

# The Bishop of St Albans' Presidential Address March 2012

## Diocesan Synod

### March 2012

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8)*

It was at the first Pentecost that the earth's tectonic plates moved. The epicentre was Jerusalem. The shock waves spread out to the Samaritans (a group who were at odds with the Israelites) and then out across the face of the ancient world to the Gentiles. Still today we are feeling the aftershocks, as the good news of Jesus Christ continues to take root in the hearts and minds of peoples, races and nations in every part of the globe.

The problem for us today is that when we think about the missionary expansion of the church we tend to do so from a European epicentre, partly because it is where we live and partly because of the extraordinary missionary movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But our Eurocentric worldview is one that is fraught with difficulties and one that can hide subtle imperialistic assumptions, as illustrated by the encounter that Br Michael Fisher SSF recounts in his autobiography when he met Jawaharlal Nehru. At one point in their conversation Fisher said to Nehru 'Of course, sir, in the East...(meaning India)' Nehru interrupted him 'Excuse me, Father, but East of what? Fisher says it was one of those salutary moments when he realised he was imposing his interpretation of history and geography on another culture.

The debate that we have just had on the Anglican Covenant relates directly to the worldwide Anglican Communion. As Anglicans, gathered around the scriptures, the historic creeds and the primacy of the Archbishop of Canterbury, we see ourselves at the centre of Christendom (with an occasional nod to Rome when we are feeling in an ecumenical mood). But over recent decades the Anglican Communion has been coming of age. There are far more practising Anglicans outside the UK in other parts of the world, especially Africa. The Lambeth Conference is no longer a meeting where English bishops set the agenda and bishops from the colonies agree with it. This was clear in 1988 when the grassroots membership of the conference rebelled and passed a motion calling for a Decade of Evangelism in the face of what they perceived to be Church of England complacency.

Part of this coming of age was the establishment of *Partnership for World Mission* back in 1978 and a number of changes in the way some missionary societies operated – some being renamed, like CMS (from Church Missionary Society to Church Mission Society), while all of them rejecting our colonial past and instead emphasising partnership in mission. The underlying assumption is that we have much to give and to receive in mission, as does every province in the Anglican Communion. Nowadays some provinces are sending missionaries to Britain. One of the latest developments in the Communion has been the establishment of the Anglican Alliance. The Archbishop of Canterbury explained that:

The Anglican Alliance has been created to connect and strengthen the development, relief and advocacy activities of Anglican churches, agencies and networks. The Anglican Alliance brings these entities together to work for a world free of poverty and injustice, to be a voice for the voiceless, to promote peace and reconciliation in communities affected by conflict, and to help safeguard the life of the earth. The vision is grounded in, and shaped by, an understanding of God's integral and holistic mission as expressed through the Anglican Communion's Marks of Mission.

These changes in our relationships within the Anglican Communion are worked out in the many companion links that dioceses have with each other across the world. As you know we

have formal links with the Dioceses of the North East Caribbean and Aruba, the Windward Islands and Guyana and we are exploring links with the Diocese of Belize. At the Diocesan Synod meeting last we voted unanimously for the motion that:

*This Synod:-*

*1) commits the Diocese of St Albans to:*

*(a) extend our relationships with the Diocese of North Eastern Caribbean and Aruba, the Diocese of the Windward Islands and the Diocese of Guyana for a further five years;*

*(b) explore with the Diocese of Belize whether we should establish a formal link;*

*(c) work with our companions to identify the benefits of our relationship so far and how we can build on them to assist us all in our mission and ministry;*

*(d) find ways to strengthen our mutual bonds in the light of tensions in the Anglican Communion;*

*(e) strengthen the support for those in the Diocese of St Albans with responsibility for maintaining and developing these overseas links;*

*2) requests that the budgets are reviewed to ensure that work can be undertaken.*

In late November and early December Archdeacon Jonathan Smith, Darren Collins (the new chair of the Caribbean Links Group) and I travelled to the West Indies. It was an opportunity to strengthen the ties that we have had with the Province of the West Indies, to commit ourselves to a further five years and also to think about how we can develop the relationships.

I am clear that we need to develop *partnership in the gospel* and that our links are only going to flourish if they make a real and tangible difference to their mission and ministry and also to our mission and ministry. I am also convinced that it should not be a relationship of financial dependence. Just as we in the Church of England have suffered from being a church which has depended on the money of other people (thank goodness we are now having to stand on our own feet and pay our own way), so in the long run it does not help other dioceses if they do not develop churches and ministry which is self-sustaining. They, like us, have to be dioceses which are in the words of Henry Venn are “self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating”.

