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Companion Dioceses Build Strong Global Links

By Mary F. Brennan

Walking as companions is at the heart of mission relationship. When two dioceses in the Anglican Communion decide to enter into a mission partnership with each other, a Companion Diocese relationship is formed. This link benefits the partners in many ways, including opening new avenues of spiritual and cultural understanding. Through mutual encouragement and prayer, a deeper knowledge of and concern for one another, and the exchange of spiritual and material resources, companions strengthen each other for God's mission in the world.

Today, 80% of the dioceses in The Episcopal Church have either formal or informal companion relationships with dioceses outside the United States. Formal relationships are recognized by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church at the request of the dioceses involved, but many informal relationships exist, as well. Some dioceses have more than one link or are involved in 3-way partnerships.

From Companion Dioceses relationships spring parish-to-parish links, lay and clergy exchanges, faithful communication, work projects and cultural exchanges, common prayer calendars, and other mutual mission experiences. The possibilities are limitless for spiritual growth and understanding.

In 1998, the Lambeth Conference declared that "the time has come for significant new initiatives in encouraging all dioceses to develop companion relationship across provincial boundaries, as part of the process of developing the cross-cultural nature of the Communion." The bishops resolved that by the next Lambeth Conference in 2008, every diocese should have made "a serious effort to identify one or more dioceses as a companion, in formal and informal ways."

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Children of the Diocese of El Salvador, which is partnered with the Diocese of Los Angeles, demonstrate the most basic form of companionship.

Lord Jesus Christ, who didst stretch out thine arms of love upon the hard wood of the Cross, that all men everywhere might come within the reach of thy saving embrace: So clothe us with thy Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know thee to the knowledge and love of thee; for the honor of thy Name.

(Written by Charles Henry Brent, Missionary Bishop of the Philippines, 1901-1918)



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A volunteer from the Diocese of Western Kansas fits a woman from the Dioceses of Mukono in Uganda with a new pair of eyeglasses.

Resources

Office on Anglican Global Relations: www.episcopalchurch.org/agr
Br. (Canon) James E. Teets, 212-716-6227, jteets@episcopalchurch.org

For information on existing Companion Diocese relationships, provincial consultants, and Anglican dioceses seeking companion relationships: www.episcopalchurch.org/companion

To download a copy of *Guidelines for Companion Relationship*: www.episcopalchurch.org/companion

Check the December issue of *Episcopal Life* for related articles.

From Glasses to Classes

Companion relationships are as different as the dioceses that form them. While all engage in mutual prayer and spiritual encouragement, the people of each diocese find a variety of ways to exchange resources of time and talent. The Diocese of Western Kansas offers an eyeglass ministry to its companion diocese, Mukono in Uganda. “Almost all of the people bring their Bibles with them to see us for eyeglasses . . . They are so thankful for the service that we provide; it really humbles a person,” says Bob Carson, Companion Diocese Network Consultant, Province VII.

Salvador Gomez Gochez, a Salvadoran who fled the civil war in El Salvador in 1980 and became a U.S. citizen, helps coordinate the Companion Relationship between the Diocese Los Angeles and El Salvador. His efforts act as a bridge between the two dioceses as they work to build homes in a community that now offers a medical clinic, a recreational area for young people, and the nearly-complete Anglican Church of Divinia Providencia.

Since 2000, eleven missionaries from the Diocese of Bethlehem have visited the southern Sudan Diocese of Kajo Keji. Some have made the journey several times. Another trip is being planned for January. “The team has a limited brief,” Bishop Paul wrote recently to Bishop Anthony Poggo of Kajo Keji. “Their main purpose takes its cue from our Lord’s Incarnation: their goal is to be with as many people as possible to let them know that their sisters and brothers in Bethlehem know about them, care about them, and want to know their story. This was the great teaching we had from Bishop Manasseh about the importance of letting people know that they are noticed.”

The Diocese of Missouri, partnered with the Diocese of Lui in Sudan, has a companion relationship rooted in the baptismal covenant and committed to opening new pathways to understanding. Whether working with its partner to drill deep water wells to bring fresh, pure water to Lui or to support seminary students in their theological education, Missouri has found unique ways to walk in companionship.