It is vitally important, however, that while we are able to benefit from the various vaccines at home, there should be equal access to safe and effective vaccines around the world.

“Support given to those nations who neither have the infrastructure, or the financial provision to establish a vaccination programme will be vital. Vaccine nationalism is simply unchristian, and flies in the face of sharing God’s heart for the world and His command for us to love our neighbour as ourselves,” he said.

Responding to the news that the Appeal had topped a third of a million pounds, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, Convener of PCI’s Council for Global Mission said, “At the time I believed that the Appeal would give us the opportunity to stand in solidarity with our global neighbours who, with the onslaught of Covid-19, found themselves in fragile and precarious conditions. I hoped and prayed that it would be a blessing to many. This news today is indeed an answer to prayer.”