Of course, if there is a crisis, such as when Hurricane Tomas brought widespread destruction to the Windward Islands back in 2010, we will help with emergency humanitarian funding.

What I believe we need to concentrate on are the ways in which we can learn from and support each other in our mission and ministry. In particular how their insights can help us in *Living God's Love* and how we can help and support them in what they are doing. Let me give you some examples, firstly of social issues:

### **Fair Trade.**

Darren Collins and I were given a tour of the island of St Vincent and we spent an hour and a half with a banana farmer, Philmore Allen and the Minister of Agriculture, the Hon Montgomery Daniel. Since the middle of the last century bananas have been one of the main export crops from the Windward Islands to Britain. At its height the trade represented nearly half of the export market and was one of the main drivers in their local economy. This was

partly due to the special 'preferential import system' which had been established between Britain and its former colonies. However, in the 1990s this system was overturned by the World Trade Organisation following a complaint from the United States of America.

As a result of this ruling, the banana trade now accounts for less than 10% of their export market. The collapse in revenue from exports has hit the islands hard. The number of banana farmers in the Windward Islands has fallen from 23,000 to 4,000. The good news is that since the first Fairtrade bananas were shipped to Britain in 2000 the trade is recovering and is now about 42,000 tonnes annually. In 2008 they set up their own organisation *Winfresh* which means they have more control over their produce.

The benefits of Fairtrade are not just experienced by the farmers. A proportion of the higher price that is charged is used to support local communities on the islands. It has enabled, for example, a bus and computers to be purchased for schools, better equipment for nurseries, and a nebulizer for a clinic in a rural area to help people with respiratory problems. They have even been able to build bus shelters.

### **Climate change.**

We are aware of the effects of global warming here in Western Europe. But the islands of the West Indies are much more vulnerable. Even very modest rises in sea level are going to have a significant effect on some of the Islands such as St Vincent, St Lucia and Montserrat. Our personal links with people from these areas can help us see the human face of these unfolding crises and also help us understand what we can do in response. I am hoping that the Bishop's Harvest Appeal in 2012 will have as one of its focuses climate change in the West Indies.

### **Respect for other races.**

On several occasions we heard stories of people coming to Britain in the 1950s. Their Anglican church back in the West Indies prayed for them, sometimes gave them letters of commendation and sent them off. But when they arrived in England some of them were cold shouldered and made to feel that they were not welcome. No wonder some of them set up their own churches. Here in our own diocese in Luton we have a community of Vincentians. On our own doorstep there is an opportunity for us to redress this wrong and to learn from people of other backgrounds.

### **Sustainable development.**

We heard quite a lot about some of the justice issues in the West Indies, such as the mining by big corporations which is destroying the land of the Arawak people, polluting it with chemicals and leaving it useless. There was also much worry about the destruction of the rain forest due to illegal logging. Is there some way we might work on this problem with out companions?

### **Justice.**

The growing disparity between the rich and the poor is not just a feature of life in the UK. It is to be found within all these other dioceses. How can we as Christian people work for a fairer and more just society? What can we learn from each other?

As well as these social issues there are also a number of areas within our church life that we can support and learn from each other:

*All dioceses were finding it hard to engage with young people.*

Indeed, in some parts of the Caribbean young Anglicans were joining Pentecostal churches. What does this say about our young people, and about our worship? Could some of our youth groups and our church schools twin – perhaps using Facebook?

*All the dioceses are concerned about getting vocations to the priesthood and all of us find it expensive to training ordinands.*

Can we pray for each other? Indeed, as we are hoping to increase the number of ordinands, is this one area that we might help fund the training of some of the ordinands in the companion dioceses?

*Are there ways in which we can share our resources?*

For example the Diocese of Belize has joined in with *Live the Challenge* (<http://www.livethechallenge.co.uk/home/>) this year. Perhaps in future years we might even be able to write a common Lent Course?

*Some people from our diocese go to the Caribbean for holidays. How can we encourage them to link up with the local Anglican church when they arrive?*

Many people from the Caribbean come here for work or to visit their families. How can we welcome them to our churches during their stay? During our stay in the Caribbean we discussed many other ideas: Should we twin some of our parishes? Could we have another Caribbean festival here in the diocese, perhaps focussed around the Abbey? Might we arrange clergy exchanges, thereby allowing some of their clergy to take sabbaticals?

These, and many other ideas, will I hope be developed over the coming months. I believe that they are not just areas in which we could be enriched, but also helped and supported as we seek to be faithful to the commission to *Live God's Love*.

+Alan St Albans