

GENERAL SYNOD

Companion Links and the Anglican Communion

Summary

Companion Links are flourishing in the Anglican Communion offering opportunities for cross-cultural engagement through prayer, visits and financial support. These relationships provide a wealth of experience for the Hospitality Initiative prior to Lambeth 2020. Recent research into Companion Links finds that cross-cultural engagement contributes to the development of discipleship in the Church of England through expanding perceptions of God's work in the world. Gift-giving offers a positive approach to financial exchange in cross-cultural relationships.

Introduction

1. Diocesan Companion Links between the Church of England and partners in the Anglican Communion, together with ecumenical links through the Porvoo and Meissen agreements across Europe, are alive, well and flourishing. They can be celebrated as instruments for God's mission in the world. They bring blessing to all parties through generous hospitality, warm friendship and mutual encouragement together with challenge for discipleship and mission.

History

2. Companion Links in the Anglican Communion have their roots in the report *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence* which came from the Toronto Anglican Congress in 1963. The report of the conference stated that,

'It is now irrelevant to talk of "giving" and "receiving" churches. The keynotes of our time are equality, interdependence, mutual responsibility.'¹

3. The Report went on to outline a wider series of measures to re-frame the nature of the Anglican Communion as a partnership of equals,

'Every church needs to develop swiftly every possible channel of communication with its companions in the Anglican Communion--indeed in the Church of Christ. This is not merely a matter of the printed word or occasional visits. It is a matter of deep and deliberate involvement in one another's affairs and life. It means the re-orientation of much of our teaching in parishes. It means a radical change in the structure of our prayers. It means massive exchange programs of men and women in different categories. It means a host of designed ways by which our common life and mutual interdependence may be expressed.'²

4. In the ensuing years there has been a considerable growth in numbers of Companion Links across the Anglican Communion. Currently in the Church of England every diocese has at least one link with another church in the Anglican Communion and

¹ Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence, Report of the Anglican Congress held in Toronto in 1963 Section 1, Anglican Communion Office.

² Ibid section 3

some have three or more. There are also a considerable number of ecumenical links with Europe through the Porvoo and Meissen Agreements. Indeed, after East Africa the greatest number of links are between Church of England dioceses and the various European churches. (See Annex B for a list of Diocesan Companion Links). Church of England dioceses are linked with more than 120 dioceses and churches globally.

5. Diocesan Companion Link relationships are expressed broadly through visits and exchanges, prayer, gift giving and financial support. Visits and exchanges can be between Bishops, clergy and laity, young people and parishes. Prayer and worship form a foundation for all link relationships.
6. The linking approach to international relationships is complemented by the Mission Agencies. Companion Links are necessarily focused in one region. The Mission Agencies have a breadth and depth of experience globally and offer support and partnership to the links and seek to learn from them. The Mother's Union has a system of diocese to diocese prayer links. Mutual sharing of resources and expertise has become a familiar feature of Companion Links and Mission Agency relationships. The faith-based Development Agencies such as Christian Aid also work closely with the Companion Links. The Anglican Alliance provides a network of support for relief and development. Over the last five years the major mission and development agencies have increased their capacity for working with the Companion Links.
7. Some parishes develop their own link relationships apart from the Diocesan Companion Link. Sharing learning and practice between parish and diocese as well as the Mission and Development agencies is important in building relationships of mutual sharing and accountability.

Hospitality Programme prior to the 2020 Lambeth Conference

8. The 2008 Lambeth Conference Hospitality Programme was the first where all Bishops and their spouses were invited to a British or Irish Diocese to experience the life of the church in the four nations. The Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church in Wales and the Church of Ireland welcomed their Companion Link partners together with Bishops who were not linked with a British or Irish diocese.
9. The Lambeth Conference 2008 Report concluded that the Hospitality Initiative offered opportunities for personal contact and relationship building prior to the conference in the context of giving and receiving hospitality that were transformative. The Hospitality Initiative also involved clergy and laity in their dioceses who would not otherwise have been involved. This made the experience of the Lambeth Conference real and accessible for a larger number of people. The Hospitality Initiative 2008 was also an opportunity to experience mission in different contexts and to learn from each other. Visiting Bishops and their spouses spent time experiencing church life, worshipping, meeting people and relaxing during their visit.
10. Dioceses are invited to participate in the 2020 Lambeth Conference by offering hospitality to Bishops and their spouses prior to their journeys to Canterbury. Further information will be distributed to Dioceses.
11. The Companion Links offer a model of cross-cultural engagement that can be adopted in many other contexts with international visitors. The experience that Dioceses have built, often over many years, in hosting international visitors means that there is a

