

Inter-Diocesan West Africa Link

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Background

Our diocese has many links throughout the world, but our oldest and strongest links are with the Anglican Provinces of West Africa and Nigeria. IDWAL (formed in 1978) is the umbrella organisation under which links of friendship and partnership are sustained between Anglican Christians in West Africa and the adjacent English Dioceses of Chichester, Guildford and Portsmouth.

Since 1998, Portsmouth's links have been primarily with Ghana; the parish of Alverstoke maintains a longstanding partnership with the Diocese of Wusasa in Nigeria.

The purpose of our partnerships is for mutual encouragement and support in Christian faith and mission. Links are maintained by email, 'phone, text, and other social media, by letter, through prayer, and particularly by personal visits, which make links come alive. Some 40 parishes and schools in our diocese have effective links.

The Last Decade

Hundreds of worshippers from the Diocese of Portsmouth have been inspired by visits to churches, villages, schools and communities in Ghana and Nigeria. Money has been raised for community projects such as the 'Hayling Bridge' in Asasewa (Koforidua Diocese), wells and toilets in Dominase (Dunkwa Diocese), a school at Wenchi (Sunyani Diocese) and a nursery at Essikadu (Sekondi-Takoradi Diocese). Our Cathedral co-ordinated an appeal for Flood Relief in Tamale Diocese in 2007, and gives ongoing assistance to schools in Sunyani. In January 2010, much of the stock from our Diocesan Library was 'exported' to Ghana by sea container. A further gift of books and other material for schools (72 boxes in all) was shipped in January 2011.

The Bishop's Lent Appeal has given regular support to projects which will benefit the Anglican Church in Ghana as a whole. In 2003 the Appeal helped to complete a new building (library, seminar rooms, offices) at St. Nicholas Anglican Seminary, Cape Coast, which trains men and women to serve as priests in Ghana and in other parts of West Africa. In 2007, the Appeal supported the proposed Anglican University College, a Church-sponsored institution of higher education which will specialise in science and technology. The 2008 Appeal purchased a minibus for St. Nicholas Seminary. The Diocesan IDWAL Committee gave the Seminary an annual grant of £2000 for the years 2008-2010. Bishop Christopher generously donated the

collection received at the Installation Service on 18 September 2010 (£3,500) to St. Nicholas Seminary to assist in the building of a new accommodation block for students.

Part of the income from the 2009 Lent Appeal (£10,000) was given to extend the infrastructure for the new Spirituality and Retreat Centre at Nkawie (Kumasi Diocese). The newly-appointed Warden of the Centre, Father Daniel Pieh, visited the UK from May-September 2009 on a training programme organised and sponsored by this diocese. Half of the income (£6500) from the 2010 Bishop's Lent Appeal was also given to the Nkawie Retreat Centre, to help with the provision of essential services (water, electricity) and road access. Father Pieh, with wife and baby, moved on site in March 2011. A further grant of £1000 for infrastructure was made by the Diocesan IDWAL Committee in July 2012.

Bishop Christopher's First Visit

Bishop Christopher made his first visit to Ghana as our Bishop in October 2011. He travelled in a group of four, including his wife, the Revd. Sally Davenport (Holy Trinity, Fareham), Terry Louden (our IDWAL chairman) and his wife Alison.

The group spent the first weekend in Ho Diocese and worshipped at St. Paul's, Agbozume, near the Togo border, and St. George's, Cathedral, Ho.

The next stop was in Kumasi. The Spirituality and Retreat Centre, supported by Bishop's Lent Appeals in 2009 and 2010, was dedicated and commissioned, with Portsmouth's contribution publicly acknowledged. With the Rector/Warden on site, and sufficient facilities, work with visiting groups has begun.

Bishop Christopher preached at the Annual Graduation Mass at St. Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast and was the guest speaker at the Annual Graduation Ceremony the following day. St. Nicholas Anglican Seminary is the one institution which serves the Anglican Church in Ghana as a whole, and its life is vital, in terms of ministerial formation and training, for the future leadership of the Church. The group presented the Seminary with 75,000 labels (which they brought in their suitcases) for the computerization of the Library.

