

## **Jim's Journal, July 2014**



**Pounding the grain in Tanzania, 2013**

Our conference programme for 2015 is as follows:

[vulnerablemission.org](http://vulnerablemission.org) write to: [jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)

**2015 conferences / consultations**  
*Avoiding **DEPENDENCY** in global Christian mission: **VULNERABLE MISSION***  
*- a potential answer*

UK

York, 11<sup>th</sup> April  
Gloucester, 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April  
Coventry, 18<sup>th</sup> April  
Oxford, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April (by invitation only)



GERMANY

Marburg, 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> May  
Korntal, 11<sup>th</sup> May (by invitation only)

## NEW PLANS

We are trying to minimise the expensive production and distribution of hard copies of Jim's Journal. After this edition, therefore, we want to only send hard copies of Jim's Journal to those people who specifically request such. If you would like to continue to receive Jim's Journals by hard copy please write to Angela Merridale at this address: 8 Northbrook Ct. Northbrook Avenue Winchester Hants, SO23 0JP, UK, or phone her at +44(0)1962 861231, or email her at <a.merridale@btinternet.com>. Please send Angela your email address so that we can send future copies to you by email. If you phone and get Angela's answer-phone then feel free just to say who you are and if you do or do not want to receive future copies of the Journal by post!

Some of you may have noticed that I did not produce a Jim's Journal at the end of last year. The main reason for this was that I already seemed to have too much work on my plate. Now at the start of 2014, I seem to have less time for writing of the nature of Jim's Journal than I used to have. The other reason is cost. The cost of postage has gone up a lot in the UK, from where my journal is sent out.

You will notice that this Jim's Journal is relatively short. I may in future only produce one Jim's Journal per year. Or, it may be good to include the content of the 2-weekly news into the Journal to send to people who do not have email. If you do not receive my 2-weekly news by email but would like to please write to: <a.merridale@btinternet.com> or call +44(0)1962 861231 and talk to Angela Merridale who distributes the news.

## **Mission/Vision**

What is my vision and where am I heading? These are the reflective questions that I have recently come back to asking myself. In terms of my living here in Africa for 26 years now – thanks to the generous support and contributions from many friends, believers, churches – where do I see myself as heading?

My conviction, as I believe many of you will know, has from the beginning been to commit myself to service in the 'poor' world (or majority world) for life (or not at all). I made the commitment for life service before God in October 1987. I am grateful to Him that now, 27 years later, I am still able to continue to live it out.

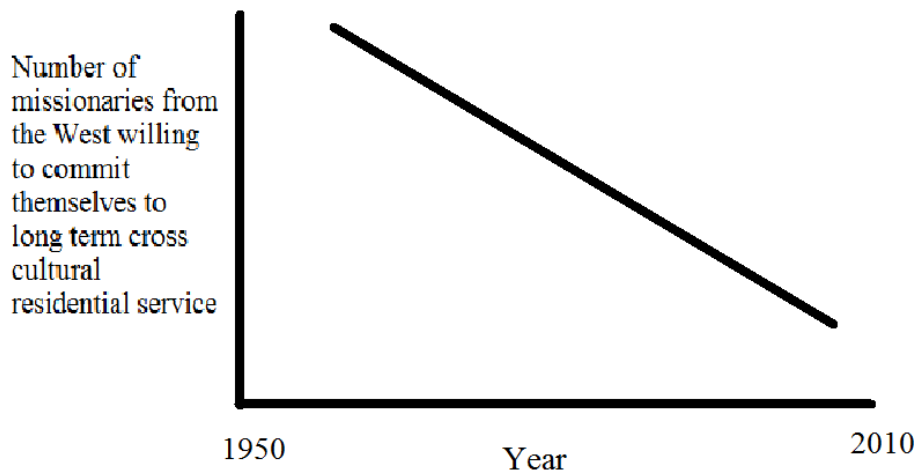
Whatever my vision and mission are now; they are not identical to what they were when I first set out for Africa. On arrival in Africa, and I think that similar things happen to many missionaries, I could see clear and straight-forward ways in which my Western education and upbringing could benefit African society. Implementation however was a different matter. The theories, good as they were, did not work! This caused me to have a major re-think (between about 1990 and 1993) and to re-strategise.

