

**Edinburgh 1910: “Roots and Fruits”  
The Jamaican Experience  
Roy and Jane Dodman**

**Setting the scene for this short reflection**

As we reflect on the Church of Scotland’s mission in Jamaica and our participation in the mission over the last twenty five years, we feel that we are not well equipped to give a detailed history of the great men and women who came and were part of the planting of the Christian church here. We are well equipped, however, to reflect on our own journey and what happens when we stretch the metaphor of roots and fruits and imagine that the fruit has dropped to the ground and the seed has sprouted and there is now a vigorous young tree growing beside the old tree. If we may be so bold, what happens when the young tree has become strong and vibrant and the old tree shows alarming signs of being in a state of possibly terminal decay? How do the two trees relate and how can both trees survive and produce good fruit?

**Our Jamaica Story**

When we offered for overseas work with the Church of Scotland, what were we looking for, what did we expect? At the time of ‘call’ we were following a very conventional pattern for a young, married committed, Christian couple. Jane had enjoyed teaching at a primary school in Newcastle until she stopped when our first child was born. Roy, a social worker, was working for the local authority. Both were well involved in the local Methodist church. At an evening service the possibility of ‘serving overseas’ for a period was mentioned. Despite disbelief and incredibility from some and the fact that the Methodist Church couldn’t find a suitable placement for us (we were convinced that if we were going to serve overseas we were both going to serve), we continued to believe that this was a call and challenge to us. We came to Edinburgh, were interviewed and selected to work with the (now) United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands in Kingston, Jamaica. Roy was appointed as a social worker/community worker and Jane as a teacher in the Mel Nathan Institute, a church based community development programme serving the deprived inner-city community of Hannah Town in Kingston. We then went for a period of training at the much maligned, but, for us, incredibly helpful St Colm’s College. By this time we were convinced that we were going to be:

- Working in a deprived inner-city community as members of a strong, local based team as a teacher and social worker
- Involved in the wider life of the United Church
- Active advocates of the work of the Board of World Mission of the Church of Scotland

We believe that we have been faithful in all of these tasks. Of course, over such a long period of service, our personal roles and responsibilities have changed and developed and we are happy to recognise the receiving church’s willingness to allow us to develop and be used and the sending church in facilitating these movements.

We have worked in Jamaica within a church that cherished its relationship with the Church of Scotland. The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands has viewed the Church of Scotland perhaps as the first among equals of the churches that shaped its life. The relationship has carried some ambivalence. There are many stories from the past where the Church of Scotland missionary is displayed as demonstrating paternalistic and colonial attitudes to local church leaders but this has always been balanced by a deep appreciation of the commitment and theological depth that was also present. The United Church has also taken to itself and further developed the social outreach that the Church of Scotland missionaries exemplified, particularly in the area of education.

In any relationship there has to be change and growth or it will die. For most of the time we served as Church of Scotland missionaries in Jamaica we felt we were part of a maturing and growing relationship that was completing the move from a dependent parent child relationship to a sibling relationship where each sibling had particular strengths and particular needs and these were shared openly to the mutual benefit of both parties.

More recent happenings have severely damaged that progression. The United Church was clearly distressed by decisions taken by Board of World Mission regarding the support of the work in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. They were far more distressed, however, by the way the decisions were made. It seemed as if there had been a regression in attitude from Scotland which reneged on the emerging paradigm of equal but different partners in mission. We were caught in the middle of this maelstrom, trying to remain loyal to our sending church who had supported us caringly for many years and in whose midst were so many dear friends, faithful committed Christian people whom we knew we would always love and respect and yet ... and yet .. The Church organisation we felt, and we still feel, was failing to show the respect not to us personally, but primarily to the United Church. This is a church with so much to offer the Church of Scotland within a mutually sustaining relationship.

Any brief comments on what God has been up to in this long journey demonstrate that there is much to celebrate - a vibrant indigenous church has been planted that continues to seek God's will and purpose in a rapidly changing society and world. We rejoice that we have been and are a part of that church and that, over the years have been able to share that journey with many in Scotland. We also hope and believe that we have been able to open some eyes to the rich challenges of working across and between cultures.

We believe that God is calling the Church in Scotland in these very challenging times to respond to crisis not by becoming more and more insular but by remaining open to the limitless possibilities that are available to those who trust in God and embrace the church of Jesus Christ worldwide. We believe that it is critical that the church repents openly (as we all must do) for past mistakes and recognises that it may be that one of the most challenging churches it has planted may be the sources of much needed renewal and transformation of God's work in Scotland. Truly Scotland in the twenty first century is a mission field.