

The Nature and Extent of Companion Links in the Anglican Communion

A research project conducted by Janice Price between October 2014 and October 2016.

Report

1. Introduction

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

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 as a whole. 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

In the ensuing 53 years there has been a considerable growth in communication through 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 some up to three or more. There are also a considerable number of ecumenical links with Europe through the Porvoo and Meissen Agreements and with other parts of Europe. Indeed, after East Africa the greatest number of links are between Church of England dioceses and the various European churches.

*World-Shaped Mission*³ gave further direction to the development of Companion Links affirming the

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

² *Ibid* section 3

³ Price, Church House Publishing, 2012 and passed by General Synod in July 2012, page

‘Journey with partners in the global church in developing understandings of mutual giving and receiving that move beyond past patterns of dependency.’

Companion Links between the Church of England and partners in the Anglican Communion are alive, well and flourishing. They are not without their complexities and difficulties as would be expected with relationships across vastly different cultures. However, they are to be celebrated as a cause of rejoicing as an instrument in the hands of God for God’s mission in the world.

This research is an attempt to ask deeper questions about the nature of Companion Links in the Anglican Communion and to steer a future direction in the Church of England’s understanding of these links towards the goal of mutual responsibility and interdependence. Such research has not been conducted previously in the 53 years since Companion Links began to be established. Questions remain such as how far the Companion Links are part of the re-framing of understandings of relationships in the Anglican Communion away from dependence and colonialism or whether they are perpetuating such patterns of the past. Other questions about the nature and understandings of giving and receiving have arisen and in particular issues around money. How Companion Links are understood theologically have profound effects on practice. This research considers the theological presuppositions that underlie companion links and asks how these may need reframing and developing. The Church of England is currently taking a focused look at the nature of discipleship as part of the Renewal and Reform programme. This research asks questions about the contribution of global link relationships of various styles and particularly Diocesan Companion Links to developing discipleship in the Church of England today.

The initial research proposal envisaged a quantitative and a qualitative part. The qualitative part would consider the nature of Link relationships and the quantitative part the extent of Links relationships. In the event the quantitative study has not progressed at the same rate as the qualitative study. This is due to resource, personnel and technical IT issues. This report concerns the qualitative study of the overall project.

Many people have contributed to this research since October 2014 when it commenced. Most notable are:

Revd Canon Dr Malcolm Brown has organised funding for the project.

The three dioceses who agreed to be case studies – Bath and Wells and Zambia, Chelmsford and the Five Dioceses of Mount Kenya East and Liverpool and Virginia.

Dr. Janette Davies and the research community at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford IGS

Revd Canon John Kafwanka, Director of Mission at the Anglican Communion Office

All have contributed to this research and supported me through its process.

2. Methodology

(a) Research question

The research question is ‘**what is the nature and extent of Companion Links in the Anglican Communion.**’ Companion Links in the Anglican Communion have grown organically often having their origins in relationships between Bishops. Successive Lambeth Conferences have spurred a growth in new link relationships as Bishops have worshipped, discussed and learnt together in small groups. At no point has a systematic and focused enquiry taken place under research conditions into the nature of such relationships and their extent across the Anglican Communion. The research question concerns the type and style of relationships that Companion Links represent and the extent of their presence across the Anglican Communion. The research question was drafted to provide a ‘simple, answerable, important and interesting’⁴ focus for the research. This also helped in promoting the research proposal among key stakeholders.

(b) Method

A case study research method was adopted for the research.

The case study approach was adopted because it offered the opportunity for a concentrated and purposeful observation of different Companion Links which had clear boundaries with the three links involved. All Companion Link relationships have different character, emphases and approaches and it was impossible within resource constraints to study all. So a case study approach would give three different pictures at a particular moment in time which could then be used comparatively by others. It is also true that as researcher I was looking to observe relationships, similarities and differences and how these were expressed cross-culturally. To enable this close observation through participant observation methods was important.

Three Church of England dioceses and their partners agreed to take part in this research. They were the Diocese of Bath and Wells which has a link with the Anglican Church in Zambia; the Diocese of Chelmsford which has a link with the former Diocese of Mount Kenya East (now comprising the dioceses of Embu, Kirinyaga, Mbeere, Marsabit and Meru); the Diocese of Liverpool which is linked with the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, USA.