The above re-strategising eventually gave birth to the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) which these days attempts to influence major ways in which missionaries relate to non-Western nations and peoples. Today still many missionaries come to Africa (and the majority world) fairly clear about what they want to do and how. The people who come in this way often have serious budgets to spend. This is at least one reason why African people like the strategies that new missionaries come with – they involve spending a lot of money that comes to be of almost immediate benefit to locals: The longer-term benefits of such spending that are often much more questionable.

When missionaries are told, implicitly or explicitly, that what they already know or have while in the West is exactly what Africa needs (a message that Africans sometimes give to Westerners so as to encourage them to invest), they perceive little point in committed long-term service. Wanting to maintain Western careers and raise families in a Western way contributes to the popularity of short-term mission. (I take short-term as being under 10 years.) What further contributes to the practice of short-term mission arises when missionaries who have served for longer realise what a poor foundation they built in the beginning and so are inclined to give up and go home.

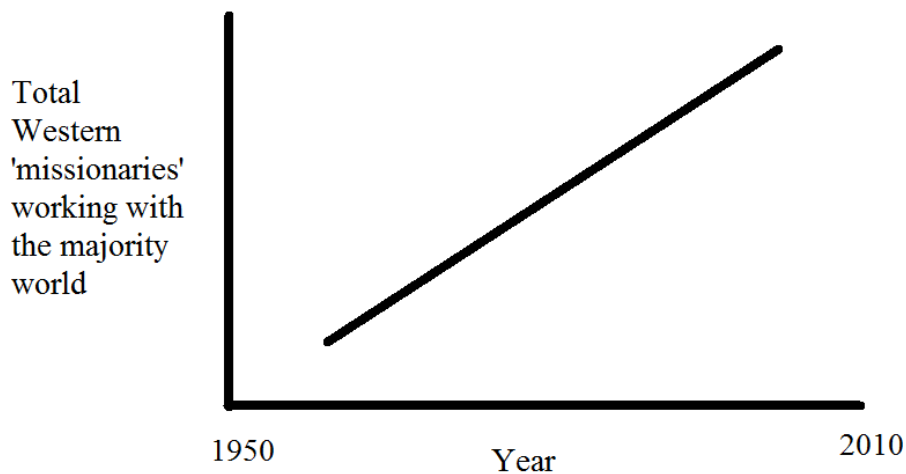
We have reached a situation today whereby less and less Christian workers are willing to commit themselves to long-term cross-cultural service, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.



What we *do* have today, enabled partly at least by technological developments such as the internet, is a vast increase in the number of 'missionaries' working directly with people in the majority world. (I put missionaries into inverted commas because of the obvious question of whether someone sitting at their computer at home in the USA making trips for a few weeks every few years should be considered to be missionary to Africa?) These people bypass nearly all of the traditional requirements for missionary service. They bypass the need to learn language, to work with a mission agency, the need to live overseas (for more than a couple of weeks), the need to give up on a career, to expose their families to challenging cultural circumstances, and so on. So see Figure 2.

Figure 2.



I would like to encourage more missionaries to commit themselves to long-term cross-cultural residential service. I would also like to inform those missionaries who prefer to work over the internet, from home, using English, and engaging in only relatively short-term trips. I find that so orienting myself has a number of effects, including:

1. Short-term missionaries and those who continue to be based in the West can be discouraged by the perspective that I provide.
2. African, and so perhaps also some other majority-world people, can feel that their monopoly on informing short-term missionaries is being challenged. (If only for sheer financial reasons, it is often better from an African point of view to have missionaries stay in the West and provide money rather than learn to live in Africa. African people sometimes prefer to have missionaries listen to them rather than to other missionaries.)
3. I hope very much that my writing and research will encourage long-term missionaries. Unfortunately, long-term missionaries can still function as if they are short-term. What I mean by this is: using Western languages and prioritising the thinking of donors on whom they find themselves to be dependent. It can be difficult for long-term (10 years plus) missionaries to make progress if they are heavily occupied in looking after short-termers.

Some people do not like being challenged to the need for more commitment. The person challenging can seem to be proud or showing off. On the more philosophical/theoretical side, I find myself having to try to undermine the widespread myth which says that that majority world people are adequate, as a result of learning English and acquiring a Western education, to orienting Westerners. I cannot go into more detail on this here. I encourage my reader to look at some of my other writings and information ([jim-mission.org.uk/articles/index.html](http://jim-mission.org.uk/articles/index.html)). If members of majority world communities are themselves fully equipped to do everything that a Westerner can do as a result of foreign language acquisition and education, then we could say that western missionaries or development workers are superfluous. Many people seem to be banking on this which is to me clearly flawed thinking.