On the second Sunday Bishop Christopher celebrated and preached at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sekondi. Meanwhile, Sally Davenport's presence in the pulpit and at the altar at the Good Shepherd, Effiakuma (Fareham link) was an important witness in a parish and diocese where the ministry of women is not yet recognised. It was good for the team to visit, at Essikadu, a completed 'Portsmouth' project, in the shape of the Crofton nursery.

Visits in 2012

Visitors from Ghana, both clergy and laity, continue to enrich the spiritual life of our diocese. Bishop Matthias Mededues-Badohu, of Ho, was present at the June 2012 Ordinations, and made a second visit to Portsmouth in November. The Bishop of Tamale, Jacob Ayebo, visited the Isle of Wight in November. Bishop Francis Quashie, of Koforidua, was also here in November, and spoke at the November Diocesan Synod. Other Ghana visitors have been hosted by Buriton, All Saints' Ryde, Crofton, North End, and All Saints', East Meon.

Travellers from this Diocese to Ghana in 2012 included Stuart and Linda Forster from Crofton who were in Sekondi-Takoradi Diocese in February and October, and a group from Denmead who visited Koforidua Diocese in October and November. Tom Kennar, from the North End Team Ministry, was installed as Hon. Canon of Cape Coast in February, and then returned to Ghana in August to set the Deanery of Portsmouth-Diocese of Ho link; his visit included leading the Ho ordination retreat. Our IDWAL Chairman, Canon Terry Louden, visited in late August and early September. His itinerary took him to Tamale, Kumasi, Dunkwa and Cape Coast, where he was also installed as Hon. Canon on Sunday 2 September. Marion Syms, our IDWAL Hon. Secretary, was invited as a guest to the Sunyani Diocesan Synod in June.

November 2012 Diocesan Synod

At the meeting of the Portsmouth Diocesan Synod, held in Cathedral House on Saturday 10 November, the following resolutions were approved unanimously

This Diocesan Synod notes:

1.
 - i the commitment of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion to partnership in mission
 - ii the roles of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council in promoting unity and communion
 - iii the deepening and strengthening of our diocesan links through IDWAL with the Province of West Africa since 1977 and, in particular,
 - iv the mutual benefits gained through the sharing of faith, the commitment to mission, the prayer support and personal encounter arising from our companion link with the Anglican Church in Ghana

and resolves:

- 2
 - i to reaffirm its commitment to mutual prayer, conversation and exchange between the Diocese of Portsmouth and the dioceses and institutions of the Anglican Church in Ghana
 - ii to foster diocesan, and parish engagement, with our partners in Ghana in understanding, discipleship and mission
 - iii to resource the Diocesan IDWAL Committee by providing for the annual working expenses of its Chairman through the Mission and Society budget
 - iv to empower the Bishop to second diocesan staff, with the agreement of the Bishop's Council, for sharing skills and experience with the Anglican Church in Ghana

This public recommitment shows that the Portsmouth Diocesan family takes the Ghana link seriously, and that it is integral and not peripheral to our diocesan life.

Changes in West Africa

Archbishop Justice Akrofi retired on 29 October 2012 and we give thanks for his ministry. The Provincial Synod of the Province of West Africa met in Liberia at the end of September 2012. The Constitution was amended to create two internal provinces – Ghana – and Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Cameroon. Archbishop Daniel Sarfo is now Archbishop and Primate of West Africa and also Archbishop of the Internal Province of Ghana.

Bishop Christopher's Second Visit

Bishop Christopher made his second visit to Ghana during April 2013.

Bishop Christopher was in Ghana for ten days in October 2011, and visited six of Ghana's ten dioceses. On that visit, he made a public promise to return to Ghana within two years, in order to strengthen the friendships made, and, in particular, to visit the remaining dioceses.

Travelling with Bishop Christopher were his wife, the Revd. Sally Davenport, Vicar of Holy Trinity with St. Columba, Fareham, the Revd. Dr. Ruth Tuschling, our Diocesan Spirituality Adviser, and Canon Terry Loudon, the chairman of the Portsmouth Inter Diocesan West Africa Link (IDWAL) Committee.

