

The MDGs: Becoming a people of mission

An interview with Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies, on the number one mission priority of the Episcopal Church: the Millennium Development Goals.

Interview by Herb Gunn

The Record: Could you put into perspective the Millennium Development Goals? What are they and why are they important to the Episcopal Church?

Bonnie Anderson: The Millennium Development Goals are a U.N.-generated concept. The eight Millennium Development Goals are named by the U.N. as a way for nations of the world to eradicate poverty. They are broken down into eight specific areas.

We are talking about it because economist Jeffrey Sachs has illustrated that for the first time in the history of the world we actually have the capability to eradicate poverty. We have the resources. We have the communication technology. We have a way to do this.

I loved what Archbishop [Njongonkulu] Ndungane said. He is Archbishop Desmond Tutu's successor in Capetown, South Africa, and he said, "Only once in a lifetime does an opportunity like this come forward. The real question is can we do it?" Can we muster it up? Can we step up to the plate and actually do this? All of the resources are there. All of the capability is there. The next question is: Are we there?

The Record: What has to happen for this movement to be successful?

Anderson: I think that people have to have a change of heart. I think that people have to internalize the will for eradicating poverty. I think people have to become less self-focused and think to themselves, "I could really make a difference, but am I willing to do it at my own costs. Am I willing to deprive myself? Am I willing to advocate [on behalf of other people]?" ...

The Record: How and why did a commitment to the MDGs become such a priority for the Episcopal Church?

Anderson: The Episcopal Church committed to the MDGs as its number one mission priority which was voted at the General Convention in Columbus in 2006 because people in the pew through the work of grassroots organizations became aware of the MDGs.

The Record: Who are the players [across the] Episcopal Church?

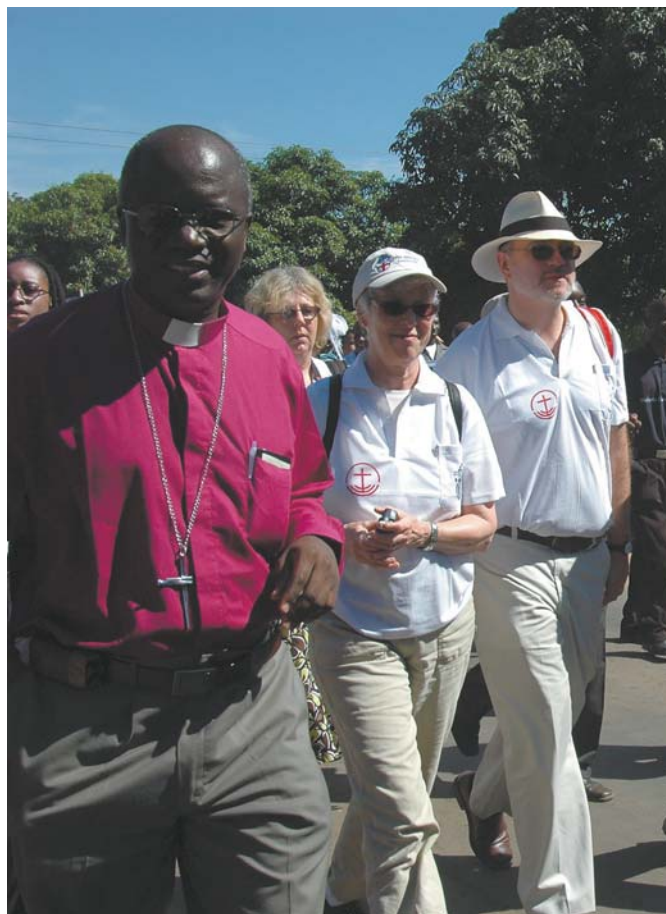
Anderson: Normally when we say "who are the players?" the response would be the elected leadership, or people that are seen as "in charge." In this case, the players are the people, the Episcopalians. Those are the important players. It is kind of the inverted hierarchical triangle. The willingness of the Episcopal Church to embrace the MDGs has turned the triangle upside down.

The Record: So it is really the people from the grassroots, the people from the pews speaking to the leadership and saying "we are moving..."

Anderson: Absolutely. The beauty of it is they're coming up with the ideas. They're coming up with the commitment. And I think that is the only way to internalize something, is to be able to say "we've said we are going to do this—how do we do this?"

The Record: Episcopal Relief and Development, the Episcopal Church Office in Washington, and Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation all have a role in moving this forward. Can you describe what those roles are?

Anderson: The Washington Office of the Episcopal Church is set up so well for us as Episcopalians to influence our legislators. We have this infrastructure that is so easy to access. They have a Web site. ... You sign up; you get policy alerts. And then they have it figured out who your legislators are and all you have



House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson and Episcopal Relief and Development President Robert W. Radtke join in a March 16 malaria-sensitization march through part of Nwengya Compound in Livingstone, Zambia.

to do is click that you want a message sent to your legislator ... The Washington Office of the Episcopal Church is all set up to make it easy for us.

