

Dorchester Celebrations – Centenary
Kimberley & Kuruman Link
Sunday – 15th April, 2012

I bring greetings from our Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman. We give thanks for our special relationship since 1993 and we are pleased that we are able to share this special day together during our centenary year. A big thank you to Bishop John for your invitation for us to be part of this great occasion. We were warmly received, as usual, by our commissary, Canon Nick Molony. We have felt very welcome as we met various groups so far. Thank you very much.

It is good to be here in this place where my official introduction to this diocese took place in 1994 when I was privileged to address an enthusiastic group with Bishop Winston Ndungane who, together with Bishop Richard Harries entered into this formal relationship. I remember how nervous I was then – I think I am even more nervous today!

So many wonderful things happened since that meeting in Dorchester Abbey such a long time ago. Real and deep friendships were formed, and a diocese which felt small and isolated there on the edge of the Kalahari Desert felt a new sense of self-belief as we discovered through this partnership that we do not always have to feel sorry for ourselves; that life has been unkind to us; but that we have something to GIVE – to offer – to share with other children of God. As we started to appreciate our own “giftedness” and as we realised that our friends were taking us seriously, we started taking ourselves seriously – in the right way, of course. We knew that we were not endowed with natural resources, but we realised that we are rich in human resources and we deliberately set about developing this precious resource. My own journey from the dusty plains of isolated and forlorn De Aar to this most unlikely position of Diocesan Bishop is part of this process. We pray that God will enable us to be able to unearth and polish all those rough diamonds as we remain faithful to this process of enabling – empowering – equipping all of God’s people.

So, as we meet together as the family of God join me in giving thanks for God’s blessings in that part of his vineyard over the past 100 years

Let us give thanks for the faithful witness, worship and service of God's people in that rugged and challenging part of the world over the last century.

Let us honour and give thanks for the vision, the grit, and the hard work of our founders who had a vision and the dedication to bring it to birth.

Let us bless God for the generosity of our people and for the faithful pastors and leaders with which we have been blessed – dedicated priests who are prepared to work hard in huge, scattered parishes – some of them up to 18 congregations with only one priest. For their willingness to provide pastoral care sometimes at the expense of their families. We give thanks for their dedicated service and ministry.

Let us give thanks for the love, support and generosity of our friends who continue to support and encourage us. Though we have sometimes fallen short of their expectations they have stayed with us, have continued to affirm us, and also helped us when the going was tough...

There is so much for which to be thankful.

When we, the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman, started our centenary year we adopted the motto: TRAVELLING ON IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.

We wanted to remind ourselves that;

- We're on journey
- We're people of the Way
- We are pilgrim people
- We haven't arrived – we are still on the road to becoming what God intended us to be.

In order for us to fulfil our mission we cannot become complacent and rest "forever by still waters!"

As we have been celebrating this mile stone of our centenary we found the following elements interweaved in our activities and programmes:

- ~ Commemoration
- ~ Celebration
- ~ Anticipation

Through the act of Commemoration we have looked aback. We have reflected on the events which have played out and brought us to this point in time and are trying to put things into perspective. We have tried to learn from the past.

Our celebrations have been joyous events of thanksgiving and savouring the goodness and love of God. We have had that wonderful Family Weekend Service where we thanked God amongst other things for another child of this Diocese who has been chosen to be the Bishop of the Diocese of George. There have been great services in Bothithong and Mmabatho where we were especially pleased when the young people came into their own and led the older folk in joyous worship.

We have been looking forward in anticipation to what God might be wanting and hoping to do with us and for us. We have been concerned about our legacy for the generations to follow. We have pondered on how we will effectively raise the next generation, pondering on Isaiah 43: 19. "Cease to dwell on the days gone by and to brood over past history. Here and now I will do a new thing; this moment it will break from the bud. Can you not perceive it?"

New Living Translation: Don't spend too much time looking back – God is doing a new thing.

How do we get to this new thing? What IS this new thing?

There are two things we should bear in mind.

As people of the Way – people on a journey – we will do well to remember another great journey – the Exodus. The people were on the move— however, they hadn't a clue where they were going – no plan, map, GPS. They didn't know WHERE they were going, but they knew WHO was travelling with them. They had confidence in the one going with them.

And so, while the journey was not altogether plain sailing, they kept on going and we know that their destination was a good one when they eventually got there.

