

Generosity and Gratitude Presidential Address March 2018

I have just got back from a visit to our link dioceses in Kenya. The main purpose of the visit was to mark the 40th anniversary of our partnership. Thousands of people attended moving and powerful services in Mbeere and Kirinyaga cathedrals. It was good to be accompanied by colleagues from our senior team in the diocese. Everywhere we went we received warm and generous hospitality. Churches are thriving and growing. New ones are being planted and built. We saw great need. We witnessed great faith.

Too often partnership links between dioceses in the UK and Africa are one-way streets. We cast ourselves in the role of the benevolent provider and our partners overseas receive from our bounty. But the truth is that we have an awful lot to receive from them, and some of them are very basic indeed, like generosity, response to need and gratitude. So here are some things I have learned from our partnership and that we need to prioritise in our own life.

The first is generosity. On my final day in Kenya we visited a church in the slums of Nairobi. People living here have next to nothing. And yet their giving paid in full for the cost of the priest, his stipend and his house, and they made a contribution towards diocesan costs. I visited another church in the Embu diocese where as well as paying for the cost of their priest in full they are raising money for a new church building. And everywhere I went money was being raised for new schools and hospitals that will be run by the Church.

In Kenya, as in many parts of the Anglican Communion, the parish share system is very simple: if you want to priest you must pay for a priest. Although I am proud of our system of mutual support and also relieved that the new share system helps parishes and MMUs to understand just how much the ministry they receive costs, levels of giving in this diocese remain woefully low. Average giving per churchgoer per week in this diocese is a little over £11. In Sheffield diocese that figure is nearer £15.

Once again the diocese faces a shortfall in the budget because some parishes are not giving what they have been asked to. Seeing this from the perspective of astonishing Kenyan generosity made me feel ashamed; ashamed of my own giving and ashamed of our diocesan giving.

Everywhere we went, even to extremely poor communities in northern Kenya where it hasn't rained properly for two years, we were not only made welcome, but offered hospitality. It is unthinkable for the Kenyan church not receive guests with honour and to offer them food and drink.

The contrast with England is again uncomfortable. We are reluctant to give from our plenty; they are eager to give from the little they have.

The second thing I learned about was need. Visiting the Marsabit diocese I found it hard to imagine how people eke out a living when the rain does fall. But without it, it is unimaginable.

I saw some painful and heart-breaking sights. Nomadic people who used to move around the desert with their herds of goats and camels now forced to settle by the one major road

that runs through the region so that they can have access to water. Elephants digging for water with their trunks in dried up riverbeds. And most sobering of all: children begging for water.

Here is an opportunity for us to give to something outside ourselves. Our Lent Appeal hopes to raise £60,000 to buy a water Bowser for the diocese. Not that much, but it would make a tremendous difference. Two thirds of the way through Lent and how much have we raised so far? £4,500. This doesn't feel generous. So, if you haven't already done so, could you publicise this appeal and encourage people to support it generously.

I also learned about thanksgiving. In Kenya even a cup of tea cannot be drunk without first giving thanks. In areas where food and water is scarce, it is, perhaps, not so hard to imagine why people are so thankful. But even in more prosperous areas of the country grace was always said. It seems that all of life was lived out of a dynamic sense of gratitude for God's presence and provision. Prayer was woven into everyday life. Thanksgiving was normal.

And as Archdeacon Elizabeth pointed out to me the other day, the most basic thanksgiving is of faith itself. When a Kenyan Christian introduces themselves they don't do it by reference to their job - Hello I'm Stephen, I'm a bishop, or I'm Robert I'm a civil servant – but by their relationship to God in Christ – Hello, I'm Stephen, I am saved, I am a child of God..

Perhaps this thanksgiving, particularly for new identity as found in Christ, is also the key to generosity, what Jesus called poverty of spirit. If we live each day with an awareness of God's provision, of the salvation God has won for us, and a dependence upon resources outside ourselves, then maybe we become predisposed to give.

As Lent concludes and Easter approaches, can I encourage you to preach and teach on these themes of generosity and gratitude.

We have much to be thankful for in this country and in this church. But you wouldn't always know it from the response of our gratitude. Our parish share barely raises enough to pay and house the clergy, let alone build new churches or schools. Yet there is great need. It is not the same as in drought stricken Marsabit but it is still important. There are huge new housing estates being built in our diocese. We need new churches. There are many opportunities for mission and service. But we do not have the resources to pay for the ministry needed. There are thousands of people who have not heard the gospel. But we have scant resources to initiate new evangelistic initiatives.

We must become a church that pays for the ministry it receives and the ministry needs. We can't expect others to pay for us. In Kenya they often have two collections. First is the tithe – the due that each Christian pays for their belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ; and then a thank offering, a gift, that is the money they give for others and for the wider mission and service of the gospel. We could learn from this. We need to give, but not just for ourselves: you could almost say that Christian giving is what you do when you have finished Christian paying. We must pay for the ministry in our churches and then we must give for the new ministry and new mission in our diocese and for the needs of God's world, especially in our partner dioceses where God has called us into close association. We are a long way away from this. And of course I am aware that often this is because small and struggling churches are giving sacrificially, but it is still not enough to pay for the ministry

received. This is another reason why our MMUs are so important. But when we do pay and when we do give on top of our paying we must do it out of simple thanksgiving for the astonishing goodness and provision that God lavishes on us, and out of heartfelt compassion and love for our brothers and sisters in their need.

Finally, I was intrigued and challenged by the semi-nomadic pastoralists I met in northern Kenya. Shepherds in this context do not so much gather their sheep together, but go where they go: herdsman travel *with* their camels and their goats, often covering vast distances as they travel with them to watch over and protect them, but most of all to be where they are. I wonder whether our model of shepherding in the church has focused far too much on keeping the sheep together and looking after them all in one designated place, and neglected travelling to new places and being where the people are?

Our strategy for forming new Christian communities aims to change that. We are looking at ways that we can develop new worshipping communities in new places and for those people who do not gather with us in our current expressions of church. In thinking about this new priority, and in recognising that our Mission and Ministry units will in many cases provide the critical mass and collaborative enterprise to enable us to start new initiatives (such as the new church on Beaulieu Park that was formally launched only last Sunday and is the collaborative enterprise of the Mission and Ministry units in North Chelmsford) we have also found some new words and new images to describe our diocesan vision. We are a transforming presence through our churches, schools, chaplaincies and fresh expressions. We inhabit the world distinctively - we are all disciples of Jesus Christ. We are reimagining ministry – we all have a share in God’s ministry. We are accountable to God and to each other. We serve our local communities and we share the gospel as effectively as we can, recognising that one of the best ways of doing evangelism is growing new Christian communities.

+Stephen Chelmsford
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- More information about the Bishop’s Lent Appeal and ways in which donations may be made are available from the following link:
www.chelmsford.anglican.org/lentappeal