The group left on Friday 19th April and returned on Wednesday 1st May.

The central event of the programme was a three day Clergy School, in which Ruth Tuschling and Bishop Christopher played a major role, at the Nkawie Retreat Centre in the Diocese of Kumasi. Christians in this diocese gave generous support in establishing the Retreat Centre and Bishop Christopher was involved in its consecration on his previous visit. The Clergy School focussed on the Benedictine tradition of spirituality and how this can be a foundation of clergy formation and spiritual life. Advice on how to run parish retreats and quiet days was also given. We sang Taize and plainchant. Thirty clergy spouses from Kumasi Diocese also came for a day, and Sally Davenport led a programme for them, based on the theme of reflective creativity inspired by the work of Hopeweavers in Southampton. Sally celebrated the Eucharist at Nkawie with Bishop Christopher as her server, a change of roles which prompted much discussion. Although there are three ordained women in Kumasi Diocese, and one in training, for many participants this was their first experience of the Eucharist celebrated by a female priest. We hope that this event may encourage local clergy to make more use of the Retreat Centre (accommodation and catering were satisfactory, especially as water and mains electricity are now connected), and that we might be invited to offer other training programmes here in the future. Our time in the Diocese of Kumasi also gave us the opportunity to greet Dr. Daniel Sarfo, now Archbishop of Ghana, who spent most of the Clergy School with us. The group offered a shortened version of the Clergy School programme in the Dioceses of Cape Coast, Dunkwa and Tamale.

The first weekend was spent in the Diocese of Cape Coast. Bishop Christopher preached in Christ Church Cathedral, Cape Coast on Sunday 21st April, and a visit was also made to St. Nicholas Anglican Seminary, Cape Coast. The second weekend was in the Diocese of Tamale, in the far north of Ghana, close to the border with Burkina Faso. Bishop Christopher preached in Bishop Aglionby Memorial Cathedral, Tamale, on Sunday 28th April. Tamale is probably the Diocese in Ghana with the biggest challenges and the fewest resources, but it was humbling to see the faith and dedication of the Bishop and his clergy. Our visit was much appreciated, as not every Western visitor gets to the north. Although the Diocese of Tamale approved the ordination of women many years ago, no female priest has yet been ordained. So when Sally and Ruth concelebrated the Sunday Mass in the Cathedral, with Bishops Christopher and Jacob, and with Terry, this was a historic occasion in Diocesan life and Bishop Jacob described it as such. On the journey between Kumasi and Tamale a stop was made at the College of Health in Kintampo, where community mental health workers are being trained with the support of the Kintampo Trust, a charity established by NHS mental health professionals in Hampshire.

This was again a wonderful, overwhelming and extraordinary experience, which the team will treasure. Our hosts were generous with organisation and time and resources, and their pleasure in our visit was evident everywhere, especially in Tamale. We were both humbled and immensely grateful. The opportunity to teach and to learn has moved the Link to another level, and we hope that this sharing of human resources can develop more broadly. The Bishop's second visit has again shown our partners that we in Portsmouth take the Ghana link seriously, and that it is integral and not peripheral to our diocesan life.

Visits in 2013

Visitors from Ghana, both clergy and laity, continue to enrich the spiritual life of our diocese. Bishop Abraham Ackah, of Wiawso, visited over the Pentecost weekend. Bishop Jacob Ayeebo, of Tamale, was present at the June 2013 Ordinations.

As well as the Bishop's 'team', travellers from this Diocese to Ghana in 2013 have included a group from St. Peter's, Hayling Island who were in Nuaso (Diocese of Koforidua) in March for the consecration of a new church, and the Revd. Ann Leonard was invited to concelebrate. Canon Tom Kennar led a clergy retreat in the Diocese of Ho in April, and plans to return with a group from Portsmouth Deanery in September. Four members of Bishop's Waltham Deanery will be in Wiawso in October, and a group from St. Catherine's, Ventnor will visit Sunyani and Tamale, also in October 2013.