We know that we still have a long way to go in our walk with the Lord. We know that there is much work to be done before we can be as effective as we would like to be.

Our onward journey will involve much wrestling and grappling and pondering about our purpose. As I said earlier we are not to be too obsessed with the destination, but rather be engaged and involved in the journey.

The early Christians had a glorious certainty about the firm direction of their lives; and we can have the same assurance. The Holy Spirit is with us, promised to us, just as he was to them. He is at work in our lives, just as he was in theirs. If we **are** on God's road, we need never fear we shall be left to find our own way; we need never fear that God will just let us drop out. He is going to persevere with us, strengthen us to the end until we are 'conformed to the image of His Son', that is till we become like Jesus. That is the goal. That is where we are heading for. And we should be sure of that, sure of being made like Jesus, even though we know we have a long, long way to go.

There is a Kirundi saying: **If you want to walk fast, walk alone; if you want to walk far, walk together!**

We are a body – we travel together – the operative word: KOPANO (working together)

We have had this wonderful journey together for the past 19 years. Yes, it has been wonderful – yes, there have been challenges – yes, there have been those moments when we said: Oh, dear, do we want to continue this journey?

Sometimes one or the other partner walked too fast and we had to say: Hang on there! Wait for us to catch up. Sometimes a partner grew tired and thought that we had walked far enough and we had to say to each other: There is so much more we can do together as we walk together and

encourage one another. Personal prejudices and perceptions were challenged – space was created to take stock – faith in each other was restored and new energy gained.

There is always the danger of becoming inward looking, to concentrate on our problems and shortcomings – for us to feel so sorry for ourselves.

A friend who will speak the truth in love is a true friend. A dirty spot on the wall easily becomes part of the scene(ry) – we do not notice it anymore. Those who visit will notice it. A friend will point it out and even try to help to remove it.

It is our desire to continue this walk together. We recognise that we have come a long way because we have been walking together, holding hands. We know that we have much to learn from each other through this partnership and, yes, we have much to offer each other.

Back home we are aware of another journey and we, as Church, have been trying to see what we can learn from that journey. As the ANC – the African National Congress – celebrate their centenary they have been wondering about their future, their legacy, as they have to make the transition from liberation movement to being a government. There has been great conflict, much inner tension.

We too have been struggling as part of the church which was a serious partner in the struggle for liberation to identify a continued role as voice of the poor and vulnerable rather than being co-opted as the ruling party at prayer.

The ANC know that they cannot remain the same – we know that we definitely cannot remain the same. We want you to continue to walk with us as friends and midwives and help us become what God intends us to be – as a family of proud Anglicans – taking hands – and working together in a diocese that cares for all and bringing hope through the transforming love of God in lively spiritual centres of worship, witness and service.

As link diocese we have been travelling together for the past 19 years – with our different histories, backgrounds, contexts. As we look forward to the next phase of this journey – to the exciting things we might be doing

together over the next century, maybe we should just remind ourselves that any journey – even one of a thousand miles – must begin with the first few steps.

What then, should we do together over the next five years to lay the foundation for the long haul?

We have mentioned the ANC's journey and we are acutely aware of their struggle with the aspirations of the young people. This issue, too, is a major concern for us. We need to look at new models, new ways of being Church. How can **OUR** young people learn from each other? We know that young people are the same all over the world and so we could explore how best we can help prepare the next generations.

We have been concerned about education as I believe you have been – as you still are concerned about the many who, in the early years cannot reach their best literary or numeracy potential. We have no university in our area, our bright children – at least, those who can afford it – go away; they are lost to us. We have put our toe into this pond by establishing our Grammar School in exploring steps through which we can be positively engaged in a process of increasing university entrance – and, of course, what are the avenues for funding? This is a major area in which we can share with each other.

We can definitely learn new strategies from you about how best to approach and influence those responsible for the health and safety of our people.

The threatening strike of the tanker drivers remind us how easy it become for employees to be exploited. What do we say to those in authority?

Unemployment and reduced income affect all of us. We feel it especially corporately when it comes to the parish share and we cannot balance the budget and consequently our mission priorities are shelved or dumped. Does this resonate just a little with you???

As the Kirundi saying encourages us, we can walk a fair distances over the next five years if we walk together.

Or, as another saying from the other side of the world suggests: let us get to know, love and support each other as we walk in the other's moccasins for a few miles.