

The Horrors of Racism and the Supernatural

Two things Africa is stuck on with respect to the West:

- 1, instead of trying to understand Africa the West is determined that there is nothing to understand, under the guise of not being racist.
- 2, really an outcome of one above, the West is determined to conclude that too many Africans believe in the supernatural.

Hence the secular West blames the gods that it does not believe in for problems it does not want to recognise.

Jim Harries News and Prayer Letter from Kenya

Contents

1. Frank's Report
2. Visiting Prayer Mountain (18th November 2015)
3. A day in the life of ...
4. Meek / *praeis* (Matthew 5:5)
5. Fellowships



On the way to Got Rawalo (Prayer Mountain)



stunning scenery

Frank’s Report

Frank wrote up a brief report following his visit here. He wrote ‘what Jim does’ and ‘what are the fruit of his labours.’ Here is a condensed version including key excerpts of Frank’s words:

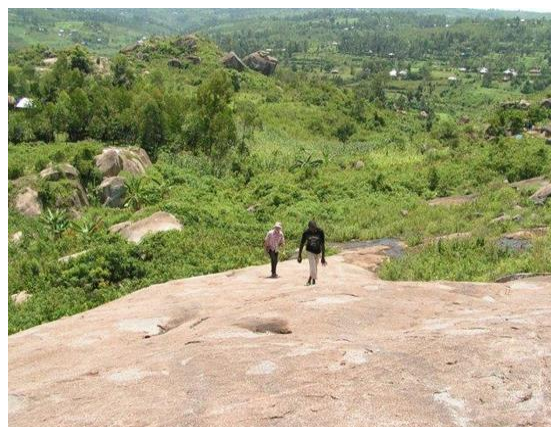
<i>Jim’s Activities</i>	<i>Fruit arising from Jim’s activities</i>
<p>Jim is: communicating with people in their language ... giving worth to what people have ... going to the people ... reaching out to the AICs [African Indigenous Churches] ... giving worth to their histories and points of view ... able to engage in true dialogue ... [providing] a model of a different and sustainable style [of mission] ... maintaining long term relationships ... supporting-encouraging-visiting [many] pastors/bishops/church workers ... lives in a village in two houses with a dozen orphans ... [relates to] to the house-mother and each and every child ... he is free to act and collaborate with all who approach him ... he offers language classes (in Kiswahili and Dholuo), sharing experiences and challenging mutually [with other missionaries] ... - his ministry of writing-sharing-thinking-stimulating theology and missiology ...</p>	<p>[He makes] people smile ... [He is] empowering them to value their own resources) ... makes that people want to help HIM; they experience that they have got something to share with him ... people say how much they value his visits and collaboration in the church services and bible classes) ... they are able to connect to understand and choose what is important for them ... - his impact in the lives of his "family" [children/orphans and their future families, (grand)children & their formal education-profession] is unmeasurable ... [He helps people to realise that] we don't need to be like westerners to be acceptable (to God) ... - his maximum support is empowering the identity and worth of persons (in their context and lifestyle); he truly builds them up (letting them know: YES, YOU CAN!) ... Local people report: “He doesn’t cause us to fight in our churches ... encourages us to hear from the Holy Spirit ... remembers us ... you eat and drink what we have, you sleep where we offer you to sleep ...”</p>

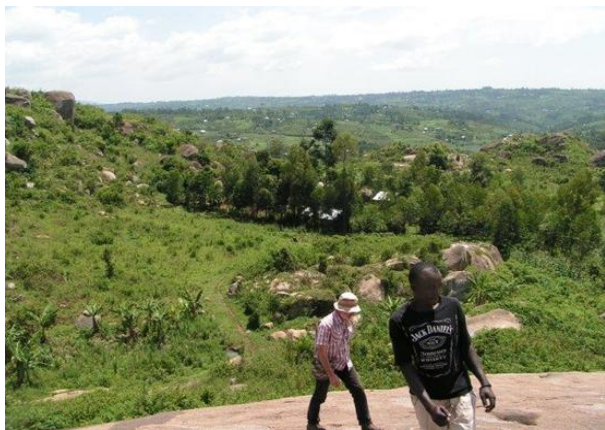
Visiting Prayer Mountain (18th November 2015

A half hour’s walk from home followed by 10 minutes on the bus, took us to the area of this church. Another half hour’s walk to the neighbours of the church building, and we were told the location of today’s meeting. ‘That’s amazing’ I thought to myself, realising that we were going to be right alongside the prayer mountain of Gem (my home area in Kenya). We had set out early enough to have spare time available, so who knows whether I might not get the chance to show my German visitor Frank the ‘mountain’?