Initially the three link officers were approached with a view to taking part in the research. This was a beneficial situation for them as they would have an outside review of their link with the costs covered by the Church of England centrally. This proved attractive. These dioceses were chosen for the length of their links and for their different emphases. Chelmsford and Bath and Wells have been linked with their respective African partners since 1978. A non-north to south relationship was required to provide a comparison and an attempt to see how north to south and north to north links compared. Chelmsford also have a link with the Lutheran Church in Sweden and it was hoped at the outset to include this in the case study. However this did not prove to be possible due to the illness of the researcher when attendance at two meetings was missed.

⁴ Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, Swinton and Mowatt, SCM Press, page 67

By summer of 2015 all three case studies were in place. It was agreed that as researcher I would make a visit to the Companion Link diocese in Africa and the USA and spend time in observation with the dioceses in England.

Prior to the fieldwork a set of questions was devised for use in interviews. The questions were as follows:

To everyone:

- What is your current role?
- How are you involved in the Link? In former roles?
- What have been the joys and difficulties in the Link?
- What do you see as the similarities and differences between the churches in the link?
- What possibilities has the Link opened for you?
- What Bible verse or story describes the Link for you?
- Have you any ideas about what direction you would like to see for the Link in the future?

To people working at diocesan level

- How has the Link worked for you in your role?
- What do you see as the main current issues for the Link?
- What financial systems do you have in place and how are they working?

To people working at parish level

- What possibilities has the link opened for your parish?
- How has the link helped you to do mission and evangelism in your parish?
- Has the parish given or received gifts through the Link? If yes, please give examples.

In April/May 2015 I visited the Anglican Church of Zambia accompanying the Link Officer for the diocese of Bath and Wells. Visits were made to four out of the five dioceses and a delegation from the Eastern diocese was interviewed in Lusaka. Each of the dioceses arranged an open meeting for clergy and lay people to attend and contribute to the assessment of the link. The word 'research' was avoided given the possibility of negative connotations in Africa where it could easily suggest a test or examination. The meetings were very well attended. The highest number attending was in excess of 60 and the smallest number approximately 30. The majority of those attending were clergy and lay people involved in the link. Meetings were mostly conducted in English and translation was provided in 2 meetings. High attendances can be attributed to the involvement of the Bishops. In effect, when Bishops call clergy and lay people to meet then the response is positive often with participants travelling considerable distances to attend. This was the case with the meetings though the Bishop did not attend in all cases. In two dioceses the Bishop was unable to attend and the meeting was chaired by an Archdeacon and a Vicar-General, both senior figures in the Diocese. This process benefited from the authority given to it by the Bishops and ensured a

cross-section of people took part. In effect these were focus groups. In effect as researcher I was assessing the link for the dioceses involved and conducting research.

In the event the list of questions above proved to be cumbersome and caused a re-evaluation of what I was trying to do. The longer list of questions was more suited to an interview than a focus group. Two questions were identified as key to begin the discussions. These were:

‘What is your experience of the Link’ and

‘How would you like to see it develop in the future?’

The longer list of questions became a checklist for myself and in the course of meetings I would put a question if it wasn’t being covered.

Due to the size of the groups in Zambia participants were given the questions and split into smaller groups who then reported to the main group. The role of the researcher was to record responses and prompt questions.

Cross-cultural research

Given the difficulties of cross-cultural research the design attempted to balance the variables that commonly occur in this type of research. Given that this was a situation that introduced a female, white researcher from a country that once colonized Zambia the opportunities for these presuppositions to affect data collection was enormous.⁵ This was the benefit of using two open questions.

A case study approach concerns engaging and building data from a particular context. Therefore the role of the researcher is to listen to that context at a deep level. To this end a Zambian was invited to take part in the meetings in the role of co-researcher. This was intended to build confidence of the Zambian participants and to be influential in analysis. In the compilation of the report of the research in Zambia and Bath and Wells this proved to be the case in highlighting Western presuppositions that appeared in the analysis.

It was also the case that as researcher I was accompanied by the long-standing Bath and Wells Officer for the link who is highly regarded and trusted in Zambia. It was also important to have someone to check details such as names and perceptions and who has a deep knowledge of the church and country.

We were accompanied by the national Chief Executive of the Anglican Church in Zambia who contributed occasionally. This also built credibility with those attending the meeting.

It was also a principle of this research that the same questions would be asked in all of the case studies. The two questions above were used in all the case studies and this was explained to participants at the beginning of all meetings. I was asked to give a short explanation of my role at the beginning of meetings but after that I was the listener and it was my aim to speak as little as possible. The questions were open and broad and gave space for themes to emerge and develop.