bedrock of knowledge and capacity that can be offered to the 2020 Lambeth Conference.

Companion Links and Discipleship

12. The emphasis on discipleship and mission in the Renewal and Reform programme is vital to the growth of the church. The contribution of Companion Links and the Mission and Development Agencies to growth in discipleship for people at parish level is very significant but has not always been clearly recognised. A research project conducted on behalf of the World Mission and Anglican Communion Panel of the Archbishops' Council entitled *The Nature of Companion Link Relationships in the Anglican Communion*³ has shown that through encounter between Christians from different cultures faith is enlivened, friendships are built and vision for mission expands.
13. Data was gathered from three case studies featuring Companion Link relationships between the Dioceses of Bath and Wells and Zambia, Chelmsford and the five dioceses of Meru, Mbeere, Marsabit, Kirinyaga and Embu in Kenya and Liverpool and the Diocese of Virginia (USA). Visits were made to each of the partners. The same questions were asked in each context. These questions were 'What is your experience of the link?' and 'How would you like to see the link developing in the future?'
14. Support for the project came from the World Mission and Anglican Communion Panel of the Archbishops' Council. The International Gender Studies Centre at Oxford University provided academic support.
15. The main findings of the research were:
 - (i) There is a strong link between growth in discipleship for church communities and individuals and international encounters.
 - (ii) Two observable changes in perception can happen when positive international encounter occurs – the world shrinks, and perceptions of God expand. These can have transformative effects on prayer, worship, engagement with the Bible and Christian service.
 - (iii) While friendship is the dominant expression of Companion Link relationships they can imperceptibly move into becoming donor recipient relationships.
 - (iv) The cycle of gift giving – giving, receiving and returning – offers a way of understanding giving gifts as an alternative to donor-recipient relationships.

Further details of the methodology and findings from the research can be found in Annex A.

Conclusion

16. International relationships through the Diocesan Companion Links and other ways of linking such as parish links and partnerships with the Mission Agencies have much to contribute to the development of discipleship and mission in the Church of England. Friendship through sharing of ministries, parish links, gift-giving and many other ways

³ Report of a research project which was conducted by the Archbishops' Council World Mission Adviser from October 2014 to 2016. The full report is available at

creates the climate for mutual learning and development. An intentional focus is needed to hear the voices of the global church as the Church of England builds the faith of her people to grow in mission.

The Rt Revd Andrew Watson
on behalf of the World Mission and Anglican Communion Panel
January 2018

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Extracts from the Report of *The Nature of Companion Links*

1. How does cross-cultural encounter contribute to growth in discipleship? How have the links observed contributed to the development of discipleship? The research concludes that it is through the power of encounter with different cultures in shared faith in Christ and through mutual study and reflection on the Scriptures that discipleship grows.
2. In this research it has become clear that one of the most powerful ways the people interviewed encounter God is through other people and other cultures. The Companion Links provide opportunities for these encounters for church communities and individuals and show the importance of such encounters to spiritual growth. The question considered here is how Companion Links contribute to the process of shaping lives around the loving and challenging presence of Christ in our lives.

Examples from the case studies

3. Here are some examples of how link relationships have helped Christians in the three case studies to develop their faith and discipleship and their engagement in God's mission.

'A priest from Liverpool Diocese visited Virginia and experienced their social justice work. On returning he helped to set up support projects for asylum seekers and refugees. He said, 'the ideas for asylum and refugee work came out of the link with Virginia'. Encounter in a different culture helped him see his own situation in a different way.

