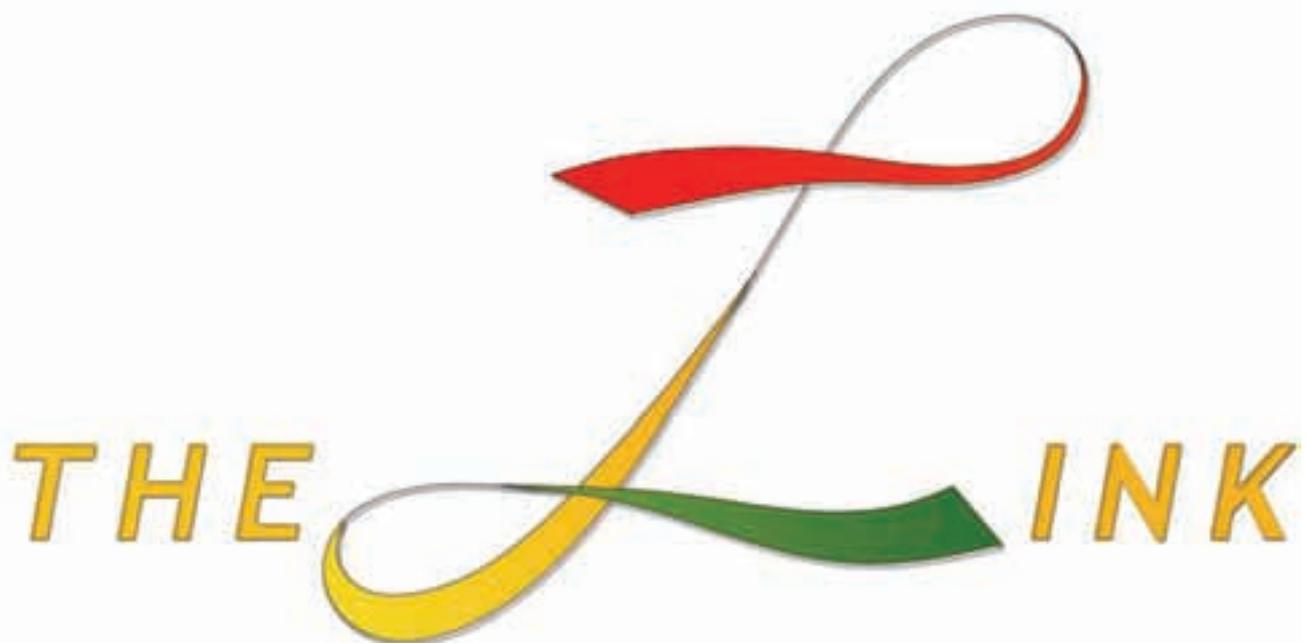




The Oxford Kimberley & Kuruman Diocesan Link

Guidance for Parishes



Linking The Dioceses
Oxford, Kimberley & Kuruman

Introduction

Over the last sixteen years a number of parish links have developed between the dioceses. Each has been mutually supportive in creating special relationships between churches, offering practical and spiritual help and in the understanding of difference as we live out our Christian faith journey.

History of the link

Following the Lambeth Conference in 1988 the Church of England produced guidelines for companion dioceses. It was within this context that the two dioceses of Oxford and Kimberley & Kuruman formed a partnership in 1993 as apartheid was coming to an end. As a beginning during the first five-year period, three priests from South Africa joined the Oxford Diocese for three months in order to develop their skills as trainers and in turn three clergy from Oxford diocese volunteered to serve in these vacated parishes. During this time the first parish-to-parish links were formed.

The first review took place in 1998. Some parish links had flourished while others had fallen away to be replaced by new ones. It became clear that such relationships have to be carefully nurtured in order to survive the distance and difficulties in communication. A couple of parishes had also started to explore projects aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the localities served by the link church. This engagement with social development work generated wider interest and became a focus for visits and financial giving. Over the period 1998-2003, reciprocal visits were made between the Oxford and Kimberley hospitals and towards its end a choir from one of the Kimberley township parishes came for a visit to its link parish and sang at the Oxford Diocesan Convention.

For the five years from 2003, the Oxford Diocesan Synod agreed to increase its financial commitment towards clergy stipends in Kimberley & Kuruman. This, together with the passing of other monies from Oxford to South African parishes and projects, highlighted the need for financial transparency. The Northern Cape and North-West Province economies are relatively poor compared with other parts of South Africa and morale can be low as can the number of stipendiary clergy. With considerable help from the Culham Trustees, the Oxford Diocese now offers resources to facilitate many aspects of clergy training.