⁵ Performing Cross-Cultural Qualitative Research, Liamputtong P., Cambridge University Press, 2010, page 86-107

In the event the meetings were lively and there was no difficulty in getting people to contribute and respond. Zambians, I found, were not hesitant in raising difficult issues in the link such as trust. Some strong feelings emerged in some of the focus groups particularly about levels of trust in the Link.

The gender balance of the groups was not equal with men outnumbering women by 5:1. The female contributors were mainly from the Mother's Union. This was not unexpected given the leadership profile of the Anglican Church in Zambia. Women are not ordained though congregations are largely female.

In Bath and Wells the context was very different but there was also potential for misunderstanding of what the research was designed to do. A feeling that emerged about the use of the word research was a concern that this was really a test. In introductions when explaining who I was I stressed that this was not a test but a way of building learning for the church at national level and for other dioceses who have Links. There was a feeling that this person was from 'Head Office'. Again I was accompanied by the Link Officer for Bath and Wells who was a trusted figure and permission for the research had been obtained from the Bishop.

The meetings in Bath and Wells Diocese in June and July 2015 took a different shape but were still based on the same two broad questions to begin discussion. I met with the Diocesan Bishop, Diocesan staff and a number of groups representing parishes that are linked with parishes in Bath and Wells. In my introductions to the meetings with parish groups and diocesan links I emphasised that I was asking the same questions in all places. Starting from this common basis rich conversations took place which revealed a depth of relationship as well as complexities and difficulties.

The field work with the Diocese of Chelmsford and the five dioceses of Mount Kenya East had much the same shape as with Bath and Wells and Zambia. It took place in January and February 2016 in Kenya and two days in July in Chelmsford. I travelled with the longstanding link officers for Chelmsford Diocese. The two questions were used and continued to open up key issues for the link. In Mount Kenya East the interviews were of a more varied style than in Zambia. I was given time with each of the Bishops and met a variety of other parish clergy and diocesan staff. In some cases it was difficult to put the two questions as there were other issues for discussion. I found myself putting together a picture of experience of the link and its future. There was clearly a danger here that I would read different things into the discussions. However, I was particular in looking for evidence for my conclusions in what I heard.

In Chelmsford the style of data collection was individual interview and focus group. The subject areas for the interviews and the focus groups were education and schools links, parish links and diocesan staff.

The field work for the Liverpool and Virginia link took place in Virginia at the end of April and beginning of May 2016 and in Liverpool in June 2016. The context for data gathering in Virginia was a Diocesan conference that included clergy and lay people and included visitors from Liverpool. The Bishop of Liverpool and the Link Officer were both part of the party from Liverpool. Again, I followed the pattern of visiting with established and trusted staff in order to build credibility as the researcher. Attending the Diocesan conference in Virginia

meant that I could get a bigger picture of the Diocese through meeting people over meals in an informal context. This meant that recording of comments was less detailed than I would have liked. As in previous field work I used the same two opening questions. I met a wide cross section of parish clergy and Diocesan staff who had experience of the Link. I also witnessed an important moment in the history of the link when one of the Bishops in Virginia was made Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Liverpool. This was a seminal moment and strengthened the link in Virginia and Liverpool.

The field work in Liverpool took the form of individual interviews and one focus group. The interviews were with parish clergy, an Archdeacon and other Diocesan staff. The focus group was with young people and leaders who participated in the first youth pilgrimage between Virginia and Liverpool.

How do I reflect on my role as researcher in these three contexts?

I moved between various aspects of being a participant observer. At times I was a participant in a conference, in worship, in delivering messages and enjoying being with people in their own context. At other times I was observing how the links worked and was expressed in formal and informal conversations. I was most clearly an observer in the Virginia Conference and in field work in the Church of England dioceses.

‘Because case study observations take place over an extended period of time, researchers can develop more intimate and informal relationships with those they are observing, generally in more natural environments than those in which experiments and surveys are conducted.’⁶

I was able to ‘develop more intimate and informal relationships’ being in contexts where I was part of a relatively unstructured and natural environment.

While these are the benefits of participant observation it was the case that it was difficult to maintain control over the environments for data collection. This was a particular issue in meetings in the three international contexts. I was heavily dependent on the Link Officers I accompanied and their understanding of what I was doing and their own need to develop relationships and do business that they needed to accomplish. The needs of the research were not often paramount though they were respected and seen as an essential part of developing the relationships. I would conclude that I sacrificed some control of the data collection process in order to gain credibility through proximity to the Link Officers and their trusted status.