4. Liverpool and Virginia Dioceses organised a youth pilgrimage in 2013. A group of young people travelled to each diocese and experienced life in cultures that have many similarities and many differences. One of the young people said,

'We have been helped to reach out on our local doorsteps because of the pilgrimage.'

5. A priest from Liverpool who took a sabbatical in Virginia heard church members talking about their faith. She had the idea to encourage 'church members to talk about their faith journey, joys and sorrows' in her own church.

6. In Chelmsford Diocese an important part of formation for curates is a visit to their link dioceses in Kenya. Curates who have taken part in these visits say that they have proved to be vital in how they develop their faith and the faith of others. Equally curates from the five dioceses of Mount Kenya East⁴ visit Chelmsford under the same exchange. One curate described how they,

'Hosted a priest with inflexible attitudes who was not willing to learn. It was difficult, but it made me think about what I really believed'.

7. This is an example of being challenged by the assumptions of another culture and how different people respond. In a conflicted situation it is possible to resist new insights or be open to new insights. In cross-cultural encounters there will be times when such

⁴ The former Diocese of Mount Kenya East is now the five Dioceses of Embu, Kirinyaga, Meru, Mbeere and Marsabit.

cultures conflict at the level of beliefs and cultural assumptions. Whatever our view of another culture humble listening among members of the Body of Christ is vital. This process of listening and learning has the potential to lead to development of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Another curate described how she had to cultivate the,

'Attitude of a learner and not to rush straight into doing.'

8. Creative possibilities are possible when Christians are open to learning from a different culture.
9. Equally curates from Kenya experienced challenges and gained new insights from church life in Chelmsford. Many talked about how they had learnt from the emphasis on mission in Chelmsford and how they needed to adopt the same approach in their parishes. One priest spoke about attending a Men's breakfast in a Chelmsford parish and how he took the idea back home and started a similar breakfast in Kenya. In a similar way leadership training is an area where a Kenyan diocese has learnt from Chelmsford.
10. The curates interviewed from Chelmsford agreed that their encounter with Kenya 'held up the mirror' to their normal life and revealed areas that needed to be changed. Experiencing church life in Kenya has resulted in gaining new insights.
11. People interviewed Bath and Wells Dioceses who are involved in parish links experience a similar expansion of vision.

'The link opens my eyes to the real world, to different ways of being church and receiving from African people. We can learn to respect the wisdom of older people which we don't here.'

'The link makes us aware that we are part of something bigger.'

'It helps us realise there is a world out there.'

12. Cross-cultural encounter expands vision and global awareness and acts against parochialism. This was also experienced in Liverpool Diocese in a different type of cross-cultural encounter in the North to North link with Virginia, USA.
13. Participants in parish links were interviewed in all three case studies. There was a remarkable unanimity in the connection between discipleship, cross-cultural encounter and mission in all three examples. The importance of personal connection through visits was emphasised throughout. At times a reluctance to make visits was expressed because the money could be used for projects. In some parishes there was a suspicion that this was a holiday or a 'jolly'. British culture is highly activist, and fundraising is part of that picture. Engaging in visits is a different style of exchanging hospitality and giving to the other. It leads to a deeper learning and cross-cultural encounter and therefore a deeper discipleship. As one participant said,

'Parish links don't really work without visits.'

14. The importance of parish links, as part of their Diocesan links, for growth in discipleship in Africa, England or the USA cannot be underestimated. They open a route for cross-cultural encounter at local level. They are complex particularly concerning

communication and the exchange of money. They are often difficult to establish and sustain. However, as one link parish leader from Kenya said,

'Through the link we receive messages that motivate us to do mission work better.'

15. The connection between mission and discipleship was very evident in the case study with Bath and Wells and Zambia. Whereas focusing on money can increase inequality so focus on discipleship builds equality. Big questions about how to follow Christ today and confront the challenges of discipleship in today's world can be faced as equal partners. This may mean focusing less on raising funds for projects and more on asking the same questions in both places. Questions such as:
 - What does it mean to follow Christ today?
 - How is the link equipping us to do mission and evangelism?
 - What and how can we learn from each other about being effective witnesses in the world today?
16. The Five Marks of Mission provide an important shared holistic tool for shaping a renewed and sustained emphasis on discipleship for links. This element has always been evident but there is a new opportunity for discipleship to be at the foreground of links in the many ways in which they are expressed. The Five Marks of Mission can act both as a benchmark and guide.