Frank Paul serves the Lord in Germany in a community called the OJC. I have often visited him there, and we have worked together on promoting vulnerable mission. He acquired his valuation of vulnerable mission following almost 2 decades of living in Argentina and ministering there amongst an indigenous Indian tribe. I was very glad that Frank had taken 10 days to visit me in Kenya, and was looking forward to hearing his comparisons between his experiences in the Chaco in Argentina and what he was now seeing in Africa.

Up the massive boulder towards the top



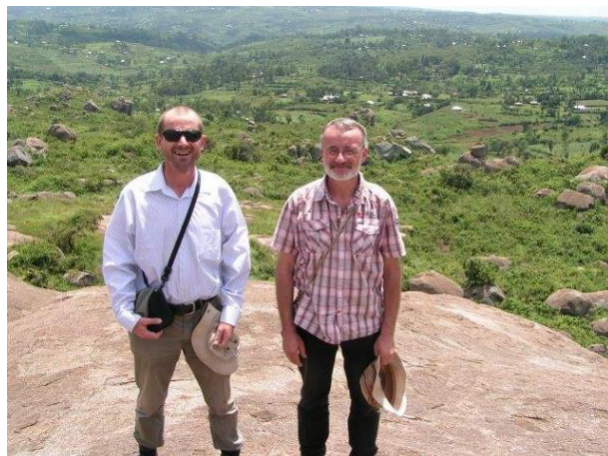


walking with our guide

To save time and my visitor's legs, we took motorbikes to the home at which the meeting was to be held. There indeed alongside us was the famous (in my part of the world) Got Rawalo (Hill of Rawalo). Of course we weren't there for the hill, but for the meeting that was to happen later. Yet, time was available, we found a local guide, and soon we were on our way walking up. Many of my friends frequently tell me stories of times they have spent up Got Rawalo, in prayer and fasting, seeking God's face. People from many different Christian denominations go there. I had been up there once before, but never with a 'guide'.

After an approach to the foot of the hill through some bushy undergrowth, we started our ascent up the sloping side of one massive boulder. That massive boulder was tiny compared to the next massive boulder which constituted one side of the hill! 'People start praying at the foot of this slope, and ascend in prayer' we were told by our guide. On the way up, we were taken to a spot at which water emerges from the mountain in the form of a spring; water of healing and water of life was available there for free. Many visitors to the prayer mountain take advantage of that spring to fill their bottles and to lap up life from the mountain, we were told.

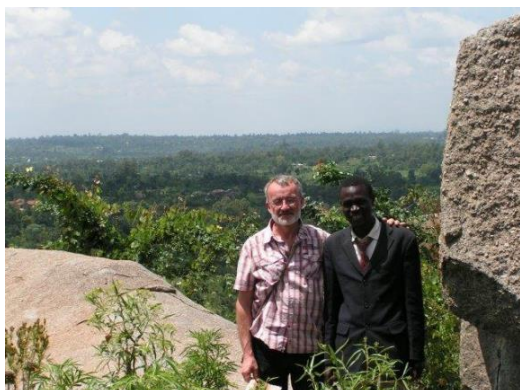
On the top of the 'boulder' was another boulder. From the distance, it looked to be precariously perched. Drawing nearer, it was less precarious. It offered shade and shelter to two people, one lady dressed in white and a man in a suit, we found praying there. The man joined us as we walked around, telling us repeatedly that he had already spent 4 days on the hill, eating nothing. He remained with one more day sleeping in the makeshift caves seeking God's guidance for a critical time in his life. He had been a pastor in Uganda, he told us. Now he was on his way to his Kenyan home.



Frank and I take a breather

Our guide and the pastor took us to 'Daniel's cave'. Brightly coloured candle wax dotted around indicated that followers of indigenous churches had been praying there. 'You can stay here for hours, and even if it rains you stay dry' we were told. Moving on, clamouring over some rocks and pushing through some undergrowth, we came across more crevasses and caves. 'This is where the power churches and Pentecostal churches come to pray' we were told. No wax there. Pentecostal churches do not use candles. After that, a massive boulder in front of us. There's a crevice in the middle, and the root of some tree dangles into the crevice like a rope. That's what people use to get up there,

our guide told us as he hung onto the 'rope'. 'Have you ever been up there' I asked? 'No', he said. It all looked a bit precarious, so we declined.