Scriptural Reflections – The Canaanite Woman

Reflection on the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman has proved to be important to the researcher in the process of this research. In Matthew’s version the Canaanite woman shouts at Jesus asking for mercy. At first he refuses to answer her as he understood himself to be called first to the Israelites. Her further entreaties cause Jesus to reassert his position through the analogy of giving the children’s food to the dogs. The dialogue develops as the woman questions his interpretation of his mission and depicts the Gentiles eating the crumbs from the children’s table. This causes Jesus to recognise her faith and her daughter is healed.

⁶ Research Methods in Education, 5th edition, Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, Routledge Falmer, 2005, page 188

Jesus was clear about the borders of his mission but he is pressed to see beyond those borders to the faith of a Gentile woman. This has caused questions to arise for the researcher about the nature of our vision of mission today. Are the Companion Links being called into new ways of envisioning their mission and, if so, to what? Are we being called into a time where we have to

‘Examine and empty ourselves of a kind of certainty that does not allow new questions and insights about mission’⁷

This is not an abandoning of the certainty about the presence of God in the world but of what and how God’s people are seeing of God’s mission and how God calls us to re-shape and expand our vision. Are Dioceses and their links being called to examine their current ways of working and discover new ways of expressing their international relationships? This is the emphasis of this study.

Chapter 2

Discipleship

Discipleship has emerged as a significant narrative in the Church of England’s Renewal and Reform agenda. As the Church of England looks to reverse decline and to revitalise congregations to become further focussed on mission so discipleship has become a word denoting personal and congregational growth in faith. Given its prominence in this narrative it was appropriate to consider the data from this research in terms of discipleship. The main question is how cross-cultural encounter contributes to growth in discipleship. How have the three links observed contributed to the development of discipleship? A major conclusion of this research is that it is through the power of encounter with different cultures in shared faith in Christ that discipleship grows.

First it is necessary to consider what is meant by discipleship. The definition of discipleship drawn from this research is that,

‘Discipleship is the life journey we take as we shape our lives around the loving and challenging presence of Christ. Discipleship is about encounter and relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit through encounter with other people and cultures’.

In this research it has become clear that one of the most powerful ways the people interviewed encounter God is through other people and particularly other cultures. That is the way of encounter that Companion Links open for church communities and individuals and why it is important to engage with other people across different cultures. The question we are asking here is how Companion Links contribute to the process of shaping our lives around the loving and challenging presence of Christ in our lives.

⁷ James H Kroeger Ed., *The Gift of Mission*, Orbis, page 57

The Four Dimensions of Discipleship

There are many different approaches and descriptions of discipleship. The Four Dimensions of Discipleship has proved significant to this research because it is a relational model and it recognises the significance of holding together the relationships between God, the disciple and the wider world.

‘Discipleship has four dimensions - upward to God, inward to the self, outward to the world and sideways to the whole body of Christ.’⁸

All of these four dimensions are about encounter. Discipleship is multi-dimensional and each of these dimensions impacts on the other and it is in these four dimensions that encounter occurs. The four dimensions are not separate but are part of the same movement.

These four dimensions are summed up in the greatest and first commandment,

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Matthew 22:37-39

Upward to God

This movement concerns prayer and worship individually and collectively. It concerns how disciples connect with God and discover the life-enhancing and life-building day to day strength to live lives in faith.

Inward to the Self

This dimension concerns the right place of self-awareness. Disciples are called to love God, neighbour and self. Loving God and neighbour helps disciples to love themselves as they see themselves and others through the lens of the grace and love of God.

Outward to the world

This dimension of discipleship concerns how disciples put faith into action. Jesus tells his disciples that they cannot be his disciples unless they ‘sell all their possessions.’ This indicates that disciples have to be fully committed to following Jesus and not held back by possessions. It is also a way of saying turn your faith into action. Take what you have and use it in God’s service.

Sideways to the Body of Christ

This is seeing each other as friends in the Body of Christ. C S Lewis in his essay on friendship in *The Four Loves* says,

‘We picture lovers face to face but friends side by side; their eyes look ahead.’⁹

Disciples walk alongside their friends whether in local congregations and in the global church. In terms of the global church there is mutuality in seeing each other as friends in the

⁸ Fresh Expressions website www.freshexpressions.org.uk accessed 31.8.16

⁹ Lewis C S, *The Four Loves*, Fount 1979, page 63

Body of Christ, friends with God and friends with ourselves. In that friendship and mutuality we know that we can learn from each other despite material differences. It is that friendship in Christ that is far more important than financial donations or gifts.

All these four dimensions work together and all are necessary to growth in discipleship. Encountering God, ourselves and our neighbours leads to growth in all the other dimensions.

