

## **ONE HOPE IN GOD'S CALL: MISSION IN DIFFERENCE**

Keynote Address for Annual Meeting of Global Episcopal Mission Network,  
at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest,  
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It is a great pleasure to welcome the Global Episcopal Mission Network to the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest for your annual meeting and Educational Institute. I rejoice in the role of the GEM Network in the Church's world mission and am hopeful for how your ministry and that of the seminary can support and enrich each other. This seminary has long been committed to cross-cultural encounter. That commitment has had a major focus in Hispanic work, strengthened by the founding the Province VII Center for Hispanic Ministries here and our close relationship with the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, which was established to prepare people for Hispanic outreach. We are now developing a Hispanic Ministries Concentration in the Master of Divinity curriculum.

Exposure to the global dimension of ministry has long been fostered through enrollment of international students. We rejoice that among our graduates out in the Anglican Communion is Canon John Kanyikwa, now general secretary of the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa, the major coordinating center of, for instance, the Anglican Communion's work on AIDS in Africa. The professorship in mission and world Christianity that I hold is new in the seminary's life and is contributing to expanded course offerings in global mission. Students are undertaking international internships through the Seminary Consultation on Mission, a collaboration among the eleven accredited Episcopal seminaries. Jane Butterfield's establishment of a field office here of the Mission Personnel Office of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society has helped to stimulate and channel mission interest both among students and the in Province VII and beyond, and we are rejoice in the orientations for outgoing DFMS missionaries that have been held here.

So welcome to you and to your work here!

*One Hope in God's Call* is the theme of this gathering of the GEM Network. As Episcopalians, we're especially familiar with this phrase from the opening acclamations of the liturgy of Holy Baptism: "There is one Body and one Spirit; / There is one hope in God's call to us; / One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; / One God and Father of all." The words are from the Letter to the Ephesians, whose author — Paul or, more likely, someone writing in the voice and spirit of Paul — pleads with his readers: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4.1-5).

This celebration of oneness is prompted by the experience of difference. The plea for unity is prompted by the threat of disunity in all that difference. The chief difference on

the author's screen is the difference between Jew and Gentile, and he is captured by what he terms the mystery — the *mysterion* — of Christ, by which Gentiles — the many ethnicities of the world beyond God's covenant people Israel — are fellow heirs of God's promises. "Now in Christ Jesus," he exults, "you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2.13-14).

So difference was central. Difference and the discord it prompted was central to the world situation of the time. Difference and the reconciliation of the discord it prompted was central to the what God was up to in Christ Jesus. What God is up to in the world is one broad definition of mission that I like. So difference turns out to be central in mission.

In this talk I propose that putting the concept of difference at the center of our understanding of mission can clarify and energize our vision for mission in the wider world. I then try to show that that concept of mission is essential to the emerging theme of companionship in Anglican discussions of mission. Finally, I discuss how difference and companionship are crucial to your diocesan work in world mission at this particular juncture in the history and life of the Anglican Communion, when we are struggling with the tensions that have followed the sexuality decisions of the Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention.

So, first, I propose to put the concept of difference at the center of our understanding of mission. I make this proposal not to solve a conceptual problem for Episcopalians only, or for North American Christians, or for churches in the Global North. Rather, I want to say that the concept of difference is essential to a Christian understanding of mission in any cultural and linguistic setting.

To confirm that point and to develop by stages this understanding of mission in terms of difference, I want to take you in imagination to a hill station in the Himalaya Mountains of North India, where in March Jane and I attended a conference convened by the Diocese of Amritsar of the Church of North India. I was in that diocese as a researcher for the Global Anglicanism Project, an initiative of the Episcopal Church Foundation that is designed to get an empirical sense of what Anglicanism is through the life and understanding of grassroots Anglicans around the world. The Bishop of Amritsar, Pradeep Kumar Samantaroy, felt that my attending this gathering would be helpful to the project. The gathering was held at Dalhousie, a hill station at 7,000 feet, from where, looking down south, one could see the plains of the Punjab and, looking up north, the jagged snow-covered peaks of the high Himalaya reaching up to maybe 23,000 feet.