Vulnerable mission is clearly a part of this wider vision. In the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) we point out what ought to be glaringly obvious but that many people seem to overlook: it seems that all the thousands of Westerners who are staying in Africa (myself included) are depending on the West and not on Africa. To find even one Westerner whose ministry is not dependent on their knowledge of a European languages and access to donors (or in some cases subsidised business enterprise) is extremely difficult! What is apparently a transformational force working over the continent of Africa is often making African communities more and more dependent on Western charity. This bodes badly for the indigenous!

The implicit assessment constantly made regarding which African people are worthy to be the recipients of Western aid is their resemblance to Westerners. Particularly critical – is their ability to have rapport with Westerners; especially their ability to get Western humour and joke with Westerners. Unfortunately being able to do this does not guarantee a deep grasp of Western cultures or value systems. Even more pertinent – the acquisition of such intricate knowledge does not of itself free someone living in the African continent from endless family and social ties that force the following of certain ways of life that are often incompatible with Western ways of thinking.

So then; what is in my 'vision'?

1. For there to be an increase in the number of long term residential missionaries from the West to places like Africa in the majority world.

2. For some of those missionaries to operate on the basis of vulnerable mission (using local languages and resources in some crucial relationships and ministries).
3. For Western people in Western nations to better see through the deceptive facade that is causing some to reject the claims of Christ. For more Westerners to know true comforting and challenging relationship with God the father through Christ His son.
4. One outcome of the above three points, is to be a deepening of faith in what are these days in Africa and the majority world often prosperity gospel contexts.
5. By God's grace, to be used in reaching Africa people for Christ.

## **Report on Children in my Home in Kenya (2014)**

Christine, aged 16, has matured incredibly in recent months, now appearing like a full grown woman.

Zachary, aged 18, has reached the pinnacle of his schooling, and is doing very well. He hopes to complete his final secondary school exams in November this year.

Michael, aged 12, has progressed very quickly in school and so is ahead of other children of his age.

Michelle, aged 18, who has now progressed to secondary school, greatly loves caring for people (and animals) and behaves responsibly.

Laura, aged 11, is growing fast although has weakened a little from her previous high standards in school.

Stella, aged 20, has taken her baby and is staying with her sister.\*

Toby, aged 2, is Stella's baby and is living with his mum.\*

David, aged 17, is an interesting lad to talk to, and obviously thinks seriously about life.

Andrew, aged 12, is proving to be very caring of other children.

Paul, aged 10 is thriving on the experience of being routinely cared for and loved.

Alison, aged 11, remains quiet while she engages intelligently with other members of the household and so shows considerable maturity.

Yvonne, aged 6, has grown amazingly quickly, and is thriving in the final year of nursery schooling.

Dusty, aged 6, joined me at the start of 2014 from staying with his grandma, having recently lost both his parents.

\* No longer staying with me permanently. (False names used throughout.)



## True Love

An American recently said to me that "there's not much to discuss about love". To him the Christian teaching of love was clear. Personally, I'm not very sure what people talk about in America. But I said to him – that here in Africa discussions about love (in my experience) never seem to end!

Another American ran a project in a neighbouring village a few years ago. Trying to find his own way of promoting development, he decided to emphasise true love. (When I talk of love here, I don't mean sexual love (*eros*) but something more like love of giving oneself for others, *agape*.) When I talked to the American, I could see what he was getting at. "We don't have love like that around here." I told him. He started. He had apparently never thought that there may be people who do not know what *agape* love is! My telling him this helped him to realise why things weren't working as he had hoped. My suggestion seemed to undermine his whole project.

The reason discussions on love never seem to end, to my understanding, is because people have trouble not doubting that love is genuine. When you look at what appears to be love for another, very often it seems actually to be love for oneself! For example, a man loves his wife, yes, because he wants her to cook for him. That hardly seems to be great sacrificial love.

In today's world we seem to operate on the basis of an assumption that what is in one place is also in another. Now that doesn't always apply. Frankly – polygamy seems to be quite common in Africa but relatively rare in Europe. Would we necessarily be right then to conclude that love is the same at every place? Or even that love *exists* for a people? (The notion that a man should be legally married to two wives simultaneously is after all pretty horrific to many Westerners, but normal for many Africans.) So, could it be that notions of genuine sacrificial love that are considered to be possible and prevalent in one place, may be off the radar screen in another?