Findings

17. There is a direct connection evidenced in the interviews and meetings observed between encountering another culture and growth in discipleship and engagement in mission. How does this encounter work? What happens when we meet people from another culture or from the same culture but who are different in some way? When my world meets yours – what happens?
18. Observation in all the case studies shows that there is the potential for two movements to happen when cross-cultural encounter occurs and where there is genuine openness to other people and cultures. The first is that **the world shrinks**. A place becomes connected with a person or community. Initially differences are encountered but similarities then emerge which can be explored between vastly different cultures. This process involves each finding and recognising the others' humanity and recognising something of us all in the 'other' person. When this happens across cultures transformative encounter and growth in discipleship and mission occurs.
19. The second thing that happens is that perceptions of **God expand and grow**. As shared humanity and faith are discovered so perceptions of God change. As people realise how large and how small the world is so perceptions of God expand. God is understood as overall and holding all things together (Ephesians 1).
20. There are also examples where cross-cultural encounter is a negative experience. This happens when people from one culture are not open to another and not willing to learn. Cross-cultural encounter requires a genuine openness to difference and an ability to reflect on one's own situation in the light of such encounters.

21. In the search for mutuality and encounter between different cultures it is important to be asking the same questions in all places. It is very easy for people from Western cultures only to look at the need they encounter in Majority World cultures. It is also easy for people from Majority World cultures to see the material wealth of the West and to fail to see the real lives of the people who they meet. Asking the same questions of each other such as 'what are the joys and challenges of following Christ where you are?' changes the encounter.
22. Often the language of discipleship is not used as people talk initially about experiences with their companion links. In the case studies with African dioceses people from the West began describing their links by detailing fundraising and projects. However, underneath these narratives they talk about how they are changed through cross-cultural encounters.
23. It has also become apparent in this research that there is little significant difference in the impact of cross-cultural encounters on discipleship between North to North and North to South relationships. A majority of those interviewed individually and in focus groups used a similar language of 'seeing ourselves through others' eyes' or 'seeing ourselves in the mirror' when describing cross-cultural encounters.

Friendship

24. Show me your friend and I will show you your character. ~ African proverb
25. What sort of relationships are Companion Links? What approach to mission do they espouse? In all three of the case studies it was evident that friendship was the most frequently stated aim of the link and the dominant model of mission. Friendship was expressed through parish to parish links, clergy exchange visits, youth pilgrimage, Bishop to Bishop relationships and educational links as well as many others. There was evidence of mutual support during times of difficulty and continuing prayer support which was particularly significant in developing friendship.
26. Friendship is a wide and expansive concept that moves and shifts across different cultures. Across all the case studies friendship was understood theologically as being members of the Body of Christ crossing all cultural boundaries. Sharing a common identity in Christ is the foundation of the Link relationships expressed as interdependence and mutuality. The image of the Body of Christ celebrates distinctiveness and unity and is material and incarnate.
27. However, for all the strength of the image of the Body of Christ its influence and resilience declines when issues of money and accountability arise. In one of the case studies the English Diocese asking for an account for funds donated was seen by some in the partner diocese as a lack of trust. The impact on friendship was considerable and created a decline in levels of trust. However, giving gifts whether time or money are an important part of friendship. In the north to north case study there were other causes of tension, namely over where responsibility lies in diocesan structures for the Link and in understandings of mission. There are tensions in all the link relationships that need careful negotiation.