The conference, convened at the Earth Center, a diocesan environmental institute, was entitled the Diocese of Amritsar Consultation on Mission Priorities. Participating were all the officers of the diocese and the leaders, both lay and clergy, of various ministries in education, social outreach, children and youth, and women's work. In opening the conference, Bp. Samantaroy stressed that the task of designating the diocese's mission

priorities was not that of the bishop alone but of the entire diocese and its leadership, hence the gathering

But what is mission? Well, a previous gathering of the diocese had actually developed a diocesan mission statement, and this articulation was shared by Vidhya Sagar, the diocesan project manager, and here it is in its English version (it had also been rendered in Punjabi and Hindi): "We visualize and discover people being renewed and strengthened in faith, (*iman*) relating to the world (*dunia ke sath*), constantly growing and involving themselves towards realization of the Kingdom of God."

No one can accuse that mission statement of not being comprehensive enough! It includes every conceivable faithful movement that any member of the Diocese of Amritsar might undertake in his or her Christian life. My guess is that you can readily see the statement's problem, though: it's too general, too comprehensive. It has no sharp edge. It does not direct the church's attention in any particular direction.

I guess also that you see a resemblance between this statement and many mission statements that you've encountered in parishes and dioceses of the Episcopal Church. They include not just everything *but* the kitchen sink, but everything *and* the kitchen sink. Everything God is calling the church to be and do — all that gets piled into the mission statement. The mission statement becomes a comprehensive description of our life, but it fails to energize movement in any particular direction.

An important part of this problem of comprehensive description eclipsing energizing focus is that the church fails to distinguish in any meaningful way between ministry and mission. The two words are often used interchangeably. Equally often, they are paired together — "mission and ministry" — probably with a vague sense that they might be slightly different, but we don't know quite how — "but let's just put them together to make sure that we're covering all the bases and don't miss anything!"

Back at Dalhousie, Monijinjir Byapari of the Church of North India's Synodical Board of Social Services spoke dramatically of the Indian situation that the church needed to be addressing: an agrarian crisis that has prompted hundreds of farmers to commit suicide; a water crisis where only 9% of the rural population has reliably safe water to drink; an education crisis where 37% of children are not able to continue beyond primary school; a health crisis where just 1% of government budgets support medical care; an inter-religious crisis in which over 3,000 people were killed in 2000; a communal crisis where people of low caste, the Dalits, continue to suffer blatant discrimination. Could the diocesan mission statement help focus the church's response to that context? Well, not really!

In contrast to the mission statement, I had already seen a good deal of how the Diocese of Amritsar addresses those issues in Indian society. One avenue is the diocese's remarkable Socio-Economic Development Programme, or SEDP. I'd attended two gatherings of landless Sikh and Hindu farm laborers that SEDP was helping to organize against the oppressive policies of landlords and local village councils. I'd met with a

group of Sikh women among whom SEDP's women's worker had organized a cooperative that had been so successful that it had its own community loan fund in the village of Mirpur. Beyond the socio-economic work, I'd attended an inter-religious dialogue that addressed tensions among Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. I'd heard evangelists talk about their witness to Christ through friendships and neighborhood Bible study groups, and I'd attended the opening of a new congregation in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Summing up a crucial dimension of all this work, Daniel B. Das, the director of SEDP, declared to the Consultation on Mission Priorities, "*Hum bahar jaiyinge!*", which is Hindi for, "We will go outside!" He meant not only outside the boundaries of the church's membership, but outside the natural constituencies of the church, to people who were different, to people that it would be a challenge for the church to reach: Hindus, Sikhs, people in distant villages who spoke a very rough kind of Punjabi, and so on.

Inside versus outside — that's a crucial marker of mission. Going outside means reaching beyond boundaries. In one important sense, the mission statement sense, mission is everything God is asking us to be and to do. That sense — what I call Mission I — is useful for analysis, but not for action. The more useful understanding of mission — what I term Mission II — is as ministry that crosses boundaries. Christian mission, I like to say, is the activity of sending and being sent across significant boundaries of human experience to bear witness in word and deed to God's reconciling work through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Those "significant boundaries of human experience" may be cultural, social, economic, political, racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographical, or any combination of these characteristics.

