

## DIOCESE OF YORK

### VISIT TO

## DIOCESE OF SALDANHA BAY, SOUTH AFRICA

1<sup>st</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2009

### BACKGROUND

The Diocese of York has been twinned with the diocese of Cape Town for some years. Cape Town itself, being a very large Diocese, split three years ago into three new dioceses, and it was agreed that each of these new Dioceses should now twin particularly, but not exclusively, each with one of the three Archdeaconries in the Dioceses of York.

The Diocese of Saldanha Bay is now linked with the Archdeaconry of York. Following the Lambeth Conference it was agreed between Bishop Martin of Selby and Bishop Raphael of Saldanha Bay that a group from York would visit South Africa in 2009. Consequently, in October a representative group travelled there.



The group included: The Bishop (Martin), a Rural Dean (Martin Baldock), an Incumbent (Peter Horsley), a Curate (Phil Carman), an Ordinand (Matt Woodcock), a Reader (Lynn Comer), a Youth Worker (Ruth Hills), a Mothers' Union Leader (Bronnie Broadhurst), a Deanery Lay Chair (Mike Bowers) and the Bishop's PA (Jeniffer Williams).

### CHURCH SERVICES

It was sometimes fun to discover only the night before how many services we were to be involved in and how far the travelling might be, but it was hugely enjoyable and the team all rose to the occasion really well. Most of the largest services began at 7am or 8am and ranged from being charismatic to very traditional. During these thirteen days the team preached and led worship in over twenty churches, some in very urban and some in very rural areas.

For example, Matt writes:

*"Phil and I had been seconded to the farthest outpost, Namaqualand. This is rugged territory and a challenging place for any Priest to serve. The distances needed to travel are huge in order to minister effectively.*



*Our host, Father Stafford, had arranged for us to meet members of a church youth group, in a small town in the parish called Okiep. It was miles from anywhere. I had taken along an England football shirt to present to one of the kids. Many of them turned up at Father David's house to greet us. It was at that point I realised we could be faced with an embarrassing diplomatic incident. They all loved football, they all loved Wayne Rooney, they all loved my England shirt. Who did I give it to without offending or upsetting the others? Phil gave me one of those classic "you're on your own" smiles.*



*In a moment of desperate inspiration I recalled someone mentioning that breakdancing was popular among the youth. With the aid of our interpreter I asked the group if this was the case. A dozen excited nodding heads confirmed it. "Ok, then," I told them, with Father Stafford repeating my words in Afrikaans. "We are going to have a dance off to decide who wins the England top." A few cheers went up and a circle quickly formed. I was saved!*

*After a thoroughly dizzying 20 minutes involving all manner of twirls, back flips, somersaults, body pops and robotics, we chose our winner. Everyone seemed happy with the decision - not least the little dance champion who'll be using the shirt as a nightie for a few years to come.*

*Phil and I have vowed to keep in touch with our new friends from Namaqualand".*



Martin will never forget his experience:

*"I really enjoyed the opportunity in every service to pray with people – to celebrate birthdays, pray for healing etc. whatever they wanted. The people were incredibly open and welcoming and loved to hug at the Peace! The scene in Cape Town Cathedral of the memory bank to keep alive the sacrifices made in the struggle for peace was unforgettable".*



Again, it comes across loud and strong from Peter:

*"A highlight of services I attended was an opportunity given for people to come forward for prayer if they were celebrating a birthday or some other milestone such as a Wedding Anniversary. The services were a wonderful mix of traditional hymns and spontaneous singing of choruses! All services I attended had a choir, and the singing and music was clearly a strong and important tradition. I felt privileged to be given real freedom by the clergy in the churches where I preached. I was able to preach in an interactive style, encouraging people to discuss a question in two's or three's where they sat and then gave feedback. I felt that people really engaged with this style".*



Mike adds a more sobering but equally powerful reflection:

*"I recall during the last service I attended at the Church of the Ascension, Archdeacon Dirk Magerman blessed a few children at the end of Communion ... they were unaccompanied by adults! After the service I asked Dirk why they were separate from other children/families. His answer was they were HIV/Aids orphans! That really hit me, especially in view of the fact I have five grandchildren between the ages of one and eleven living with parents in good homes!*

*When Dirk have me the details of the Children's Centre and asked if we could help, I told myself this is something I would like to become a reality ...our visit hopefully resulting in the construction of this Centre. A big mountain to climb but not impossible with support from others."*

Bishop Martin says:

*"I was humbled at being asked to preach at Confirmation Services to congregations ranging from 500 to 1,000, and on one occasion discovering not only that the service was to be in three languages, have choruses and a steel band, liturgical dance, robes and incense, open prayer, and chanted psalms – but that I was invited to not only preach but to lead the entire service. The level of trust in allowing this was just amazing and, of course, this only happened because we are all Anglicans and therefore could make certain assumptions about each other. The Anglican Communion is very much alive and well!"*



## CLERGY SCHOOL



Our host Diocese had arranged for their annual Clergy School to take place during our visit so that we could not only participate but join with them for four days and meet at depth with every one of the clergy. This was a wonderful opportunity and so different from many visits which are often restricted simply to a few meetings with a few groups. The Clergy School took place at St Helena Bay in a beach-side hotel overlooking the clear blue sea and silver sands, and the mixture of worship, learning, laughing and sharing seemed so very easy. It was a tonic for all of us.

During this event, on the first evening the team all introduced themselves and their particular areas of interest, and during the programme Bishop Martin led three sessions on Celtic Spirituality. At one point there was a request from the majority present that the York team should be given a larger place in the programme, and so at very short notice most of the next morning was given over to us. The team were all given time to share something of their own expertise and observations of church life and Christian discipleship which led to a wonderful time of open discussion. As a result of this, a whole host of things came to the surface including "Clergy Wellness" and the difficulty of keeping one's faith alive in the face of the grinding round of meeting expectations.



Bishop Martin says:



*"The whole team sparkled with their input, which they had had very little time to prepare, and I was so proud of them. It could only happen because our hosts were so welcoming, affirming and appreciative at every point. Indeed, we were overcome with their hospitality and we have a lot to learn about the ministry of "welcome to strangers"."*

As if to take that open partnership theme further but on a different direction, Martin noted:

*"I was very struck by the comment at clergy school about how Muslims and Christians worked side by side working together and supporting one another in the apartheid years in the townships."*

## **CHURCH ISSUES**

Many of the issues facing the church resonate with those we face here: growing secularisation, disenchantment with the Church on the part of young people, anxiety about finance, clergy numbers and training.

Amidst all the laughter, praying, partying and real development of friendships, as Westerners we had to learn to be ready to "go with the flow" as far as time was concerned. The lesson did us a great deal of good! Indeed, some of our team were able to be spontaneous themselves and simply take off to tour, for example, Mothers' Union groups, schools and other churches. During our time, various Archdeaconry Days were organised in which our team were invited to give particular input and the themes ranged from involvement with communities, schools and youth work, and so on.

Peter says of his visit to the Archdeaconry Day in Paarl:

*"This was a well attended event with an excellent discussion ranging over a number of issues aimed at helping to develop the links between us. These included educational links, work with young people, establishing 'links' with parishes and the importance of prayer."*

**Educational links** – here we discussed the possibility of establishing cultural links between schools in the Diocese of Saldanha Bay and here in the York Archdeaconry. The need for possible financial support was also highlighted – there is a need for library books in schools, school libraries are not well stocked with books due to stretched financial resources.

**Young People** – we discussed the need for services and events that are relevant for young people and the importance of sharing models for doing 'church' with them. It was felt that links could be established between youth leaders in the Diocese and York Archdeaconry to share resources and good practice.