28. The practice of mutual accountability in friendship is an area which needs greater understanding and development in understanding best practice. Mutual accountability is a broad concept which brings together our equal status before Christ which is the foundation of all other accountability.
29. Awareness of power issues in relationships where resource differentials are significant need to be better understood in Companion Link relationships. In some cultures, friendship involves giving or loaning money. This is the case in many African and Asian cultures. In Western contexts friendship is less likely to involve loaning money or giving gifts of money.
30. It also became clear that friendship for some is a challenging concept that is about transformation and expanding horizons in God's mission. It involves self-sacrifice and moving beyond the comfort zone for the sake of the other. Self-fulfilment is not the goal of Christian friendship.
31. Companion Links are cross-cultural relationships. As such they have a character and complexity. Assumptions about the way friends live and understand their lives are very different and cannot be assumed. Expressions of friendship can be different in different cultures. Obligations as part of friendship can be complex to understand and negotiate for a guest or outsider where they are clear to people who know and live with them.
32. Cross-cultural friendships involve vulnerability with a willingness to be changed through the encounter. In this way discipleship can be developed. Cross-cultural relationships have the potential to challenge our deeply held and often uncritically absorbed beliefs about life, God, church and what is normative.
33. Friendship is best developed through visits. The giving and receiving of hospitality, eating and talking together and sharing different patterns of daily life are the way friendships are made and grown. It is a common pattern in the case studies for Western visitors to move quickly from one location to another. A different model of visit is to stay in one place for longer. Receiving hospitality in homes is also a growing practice. The home is a place of encounter and depth where the whole person can be revealed and known.
34. One of the case studies included a home stay in an African home as part of a visit to the link partner. While this caused some anxiety the home stay proved to be one of the most significant parts of the visit as African home life was not only observed but experienced. It is all too easy for visitors from the West to observe life in a very different context and yet for friendship to grow such life needs to move into first-hand experience. In our Companion Links do link partners merely observe the life of another or are partners actively experiencing the life of another? This is the deeper calling to many links today.

Companion Links and Finance

35. While friendship was the stated aim and purpose of the Companion Links a tension became apparent between priorities for friendship and for giving money. What can happen is loss of the original purpose of friendship and the donor relationship becomes dominant. From the mutual relationship of friendship, the relationship moves to the asymmetrical relationship of giver and receiver. One of the partners thereby draws power by having the means of financial aid and the other is left asking and receiving

but not sure what they are giving. Are friendship relationships incompatible with donation? It is not necessarily the case that funding is incompatible with friendship, but donations need to be understood as gifts within an ongoing relationship.

What is the nature of a gift across cultures?

36. Friendship is historically a framework for gift exchange of giving, receiving and returning. The relationships between English and African partners are asymmetrical relationships. While gifts of money pass from the English dioceses to the African partners it is rarely possible to return the gift in the same way. In one case study while there was great gratitude expressed by the African partner for financial gifts they were left wondering how they return the gift to the English Diocese. It takes time for the African partners to realise how much they give to Western partners in terms of prayer, hospitality and a shared sense of being together in the Body of Christ. However, these are intangible while the more visible gifts of money can dominate the relationship. English partners need to discern what will build their friendship relationship and not always think in terms of financial gifts.
37. A broad landscape of gifts needs to be identified which include visits, regular prayer, and exchange of ideas on social media as well as fundraising and financial donation. Gratitude needs to be understood by all partners to be part of the honour given to the giver which is also a gift given in friendship.
38. The gifts exchanged in the north to north link are shared ministry through official recognition of episcopal ministry, sabbaticals, Bishop to Bishop relationships together with shared insights, prayer, visits and particularly the youth pilgrimages to Liverpool and Virginia. History in the slave trade is shared and a common desire to work to eradicate modern day forms of slavery is part of that sharing. The challenges in the North to North link are being the church in advanced capitalist countries where value is calculated in monetary terms more than relationship.
39. Church of England partners need to be explicit about how they perceive gifts are returned by their African partners. Given that the dominant model in our world is the market economy partners need to be especially aware of articulating different ways of giving, receiving and returning gifts.
40. Accountability to each other is an important aspect of being the Body of Christ. All partners stand before God and are equally accountable to God. Our equal status therefore allows for trust to grow where difficult questions may be asked of each other in a spirit of mutual discipleship.