What distinguishes mission is that in mission we are reaching out beyond our comfort zones, the zones of our own communities, to encounter and minister with people and communities who are not us and whatever it is that characterizes and defines us. Intuitively and routinely we sense and use this kind of understanding as we think about our life in the church. When talking about a parish, people often comment, whether positively or negatively, on the congregation's worship life, on the preaching, on the community life, and on the education offerings. If the question is then asked, "Are they a mission congregation?" or "What sort of mission work do they do?" everyone knows what is being asked. The question might be re-phrased: "What sort of outreach do they have?" "In what ways do they try to reach people beyond the congregation?" "How are they serving their neighborhood?" If it's an urban parish, the questioner might have in mind recent immigrants, or young professionals, or inner-city poor, depending on the context. If it's a town, people might have in mind latch-key children, or the unemployed, or simply the unchurched, again depending on the context. In any context, the questioner might have in mind whether the congregation has any work in other parts of the world, beyond national boundaries.

Back at Dalhousie in North India, Bp. Samantaroy called me out of my researcher role and into a consultant role at the mission priorities consultation. He asked me to serve on a panel and to comment on how the mission conversation was going. I told the group

much of what I've told you but went on to share with them a more concise definition of mission that I'd been formulating and mulling for some time: Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference.

Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. As a category, difference is helpful in describing the fundamental feature of variation in the conditions and experience of human communities. The terms, "the other" and "otherness", can also be helpful in highlighting the personal or existential experience of strangeness that we often have in encountering difference. The term difference has the advantage of denoting an objective fact and being a little less relative, a little less tied to the experience of the particular observer or participant.

Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. This definition of mission also highlights in a very concise way both the continuity and discontinuity, the similarity and dissimilarity, between ministry and mission. Ministry is the whole of the work into which God invites and draws us, so ministry includes mission. The two differ mainly in the context in which they are done. The specific kinds of work in ministry and mission may be similar and even identical. It is the context of the minister that distinguishes them, the issue being whether the minister is working in his or her own context or in the context of another culture, another people. As pastor in a congregation north of Boston, I preached, guided liturgy, taught, counseled, visited the sick and generally built up the life of the church. As a pastor in a church district in eastern Zimbabwe, I preached, guided liturgy, taught, counseled, visited the sick and generally built up the life of the church. In Hamilton, Massachusetts, I was a curate and then an interim rector. In my work in the Bonda Church District in Zimbabwe, people on both sides of the Atlantic understood me to be a missionary. What made the difference was the dimension of difference. White, USAmerican, with English as our mother tongue, Jane and I were ministering among black Zimbabweans whose mother tongue was Shona. It was the dimension of difference that made it mission.

Similarly, this year, Mildred Mbwando of that very same Bonda Church District is studying here at ETSS and serving in local parishes. In Zimbabwe she preached, guided liturgy, and taught. In Austin, she preaches, guides liturgy and teaches. No one called her a missionary in Zimbabwe as she ministered among her own people. Here she is a missionary to the USA, appointed by the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society. It's difference that makes the difference. It's the dimension of difference that makes it mission. Similarly, Scott and Carol Kellerman had important work as a physician and a spiritual director in California, but no one called them missionaries. In their medical and evangelistic work among the Batwa of western Uganda, though, they are termed missionaries. It's difference that makes the difference. As a church musician in Amherst, Massachusetts, Randy Giles played for services, taught, composed and participated in music conferences. No one called him a missionary. In Madras, South India, Randy sometimes plays for services, he teaches, he composes, and he leads music conferences, many of them concerned with the institute for indigenous liturgy and music he's been asked to establish. There he's a missionary. Why? Because of the dimension of difference between Caucasian and Dravidian, English and Tamil, American and Indian.

Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. In developing this theme at such length, you may think that I am belaboring the obvious. Alternatively, making difference so prominent in the definition of mission may make you wonder, "Well, if that's the case, what's the big deal about mission? If it's just a matter of the context of ministry, well, maybe we should fold everything together again, domestic ministry and foreign mission."  
= only 19 minutes

To these possible objections I say: The context for ministry is crucial, differences between contexts are crucial, and the presence of people willing to minister in the context of difference is crucial. Why? Look at the world situation and look at God. The world is struggling with difference. People are *dying* over difference. God created some kinds of difference as an expression of the rich diversity of existence — differences of locality, race, ethnicity and language, out of which the human community developed a rich diversity of culture. On these God-inspired differences, the human family has constructed differences of wealth, privilege, status, and power that are maintained by oppressive structures of wealth, privilege, status and power.

People are dying of these differences the world over. In the Darfour region of western Sudan, people are dying over the difference between Arab and black and all the differences of wealth, status and power that have grown up around that difference. In Iraq, people are dying over the differences among Sunni, Shia, Kurd and Baathist and over the difference between USAmerican and Iraqi. In south Asia, people are dying over the difference between having caste and having no caste and all the differences of wealth, status and power that have grown up around that difference. In Haiti, people have been dying over the difference between being Haitian and not Haitian for centuries — from genocide to enslavement, to perpetual impoverishment, which led to the deforestation which led to the mudslides that so recently killed so many — all of it having to do with difference and the structures of oppression that are built up around difference.

What's *God* up to with difference? Well, God's the *source* of difference. In the creation stories, it's as if difference was God's playpen. Genesis 1 is a catalogue of all the various kinds of existence, and it's a catalogue of difference, not only day by day but within each day: "The earth brought forth vegetations, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds" — which means according to their differences — "and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind" — which means according to their differences. And so on with the swarms of living creatures in the waters, in the air and on land, "each according to its kind" — which means according to its difference. The Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 is similarly a celebration of variety, which included every kind of tree and in which the many different kinds of animals were brought to Adam for naming. God is the source not only of abundance, but of abundant variety and the celebration of that variety. As the Presiding Bishop said at Executive Council last week in connection with anti-racism training, "Difference is part of the mystery of the abundant and profligate imagination of God."

As we've seen, what humanity has done with difference is essentially to develop a taxonomy of sin, or, to use a different metaphor, to make difference a blueprint for sin. As we've seen, the writer to the Ephesians saw God's work in Christ fundamentally as bringing people together over the alienations gathered around differences. It was reaching out to difference that defined the mission of the early Christian movement, and it was that embrace of difference that ensured the movement's survival.

Reaching out and embracing difference is still the heart of mission. Again, mission is ministry in the dimension of difference. In mission, we are called to participate in God's work of reconciling people across difference, or, as the Catechism puts it, restore people to unity with God and each other in Christ. In mission we seek to recover a vision of how God treasures and cherishes difference, and participate in that treasuring and cherishing.

Companionship is a major emerging theme for how we can participate in that treasuring and cherishing. It was striking how *Missio*, the Mission Communion of the Anglican Communion, in its final report in 2000 called for moving from the mode of partnership, which was experienced by many as a business model for mission, to the mode of companionship in mission, which connoted a sharing of life on a shared journey in Christ. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America is using the similar term accompaniment as its principal paradigm for mission.

The Standing Commission on World Mission of the Episcopal Church continued in this vein as it sought to offer the Church a vision statement for world mission in the 21st century. *Companions in Transformation* was the result, a report submitted with a strategy and funding proposal to the 2003 General Convention, which commended it to the church for three years of study. The document marks the major features of today's context for mission: the poverty crisis in an age of globalization; the environmental crisis of the groaning earth; the crisis of conflicts among religions and peoples; the opportunity of experiencing Christianity in the multi-cultural Global South; and the needs of the under-evangelized. The commission's conviction was that the quality of mission presence God is calling us to in the world is the presence of a companion, one who shares bread on the way and so shares life, experience, culture, and the eucharistic bread of Christ's broken and risen presence in the midst of cherished difference. In this companionship, the Church and each one of us is called to be a witness, a pilgrim, a servant, a prophet, an ambassador, a host, and a sacrament, and the report develops each of these themes.

Central to companionship is the phenomenon of difference: the God-given differences to be discovered and cherished, the human-initiated differences to be discerned and reconciled. Such mission companionship in the midst of difference is especially crucial at this particular juncture in the life of the Anglican Communion.