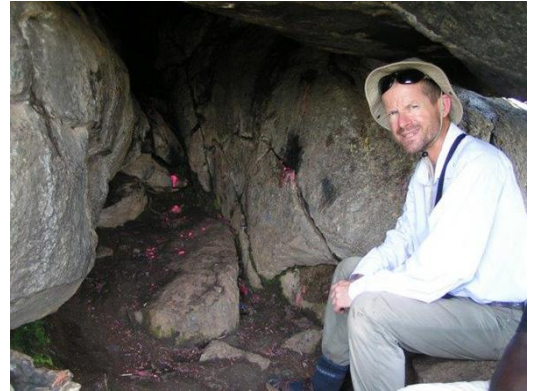


Companionship on prayer mountain

Turning back, we came across another massive boulder, this time long and thin and standing upright. This boulder stands out particularly. It can be seen from miles around, including from my own home area. We did not even think about climbing up that one! Instead we were shown still one more cave. Entering it was particularly precarious. We sat for a while, enjoying the cool air blowing over the rocks, and imagining what it would be like to do what my colleague was doing, and to sleep there

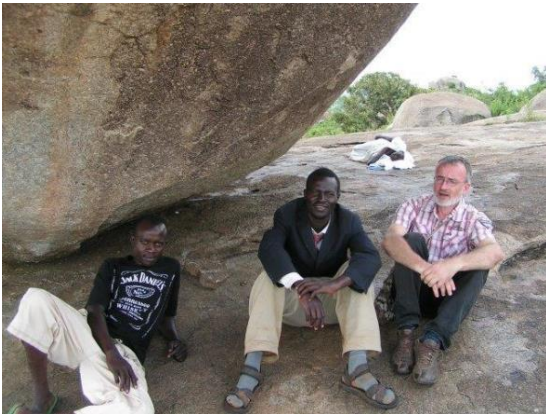
night after night 5 days running, alone, while fasting and praying.

After detaching ourselves from that cave, we went back to the 'precarious' boulder sitting on top of the massive massive boulder! The woman still lay there, ignoring us. We did not disturb her. She had come to the mountain for peace and prayer. We sat and then laid in the shade of the rock, eventually falling asleep lying on the hard surface, where we had found my colleague sat in prayer when we first came up the hill. I did not have my bible with me. We had left our bags in the homestead below us, or we might have read some Scriptures. Each of us prayed to God in his own heart, until the time came to descend back down towards the home at which our fellowship was due to begin.



In the caves

The people of this home had no idea that we might appear at their place that day. I also did not have a clue that we might end up there, until I was told that the midweek meeting from one of the churches whom I like to visit was actually some miles from the church building at the foot of this hill. Frank and I felt very warmly welcomed. Frank was about to have a *Roho* church experience. About 20 of us were gathered in that small sitting room. Loud cymbals and a volumous drum accompanied our singing. People were given



*Sitting and sleeping under the precarious bolder
(sleeping woman in background)*

opportunity to share their dreams; no one had a dream to share. Instead, many shared from the bible. Typically they read a few verses and might have expounded on them. While someone spoke, others could break into song. All would stand and sing vigorously, then we sat and the person continued. Frank and I were given opportunity to share a word (I translated for Frank, between German and Luo). Eventually an old man drew the various sharing's into a coherent message; what God had to say to us today. Worshippers were particularly concerned over the absence of the 'church mother'. Someone had stolen her chickens. Someone else's cattle had been stolen, we were told. We prayed for return of the stolen goods.

The meeting was followed by very good tea and *nyoyo* (a mixture of boiled maize and beans). This was a first for Frank; he really seemed to enjoy the maize and beans. It seemed to rain every afternoon while Frank was here in Kenya. Absolutely amazingly, on this day, God held onto the rain till night time. Had it rained, Frank and I would have been left with a 3 miles walk back to the road, much of it through mud! Instead, we could use the lazy-man's way; motorbike taxis took us to where we could catch our bus. Half an hour later and well before dark we were in the Coptic Orthodox Church compound for the night. It had been an amazing day.

