

PARTNER PLAN

Colin Johnston - Egypt April 2018

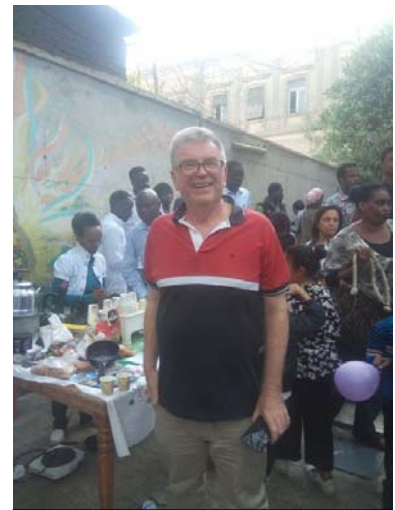
c/o Evangelical Theological Seminary Cairo
8 El - Sekka El - Bedah Street
Abbasiah
Cairo 11381
Egypt

Blog: <https://colinincairo.wordpress.com/>

Dear Friends,

Greetings from a hot, dusty Cairo. Cairo is a city of between 20-26 million people (depending on which article you read), whose ever-growing population puts an incredible strain on the infrastructure. It is big, bustling and chaotic – and also worryingly polluted. It was refreshing, therefore, to have a few days off after Easter and travel to Alexandria and be able to enjoy gazing out at the sea. I was also able to connect with a few of my former and present students, who live in the city.

The growth of Cairo and indeed of other cities in Egypt has presented a challenge to the Church, as many Christians have left their traditional villages to migrate to the cities for work. The Presbyterian Church has risen to this challenge, and, in the last 10 years alone, over 40 new congregations have been planted. They have been planted in the new cities which the government has built to ease the over population of Cairo, and these churches have been given plots of land, though have to develop them within a three year



Me at StARS Bazaar



With Medhat, my former student in Alexandria

period or else the land will be taken away! Building churches has always been problematic in Muslim-majority Egypt, but a new law has recently been passed which has somewhat eased the situation. The other area where new congregations are established is in the densely-populated, ever-expanding suburbs of the big cities and especially Cairo.

Al Nuzhaltneen in the North East of Cairo is a case in point. It is a high density neighbourhood, to which people have migrated from Upper Egypt searching for work. They left behind their extended families and close-knit communities and have had to settle in a new environment. There are roughly 3,000 families in the community, about half of

whom are Christian. The ministry there was set up by a friend of mine, Pastor Medhat Nady, in 2009, who first visited homes and then began to hold services in an apartment. Medhat was

PARTNER PLAN

appointed to the Seminary staff, and Pastor Basem became pastor. As many of the men were at work, a lot of emphasis was placed on teaching the women and building up their skills. Family groups were also established, and marital counselling given. As the congregation grew, so it needed to move to bigger apartments. This was just a temporary solution, however, and they needed to erect an actual building. After much prayer, they decided to go ahead, and the congregation was encouraged to give, and the very first people to respond were two Sunday School children who took their savings to the pastor. One had five Egyptian pounds, the other two (Probably around 50p at the time!!). The other members of the church were so encouraged by the children's giving that more money came in – and also gifts in kind like bags of cement. People also borrowed money from their work to pay back later. Now, years later, the building has six floors, including a floor for the sanctuary, a floor for a kindergarten and a floor for the pastor's accommodation, plus a flourishing congregation.



Presentation of my African shirt

I continue to be heavily involved in the refugee congregations at St Andrew's. I preach a lot and also teach English to some of the youths from South Sudan. Recently the Dinka-Padang held a celebration of their culture and I happened to attend – which was fortunate, as they had made me an African shirt, which they duly presented to me. They should of course have taken accurate measurements first, as the shirt took Slim Fit to new extremes! I have since been to the Sudanese tailor for proper measurements, though now he has rather overcompensated on the arms!

The Seminary is fine with the students busy finishing their assignments before the exams begin in the middle of May. The graduation will be at the beginning of June, though I will not attend it this year.

My main news, however, is that I will be coming back to Scotland. I will travel back in the middle of May to attend the General Assembly and then to visit Sutherland and Shetland on **deputation**. It will be good to visit with you and share my experiences about Cairo and the Church in Egypt. I will also, however, be sharing some more personal news. Much of my time at ETSC is spent in an



Dinka students learning English

office in front of a computer screen, and after two years I find I desperately miss being in a congregation. Some people are good with administration, but I think I am a minister at heart and miss being in the midst of a congregation fulltime. I have thoroughly enjoyed living in Egypt and will miss it incredibly much (It is said that once you drink the waters of the Nile, you will keep coming back, and I reckon that will be true!). However, I have been working with World Mission for 25 years, so perhaps it is time to return to Scotland to put down some roots and even buy my own furniture (25 years is a long time to live with other people's beds and chairs!). So while I am in Scotland in the summer I will begin the process of looking for a congregation. It is a daunting prospect and

one that I am not particularly looking forward to, but by God's grace I will be able to find somewhere.

I am not finished with Egypt quite yet, though, and will come back to Cairo for a final three months in the late summer to work especially with the Sudanese and Ethiopian refugee congregations, as well as finishing off at the Seminary. Meanwhile there are still a few weeks left before I fly to

PARTNER PLAN

Scotland in May, and I am looking forward to the St Andrew's retreat at Anafora, a special retreat centre run by the Coptic Orthodox outside of Cairo.

I am very much looking forward to seeing many of you over the next few months.

With every blessing

Colin



Palm Sunday in a church plant

Deputation Details

Presbytery of Sutherland
Dates: 26 May to 4 June 2018

Presbytery of Shetland
Dates: 8 to 17 June 2018

*Dates to Note:
19-25 May - General Assembly
5 June - MEC