Examples from the case studies

Here are some examples of how link relationships have helped Christians in the three case studies to develop their faith and discipleship. It is possible to see the various dimensions outlined above.

‘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.

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.’

Again encounter with another culture has built confidence to see the home context in a different light and to engage with their locality in a new way. These new insights result in practical faith in action and help Christians to grow in their discipleship.

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.

The Bishop of Virginia describes how the link with Liverpool has helped them grow in the fruits of the Spirit. He said, ‘Liverpool has taught us by humility. Perspective brings humility. Links teach us that we need each other with neither imploding under ideology’.

Links are a visible sign of the Body of Christ at work in the world. The examples above show how they work on a practical level as well as developing spirituality and in helping Christians to speak about their faith. The four dimensions of discipleship work differently yet together in these examples.

In Chelmsford Diocese an important part of formation for curates is a visit to their links 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 East¹⁰ visit Chelmsford under the same exchange.

One curate described how they,

¹⁰ The former Diocese of Mount Kenya East is now the five Dioceses of Embu, Kirinyaga, Meru, Mbeere and Marsabit.

‘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’.

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 cultures conflict at the level of beliefs and cultural assumptions. There is the potential for listening and learning or resistance. Whatever our view of another culture our attitude in the Body of Christ needs to be one of humble listening. 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.’

Links open up people to God. They change our concepts of the norm by seeing faith expressed in different ways and in different contexts. This opens up creative possibilities which is a ‘shaking out of the norm’ as one person described the experience.

Another of the curates talked about a visit of a community from Melanesia and said that

‘Their prayerful presence slowed us down in the parish – it took us back to basics.’

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.

All of the curates from Chelmsford agreed that their encounter with Kenya ‘held up the mirror’ to their normal life and revealed areas that needed to be changed. Would they have seen with such clarity without the visit to Kenya? They may have done but they cite experiencing church in Kenya as key to their gaining new insights.

People interviewed from Chelmsford and 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.’

Cross-cultural encounter expands vision and global awareness and acts against parochialism. This was true in Liverpool Diocese in a different type of cross-cultural encounter in the North to North link with Virginia, USA. This expansion of vision draws Christians into the outward dimension of discipleship through the sideways to the Body of Christ dimension.

Participants in parish links were interviewed in all three case studies. There was a remarkable unanimity in the connection between discipleship and cross-cultural encounter 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. Making 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. Fundraising can be seen as arms length involvement. Visiting and sharing life and relationship is the way of a deeper calling, a deeper engagement with each other and with God. As one participant said,

‘Parish links don’t really work without visits.’

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 up a route for cross-cultural encounter at local level. They are fraught with complexities particularly concerning communication and many find it difficult to establish and sustain relationships. However, it is important to keep a vision of local level cross-cultural relationships. As one link parish leader from Kenya said,

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

The connection between mission and discipleship was very evident in the case study with Bath and Wells and Zambia. Whereas focusing on money increases 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?

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 it is expressed. The Five Marks of Mission can act both as a benchmark and guide.

Conclusion

There is a direct connection evidenced in the interviews and meetings observed between encountering another culture and growth in discipleship. 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?

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**. When encountering someone from another culture and there is genuine engagement places that previously existed on a map are personalised. A place becomes connected with a person or community. It is usually differences that are explored initially but then similarities are discovered and 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 encounter that has the potential for transformation and growth in discipleship occurs.

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).

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.

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 which may not be as prosperous as they seem. One African Bishop said,

'When people from the West come here our people see money not a person.'

Asking the same questions of each other such as 'what are the joys and challenges of following Christ where you are?' changes the encounter.

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.

It has also become apparent in this research that there is no 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. There were also references to 'realising that there is a world out there' and 'realising new things about the Christian faith.'

Relationships are the heart of discipleship. We grow in Christ through our relationships with others as much as through encounter with the Bible and worship. The Companion Links research has found that one of our greatest growth areas is relationships with people from another culture. Our first relationship is with God through Christ and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. It has appeared that engaging in relationships with people who are from different backgrounds and cultures has the potential to deepen and expand our knowledge of God, the world and ourselves – the four dimensions of discipleship.

Chapter 3

Friendship

Show me your friend and I will show you your character. ~ African proverb

Return to old watering holes for more than water; friends and dreams are there to meet you.
~ African proverb

This research asks the question ‘what is the nature of Companion Links?’ 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 espoused through the Companion Link. Friendship was expressed in a variety of ways. Parish to parish links were a major expression of friendship as were clergy exchange visits, youth pilgrimage, Bishop to Bishop relationships and schools links. There was evidence of mutual support during times of difficulty and continuing prayer support which was particularly significant in developing friendship.