This of course ties in with Christian teaching. Christian teaching claims to advocate and describe true love. This presumably implies that people who are not yet Christian might not grasp what true love is. Such a notion is ridiculed by the secular world, indeed, because to concede it would be to concede a necessary historical and contemporary role for Christianity (i.e. religion). But, that does not mean that secularists are right, not by a long stretch of the imagination! So maybe they are wrong, and it is true that a non-Christianised people do not perceive *agape* love?

The above is not to say that Christians have love mastered, off pat, or down to a tee. Not that Christians never fight, or hate, or dispute, are jealous, angry or hateful! We are not here considering whether people have become perfect – because certainly they have not. But this does not mean that the difference is zero! Some Christians comprehend a concept of love, that they at times may implement in practice, that is essentially beyond the comprehension or grasp of other people. That might be as such as we are saying.

The implications of the above, as I have already intimated, include that Christian missionary work may be the key thing required to bring about socio-economic development. Nowadays, in the English speaking world which dominates global

scholarship, much about the rest of the world is presupposed. That English speaking world has been nurtured by Christianity for hundreds of years. They are inclined, by default, to assume that others from outside that English block are the same as them. But they may be wrong. At the same time, the ability to conceive of love that is sacrificial giving of oneself for others as a real thing, may just be a prerequisite for certain types of socio-economic advance.

I once spent some time in the USA at a Christian university oriented to promoting development. I was privileged to have a colleague while I was there, who was very familiar with East Africa. Although born in Kinshasa, he had taught in Kenyan universities. On one occasion we got to talk about love. When I told him that East Africans do not have the kind of love that Westerners (i.e. those brought up for centuries under the influence of Christianity) consider themselves to have, he was not happy. He disagreed. This did make me wonder – if he believes in the power of the Gospel, then why deny that the gospel has had a profound influence on people over many generations? Why was he displeased rather than challenged? There may be good reasons for him to be concerned. If there are basic things like love that can only be learned over many generations, this implies that certain groups of people may be better at doing some things than are others, a notion which can be threatening in this case to Africans.

There is a sense in which it is clear that non-native-English speaking people cannot have 'love' in the way that English speaking people have it. This is because every language/culture has a unique perception or categorisation of concepts. Certainly the semantic context of whatever words are used in other languages to translate love cannot be identical to that of English. In that sense we could say that no one else understands love as native English speakers do! (Learning English will help someone understand how native English works. At the same time, there will inevitably be carry-over from one's original language(s) and culture(s) to someone who has learned English as a second language.)

Interpersonal relationships, I suggest, are inevitably affected by one's belief in the divine. People in East Africa tend, in my experience, to be careful of the kinds of relationship that could result in haunting should a person die, for example. Such a concern can override what in the native-English speaking world may be considered love. An African pastor once told me that this is one reason people tend to avoid visiting a person who seems to be so sick that his life is in danger. He told me that people who visit such a sick person will be uppermost in the sick person's mind when he dies, so are most likely to be haunted. Abandoning of a dying person does not seem to align with native-English speaking people's notions of true love.

PS It may need to be added, that even if *agape* is not unknown or absent in a people one is reaching out to, it is still not a bad thing to try to introduce it.

### **Aparentist/ism**

Some UK people call themselves atheists. Well, I could call myself aparentist if I want to. Usually use of such a title neither makes my parents disappear, nor diminishes the foundational influence they have had on my life. Doesn't the same apply to *theo* (God)? Atheism, it seems then, is pretence.

Coming to Africa made me aware just how Christian we are in the UK. Before coming to Africa, I thought British people were normal, and others (like Africans) were the odd ones out. That this is not the case is now official! At least according to Henrich and co! Henrich found that in so many things it is Americans that are odd. They say 'weird', and Brits are not far behind them! According to Henrich Brits and Americans are about the weirdest people in the world! (see; Henrich, Joseph & Heine, Steven J. & Norenzayan, Ara, 2010. 'The Weirdest People in the World' 61-135 in *Behaviour and Social Sciences*, 33.)

What others might think is weird about us, we think is great! After all – we think we're about the best there is. We are the most wealthy and powerful people that have ever been. We live longer and more healthily and our universities are booming and leading the rest of the globe ... ! Why are we so different? Well – if it is not due to atheism (as it cannot be), then it must be thanks to our relationship with God.

