

“Voices from Africa” Background note from the Board of Mission

Introduction

- 1 In an introductory book for those attending the World Council of Churches Assembly held in Harare in 1998, Rt. Rev Sebastian Bakare, Bishop of Manicaland, Zimbabwe, suggested that Africa is “a continent which is largely - and perhaps for too many people exclusively - known as a place of hunger, disease, poverty, exploitation, political instability and misery.” However, he was quick to assert that Africa is also “a region ... where Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth - an exciting, though also challenging reality.”

- 2 It is the challenge of this reality - a vibrant life within such a difficult context - that this debate will seek to address. What is it about the churches in Africa that, in many places, offer models of growth despite the marginalised situation they find themselves in ? If we can tease out the answers to this question we might be able to learn from our African sisters and brothers about our own missiological calling.

The Voices

- 3 The seed for some kind of report on the life of the African churches was sown in conversations between Lambeth Palace, the International Department of the BSR and

Partnership for World Mission prior to the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Nigeria in February 2001. The original idea was to commission a number of essays from 'Africa experts' within the Church of England. However, in the early stages of this discussion one of the mission agency Africa regional staff rightly pointed out that a report on the life of the Church of England written entirely by Africans would not be considered as, in any way, authoritative.

- 4 In the light of this stinging criticism the material in *Voices from Africa* came about by commissioning and collecting a range of writings that, together, would bring together a variety of *voices* speaking to us from the churches in Africa. The partial and inadequate nature of the *voices* in the anthology is addressed in the introduction to the publication and they do not claim to offer a total picture. Nevertheless, the range of speakers and the scope of the subjects covered does offer wide ranging insights into the ministry and mission of the churches in Africa.
- 5 Many of the *voices* are those of people unknown in this country; some, for a number of reasons, are unnamed; but all are authentic. They speak out of very specific, local circumstances and from a pan-African and global dimension. Together, they offer a challenging lens through which we, the listeners, can look at our own situation.

Voices from Africa

- 6 The anthology's tone is set by the "Drumbeat of Life", an extract that takes us to the heart of African spirituality. It also highlights the first challenge we in Britain encounter - to hear 'inner feelings' through written communication.

There follow four pieces from national leaders offering a vision for the missiological task of the churches in Africa. This vision is then firmly grounded in the reality that is the lot of millions within the continent - marginalisation. Poverty, displacement, gender, the lot of children and those suffering with HIV/AIDS all temper this vision but, in so doing, recast it powerfully within a variety of concrete contexts. The final two main sections go on to address the two specific challenges of Christian-Muslim relations, especially in those areas of the continent where to be Christian is to be marginalised; and of the challenge of theologically educating the church within a marginalised continent.

- 7 The final piece in the anthology is an attempt at bridge-building between Africa and Britain. Do we marginalise these voices as they are simply not relevant to our situation or do we accept the challenge to listen and learn ? The Bishop of Birmingham, Rt. Rev John Sentamu, begins to construct the bridge that we are being challenged to use in order that the *voices* can speak into our situation.

- 8 In 1993 General Synod debated the report *Rejoicing amidst suffering - the Anglican Communion in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Church of England* [GS1043]. In that report, right at the end, is a short section entitled 'The Principle of Reciprocity'. It quotes the Rt. Rev Tilewa Johnson, the Bishop of Gambia, "one thing has puzzled me in our relationship: you have not been able to tell us how we could help you." The report goes on to say

"he (the Bishop) was picking up the ACC principle that 'mission involves a process of giving and receiving among equal partners in

which all have gifts to offer and all have needs to be met'. Christians of the Church of England need to discover how to receive from the Christians of Africa and identify ways in which our partners in Africa can help us in our needs in this country". (section 93 & 94)

- 9 So, this debate is not, primarily, about Africa although we will be helped by those who understand this continent from having visited and worked there. However, the main thrust of the debate is about how we, the listeners, respond to the *voices* we hear.