Friendship is a wide and expansive concept that moves and shifts with different cultures. Therefore what types and styles of friendship were evident in the case studies? Across all three case studies friendship was understood theologically as being members of the Body of Christ crossing cultural boundaries. Sharing a common identity in Christ was expressed as the foundation of the Link relationships. The image of the Body of Christ enabled links to express interdependence and mutuality theologically. The Body of Christ was the theological motif that gave strength to cross-cultural friendships both to deepen and express relationships. It is a visceral image that all share. It is a working concept or image that celebrates distinctiveness and unity. The image of the body is material and incarnate.

However, for all the strength of the image of the Body of Christ its influence reduces as a leading image and motif when issues of money and accountability arise. In one of the case studies the English Diocese asking for an account for funds given was seen by some as a lack of trust and asking questions about use of funds was seen as a personal insult. The impact on friendship is considerable and created a decline in levels of trust. However, friendship involves giving gifts whether of time or money and gifts are an important part of friendships. In the north to north case study where the exchange of funds was not an issue there were other causes of tension, namely over where responsibility lies in diocesan structures for the Link and in understandings of mission.

The practice of mutual accountability in friendship is an area which needs greater understanding and a developing practice. Mutual accountability is a broader concept which brings together our equal status before Christ which is the foundation of all other accountability. Awareness of power issues in relationships where resource differentials are significant needs to be deepened on the part of all involved in Companion Link relationships. In some cultures friendship involves giving or loaning money. This is the case in many African and Asian cultures where the absence of statutory provision means people rely on

friendships and family when difficulties arise. In Western contexts friendship is less likely to involve loaning money or giving gifts of money.

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.

'Human relationships are the 'bridges of God' across which the Gospel travels.'¹¹ The purpose of Christian friendship is to be the 'bridges of God across which the Gospel travels.' The purpose of Christian friendship is to help each other to know God, love God and serve God in God's world. It is to be alongside each other in and through Christ. Understandings of friendship in the West can miss this element of friendship where finance and friendship are concepts that are separate whereas in the Majority World they are more closely aligned.

Companion Links are cross-cultural relationships. They have a particular 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 very simple to people who know and live with them. Difference is at the heart of cross-cultural friendship. Cross-cultural friendships involve vulnerability with a willingness to be changed. In this way discipleship is developed through friendships but particularly cross-cultural friendship. Cross-cultural relationships have the potential to challenge our deeply held and often uncritically absorbed beliefs about life, God, church and what is normative.

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 stay in hotels and to move quickly from one location to another. One way for friendship in links to grow is to stay longer in one place. This was the pattern adopted by the researcher in a visit to Nkhosakota, Malawi in September 2016. This involved staying in an African home and working in All Saints Cathedral with the Dean. The visit involved preaching and teaching and pastoral work over a two week period. The benefits of such a visit are the development of closer friendships through sharing in day to day life and being part of a community. This was found to be affirming to the local church and community in many ways. To be invited and welcomed into a home has closeness and intimacy that is like being invited into the intimacy of God the Holy Trinity. Home is a place of encounter and depth where the whole person can be revealed and known.

One of the case studies included a home stay in an African home as part of their curates visit to their 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

¹¹ McGavran D., *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*, World Dominion Press, New York, Friendship Press, 1955

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.

Finance and friendship – expressing mutuality or conflict of priorities

While friendship was the stated aim and purpose of the Companion Links a tension became apparent between priorities for friendship and for giving money from one partner to the other. While the espoused purpose of the Links is friendship the theory in use is that of financial donor. The key question is what happens when a link friendship relationship becomes a donor relationship. The result is that the original purpose is obscured and another purpose emerge, namely donor emerges often without recognising it as such. So the roles of the partners change. 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. The question of accountability arises quickly. One partner begins asking questions about how money has been used that can appear at best to be asking for information and at worst a personal insult which questions the judgement and trustworthiness of the receiving partner. This is where most links experience difficulty and where a way forward needs to be found.

Are friendship relationships incompatible with donation? It is not necessarily the case that funding is incompatible with friendship but donations need to be understood and managed as gifts. Gift exchange comes in a variety of ways. A further tension emerges with the language of gift as institutions are required to account for cross-cultural transactions legally. Does this conflict with the essence of a gift?

What is the nature of a gift and particularly across cultures?

