Press release

For immediate release

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The Leprosy Mission’s bid to switch occasional givers to monthly donors

The Leprosy Mission is focusing on a new initiative to transform occasional givers to monthly donors by Direct Debit. And the plea to donate a minimum of £6 per month will be made by a newly-strengthened network of volunteers pressing the ‘play’ button on a thought-provoking video clip.

Bold steps have been taken by The Leprosy Mission to beat recessionary forces and a new approach to Direct Mail has been accredited for last year’s income rise by 13 per cent, from £5,420,709 in 2011 to £6,131,425.

There has been a restructure in the Community Fundraising team with the number of paid positions reduced from 11 to seven. A new national volunteer recruitment drive, to be launched in Peterborough on 18 September, will ensure the message from some of the world’s most marginalised people reaches those who have the ability to help via a series of talks.

Feedback received from The Leprosy Mission’s existing network of faithful volunteers reveals that while volunteers are happy to talk about The Leprosy Mission’s life-changing projects, they are reluctant to ask supporters for money.

Therefore a short film entitled Cure Partners (www.curepartners.org) has been shot in India to make this request on the volunteer’s behalf. It shows a young girl named Roopwati who has just been diagnosed with leprosy. The film then cuts to an older lady named Uma whose life has been blighted by disability and stigma surrounding leprosy.

There is then ‘an ask’ for a monthly Direct Debit to help cure a person affected by leprosy, it taking an average of £6 to transport medication to the patient (the medication is provided free of charge by pharmaceutical company Novartis). A monthly payment of £20 includes the cost of treating a patient at an outpatients’ clinic. A Direct Debit mandate form is put on the chair of each supporter attending the talk.

National Director of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales, Peter Walker, said:
“We have some fantastic and extremely loyal supporters. But gone are the days when we can be complacent about receiving regular donations, in particular from younger givers.

“Many of The Leprosy Mission’s older donors have been supporters since their Sunday School days. They are very faithful.

“But while it is certainly not the case that people are less generous in the 21st century, there are more charity demands on their money and, quite rightly, we have to work harder for loyalty.

“By giving people the knowledge that their monthly payment will help cure a person affected by leprosy, we are empowering them to give with the realisation that they are doing something life-changing each month.

“We support projects in 11 countries across Asia and Africa and have to be prudent with our budgeting process each year. If money is coming in by Direct Debit it is easier for us to be bolder in allocating funds to projects.”

Donors signing up to the Cure Partners Direct Debit will receive separate mailings from The Leprosy Mission England and Wales in order that they are not overloaded by requests for money.

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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.