- 10 As you read *Voices from Africa* the following questions might be a help in attuning your ears to the *voices* you hear:
 - Is there anything in our contemporary British experience of mission that makes this an important time to listen to the African Church?
 - We have heard many things over many years from the African Church. What might be the difference between such listening, and "hearkening" today to the deepest concerns of our African brothers and sisters?
 - What have our dioceses and churches already received from Africa? What are the stories that give expression to these experiences?
 - What can we do to prepare ourselves to listen more effectively?
 - What practical steps can we take to enhance our relationship with the African Church and give our mutual commitment greater integrity and authenticity?

- How do these *voices* stimulate our own thought and action on mission and evangelism in our context?

Background to the following resolution

- 11 The Church of England has two primary channels through which this relationship of mutual receiving and giving is facilitated. The first is through the work of the PWM Mission Agencies and the nature of their work is outlined in Appendix B. The expertise, insights and experience, over many years, of these Agencies has much to offer the Church of England in its life and witness *in* England.
- 12 The second is through the formal Companion Links that each diocese has with provinces, dioceses and churches outside England (see Appendix C). These links that started in the early '60's but which have mushroomed in the last 25 years make an important and significant contribution to the life of dioceses. They have matured over time and those involved are anxious to ensure that they are conducted on the basis of the good practice that has been distilled over time. *Living Links* - the Church of England Guidelines for Companion Links - offers help in ensuring that links continue to strive for sustainable, mutually supportive and enriching companionships. Those responsible for these links also meet for 24 hours each year to reflect on all these links are and can be.
- 13 The following resolution in this debate gives thanks for what we already receive from the churches in Africa; reaffirming our commitment to working with the Mission Agencies whose expertise and experience is so vital in helping us to understand our place within the World

Church; and finally to acknowledge our need to improve our ability to receive from our partner churches and for the examples of good practice that can enable this.

+James Liverpool
Chairman, Board of Mission.

January 2003

Appendix A - Map of the Anglican Provinces in Africa

Appendix B - PWM Mission Agencies working in Africa

1. Traditionally the world mission agencies have been major agents of the Church of England's involvement overseas - a role affirmed by the General Synod in a debate on Africa in 1994. Today almost two-thirds of their overseas grant expenditure and two-thirds of the mission personnel they send overseas are sent to sub-Saharan Africa.
2. The main thrust of all the agencies in their relations with the churches in Africa is to strengthen the churches in those areas of their life, witness and service that have been identified by the churches themselves as priorities. People are sent and grants provided at the request of diocesan bishops in support of the churches' programmes in such areas as evangelism, pastoral work, community development, theological education, medical and AIDS related work, educational, administrative and diocesan support services.
3. A second and growing thrust is the support of the global missionary vocation of African churches by helping to facilitate a long term African contribution to the missionary outreach of church in England. For example:
 - Cyprian and Jane Yobera, a Kenyan couple, working with the Eden Project - a youth outreach programme - in Manchester. They are specifically involved in the cross-cultural elements of this mission venture which seeks to use contemporary music and relational evangelism in sharing the gospel

with young people who are culturally estranged from the church. [CMS]

- Sponsorship of visits by two African bishops to parts of Britain and Ireland where they met bishops, other clergy and congregations discussing a range of issues such as church planting. [Crosslinks]
- The London based Nigerian Chaplain and his wife (Ben and Kemi Enwuchola) have the mission and pastoral role in building bridges between Nigerian Christians and local congregations and encouraging the leaders of Nigerian churches in England. [CMS]

Areas of involvement

4. The general mission agencies have traditionally related to specific countries and provinces. USPG has its strongest connections with the Provinces of Southern Africa and Central Africa. CMS's partnership is primarily with the Provinces of Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Nigeria. It also works with the Diocese of Egypt, Tunisia, Chad and Ethiopia. Both Societies relate to the Provinces of Tanzania, West Africa, Southern Africa, the Indian Ocean and recently had joint work in Eritrea.
5. Crosslinks has strong connections with evangelical dioceses in Tanzania and Kenya and Karamoja in Uganda, and increasingly with non-evangelical dioceses in Tanzania and the Provinces of Southern and Central Africa. They also work in Ethiopia.

