**22 March 2021**

**Presbyterian Moderator assures new Myanmar Moderator of prayers**

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, has sent his congratulations to the Rev Ling Zaw, the new Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM). Dr Bruce also assured him of his prayers and those of PCI, especially at this particular time, following last month’s military coup and the civil unrest.

Initial contact with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar by PCI, began in the early 1980s, and for many years it had been a challenge for PCI to develop a strong relationship with the denomination on the ground. With the political and economic reforms that led to the ending of more than five decades of military dictatorship in 2011, Rev Ling Zaw, as PCM’s General Secretary, was able to attend PCI’s General Assembly in Belfast in 2016. The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar is now recognised as one of PCI’s Global Mission Partners.

“From colleagues in PCI who have been in contact with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, the situation following last month’s coup is very difficult. At this particular time, as he has been called to lead his church, I want to assure Rev Ling Zaw of the prayerful support of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland,” Dr Bruce said.

“We have all seen on the news that there have been many peaceful demonstrations opposing the overthrow of civilian rule - but with live ammunition being used to disperse crowds, many demonstrators have lost their lives, and many others have been injured, beaten and imprisoned. With many workplaces closed, the economic situation already worsened by the pandemic, is also taking a huge toll on local people.”

The Moderator continued, “We are deeply disturbed by these scenes, but the primary request from our church partners in Myanmar is that we pray for a just and peaceful resolution, and they can be assured of that.”

With more than 30,000 members, the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar is a small denomination in a majority Buddhist country of over 50 million people. Rev Dr Liz Hughes, Convener of PCI’s Council for Global Mission, met Rev Ling Zaw in 2016 when he was in Belfast for PCI’s General Assembly.

Assuring the new Myanmar Moderator of her prayers also, Dr Hughes said, “As our relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar develops, I am really heartened by the fact that over many years a number of our congregations across Ireland have had direct links and close ties with the Christian community in Myanmar and continue to support them in a range of ways, not least prayer.”

Encouraging people to pray, Dr Hughes said, “With a six and a half hour time difference between us, our day has come to an end as the people of Myanmar are waking up to face another. Could we all commit to pray for the people of Myanmar at our bedtime so they can face the day – particularly during this time of emergency - especially remembering those of the household of faith,” Dr Hughes said.

Dr Hughes also encouraged people to pray for specific situations

·         for the current crisis to come to a just and peaceful resolution

·         for the issues and people laid on our hearts as we watch, hear and read the news

·         for the families of those who have lost their lives and also for those who have been beaten and imprisoned during this crisis

·         for those who have positions of influence inside and outside of Myanmar that their actions may promote peace

·         for the worsening economic situation, especially for those already adversely impacted by the pandemic and that it would ease

·         for the new Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and for all other leaders in the Christian community in Myanmar that they may have the wisdom and discernment needed to spiritually equip their members at this time, and bear ongoing witness to the love of Jesus for all people.

Last month Dr David Bruce, joined with his Scottish counterpart in urging the UK government to ‘do all that it can to ensure the restoration of democracy which fully respects the November election.’ In their letter they fully endorsed a statement released by the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar in condemning oppression and calling for the release from house arrest of the State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar President Win Myint and other elected leaders.