

# **THE BISHOP AS PRINCIPAL MISSIONARY AGENT OF THE DIOCESE**

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Diocesan Partnerships are forged for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways.

As an agent for mission in the diocese, the bishop might first draw together people who have both enthusiasm and willingness to learn how to engage in the enterprise of mission.

A mission partnership which truly engages a diocese requires the work of a good committee, funding, ceaseless communication, and a broad base of general diocesan support. Lots of people have to be committed and involved to make it happen and to make it meaningful. Even with all of this in place active participation of the bishop is needed....for a variety of reasons.

1. The bishop and the diocesan mission committee can support each other and hold each other accountable.
2. Bishops in such partnerships expect that there will be mutuality and willingness to become part of each other's lives and journeys. Bishops must be willing to travel and to share fully in the life and worship of the companion diocese - and to extend reciprocal invitations to partner bishops.
3. Such relationships deserve to be a priority in the partner dioceses, which means budget support. Unless the bishop is supportive, allocations for mission partnerships may be difficult to sustain. The bishop has the most visibility and the tallest bully pulpit when it comes to raising funds.
4. Articulation of the reasons for mission partnerships in the first place, and the interpretation of what is being gained by them may be one of the bishop's most important and challenging contributions.

The first challenge may be to distinguish between "mission work" and "diocesan partnerships."

For many Christians "mission work" has traditionally meant sending missionaries with to evangelize those who have not heard the Good News of Jesus. Once established, the work shifts to building up the community of faith and raising up local leaders to continue the work. On the way to saving souls other good things are accomplished in education, medical care and economic enterprise. But the agenda set by those sending the missionaries, and what is likely to provide the most satisfaction are statistics which show church growth.

For many Christians today the motivation for mission is very different. Many Christians share a conviction that in Jesus all persons have in fact already been saved. For them, the goal of mission work is not to save souls, but rather to live among others, sharing Jesus' own message of the realm of God. In the midst of that enterprise much good is often done in areas such as education, medical care and economic enterprise --- so these two approaches can seem very similar, especially when we acknowledge that in this kind of mission the agenda has often been set entirely by those engaging in the ministry of mission. But where the theological impetus for the first group is the Atonement, the theological motivation for the second is the Incarnation, and the need for persons to appropriate that saving action of God in Jesus the Christ, and to share the living of it with their Lord. What will prove most satisfying to those whose support for mission has this focus, will be reports that people are living together in new ways which coincide with the teachings of Jesus about the kingdom of God, including the seeking of justice, peace, and in the American mind, capitalistic free enterprise!

The use of the language of "partnership" has raised the importance of rethinking old models of "doing mission." Because whether one's primary theological focus is the Atonement or the Incarnation it has always been possible to adopt the attitude that "what I bring is something they don't yet have and very much need - therefore I am here to do them good."

But this is never the goal of partnerships, and it is crucial that the bishop be able to articulate this difference clearly.

A partnership is mutual; it assumes that each party will bring something much needed by the other into the relationship. When we form partnerships, we do so with the goal of sharing what we believe, *and* learning from others.

In partnerships, we ask questions, we share experiences, we pray and sing, and dance, and work together. We even dare to dream together . . .

For the interest and enthusiasm of a diocesan household to be maintained over time, the bishop must encourage ongoing and full communication about the partnerships.

Here in the Diocese of Indianapolis we have two global partnerships. What I particularly wanted was to keep a relationship in Africa, but also to have one in this hemisphere. I proposed having a relationship in each place that would also connect the African diocese to the one in South America.

After some research, I invited the bishops of Brasilia in the Igreja Episcopal do Brasil and Bor in the Church of the Sudan, to consider a partnership with the Diocese of Indianapolis that would also be a partnership with each other. They both agreed, and in April of 2002, I went with a group from this diocese to visit in Sudan, joined by the bishop of Brasilia and a translator. Later that year we took a group to Brasilia, including the bishop and three others from Bor. In 2003 groups from Brasilia and Bor came to us at the same time.

The depth of all those experiences has been a real gift; encountering the vast differences in culture alone has opened all our eyes to the ways in which our brothers and sisters live out their faith. Our hope is to make another visit to Bor after the rainy season this year, taking partners from Brasilia as well.