Episcopal Relief and Development is our organization for relief and development. It's ours. There are a lot of relief and development organizations out there that are doing really great work. But I think as Episcopalians, we have a commitment to our own organization. ...

[Anderson discussed a recent trip with ERD that took her to Zambia.]

We have built-in access to the people of the villages. There are churches where the road stops. The road stops and you keep going and there are Anglican churches there. That's who ERD is working with. ... If people are looking for a place to contribute, ERD is it. They're our organization.

EGR—Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation—was very instrumental in getting the commitment from the Episcopal Church to the Millennium Development Goals off the ground. They are still really good at getting people energized around

the Millennium Development Goals. ... they are really committed to the grassroots movement of this.

I think we have the best of all worlds. We have the instigators as EGR. We have a place for us to put our money and enable our organization to do really great stuff. And we have a built-in way to advocate with our legislators.

The Record: Is there a creative tension [with three agencies advocating different approaches]?

Anderson: I think the tension, if there is any to speak of, might come from figuring out who does what. I think all three of those functions are really necessary.

The Record: The Episcopal Church has seen in the past generation some big ideas turned into slogans like 20/20, the Decade of Evangelism, the year of this, the year of that. Is this yet another generation of an acronym that motivates people to do something for a little while, and then the energy subsides? How is this different?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9A ➔



House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson preaches during one of two services May 20 at Saint John's Cathedral in Denver. During her two-day visit, Anderson also addressed the Richard Hooker Forum on May 19 and spoke at the Dean's Forum between services on May 20 as well as the Martyn Hart Legacy Society Dinner that evening.

Hear the entire interview with Bonnie Anderson on the Millennium Development Goals by accessing The Record Online through www.the-record.org

Anderson: I think you are talking about what I like to call mission *du jour*. ... everybody gets behind it and we do it a little while, but then we get a little A.D.D. and our attention wanes. ... But I think the reason we do that is that we as Episcopalians have not internalized what it means to be a people of mission. It is easy for us to say 'oh, let's do that; that sounds good' because we have the heart for mission; we want to do it. But it isn't a deep part of our being. It isn't part of who we are.

In part, it stems from the fact that we, as Episcopalians, have no ability to publicly narrate our identity. We can not say easily who we are and what we think. Catholic-lite is not a good response to what it means to be an Episcopalian. I think all of those things are connected. Because we flip from one mission project to the next or from one acronym or slogan to the next indicates our good heart and our willingness and desire to do this. It also indicates that we have not internalized what it means to be a people of mission. I think we haven't internalized it because we don't un-

derstand fully who we are and that is part of our identity.

The Record: What's at stake this time around if we don't internalize it and become a people of mission?

Anderson: I can tell you what would be at stake for me, personally: An extremely important lost opportunity. To me, that's at stake. I've look in the faces of the people who are helping us by understanding them and that we are helping by redistributing some of our resources. So what's at stake to me would be the lives of people who I have looked into the eyes of—children particularly.

The Record: The Millennium Development Goals, there are eight of them. Which in your mind is the most important?

Anderson: ... Around the world, it seems to me that women, and particularly girl-children, are very disenfranchised. And saying disenfranchised would be a very mild term for what I have actually witnessed myself. So I am drawn to maternal

“We have not internalized what it means to be a people of mission. I think we haven't internalized it because we don't understand fully who we are and that is part of our identity...”

—Bonnie Anderson
president of the House of Deputies

health. And I am drawn to educational parity for boys and girls across the world. Those are some things I feel I could make a difference in.

Is it more important than environmental sustainability? No. Because if you are not sustained, if you don't have water to drink and fresh air to breathe, then whether or not you are educated is moot. So if I had to rank them in order of importance, I wouldn't be able to do [it]. But I am drawn to help for the girl-child.

The Millennium Development Goals are actually forcing us to take a broad look and, at the same time, we have access to the world through the Anglican Communion. Then there is the question, are we part of the Anglican Communion or are we not part of the Anglican Communion? Well, yes, we are part of the Anglican Communion and no body can take that away from us.

The Record: Is there an added emphasis or intensity about the

Millennium Development Goals and how successful we are in our response given the tentative or the tenuous ongoing conversations within the Anglican Communion about who's in and who's out?

Anderson: No, I don't think so. [During my trip to southern Africa in March] it was all about mission. It was never about anything but mission. We have committed to continue our mission work that [is] built on relationship. That's the difference. It's built on relationship. We've committed to do that and we are going to do that. So if we are members of the Anglican Communion in a first tier or a second tier or no tier, that doesn't make any difference with regards to our mission, that I know of. I can't see Father Katite in Zambia saying “we don't want you here to give us mosquito nets and work with us and learn from us because you're a second-tier citizen of the Anglican Communion.” No.

Episcopal Church agencies focusing on the Millennium Development Goals

Episcopal Relief and Development
..... <http://www.er-d.org>

Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation
..... <http://www.e4gr.org>

The Office of Government Relations and to join the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN)
..... <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn.htm>