

The Partnership of the Dioceses of El Camino Real, Gloucester and Western Tanganyika

2 College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LR, UK

The Most Revd Rowan Williams
The Archbishop of Canterbury
Lambeth Palace
London SE1 7JU

30 June 2010

Dear Archbishop Rowan

We would like to share with you a testimony of hope from the dioceses of El Camino Real, in California, Gloucester, in England, and Western Tanganyika in Tanzania.

I think you know that, at Lambeth 2008, the bishops of these three dioceses met for the first time, and quickly committed themselves to a companion relationship in which to explore the joys and dilemmas of being Anglicans together in a troubled Communion. The conversation, that began with the bishops, has now continued for two years, and drawn in other diocesan members, lay and ordained. It has been a great joy.

The three bishops, with their teams, met in Tanzania in March last year. Bishop Mary visited Gloucester in May last year and Bishop Gerard in July. The three teams met again in California in September. We have just completed the one gathering planned for this year, meeting in Gloucester from 17 to 23 June.

In this latest meeting we recognized several fundamental themes which have made our conversations so good and which we would like to share with you and with the Communion.

1. **Going on Safari**

In Tanzania, '*safari*' means a shared journey, even a pilgrimage. We have been companions on a journey, becoming a family, characterized by the way in which we walk and talk as we move. Our safari has been held within the shared daily discipline of scripture, eucharist, office and prayer. We have listened to God and one another, and grown in genuine affection as community has formed among us. Our conversations during the day have frequently drawn on the *lectio divina* with which each day starts. One passage that spoke powerfully to us was the Emmaus Road and, like the disciples in that story, we have continued the journey in order to continue the argument.

2. **Celebration and Diversity**

We have celebrated our diversity, but this has not been through a blurring of our differences, by 'simply accepting that we are different'. Our conversations have been characterized by love and honesty, and we have been careful to hold each other to account to say what we truly mean – and to share what we truly feel. We have been diligent in identifying and facing hard issues on which we disagree. We have recognized in

one another a common commitment to scripture, whilst admitting that we profoundly disagree on some areas of interpretation. We have listened, more determined to understand than to change each others' minds, though ready to change our own. Above all, we have been able to accept one another within the body of Christ; as our African brother and sister Christians reported when they visited the Diocese of El Camino Real in California, "*I see Christians*".

3. Culture and Risk.

Our partnership has always been associated with risk: risk of misunderstanding from those from our own cultures as much as those from another culture. We have sought to recognize how much of our theology is bound up with our culture. This is, of course, especially true of the debates surrounding gender and sexuality, where notions of what is acceptable, normative or even a justice issue vary widely between us. However, it is also true of our other debates – as we have explored orders of ministry and the doctrine of salvation, we continue to debate how our theology relates to our cultural context, as we have lived out building the Kingdom and the Church in ways which witness to the work of the Spirit in languages whose differences go so much further than just words. All of us believe that all cultures should be subject to judgment from the scriptures, but we come to differing conclusions about what that looks like in practice. We have risked our security in the adventure of faith, allowing the possibility that God will lead us into unfamiliar and alien ways of witnessing to his saving love. We have built a new community culture each time we have met, under the direction of one host diocese or another, around the common discipline of scripture, worship, prayer and honest discussion.

4. Keep it small, keep it personal

As we commend our conversations to you as a model for wider conversations in the Communion, we know that they have been possible because they have been intimate. We have come to know each other as friends, as real people and not as strangers who stand for something we abhor. There has been a lot of humour, and thanksgiving for that which unites us as so much more than that which divides. Our meetings have included bishops, clergy and lay people who have been present as themselves, not as delegates representing a wider cause, but naturally bringing their own story, their own perspective. It has made a difference that our partnership included a woman bishop. It has also been important that partnered gay and lesbian people engaged with the teams when we visited California, so that it has been possible for members of churches in England and Africa to learn at first hand how God has been present in the vocation and Christian life of people whose life experience has been different to their own. The friendship and love that has grown amongst us stands in contrast to the impersonal communication that has on occasion emerged from national church offices.

As we were meeting, the statements regarding the visit of the Presiding Bishop of TEC to England placed some strain on our friendship and communication, providing an unfortunate background to our meeting. When there is adverse or controversial publicity nationally or internationally, it does undermine the best efforts of those working more locally. We ourselves see our partnership relationship as a gift from God, and seek to celebrate the Anglican Communion in the same terms.

5. Beginning with Bishops

The progress our safari has made has been rooted in the mutual commitment of the three bishops at its heart. Without their relationship and hospitality it would have failed. They have given themselves personally, and openly, but they have been disciplined in their openness, as an exercise in faith, seeking understanding. They have also welcomed into their growing friendship the presence of others, modeling an out-flowing of affection as a sign to the wider dioceses and communion. The powerful witness of common love (John 15) of our partnership starts with the relationship between the bishops.

As we met for a day wholly given to theological discussion, our *Lectio Divina* followed John 6, the feeding of the five thousand. We noticed, of course, the thanksgiving over the bread and fish, such a small offering, which served in Christ's hands to satisfy the multitude. We were also drawn to the *fragments*, left over but gathered, twelve baskets signifying the gathering of the people of God. Our conversations may have appeared to be the fragments being swept together, like the ablutions following the Eucharist, but in them we saw a sign of hope for the future of the Communion - a celebration of love and hope for the future.

In summary, we have found so many ways to celebrate the generous love of God, for which we offer grateful thanks, and to which we like to bear our testimony, that others may share our joy.

You have to carry a heavy burden of leadership in a fragmented Communion. We assure you of our prayers and we want our story to be an encouragement to you. We also hope that you will yourself give strong encouragement to the formation of partnerships like our own that cross the most difficult cultural and theological divides. Our experience is that such partnerships can be transformative. Ours has certainly been so.

We would like to share this letter to you more broadly by putting it on our websites and to share it more broadly, but we will refrain from doing so until 19 July in order to give you the opportunity to say if you think that would be unhelpful.

+Gerard Mpango
Bishop of Western Tanganyika

+Mary Gray-Reeves
Bishop of El Camino Real

+Michael Perham
Bishop of Gloucester

On behalf of the teams from our three dioceses who drafted this letter in Gloucester on 22 June 2010