We have learned that both Brasilia and Bor have a deep concern for the education and training of clergy and lay leaders. Each has a concern for the educational and economic needs of the poor among and around them. In addition, Bor has struggled with the ravages of war, and the need to reach out to internal refugees and to learn to contribute to making the peace agreement work.

As you can imagine, requests for money come to my office on a regular basis. Our relationship with Bor and Brasilia includes a firm understanding that any money sent for projects will be channeled through their diocesan offices, to ensure that diocesan priorities are being upheld.

But because partnerships are not just about money, there are other ways for the bishop to be communicating, over and over, the "value added" to diocesan life. The rich learnings have already been mentioned, but let me just add that at this particular point in the history of the Anglican Communion, it is more important than ever that we have brothers and sisters around the world who are not getting all their information about us from the internet, and can say, "I know what the Church in the United States is like. I've visited there and seen with my own eyes what they do, how they pray, what their life is like. We know and love each other. Their life is bearing good fruit."

We offer our Sudanese brothers and sisters an example of being Christian in the midst of religious diversity. We have a very similar church structure, but because of the war, the ECS has not been able to carry out all the provisions of its Constitution and Canons. We can provide the example and some training to help them get established as they want to be, as can the Diocese of Brasilia.

In Brasilia there are skilled practitioners in healing with herbs and plants. The people of Bor also knew these things, but because of the war, they have lost some of it. From Brazilian brothers and sisters they will regain some of their own heritage.

Ecumenical relationships are thriving in Brasilia in ways that are not always true here. We have some things to learn from them about how to listen, learn from, and accept each other. And Bor has been teaching us all about the steadfast faith which believes when there seems to be no reason to believe - when faith means being willing to keep putting one foot in front of the other because there is nothing left but the hope of faith and trust in God.

What a visiting team sees and experiences must be shared fully with the diocese, but there are times when the bishop's role as communicator expands beyond diocesan borders.

Following our visit to Sudan in 2002, I shared what I had seen and heard with the House of Bishops. I was the first US bishop to visit within Sudan since the 1970's. I told my colleagues about the living conditions we encountered, the poverty, the terrible longing of the people to return to their homes, and the cruel separation from family members they could not be sure were still alive. I told them of our visit to the refugee camp at Kakuma in Kenya, about the very rustic "conference center" where we were able to tune in CNN Europe each evening for an hour or so, *never hearing a word about Sudan*.

I also told them of the deep hope and faith we encountered, of having our feet washed when we entered a new village, of the endless singing and dancing, the prayer and worship. I told them of meeting a generation of young people who had only heard of home - and of the adults who taught the children to have hope for the future because they trusted that God would bring them home again just as surely as the Exiles had been gathered home from Babylon.

I told them about the 7 year old girls who sang to me about wanting to grow up to be a bishop!

I told them of the tremendous generosity of spirit we encountered, and the determination we had seen to learn and study and grow in the faith. And then I asked them to DO SOMETHING! At the very least, I asked them to pray for peace in Sudan, but even more, to learn about our brothers and sisters there, and to discover ways to be helpful and supportive of them.

Since that time, at least two other bishops have visited Sudan (*they went in the legal way!*) and several others have begun plans for forming mission partnerships. The role of bishops is not just to be missionary agents within the dioceses they serve, but beyond them as well.

But what makes any bishop effective - and I say this with humility and gratitude to our mission partners - is the willingness to be changed. It helps me to think of these visits as pilgrimages - visits made to places that we already count as holy, because we know that God has worked wonders among the

people there.

We cannot enter deeply into the lives of others and allow them into our own, without being open to change. A partnership of this kind expands the circle of interdependence. We open ourselves to respond to requests, but we also ask for help.

When we pray for our partners we call to mind the things that make up their struggles and their triumphs. We offer to God our own yearnings for the success of their ministries, and take comfort in knowing that they are praying for us as well. It seems impossible to me to remain unchanged in the midst of such a relationship.

Pilgrimages to other parts of the world can always open our eyes to the beauty of God's world, the marvelous variety in nature, and the boundless creativity of our brothers and sisters. And we learn to look at ourselves and our faith through new eyes.