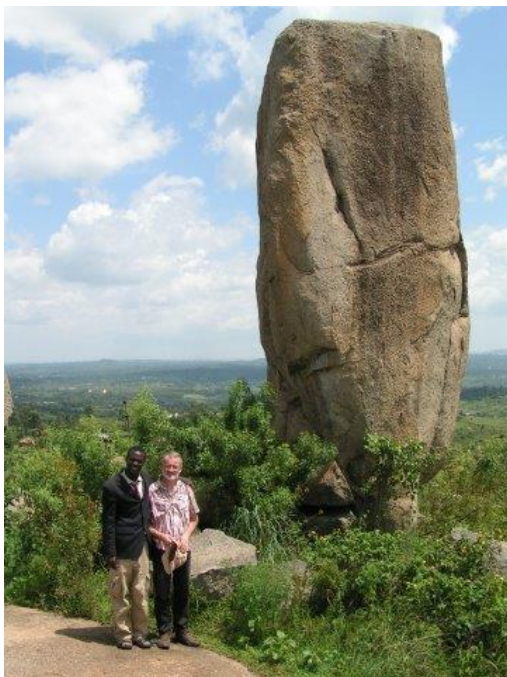
A day in the life of ...

Half hour longer in bed this morning than the last three days. I got up at 5.30am instead of 5.00am. A bite of breakfast, then 25 minutes cycling found me in Yala, ready to board a bus to Kisumu. On route we hit a big jam, reminding us that a local university had its graduation ceremony that day. That would continue to be a consequential event later in the day ... but for now, in due course, I arrived at the headquarters of my home



Through the undergrowth

church. This is where our youth conference was now in its second day, and I had gone along to learn and to share. Resting in the bishop's expansive office, a visitor was left sitting beside me. He has been a professional at reaching school children with the Gospel message for 14 years, he told me. What a privilege to be able to chat with a man who has that kind of experience and track record. Sure enough, when his turn came to present to the youth, he was right on the ball. "You give me three issues that are challenges to today's youth", he told them. Number one came as the temptation to pre-marital sex. Number two came as marriage. Number three was poverty. One and two were somehow related! Our speaker had obviously handled that topic before, and hammered us with it. In short: 'flee from sexual immorality' would be a good summary of his message! The young people were lapping it up. It's almost as if they need to be told every day, so strong is the temptation to ignore what they are told and follow the course of worldly lust.



Tall thin boulder

I was reminded of the anonymous spam message I had received the night before on my phone. In Swahili it said something like 'your lover is cheating on you, don't say that it's me who told you'. Hmm, I thought, who is my lover? I felt the message wasn't very relevant to me, but I wondered how many marriages and unstable relationships such a message might undermine? 'Flee from sexual immorality' is indeed a vital message to be emphasized and re-emphasised to the youth.

My own message was relatively short, and endeavoured to re-emphasise what our visitor had already told the young people. I left to visit a child who stayed with me years ago, now an adult with her own three-year old child, but often very sick. "You mentioned it the last time you came. I am going to church now" she told me. 'Halleluyah' I said under my breath. ... Not that 'going to a church building and singing songs' itself means very much. I could see though a sign of a girl who was maturing and realizing the need for God in her life.

I thought I had left ample time to get back to my Maseno office. Then we hit a traffic jam (a friend of mine had picked me up in his truck, so I wasn't in a bus). There were three lanes to the road. Traffic clearly was not moving up ahead. Vehicles leaving Kisumu were trying to creep into any gaps left, so we filled three lanes with about 5 lines of traffic all pointing away from Kisumu. No one could pass the other way! 'This could take a while to clear' I thought to myself, as we'd effectively made it impossible for traffic to flow the other way! With my bags on my shoulder, I started walking alongside and between lines of traffic, competing for 'edge space' with motorbikes and crazy drivers. A few miles on, a motorbike gave me a ride to another jam ... another mile's walking and another bus and another motorbike ride later, I got back to me office 10 minutes before our Alliance for Vulnerable Mission executive meeting over skype at 6.00pm that evening!

By the time we'd had our meeting, I was a bit worn out. I did have opportunity to meet with some of my Egyptian colleagues, who had come here from Nairobi for a short stay. Someone had picked them up from the airport using the hospital ambulance, I was told. When they got stuck in the jam, they turned on the siren and got through ... !

