**Press call**

8pm, Saturday 29 June 2013

St Jude's Church, St Jude's Road, Wolverhampton WV6 0EB

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**Super-fundraiser’s efforts come to the attention of Her Majesty the Queen!**

Super-fundraiser Mavis Littleford’s charity fundraising efforts have become so prolific that she is to be awarded the British Empire Medal.

Mavis has been The Leprosy Mission’s church representative at St Jude’s Church in Wolverhampton for 20 years. The grandma-of-three has been instrumental in raising tens of thousands of pounds to benefit people affected by leprosy, some of the world’s poorest and most marginalised people.

This has been achieved through Mavis’s tireless efforts organising dozens of fundraising events including quiz nights, church lunches, sponsored blanket knits plus being the instigator of other novel fundraising ideas such as replacing the sweets inside a Smarties tube with coins.

Mavis also supports Samaritan's Purse in their Operation Christmas Child shoebox appeal each year.

The British Empire Medal was awarded to subjects of the United Kingdom until 1992 after which it lay in abeyance until June 2012 when it was brought back for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. Instead of being awarded at a ceremony held at Buckingham Palace, it is presented by the Lord Lieutenant of a recipient's county.

Mavis will be awarded her British Empire Medal by the Lord Lieutenant for the West Midlands, Paul Sabapathy, at a brass band concert organised by The Leprosy Mission at St Jude’s Church at 7pm on Saturday 29 June. Langley Brass is performing and Mavis will be awarded her British Empire Medal from 8pm.

Tickets to the concert are priced at £6 on the door or £5.50 in advance/ £3 for concessions (contact Allister du Plessis on 0121 384 2402) and include refreshments. Proceeds will benefit The Leprosy Mission’s work.

Mr Sabapathy applauded Mavis’s outstanding fundraising efforts and said The Leprosy Mission was a cause close to his heart:

“Coming from India I have witnessed at first hand the suffering and marginalisation of poor people with leprosy. My wife and I have supported The Leprosy Mission for many years including buying Christmas presents from The
Leprosy Mission Trading's catalogue as this is a practical way of rehabilitating people affected by leprosy.

“The Leprosy Mission deserves our wholehearted support as it works hard to help millions of people with leprosy-caused disabilities around the world.”

Members of the press are welcome to attend the presentation to Mavis Littleford at 8pm on Saturday 29 June at St Jude’s Church, St Jude’s Road, Wolverhampton WV6 0EB.

Please contact Charlotte Orson on 01733 404876/ 07944 660996 or Allister du Plessis on 0121 384 2402 to confirm your attendance or ask any questions.

Charlotte Orson
The Leprosy Mission England & Wales (TLMEW)
Peterborough PE2 5GZ
Telephone: 01733 404876/ 07944 660996 Email: CharlotteO@TLMEW.org.uk

@leprosytalk
search for ‘The Leprosy Mission England & Wales’
www.leprosymission.org.uk

About The Leprosy Mission England & Wales:

The Leprosy Mission is an international Christian development organisation, transforming the lives of people affected by leprosy. Our goal is to eradicate the causes and consequences of this disease.

We are currently focusing on 11 countries where leprosy remains both a chronic disease and a social challenge. These are: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Sudan and South Sudan. Issues centre on disease, disability and discrimination. They also include: neglected tropical disease; housing; poverty; social exclusion; micro-loans; education and employment opportunities.

About leprosy

- Leprosy is a mildly infectious disease caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium leprae (a relative of the tuberculosis bacterium or ‘TB’ germ). It can stay in the body for up to 20 years without showing symptoms.

- Leprosy causes nerve damage and, if left untreated, can lead to a loss of sensation in the hands and feet. This can lead to disability and the amputation of limbs. Leprosy also damages nerves in the face causing problems with blinking, eventually leading to blindness.

- It is not hereditary and it cannot be caught by touch.
• It is most common in places of poverty where overcrowding and poor nutrition and housing allow people to become more susceptible to leprosy infection.

• The last case of indigenous leprosy in the UK was diagnosed in 1798 and although it can no longer be contracted in this country, around 12 new cases are diagnosed in the UK each year.

• Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), which was developed in the 1980s. Within one day of starting MDT there is no risk of the disease spreading to anyone else. Lack of education, however, means that many people affected by leprosy are still stigmatised, even after they have been cured, especially if the disease has caused disability.

• There are around three million people worldwide disabled as a result of late treatment of leprosy. In 2011 there were 219,075 new cases of leprosy diagnosed. That is approximately one every two minutes. Over half of these were found in India. (Source: World Health Organisation).

• In 2011, five countries where we work reported an increase in the number of new cases detected. These were Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Only Mozambique showed a slight decrease in the number of new cases diagnosed with data from the remaining countries in which we work not available or inconclusive.

• In recent years, trends in new case detection have shown a reduction globally (in Africa, the Americas, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific area) with the exception of the East Mediterranean region. The number of new cases with already established disability, however, remains fairly constant.

Leprosy is a disease. Those affected deserve dignity not discrimination.