I have also heard a young Sudanese man say that there were times when he wondered what his people had done wrong - that their lives were so painful. That sometimes he thought maybe God had made them for an experiment and not for life. He then went on to say that even so, he knew God had been with them and would deliver them from their suffering.

And I will never forget the women, who brought food to a celebration, holding the dishes above their heads and coming into the compound on their knees in the dust, singing and thanking God that people had come to hear their story and to share their journey. I could not view my own life in the same way ever again.

In our own members who have joined in our pilgrimages I have been blessed by their sense of excitement and awe, concern and commitment, and the prayerful and humbling recognition that in these partnerships we have as much to receive as to give. I have seen our own members transformed and their own faith energized as they come to see their own lives in new ways.

In all of this I have been changed, and if I am effective at all as an agent of mission in this place, it is because of brothers and sisters here and across the globe, and the Holy Spirit whose never-ending presence envelops us all.

Mission partnerships, if they are faithful, must be about the conversion of everyone involved... and conversion often includes having to leave behind treasured assumptions, prejudices and agendas.

But perhaps the most important aspect of being a missionary agent is to pray. I became convinced long ago that prayer shapes ministry; and wherever the life of prayer is meager and sporadic the ministry will reveal that. And where the life of prayer is disciplined and intentional the ministry will reveal that as well, because in prayer we make ourselves available to God.

My prayer is that more and more of our members will open themselves to the ministry of mission, embracing the conversion that partnerships must include; and that together with our brothers and sisters we can become agents of the justice, peace, and reconciliation that are signs of God's reign among us and within us. Ω

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## OUTLINE

- I. Bishop as agent of mission
  - A. Calls good committee
  - B. Bishop and Committee maintain mutual accountability
  - C. Becomes personally involved with and present to partner diocese and bishop
  - D. Empowers budget support for the partnership
  - E. Articulates reason for, and benefits of the partnership to the diocese.
  
- II. Partnerships are not "Mission Work"
  - A. "Mission work" can be either:
    1. Directed toward saving souls, or
    2. Directed toward sharing the realm of God.
    3. The first is Atonement centered, the second Incarnation centered.
    4. Both are directed by the senders, and bring to others that which they lack.
    5. Both produce good fruit, including education, health and economic improvements.
  - B. Partnerships are different: mutual, all share, all learn, all even dare to dream together.
  
- III. To maintain enthusiasm over time, the bishop much encourage ongoing and full communication about the partnerships.
  
- IV. Description of developing a three way partnership among the Dioceses of Indianapolis, Bor in the Church of the Sudan, and Brasilia in the Igreja Episcopal do Brasil.
  - A. Initiation and visits.
  - B. Financial support of projects only done through diocesan offices to support diocesan objectives.
  - C. Especially important given present tensions in the Anglican Communion.
  - D. Examples of benefits of the partnership to each of the three dioceses.
  
- V. Bishop may, sometimes must, share what has been learned with the larger church, as she did about the Church in Sudan.
  - A. Described:
    1. Living conditions, poverty, refugees, separation.
    2. Deep hope and faith.
    3. 7 year old girls who sang of wanting to grow up and become a bishop.
    4. Generosity of spirit and desire to study and grow in the faith.
  - B. Asked the to DO SOMETHING. Some have.
  
- VI. What makes any bishop effective is willingness to be changed.
  - A. Visits are pilgrimages.
  - B. Prayer, and being prayed for, recalls what has been experienced and changes us.
  - C. She was changed by faith of Sudanese. (2 stories)
  - D. Blessed by excitement and changes in other visitors.
  - E. "If I am effective as an agent of mission in this place, it is because of brothers and sisters here and across the globe, and the Holy Spirit whose never-ending presence envelops us all."
  
- VII. Mission partnership must be about the conversion of everyone involved, including leaving behind treasured assumptions, prejudices and agendas.
  
- VIII. Most important is to pray. Disciplined and intentional. Makes us available to God.
  
- IX. My prayer is that more will enter ministry of mission, embracing the conversion that partnerships must include; and that together with our brothers and sisters we can become agents of the justice, peace, and reconciliation that are signs of God's reign among us and within us.