In 2007 both dioceses welcomed new diocesan bishops. In 2008, through Bishop John's visit to Kimberley & Kuruman and Bishop Oswald Swartz's visit to the Lambeth Conference, a strategy for the next five years was drawn up. This is very ambitious and reflects both bishops' previous experiences as well as building on the past. With key people working on the Link from both dioceses the future looks very promising.



What makes a link?

The basis of a successful link is getting to know not only the other parish and its geographical, community and social setting, but particularly the members of each other's congregations, at a personal level. The link is then strengthened by each contact between individuals. Each phone call or letter received can bring information about the welfare of the parish as a whole.

Distance should not deter people from undertaking fairly regular fact-finding visits. These are critical in the forming of relationships and in learning about a link parish. Benefits accrue for a whole congregation as well as for the individuals who actually visit; the talks, videos and photographs of returning travellers are a vivid and informative illustration of the link parish for those who will never actually go there.



Whilst large group visits do take place in each direction, in general a few people visiting at a time is the norm. This makes fact-finding and forming relationships easier. Nothing is more wonderful, after travelling a great distance, than to be met by a familiar friendly face!

A link isn't just about visits and the provision of financial support (although in South Africa these are both much appreciated). The exchange of prayer, information, books and consultation is also important and helps to cement any link.

Things to consider

Careful consideration should be given to the level at which a link can be sustained. Sometimes one person becomes deeply involved and leads the link, and this can be successful, provided that this person is supported by the congregation. Lack of enthusiasm or a half-hearted approach can lead to great disappointment in your link parish.

On the other hand, too big a group with too many ideas can lead to inaction. It should be remembered that the link is between the parishes rather than particular individuals, and firm foundations should be established so that the link has a secure future if activists move away. In particular, a successful link will not be confined to the parish priests on either side. It may be possible to enlist the interest of your local school or wider community as added support. Several links have in fact been initiated - and show signs of growing - between primary schools in parishes in the Oxford diocese and the local state schools in Kimberley & Kuruman. Some teachers from here have spent a week in their link school. Experience in this field is available to be shared with you.

On a few occasions there have been visits from African choirs. These have been exciting and enjoyable and parishes might like to think about such a visit.



Communication: with them...

The majority of the people in Kimberley & Kuruman speak good English, the children being taught at school in English from an early age. However it needs to be remembered that this will usually be the second or third language for them. Setswana is the language widely spoken in the North of the diocese, with Afrikaans and other native languages being the day-to-day means of communication in other parts. In an oral culture, not many feel confident about writing in English but functional spoken communication has never presented problems, as there are always people available to interpret. (See further, however, in Preparing to Visit below.)

Despite this the discrepancy in communication systems can cause problems. Where e-mail communication exists and is reliable it should be used. However, it is generally the case that the most efficient forms of communication are phone calls and (for those who are comfortable with written English) letters. Phone calls are the more useful, as just about everyone in Kimberley & Kuruman has a cell-phone, and usually a landline. But don't make the assumption that a parish priest or a member of the parish can afford to call; so don't take the lack of return calls as a lack of interest... if you want to contact someone keep trying!

...and between ourselves...

As a committee we are keen to bring together regularly those with parish links. It is good to hear about one another's experience and advantage can be taken of other visits being made to South Africa, for information gained, and, on a practical note, for delivering letters and special messages or gifts.

The committee produces a six-monthly newsletter, which will be sent to all link parishes. As well as information on the particular projects we are supporting, it will contain information on trips to and from Kimberley & Kuruman and a section from Bishop Ossie and the Oxford Link Committee.



Financial support

Obviously, as well as building relationships between congregations, parishes in Oxford at sometime or other are likely to want to offer some financial support to their link parish.

The ideal financial system will provide reliable and inexpensive money transfer reaching remote areas and poor households. However, this is not always easy. The dioceses are working together to try to create smooth and transparent systems for money transfer. Therefore it is imperative that the Link Co-ordinator knows what financial understanding and arrangements you may have or develop with your link parish.

The major steps involved when a parish offers financial support to its link partner are raising funds, making payments and monitoring the use of funds. There is much experience in these areas around the diocese already, so please contact a member of the Link Committee to find out more.

For various reasons It is generally better to support financially than to offer other material support (i.e. sending clothes, shoes, food etc). It gives the link parish the flexibility to spend the money to fulfil their requirements, which in turn stimulates the local economy. Further, duty is payable on items received from outside South Africa.

Development projects and environmental work

If you would like to start a social development project with your link parish, please contact Revd Charlotte Bannister-Parker who will be able to advise you and support you in achieving the aims and objectives established for the project by the parishes.

Some links may want to start projects that have an environmental focus and several examples already exist. You and your link parish might want to work on a joint environmental education project for both parishes, bearing in mind that the West causes much greater environmental damage than does Africa.