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List of Diocesan Companion Links

(known to Partnership for World Mission as at December 2017)

Bath and Wells

Lusaka, Central Zambia, Northern Zambia and Eastern Zambia, Luapula (Zambia)

Birmingham

Lake Malawi, Southern Malawi, North Malawi, Upper Shire

Blackburn

Bloemfontein Free State (Southern Africa), Braunschweig (Germany) (Evangelical Lutheran Landeskirche)

Bristol

Province of Uganda, Meissen (Bavaria)

Canterbury

Antananarivo, Antsiranana, Toamasina, Mahajanga (Madagascar), Arras (Normandy), Basel (Switzerland)

Carlisle

Zululand (Southern Africa), Northern Argentina (Southern Cone), Stavanger (Norway)

Chelmsford

Embu, Kirinyaga, Meru, Mbeere, Marsabit (Kenya), Trinidad and Tobago, Karlstad, Iasi (Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese)

Chester

Province of Melanesia, Aru Boga (Congo)

Chichester

Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Guinea, Liberia (West Africa), Nakuru, Nyahururu, Kericho (Kenya)

Coventry

Kaduna (Nigeria); Syrian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem

Derby

Church of North India

Durham

Lesotho (Southern Africa), Alba Iulia (Romania), North Elbia (Germany)

Ely

Vellore (Church of South India) (Ecumenical), Church of North Elbe

Europe (North West Europe Archdeaconry)

Luweero Diocese (Uganda)

Exeter

Cyprus and the Gulf Thika (Kenya), Bayeux, Lisieux

Gloucester

Karnataka Central, Dornakal (Church of South India), Vasteras (Sweden), Western Tanganyika (Tanzania), El Camino Real (USA)

Guildford

Nigeria, Viborg Diocese (Church of Denmark), Evry Diocese (France - RC)

Hereford

Masasi, Tanga, Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Mount Kilimanjaro (Tanzania), Kirchenkreis of Nürnberg (Germany)

Leeds

Southwestern Virginia, Northern Sudan, Erfurt (Germany), Colombo and Kurunagala (Sri Lanka), Mara (Tanzania), Faisalabad (Church of Pakistan), Adelaide

Leicester

Mount Kilimanjaro (Tanzania), Trichy-Tanjore (Church of South India), Wyoming (USA)

Lichfield

West Malaysia, Kuching, Sabah (Malaysia), Qu'Appelle (Canada), Mecklenberg (Germany), Matiosane, South Africa

Lincoln

Tirunelveli (Church of South India), RC Diocese of Brugge

Liverpool

Akure (Nigeria), Virginia (USA)

London

Lebombo and Niassa (Mozambique) and Angola

Manchester

Lahore (Church of Pakistan), Namibia (Southern Africa), Tampere (Porvoo)

Newcastle

Botswana (Southern Africa), More (Norway)

Norwich

Province of Papua New Guinea

Oxford

Kimberley and Kuruman (Southern Africa), Nandyal (Church of South India), Vaxjo (Sweden)

Peterborough

Bungoma (Kenya)

Portsmouth

Ghana, Stockholm (Porvoo)

Rochester

Estonia, Mpwapwa, Kondoa (Tanzania), Harare (Zimbabwe)

Saint Albans

Guyana, North East Caribbean and Aruba, Windward Islands (West Indies), Belize (informal)

Saint Edmundsbury & Ipswich
Kagera (Tanzania)

Salisbury
Episcopal Church of the Sudan, RC Diocese of Evreux (France), Latvia (Lutheran Church)

Sheffield

Argentina (Southern Cone), Hattingen-Witten (Germany)

Sodor & Man
North Mbale (Uganda), EKD Bochum

Southwark
Manicaland, Central Zimbabwe, Matabeleland, Masvingo (Zimbabwe)

Southwell and Nottingham
Natal (Southern Africa)

Truro
Strängnäs (Sweden)

Winchester
Province of Uganda, Meissen (Bavaria), Province of Myanmar, Provinces of Rwanda, Burundi and Republic of Congo, Florence

Worcester
Peru (Southern Cone), Protestant Church of Central Germany, Morogoro (Tanzania)

York
Cape Town (Southern Africa), Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium)