

Rt Revd Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough, writes

Supporting overseas mission

It used to be standard practice for parishes to support Christian missionary work overseas. This might have involved a link with one of the mission agencies such as the Church Mission Society or the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (now known as US), with regular news, an occasional visiting preacher, mentions in the weekly intercessions, and an annual donation.

It might have been a personal link with one of more mission workers, with regular letters and photos, gifts and occasional visits. At the same time most dioceses had a small team encouraging and supporting these parish links. One of the signs of a healthy church was that it maintained a link with the overseas church and overseas mission.

I suspect that the growth of diocesan links, such as ours with Bungoma and Seoul, is one reason why many parishes no longer have active links with mission agencies or individual missionaries. I am not against diocesan links; I'm very much in favour, and enjoy hearing how our parishes get involved with parishes or projects in our link dioceses. But I am saddened at the loss of so many other links, and at the fact that the mission agencies find it increasingly hard to raise support from local churches.

I am conscious of people in the diocese who have worked overseas for different mission agencies. I know of such connections with Crosslinks,



Missionary Aviation Fellowship, and Africa Evangelical Fellowship, as well as CMS and US, and of people who have worked in Kenya, Nepal, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. There must be others I don't know about, and some I have forgotten. These connections are part of our story as a diocese, and we are the poorer if we lose them.

We don't currently have an overseas mission group, or any other structure to help us hear and tell the stories, or encourage such work in the future.

I'm not forgetting or minimising the good work of the Bungoma and Seoul link committees for which I am grateful, but simply hoping that we don't lose an interest in overseas mission more generally.

More positively, I am hoping that we can rekindle a passion for overseas mission, which I am still convinced is one of the signs of a healthy church.

I welcome feedback on this!

Best wishes

+ Donald

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