I need to add though – that it is my understanding that God is above us and not below us. We talk to people about God *not* because of something we might want to happen. Rather, we talk to people about God, because he is God!! Not to talk to people about him, and yet he has made us everything we are, is dishonest, even deceitful and misleading.

### **Wanting to Know the Language**

I seem to have an inquiring mind. I love to research things and to explore things. I love to seek understanding, of whatever is around me. I am intrigued by things that seem incomprehensible.

This, in part at least, is what has fired my interest in language. I used to be intrigued on hearing African people talking amongst themselves. "What are they saying?" I asked myself. I wondered – are they saying just the things that we would be saying back in UK? Maybe, but they are culturally vastly foreign to the way we are in the UK. May be they say something different. What are they saying?

When I was in Zambia I started learning Kikaonde (a Zambian language). Then when I came to Kenya, I started learning Kiswahili. Later I started learning Dholuo. I keep learning the (latter two) languages almost every day, 20 years later. I am still intrigued as I ask myself "what is going on?"

I don't consider that inquisitiveness to be immaterial or unconnected to the missionary work that I am doing. A part of reaching people with the Gospel – is understanding where they are at. A part of reaching people with the love of God is being able to understand what they say. It is having an interest in who they are. It is being able to talk to them in familiar categories, instead of in exotic terms using strange categories of meaning that they come across in the course of their formal schooling.

Even now, I am left with a constant urge to get involved with indigenous people. Partly, I still desire to learn and understand more. Partly, I have grown to love and appreciate the people, for all their strange (to me) ways. They have become friends and family who I want to relax with.

For other missionaries, I guess, the prospect of going into the 'interior' can be a daunting one. Indeed, unless one has a group of fluent English speakers to keep one company, it holds the prospect of a kind of loneliness and being left out of things. If one as an outsider is in charge – then it is a feeling that one is doing things without really knowing where one is heading. Now I don't want to overdo my case. The prospect of spending a lot of time in unfamiliar 'native' villages can still be daunting to me. Much of local people's culture is still very foreign to me. But a part of me is also very enthusiastic to explore further and to share God's Word with people in dark corners.

Knowing the local languages makes a vast difference to how one orients oneself to the people. The difference can be like night and day. Years ago in my early days in Africa I asked myself whether what people are saying is different to the things that we say 'back at home' in the UK? Yes it is. You want to know more about how? Learn to use an African language.

### **To Visit the Sick?**

Our neighbour's daughter is sick in hospital in the local town, I have heard. I am due to visit the same town. Our neighbour is a widow living far away from her family. She is not very well off. Should I offer to visit her daughter?

People's life orientation in my home African community is often about pleasing the dead. The dead are considered authoritative over the living. Their example and their words, it is understood, must be followed in order to prosper. Not following the dead can end up in one's being haunted. The same 'dead' often do not consider economics when they dictate what to do and how. Hence some African people, unless they receive a lot of outside support and foreign aid, tend to be poor.

Visiting someone in hospital in the UK may be a routine charitable thing to do. (Except should someone say that they don't want visitors.) In this part of Africa, the experience can be different. Especially, that is, if your skin colour (white) identifies you with money, as does mine. In short, you can be landed with all sorts of guilt trips – things that you must do to save the life of the sick person, generally including a lot of money.

I guess that is why better off people tend to live separately from poorer people. Then the better-off don't have to be constantly troubled by the qualms of the poor. If that had been my aim, I wouldn't have left the UK in the first place. Even now, many people coming from wealthier parts of the world to Africa end up living in wealthier parts of the continent. That saves them from constantly having to be engrossed in the issues of the poor.

I have done things a little differently. That is – I live very close to a lot of poor people, in many ways as if myself a poor person! That means, as a general rule, that I will visit someone in hospital. I will pray for them and encourage them. I occasionally leave a small gift. But I probably won't pay their bill or be there to try (medically) to save their life. When I live with a lot of 'poor people', I have to be one of them. My identity needs to be not in the money that I have, but in the God whom I serve.

## **Update**

Please join me in praying for my anticipated visitors. A friend from Andover Baptist Church called Peter Stagg is to visit me for about 10 days in mid July. My mother is to come with a friend to visit me in mid October. Also on the programme, are some Tanzanian friends who are to come to visit me from the end of July through August. We hope to hold a number of seminars. The first is to be in my home village, then others are to be held in northern Tanzania (about a day's travel from home).