Perhaps you might want to think about the role of sustainable technologies: for example, you might want to fund a project in which you look at renewable technology for your church and help to raise funds for renewable technologies in Kimberley & Kuruman to provide better access to electricity. Or perhaps you would like to look at how both your communities will adapt to climate change - questions around water use, for instance, are likely to arise both here and in South Africa.

There are many excellent resources that can help linked parishes think about these questions – not only materials that have been developed for both UK and South African contexts, but also experts on whom we can call to help you think through the issues. If you would like to consider environmental project work, please be in touch with Maranda St John Nicolle.

The needs of our partner diocese are huge and manifold. To be able to contribute even in a small way from our wealth of education and facilities towards meeting some of the challenges of living in sub-Saharan Africa is a great privilege. This is particularly so where water is scarce, people hungry, schools without equipment, HIV/AIDS sufferers marginalised and dying, and numbers of orphaned children spiralling. Though we have the capacity to help, however, we must seek to understand and consult the people living with these problems before initiating programmes, which need to become sustainable. And let's not forget that we have much to learn from those we are linking with: there is much courage, fortitude, faith and joy in evidence in this very poor part of Africa, and a level of trust in God which is truly inspiring.

Preparing to visit

Good preparation can make a huge difference to the value of personal visits in either direction. The Link Co-ordinator is happy to brief any Oxford parish representative going to Kimberley & Kuruman for the first time. If one is to be a sensitive visitor, it helps to be aware of some of the things that might be unusual in one's own context. A few points among many that might be made follow.

The climate being very different, curtains are often drawn during the day and people frequently rest in the afternoon; on the other hand, the absence of central heating means homes can feel cold in the African winter. Hospitality is offered generously and often provided communally, but marked difference in gender roles surfaces on party occasions. (Priests do not have much money, and therefore are often not able to take visitors out to eat - every rand for them really counts.) Televisions may be left on during conversation and visitors may find their hands being held by the person talking with them.

Worship in Kimberley & Kuruman tends to be lengthy by Oxford standards. It varies in feel from place to place but is usually, for historical reasons, Eucharistic and accompanied by *'a visible sense of rhythm'*, often with much incense. The structure and protocols of the diocese are different from those of Oxford : a Bishop delegates less and is more 'hands on', so that he himself may wish to see an Oxford visitor. There is a considerable difference in the diocese between urban and rural areas, the latter tending to be particularly deprived, as there is between the south (centred upon Kimberley) and the north (the largest settlement being around Mafikeng/ Mmabatho, Mmabatho having been the capital of the homeland state of Bophuthatswana under apartheid).

There are eleven official languages in the Republic of South Africa, of which English is one. Most English speakers in South Africa will not have the language as their mother-tongue, so whatever their functional competence in English, it cannot be assumed that they will appreciate the full range of nuance in the language as spoken in the UK. As many of us find others' languages difficult, we might try to put ourselves in their place. If there is time to acquire a basic knowledge of Setswana or Afrikaans, this will go a long way and will be greatly appreciated.

A pre-journey briefing would also include warnings about safe travel and being prepared to speak at a moment's notice to a public gathering! There will also be practical tips on such matters as vaccinations, visas and ways to travel from Johannesburg.

De-briefing

Travellers need tools to reflect fully and these should include competent debriefing. This is best done with another who has had experience of the situation, though a productive process can be the writing of a letter to oneself expressing inner feelings about one's journey and what it might mean for the future. De-briefing is likely to be important in coming to terms with, learning from and growing through what may be a profoundly challenging experience. On a less personal level, a session with someone like the Link Co-ordinator allows the 'home' diocese to receive recent insights and through these develop its understanding of Kimberley & Kuruman. This will allow future visitors to South Africa to be better prepared.

The Oxford / Kimberley & Kuruman link has been life-changing for many involved on either side and your participation would certainly help your faith live and grow. So, thank you for your interest. Be part of our world-wide 'Living Faith' vision.

Be changed.



Five steps to developing a link:

1.

**Contact your archdeaconry representative
to find out more**

2.

**Discuss it at the PCC/DCC. Once you have decided to take
it further, invite a member of the link committee to come
to your parish and meet interested members**

3.

**You will be invited to write a short profile of your parish
to send to Kimberley & Kuruman**

4.

**The link co-ordinator (whose role is to liaise between the
two dioceses) will liaise with Kimberley & Kuruman
to help you find a suitable link parish and
will give you contact details**

5.

**Please keep your archdeaconry representative informed
of how your link is progressing, especially when a
visit has taken place – your experience is valuable
to others and should be shared around.**

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