6. The Mothers' Union (MU) has strong connections with all the provinces of sub-Saharan Africa. Although initially perceived as working with women, MU has an increasing involvement with families, family relationships and the Churches' support for them.
7. Among the agencies with a special remit, SPCK, the Church's oldest missionary society, provides extensive grants for literature work, libraries and development of materials for theological education. The Mission to Seafarers carries out its distinctive ministry in over a dozen of Africa's major ports. The Church Army in East Africa is an autonomous member body of the Church Army world-wide. It has almost 400 Officers working in Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan. The Church Army Training College in Nairobi, whose Principal is a Crosslinks Mission Partner, trains people from all these countries. SOMA sends short-term renewal teams to different parts of Africa. The Overseas Bishops' Fund provides grants to a number of African bishops.
8. In addition to the world mission agencies there is the loyal support of diocesan associations often made up of Christians who have worked in the dioceses concerned and who have returned to England.

Principles of the work

9. Three ideals undergird the work of the world mission agencies:

- i) to assist the Churches in Africa in their life, witness, service and work for justice in ways that they themselves have determined;
- ii) to enable the experience gained and lessons being learned in the new Churches of Africa to be shared with Christians in England;
- iii) to remove the stereotype of Africans purely as receivers of aid and paternalistic help and to encourage a vision of Africans as people with gifts and experience to offer to enrich other Churches.

Appendix C - Diocesan Companion Links with churches in Africa

As this paper provides the background to a debate arising out of *Voices from Africa* the list below only contains the Diocesan Companion Links with Africa. However, what is said about the mutuality of receiving and giving applies to all the 180+ Anglican Communion and ecumenical links that dioceses have. A full list of these links together with other material about this aspect of the church's life can be found on the PWM web-site at www.pwm-web.org.uk

Bath and Wells

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

Birmingham

Lake Malawi, Southern

	Malawi, North Malawi
Blackburn	Bloemfontein (Southern Africa)
Bradford	Khartoum, Kadugli, El Obeid, Port Sudan (Northern Sudan)
Bristol	Province of Uganda
Carlisle	Zululand (Southern Africa)
Chelmsford	Embu, Kirinyaga, Meru, Mbeere (Kenya)
Chichester	*IDWAL – Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Guinea (West Africa)
Coventry	Kaduna (Nigeria)
Durham	Lesotho (Southern Africa)
Europe (North West Europe Archdeaconry)	Luweero Diocese (Uganda)
Guildford	*IDWAL – Nigeria
Hereford	Masasi, Tanga, Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Mount Kilimanjaro (Tanzania)
Leicester	Mount Kilimanjaro (Tanzania)

Liverpool	Akure (Nigeria)
London	Lebombo and Niassa (Mozambique) and Angola
Manchester	Namibia (Southern Africa)
Newcastle	Botswana (Central Africa)
Oxford	Kimberley and Kuruman (Southern Africa)
Peterborough	Bungoma (Kenya)
Portsmouth	*IDWAL – Ghana, Nigeria
St Edmundsbury and Ipswich	Kagera (Tanzania)
Salisbury	Episcopal Church of the Sudan
Sodor and Man	North Mbale (Uganda)
Southwark	Manicaland, Central Zimbabwe, Matabeleland, Masvingo (Zimbabwe)
Southwell	Natal (Southern Africa)
Wakefield	Mara (Tanzania)
Winchester	Provinces of Uganda; Rwanda; Burundi; and The

Democratic Republic of
Congo

York

Cape Town (Southern Africa)

*IDWAL – Inter-Diocesan West Africa Link

Chichester	West Africa
Guildford	Nigeria
Portsmouth	West Africa