Meek / praeis (Matthew 5:5)

"The meek ... will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5) is one of the most



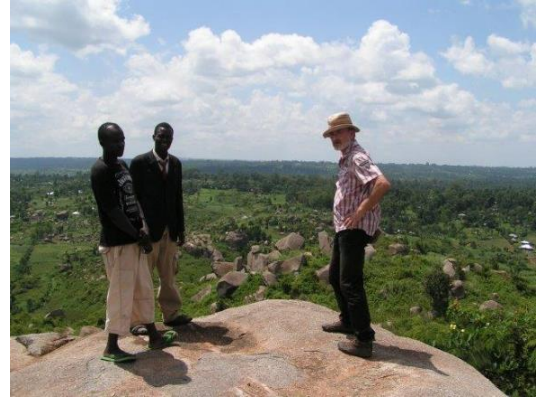
After our descent our colleague remained up the hill to continue praying and fasting

puzzling verses in the bible. In English meek just sounds so much like 'weak'. What on earth is it trying to say?

Researching the original Greek term, I find that *praeis* was used in New Testament times to refer to a horse that has been broken in.¹ Should we translate 'the broken-in ... will inherit the earth'. Wow! That sounds rough; are we horses? Indeed, horses yet to be broken in are not of much help to anything. So, if we Christians are the ones to be broken in, is God the one riding on us?

At first, that seems a repulsive thought. Is God looking for dumb horses to ride? Surely not! Who wants to be 'ridden'?

On further reflection I realised that many Christians love the fact that they are *needed*. I recall circles of ladies in the UK getting together on a regular basis to knit and natter. While nattering, they make clothes, blankets, or socks for children somewhere. They love it! Somewhere there were needy children. Such takes a grip on all of our hearts, but perhaps especially that of ladies; 'please come and knit to help needy children'. Such ladies are willing to be broken-in horses!



I visit many different churches here in western Kenya. Invariably many in the congregations are women. By comparison with church congregations back in the UK, those women are usually ridiculously poor! I am inclined to pity the poor women, who cook in smoky kitchens, dig massive gardens by hand, carry enormous loads of water every day from the river, have no insurance, no electricity, no pension ... and you name it.

Of late I have noticed that many African pastors do not 'pity' the women in their churches as I might. They see what I all too easily miss that I've mentioned above: those women want to be needed! To use Jesus' terminology; they prefer to be broken-in and active to being 'poor' and helped! Time and time again the message from the pulpit to the congregation is: *we can't move without you*. Masses of women flock to the churches, and fellowships, and prayer meetings, and celebrations, and and and. They give constantly (time and resources), generously, sacrificially and they are helped spiritually and even physically because; those churches are *theirs*. They are women who have fire in them, a purpose, a lively spirit, a determination to be used in God's service! They want to be *praeis*!



Westerners typically look at Africa through Western eyes. Then we say 'aren't they poor'. That's what we notice. We can miss that *people have always served gods*. Some contemporary Westerners these days confuse things by saying 'we don't believe in god'. They say this while serving gods of one sort or another. Serving a cause makes life meaningful, and a meaningful life has the greatest chance of being a happy life. Poor women in Africa aren't so different from the knitting circles in the West.

Many churches in Africa are booming. A reason for this is given above. The church enables people to serve. We all serve gods (or God or god). That's what we're happy doing. African women have been serving gods for centuries, if not millennia. Sometimes those gods have been rough on them. They've had little choice but to continue anyway. Now; they listen with intense fascination to authoritative news of God of the bible. They learn of God who looks for people who are *praeis*, who *needs* people to serve him. Unlike those old gods however, this God is one, he is loving, full of grace and understanding, he brings peace, and

¹ <http://www.basictraining.org/print.php?nid=216>

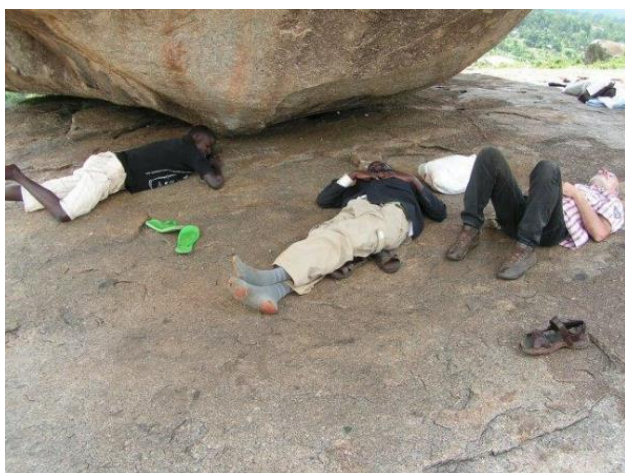
can generate unity, he discourages sexual immorality, and says we can be forgiven. Let's be *praeis*, let's be broken in to serve together, they say to one another!