I continue to be involved with Coptic Christians here in Maseno. We are back into 'holiday season' in the West, which generally means a constant flow of visitors. Many visitors are ethnic Egyptians but living in Western parts of the world. As I write we have about 12 girls and a boy here, most come for a period of one or two weeks. I join them all for fellowship in the evenings on the nights when I sleep here at Coptic. Amongst other roles I have picked up here, seems to be informal part-time hospital chaplain.

Ministry from home also continues apace. I continue to nurture relationships with a wide variety of churches and fellowships in the vicinity of home, often being given opportunity to share publically, frequently being able to encourage, sometimes by my sheer presence. In addition, hospital visiting and visiting the old, sick etc. in their homes is taking up an increasing amount of my time.

I seem to have picked up a language-teaching role to fellow missionaries. This includes in Coptic, where I teach Swahili twice a week. Pray for the contacts that I have in Kisumu, that I may be an encouragement to missionaries based there to take Luo language learning very seriously. This might require me also to study Dholuo more profoundly before I can teach it better, as I tend to know a great deal of Luo without knowing how I know it!

## **The Real Reason?**

Once upon a time, I was strolling with a missionary colleague. We were conversing using Swahili (a Kenyan language). A few evenings before I had visited him at his home. 'When I came to your home', I told him 'I didn't want to use Swahili, in case you thought I was showing off'. (Actually I said 'siku ile sikutumia Swahili ili nisikukwaze ukifikiri najivunia'.)

I later reflected on my own comment. Indeed, knowledge or lack of knowledge of an indigenous language can be quite an issue between missionaries. If I am the missionary who doesn't know the language, I could be put off by people using it liberally in our meetings. If I do know it, I might fear using it in case I be accused of being proud. Hence within one's own missionary circles, so as to avoid issues of jealousy, pride, envy, upsetting people's egos etc., one is inclined to use one's mother tongue, i.e. English.

If my use of, for example, Swahili is threatening to my missionary colleagues, I asked myself, does the reverse also apply? That is – what happens amongst African nationals when they are faced with the prospect of the use of an outside language?

Could it be that also in their own circles, anyone deigning to use that outside language will be considered to be proud or showing off? Hence they keep to their mother tongue. The courageous amongst them who use English offend their colleagues. If this is the case, then what are we as missionaries' who fail to become fluent in the local language in order to reach the people doing? Are we, by saving ourselves the difficult issue of seeming to be showing off to each other as to who has the best language skills, inflicting issues of jealousy, envy and pride onto nationals we are reaching?

I hope I am clear above. It is difficult for us 'missionaries' NOT to use English in our own circles. Is it not just as difficult for nationals NOT to use their mother tongues? If so, then the missionary who uses the foreign language (e.g. English) in ministry is, while avoiding problems of jealousy and pride within their own group, imposing the same on the people being 'reached'.

I wonder if the same applies to wealth, or standard of living? Missionaries could be offended if a colleague keeps a lower standard than them. For example, one wet day we go to a place at the same time, they drive and their colleague cycles. They feel bad because the colleague is 'suffering', but it is clear that he doesn't want them to give him a lift. That can be threatening to them. Hence missionaries can dislike fellow missionaries who chose a lower standard of living than they. But then, if we cannot cope with such differences within our missionary community, how can we expect nationals to cope when some of their number acquire cars, while others remain cycling? Won't they be eaten up by jealousy?

Does the above describe a large part of the REAL REASON as to why missionaries keep up a high standard of living in a poor community, and fail to engage in local languages? Is it 'our' missionary ego and good relationships between us that we are jealously guarding? Is this at the cost of the ability of nationals to relate well together? So also for language. Is the use of outside resources and foreign languages in effect offloading difficult interpersonal issues that we are avoiding onto the people we are reaching?

### **2015 furlough for Jim Harries**

I am engaged in planning my next furlough, to be March to June 2015. If anyone who I do not usually visit would like me to visit them during that time in the UK or in Germany, please let me know! ([jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)). (I am not planning a trip to the USA until perhaps 2016.) My outline programme is as follows:

March 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Andover BC

March 20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> New Farm Chapel

March 26<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> Wantage BC

April 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Andover BC

April 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Acomb BC

- conferences UK

April 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> Andover BC

April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 7<sup>th</sup> – supporting churches in Germany (and family).

- conferences Germany

May 15<sup>th</sup> to May 25<sup>th</sup> Norwich Central BC

May 30<sup>th</sup> Andover BC

June 3<sup>rd</sup> to June 14<sup>th</sup> Andover BC