

Tanzania Links Update

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A New Year with New Opportunities

This is my last 'Links Update'. At the end of January I am leaving my current post to become director for theological education in the Anglican Communion. I have mixed feelings – excitement at the new post but also sadness at stepping down from being diocesan link officer. It has been a huge privilege to co-ordinate all the links between Leeds Diocese and Mara, Rorya and Tarime dioceses, one which I have really enjoyed.

When I took over the role from Peta Moffat in 2012 we were still in Wakefield Diocese and I helped to arrange visits by bishops Stephen Platten and Hilkiyah Omindo in both directions. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the link in Wakefield Cathedral in 2013, inspired by the preaching of Bp Hilkiyah. There was a very good visit of parishioners from Mara and Tarime to Wakefield in 2014. Then we became the Diocese of Leeds (via West Yorkshire and the Dales) and Bishop Nick came with a group to Tanzania in Feb 2016, which helped him become 'Maranated'. Bishop Tony and I attended the consecration of George Okoth as the new bishop of Mara and then welcomed him over here at Easter last year. Last year also saw harsh drought in Tanzania and a very generous response by many people across the diocese - we were able to send a whopping GBP 34K which helped a large number of clergy and their communities. The last few years have also seen visits by teachers from our diocese to Mara and the setting up of an excellent network of primary school-to-school links by Rev Gill Johnson of the Education Dept with Link Officer Arthur Mauya and Melina Galibona. In Mara the last few years have also seen the building and opening of Bunda Girls Secondary School, with growing support for bursaries from this end. Issenye Secondary School has continued to receive strong support, helping it through a tricky period with low admissions, co-ordinated by Eelin Megson. Bunda Bible College has had its chapel built, and a women's dormitory roofed and opened, through support from Wakefield Lent appeals, and the ordinands of St Hild College at Mirfield are currently helping to complete its new library. Water for Life has continued its crucial work in water harvesting and health education in Tarime and

Rorya dioceses, as well as supporting drought prone parishes in Mara, ably managed by Tineke Bentley and the Water for Life committee. Behind all this have been the parish-to-parish links, through friendship and prayer going in both directions and financial support *bega qua bega* (shoulder to shoulder), helping congregations put roofs on new churches and build vicarages. These links have always been the backbone of the whole relationship, and long may they continue.

Part of my new role will be to take my experience of the Mara link and apply it to building companionship links between theological colleges and courses across the world. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have learnt about how it's done, especially the importance of face-to-face contact and ongoing prayer. Thankyou Wakefield and Leeds!

For the future there will be the need to build up support for the Safe House at Mugumu in Mara's Serengeti district. Also Bunda Bible College needs help with providing bursaries for ordinands from poor backgrounds to train for ministry. Many parish links also need encouraging and strengthening. There is plenty for my successor to do (who will shortly be announced). But I am confident that our friendship and companionship in the gospel, which has sustained this marvellous link for almost 30 years, will continue in the years ahead.

I want to thank Bishop Stephen Platten for asking me to take on the role, my colleagues in Tanzania – Rev Peter Oyoo in Rorya, Rev Charles Mwita in Tarime and especially Lay Canon Arthur Mauya in Mara - for all their unstinting support and encouragement over these last five years. Thank you also to the hard working members of the Tanzania Link Committee: Sally Firth the treasurer (and before her the wonderful Michael Storey), Oriel Kelly and Edwina Offori the assistant link officers, Bishop Tony the chair, Jack Dodds the secretary, Ruth Harris who organises the prayer calendar, Angela Byram who keeps the lists and all the other members who do so much work behind the scenes. Finally thank you to all of you for your continuing involvement and support for what is THE BEST companionship link in the Church of England.

Bwana asifiwe!

Stephen