Fellowships

Fellowship and small churches of all kinds are started it sometimes seems almost on a daily basis around my home in Kenya. Involved in these gatherings are hearts and souls of sometimes numerous people. They are of many shapes and sizes and forms. At the same time given the history and culture of the people, they have similarities and things in common.

Many such fellowships I relate to intimately. Intimately, that is, in the sense that I go to great trouble to be there for them. My heart of concern that has me visit and demonstrate interest in what they are doing seems to speak volumes. The fact that I can speak to them in their own language brings an instant bond. Unlike many Whites whose reputation is as having a great pre-occupation with money, I do not carry things that end up causing fights amongst the poor communities I visit.

Building relationships with leaders and members of such fellowships is a key part of what I do. Over 23 years I have been privileged to touch the hearts of scores or is it hundreds or thousands or more of African people. The impact of this work is far from quantifiable. It is in many ways totally invisible. It is of the nature of "there is a White man who takes the trouble to visit and relate to us who frequently opens God's word to us, who knows our language and is interested in our lives."



sleeping under the boulder

I do often search my own heart regarding how to use my incredibly privileged position. I have to avoid being identified with money at all costs. Language knowledge gives me endless insights. Yet it seems there is no 'master plan'. Searching for an appropriate formula, schedule or teaching strategy seems futile. I seem to be able only to give nudges. The force behind those nudges is not confined to my presence and words on a particular day – although the latter contribute. It is my whole life of singular dedication to a people, as a tiny stream part of the total glow of the light of the love of God.

Under a veneer of English-speaking competence, one finds deep intricate spiritualities. The space is crowded. Fear of witches and ancestral revenge are prominent. Planting Jesus in there is like engraving a rock while swimming deep in a pond murky with life's complexity. It can even be - more faith than understanding.

Some of the above was in my mind as I cycled over an hour to a small church on Christmas Sunday. A total of just 9 women and 3 men attended this church. It is a type of church that is typically very orientated to ancestral spirits.

Approaching the building, some boys walked alongside me. They were the first to arrive, and to beat some metal rings with pedal cranks from bicycles as they sang and danced. Before long the adults had joined them. We sang, we danced (well, they danced more than I did), they shared a few dreams and reports, one woman went outside to drive away a demon that her dream-interpreter had recognized. I was able to share a message with them in their language. Everyone listened intently as I told them how the lives of some witchdoctors had been transformed as a result of their visit to see the baby Jesus (Matthew 2). Others also shared. The leader expressed his appreciation for my message, saying how valuable and challenging it was, and that everyone understood my use of *Dholuo* clearly! ...

One additional factor. I felt like I was a sledge hammer beating on the prosperity gospel! In some circles the understanding of the connection between Jesus and getting rich is very close. Here was I in direct contradiction to such – a single male missionary turning up on a bicycle and no message of prosperity – except that faith in Christ could turn people’s lives away from the fearful destructive approach of the witchdoctor. I jumped back on my bike and went home, trying to beat the rain.



Distant view of the Prayer Mountain (Got Rawalo)

Sent by: Andover Baptist Church, Charlton Road, Andover, Hants SP10 3JH
<http://www.andoverbaptist.org.uk/content/view/14/14/>

To: Western Kenya, working in the region of Yala/Maseno with some extended ministry to other parts of East Africa.

c/o Zion Harvest Mission, PO Box 932, Yala, 40610, Kenya

Chairman of AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission).

Professor of Religion, Global University

Email: jimoharries@gmail.com

www.jim-mission.org.uk

www.vulnerablemission.org

Council of Reference: Peter Stagg (Andover), Mike Thompson (York), Jean Johnson (Minnesota), Tim Reeves (Norwich), Rev. Dr. Steve Rennick (Indiana), Colin Morgan (Norwich).

Finance: Peter Stagg, 70 Turin Court, Roman Way, Andover SP10 5LD, UK
email: peterdavidstagg@yahoo.co.uk

Newsletter Distribution: Angela Merridale, 8 Northbrook Court, Northbrook Avenue, Winchester, Hants SO23 0JP, UK Email: a.merridale@btinternet.com Tel: 01962 861231