Friendship has long been a framework for gift exchange. One of the main differences between a north to north relationship and a north to south relationship is not friendship but how friendship is expressed through gift giving and particularly in the area of finance.

In order to understand this more deeply it is necessary to look at the pattern of gift giving namely giving, receiving and returning. Throughout history gifts have symbolised differentials in power among givers and receivers. There are particular dynamics at play in the Companion Link relationships observed as part of this study. The relationships between English and African partners are a clear example of asymmetrical relationships. While gifts of money pass from the English dioceses to the African partners it is impossible to return in kind. This creates an asymmetrical relationship where the African partner desires to reciprocate but lacks the means. In one case study while there was great gratitude expressed for financial gifts they were left wondering how they give 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. 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. These are friendships in Christ and their priority is to build each other up in the

Body of Christ. Friendship relationships need to display a wide range of expressions to be true to themselves. 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. It seems that difference between the English and the African partners is liable to be highlighted and emphasised rather than similarities.

What are the gifts exchanged in the north to north link? 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. These are the common challenges and areas of shared ministry which are underlined by a common understanding of being part of the Body of Christ together.

Where do gifts exchanged as part of friendship relationships differ from commercial exchange? Western commercial exchange forms a very particular form of cultural exchange. With the elevation of the market there is a direct relationship between money paid and receipt of goods. Gift exchange, while still a common form of exchange, reflects a pattern of personal relationship that is distinct from commodity exchange. When gifts are given and received there may be a time delay until reciprocation or return occurs. This is not subject to contracts though it is likely that there is an understanding of obligation for return. However this will be understood personally and discretely. There are examples in the three case studies of situations where a gift has been offered but the release of the funds will be made on receipt of a strategic plan for the spending of funds. The strategic plan is not forthcoming and so the gift remains unmade. This appears to the Western partner as a lack of gratitude that can lead to resentment. To the African partner this may seem like a demand too far or an unnecessary condition on the giving of a gift.

What kinds of relationships are created, sustained and reproduced by what sort of gifts? Gifts carry an expectation of return. Reciprocity is expressed in many different forms. It can take the form of a financial gift which is returned in proportion to the gift previously given. Or reciprocity can take the form of hospitality received by the original donor. Another form of reciprocity is honour. The donor is honoured in a particular way through public recognition of their gift. Companion Link relationships contain all these forms of reciprocity but they are not always recognised as such. While the Church of England partner may give a financial gift it does not need to be returned in that same form. The gift of prayer and gratitude are ways of returning gifts. However, there has to be a return of a gift in order for dignity to be retained by all parties in the friendship. This understanding of the return of the gift is essential for the development of Companion Link relationships. This issue was articulated by the African partners in the two case studies with comments such as,

‘We don’t know what we give to our partner in the Church of England. They give us money which is very welcome but we don’t know what we give.’

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. In the north to north case study there is much giving, receiving and returning which is expressed through non-financial means. Shared ministry is a particular way in which the giving, receiving and returning dynamic is expressed in the Liverpool and Virginia partnership. However, at times it has been unclear how and where reciprocity happens in the north to north relationships..

Transparency and accountability are key elements of Companion Link relationships and this is a further expression of the returning of a gift. Being accountable is a key part of being part of the Body of Christ. All partners stand before God and are equally accountable to God. Therefore accountability is part of our mutual accountability before 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.

This researcher observed a spectrum of expressions of Companion Link relationships through a mixed pattern of friendship and support for projects and infrastructure. A number of dioceses are reflecting on their approaches to their links through review processes.

Is a charitable donation a gift? First a charitable donation is voluntary and is not a payment for services or goods. It is motivated by desire for the good of others in many and varied forms. It is both interested since that is what motivates the action of giving but is also disinterested since if it is mediated through the work of an agency then ownership of it becomes remote. However, there is a trend where donors have become more interested and invested in the channels that they use for giving. Donor scrutiny of charities has become more direct and interested following public stories of how gifts are used. Fundraising methods too are scrutinised much more directly. Gifts can be voluntary and obliged, disinterested and interested.

Conclusion

While friendship is the dominant description of Companion Links it lacks resilience when alongside the financial donor model of linking. This research offers a way forward through the understanding of financial donation in terms of gift exchange. Companion Links need to develop deeper expressions of the many forms of gift exchange and express these to each other more clearly where disparity of resources exists. In north to north links while asymmetric relationships do not exist to the same degree clarity about different understandings of mission needs to be addressed and understood.

