

REVIEW OF THE BIRMINGHAM MALAWI LINK AND RESPONSES TO IT

A. Summary of the Report by Canon Janice Price, Independent Reviewer, April 2014

1. 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.' I Corinthians 12:26. For nearly 50 years the Partnership has expressed what Paul describes. Janice expresses thanks to the bishops in Malawi and Birmingham and to others who have helped in the review's production.

2. The agreed Terms of Reference were:

"The purpose of the Review is:

- To help both parties look towards the 50 years celebration of the Partnership in 2016
- To celebrate what has been achieved in the last 50 years of the Partnership
- To consider the current characteristics and activities of the Partnership
- To make recommendations as to the Partnership's future purpose and shape

The overarching question to be considered in the Review is how the Partnership can be a relationship that is mutually beneficial and equip each partner for their common participation in God's mission in the world."

The preparation of the Review included fact-finding visits to the four dioceses in Malawi in January 2014 and to Birmingham in February 2014.

3. The theological and Biblical roots of the Partnership include the key concepts of 'one body, many members, in Christ' [1 Cor. 12] and Christ's love commandment. The depth of commitment to the partnership is evident from statements from bishops in Birmingham and Malawi. Bishop David has said: 'Living in partnership with the Anglican Church in Malawi is a vital part of mission here in Birmingham'.

4. Alongside the Malawi Review a task group has been at work to review Birmingham's engagement with the world church at every level. The group has produced ten reasons why engaging with world mission is important for the C of E in Birmingham. These include gratitude, generosity, bringing a healthy broader perspective, obedience to the Great Commission, participation in what the Spirit is doing, and its transformative effect. World Church engagement also forms and informs those doing cross-cultural relations in Birmingham.

5. Two characteristics of world mission today are that the church is both global and local, and that all mission is cross-cultural. The review highlights three cross-cultural issues that can only be addressed together: climate justice, inter-religious living and gender-based violence.

6. The mutuality of the partnership is shown in the varied ways in which each side supports the other. The Malawian Church offers hospitality and the challenge of seeing – or hearing and learning about – living with faith and trust amidst challenges. The Birmingham Church gives grant support to dioceses running at £10,000 each in 2014, and supports hospitals, schools and other projects; runs the Skillshare programme that takes Birmingham teachers to Malawi to train interactively with Malawians; and sends annual containers of gifts. Group and individual visits take place in each direction.

7. The key issues identified include the strain on the inherited form of financial support arising from the increase of one Malawian diocese to four, and potentially five dioceses.

"Essentially self-sustainability means the re-balancing of means from a primary reliance on outside funders to a primary reliance on internal giving to sustain ministry and mission." Self-sustainability can also be seen as the capacity of a church to give to others from its own resources; and the capacity to endure. The journey to self-sustainability includes realising the gifts God has given to the Malawian Church and the development of a mixed approach that includes both small scale income generating

activities and teaching on stewardship at parish level. The movement towards self-sustainability needs to be an aim publicly acknowledged and shared by all partners. A self-sustaining church needs to develop flexible and entrepreneurial leadership.

8. Recommendations

1. In the time leading up to the 50th anniversary of the partnership the Bishops in Birmingham and Malawi discern together whether God is calling them to engage in the journey towards self-sustainability. As part of this process of discernment the dioceses in the partnership be called to prayer for the partnership and for God's mission in Malawi and Birmingham.
2. If this is discerned to be the way ahead, working with the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa as well as other Anglican mission agencies, Bishops in both dioceses embark on an exposure visit to a part of Africa where the Church and Community Mobilising Process (CCMP) has been implemented with a view to implementation in Malawi.
3. A small number of parishes in Malawi and their parish links in Birmingham pilot a local CCMP process.

B. Malawi Review: Response from the Bishops of Birmingham and Aston, August 2014

"We were delighted to receive the Review of the Link between the Diocese of Birmingham and the Malawian Anglican Church. This is the fruit of much observation and listening to the partners in the Link in Birmingham and in Malawi and of broad experience of developments in the wider Anglican Communion.

"We are pleased that the Review details the strengths of the Partnership and the blessings it has brought to both Malawi and Birmingham. We welcome the Review's stress on mutuality and sustainability, both that of the Malawian Church and of its budget support from Birmingham.

"The Partnership is in good heart as it approaches its 50th anniversary and we reaffirm Birmingham's commitment to it. We believe that patterns of external support for the Malawian Anglican Church need to evolve to best support God's mission through that Church as it continues to grow to maturity.

"Our hope and prayer is that the Review will serve as the basis for ongoing discussions between Birmingham and Malawi over the next year or two. We are grateful for the reflections received from one bishop in his individual capacity on behalf of his own diocese, and would welcome other such responses. We look forward to a joint response from the bishops in ACM shortly."

C. Responses from Malawi, June and November 2014

These have included thoughtful and detailed comments from one Bishop and a 'draft response' from ACM. Both papers are cautious about the Review's conclusions and to some extent critical of them. Both discuss the key concept of self-sustainability, but point out the difficulty of reaching it.

The 'draft response' stresses that the Malawian Church is a growing Church but still needs help. It endorses the concept of self-sustainability, but asks for more financial support from Birmingham to develop projects for income generation and for training of clinical officers for health facilities.

The Bishop welcomes +David's strong endorsement of the Partnership quoted in the Review. He also asks about Birmingham's World Church Task Group and seeks reassurances about the future status of the Malawi Link. He agrees with the priority of the three cross-cultural issues identified in S.5 above and discusses their significance for Malawi. He also shares his sense that awareness of and support for the Link in Birmingham was more widely based in the past than currently.

Discussion of the Review is ongoing.