The communion-wide turmoil prompted by General Convention's sexuality decisions is well known to all of us and much on our minds. It is especially good that it be on the minds of those of us committed to global mission, for we have more to do than most with

Anglicans in various parts of the world and thus with the communion as a whole. I make three observations about this particular context of difference in the communion.

First, it's important for us to discern and honor the ways in which all sides of the current controversy relate the controversy to mission. I stress this because it is easy to dismiss the controversy as a distraction from the mission to which God is calling us. You've probably heard people make comments like, "There's so much to do in mission, and here we're obsessing about sex!" You might even have made such comments yourself! In fact, people who affirm the full participation of homosexual persons in the church's life often do so out of a keen sense of mission, a sense that God is calling the church to work to include all, much as the early church included those who were not Jews. Equally, people who do not affirm the full participation of homosexual persons often do so out of a keen sense of mission, a sense that God's mission is disempowered, even vitiated, by a course of action viewed as unfaithful because contrary to God's will as revealed in scripture. Response to difference, in this case difference in sexual orientation is at the center, and, not surprisingly, that is experienced as a mission issue. We need to honor the missional concerns of those on all sides of the controversy.

Second, many Episcopalians have been caught by surprise by the strength of feeling in other parts of the world about our church's actions. Indeed, many Episcopalians have been startled by the sheer fact of there being so many Anglicans in other parts of the world to be upset. Many in our church are relatively unaware of the size and diversity of the Anglican Communion and the fact that there are more Anglicans in Africa, Asia and Latin America than there are in Europe and North America. The decrease in the number of Episcopalians exploring and interacting with Christians in those parts of the world is one important factor in that lack of awareness. Many Episcopalians are global in their professional lives but parochial in their Christian lives. They have business, educational, medical or consulting relationships all over the world but often know little about Christians, let alone Anglicans, in those places. Historically, missionaries have been the people who *have* known about Christian and Anglican life in other places, because they have been there specifically for such interaction — living close to the ground, knowing the language, growing in the culture. After a long numerical downturn from the late 60s onward, missionary numbers are growing again, both from the DFMS and from the voluntary agencies, so there is hope of the knowledge base expanding again. Here is where the diocesan GEM committees can have a crucial role. You can initiate and nourish the Companion Diocese Relationships that since 1970 have done more than anything else to bring Anglicans around the world in touch with one another. You can recruit and encourage the missionaries who will develop the in-depth knowledge that can inform and transform the consciousness of Episcopalians about the global Body of Christ.

Third, the quality of presence we must have in the current turmoil must be that of companions. A companion listens, because a companion want to learn deeply about the life of the one with whom one is walking. A companion has a passion for learning, growing deeply in the world view and lifeways of the companion's culture. It is out of listening that the companion asks questions, and then listens some more. This is the pilgrimage motif of companionship, the confidence that one will have much to learn, and

that that learning will transform one's own understanding, one's own spirituality, one's own apprehension of who God is and what God is up to in the world. A companion also bears witness, even prophecies, but the witness and the prophecy come out of the listening, and as they come out of listening, rather than simply getting one's word in edgewise, one's companion may be more open to the witness and the prophecy, and a conversation ensues. Such listening and sharing companionship in the midst of difference is the crucial quality of mission presence in our current turmoil. Again, mission is ministry in the dimension of difference.

I end this reflection with a celebration of discovering difference in mission from a particular Episcopal missionary now serving in Africa. Dennis Berk trained for mission at the January 2003 Mission Personnel Orientation held here in January of 2003 and is now teaching at St. John's Theological College in Mindolo, Zambia. In his June 2004 newsletter, he writes: Although the media would have us believe that all of the poor people in Africa are mired in lives of desperation, hopelessness and unhappiness, I have discovered they have an astounding capacity for celebrating joy even within the midst of their poverty. My preconceptions have been shattered as my experiences in Zambia have revealed to me a way of life that is very rich even though most people have neither a bank account nor any money to deposit within such an account. . . . Living in Africa has resulted in . . . eye-opening experiences that have brought new life to my spirit and joy to my soul."

Thanks be to God!