Styles of Companion Links Questionnaire

Introduction

All Companion Links have their own style and emphasis. Some focus on friendship and others focus on project support and fundraising. Most are a mix of these different styles. This questionnaire is designed to help parishes who have links with other parishes to understand their approaches, styles and preferences in their link. This process of reflection can lead to a deeper understanding of links – why we have them and what they can do. An emphasis on fund-raising, for example, may develop into a greater understanding and practice of friendship.

This questionnaire is a tool for greater understanding of links that is part of the learning from the research project described above.

Using the Questionnaire

Tick the questions that best represent your current approach to your parish link.

It is possible to complete the questionnaire as a group or as individuals. The questionnaire is designed to help links discuss what they believe and what they do in their links.

When you have completed the questionnaire circle the numbers of the questions you ticked. Add up your scores for each category.

Then assess where your preferences lie and discuss where you might consider developing your link. There are no right or wrong answers. This questionnaire is designed to reflect your current priorities and help you in making priorities in the future.

1. Our main activity is fundraising for our link parish
2. We've been doing a Bible Study on Whatsapp with our link parish
3. We regularly pray for our link parish
4. We are planning our first visit to our link parish.
5. We always send money to our link parish through the diocese
6. Visits are the main way we express our link.
7. We are glad of the help of the mission agencies when preparing for visits to our link parish
8. Our main aim in visits is to see the projects we have given money for.
9. Communication is a problem in our link.
10. We like to send letters to our link parish but we never get a reply.
11. The focus of our link is discipleship.
12. We're not likely to visit our link parish.
13. We don't send money to our link parish but we pray for them every Sunday.
14. We learn lots from our link parish through social media like Facebook and Whatsapp.
15. Our vicar is fully involved in our link committee
16. We were delighted to host a visitor from our link parish.
17. Our main aim when we visit our link parish is to share in the life of local communities and churches.
18. It's difficult to recruit new people to our link committee.
19. We believe our link helps us in our local mission here at home.

20. Our link is important to us because we are reminded that the world is bigger than ourselves.
21. We are inspired in our link by St. Paul's image of the body of Christ.
22. Being involved in our link is a way of sharing what we have for those who have less.
23. So many were inspired and encouraged in their faith when we hosted people from our link parish.
24. Unfortunately little happens in our parish link.
25. We are in touch with the mission agencies who work in our link parish.
26. Friendship in Christ is the main reason for maintaining our link.
27. When we try to organise visits to our link parish people in the congregation say that we should send the money to help them instead of visiting.
28. The Good Samaritan is the Bible passage that expresses what we are doing in our link.
29. People in our congregation are reluctant to give to our link parish and say 'charity begins at home.'
30. At important times in the life of our parish we know that our link parish are praying for us.
31. It's very difficult when we send money to our link parish and we don't hear how the money is spent.
32. We've decided to focus our link relationship on prayer and friendship because of difficulties we have had with sending money.
33. It's very frustrating when we ask for prayer requests from our link parish and they don't send any.
34. How can we pray meaningfully for each other when we don't hear anything from our link parish?
35. We are glad of the support of the diocese in our link relationship.

36. We need help to use social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp in our link.
37. The clergy are very good at communicating with each other in our link but the congregation never hear any news from our link parish.
38. Our link parish don't seem to understand that we need to know how the money we send is spent in order to keep within the law.
39. We are all accountable before God. That is the best way to understand our accountability to each other.
40. We are all one in Christ. This best expresses our togetherness as Christians despite all the inequalities in our world.
41. The main thing we want from our Link Parish is friendship, not money.
42. We can't reciprocate through giving money to our link parish but we will make them very welcome when they come to visit.
43. We need to say more clearly what we value about each other and what gifts we give and receive through the Link.
44. God's love to us is a gift and we share that gift through our Link.
45. We need help in understanding how our different cultures understand gift giving.

Now go to the next page to consider your scores.

Scoring

Circle the numbers of the questions you have ticked in the questionnaire above.

Friendship

3 4 6 13 16 17 23 30 41

Project Support

1 5 8 12 22 31 32 38 42

Communication

2 9 10 14 33 34 36 37 43

Theology

11 19 20 21 26 28 39 40 44

Support

7 15 18 24 25 27 29 35 45

Total your score for each category (1 point for each number circled).

Look at your scores. Consider where your link is strong where it has the higher scores.

Consider the lower scores. How do these reflect your current priorities? Where do you think you might need to develop your understanding of link relationships?

Think through what your priorities are for your link. Where would you like to develop in future? Ask your link parish to complete this questionnaire and see how their scores compare with yours.

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