**'Links with parishes'** The suggestion of churches 'linking' as a way of gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of issues facing churches here and in South Africa. A key component of this could be informed prayer for each other.





*In the discussion I initially felt we would have little to offer because the churches seem to be very full compared with most churches here in the UK. However the loss of some young people from the churches there after Confirmation highlighted a concern that the problems we currently face in terms of attendance especially among younger people may also become a pressing issue for the church in South Africa in the next ten to fifteen years. There was an opportunity to discuss new styles of service taking place here in the UK to help address this problem."*

Bronnie is equally enthusiastic:

*"I was taken by the MU President elect to the Mayibuye Museum on the campus of the University of Western Cape. This was an amazing and moving portrayal in words and photographs of the horrors of apartheid - the superb photographs had, for the most part, been submitted anonymously by those who witnessed the effects of the pass laws, clearance of townships etc. The expression on the faces of those who were fleeing imprisonment or worse illustrated the courage and terror of those who suffered so much.*



*I also visited three townships - the first shack, in urban Fisantekrael, consisted of one small living room and kitchenette for a couple, their daughter and her children. The floor covering had disappeared and there was no fabric left on the settee and chair. The second urban shack was larger and inhabited by a young couple, who were both working, so was well decorated and furnished. Finally, I was shown an example of the much larger rural township dwellings. The Mothers' Union members much prefer the smaller size of the new Diocese as transport is a big problem and some branches now have meetings on a Sunday afternoon, after sharing lunch following the morning worship. Their meetings concentrate on prayer, far too much business and then making items to sell for others less fortunate than themselves - no speakers unlike our branch meetings - but they do manage an Annual Meeting.*

*I was very impressed by their spirituality, forgiveness and love. This was illustrated by the title bestowed on me as a mark of great respect - Mama Bronnie."*

Wow!

Mike adds:



*"With Peter, I was in Paarl and was overwhelmed by the warm welcome. We ranged over youth ministry, inter-diocesan links, Mothers' Union membership, and the role of Deanery Lay Chairs. I also visited four primary schools and was impressed by their attractive buildings, but also the need for more space for IT, sports and library facilities. The children were all smartly dressed in uniform and very polite. The headteachers all had a very clear vision for the future, but shared concerns about finance and staffing, two of the heads being ex-pupils of their own schools! Pen-friends, school links and perhaps some fund-raising were all practical ideas I have brought home."*

## THE CONTEXT



In South Africa itself we were treated to see some of the wildlife and wonderful landscapes around Table Mountain and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In this post-apartheid nation where there are clearly many issues still to be resolved there is vast difference between the rich and the poor, and the racial and cultural divide still exists in terms of economic and employment freedom. The lack of hatred and the depth of mercy and forgiveness is a massive testimony to people like Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the Church is working hard to be a very constructive partner in building a new united country.

Some of the neighbourhoods are very affluent and a lot of foreign money has bought some of the best real-estate. Not far away, however, we saw huge settlements with vast numbers pouring in each day from neighbouring countries. In these communities where there is low employment and consequently worrying levels of crime, drug abuse, alcoholism and violence, there are a host of people working to raise the vision and bring about a new order of society. There are some very inspiring stories of Christian ministry here with amazing examples of heroism on the part of both clergy and congregations.



For example, Martin says:

*"I was very concerned in rural areas about the threat of human trafficking to 'service' overseas visitors coming to South Africa for the World Cup. I heard the story of one 15 year old who had been abducted but thankfully rescued from way over in Jo'berg. I begged a large poster about the issue which will go up in St Edward's notice-board after Christmas. At Lambert's Bay we met a small group of people in the 'new' church. The old one had been repossessed and knocked down when the Group Areas*

*Act which came in during the 1960's. On behalf of the group, one of the teenagers thanked us for visiting them as she said "we don't meet people from other countries". Actually lots of foreign tourists go to that area but only to the richer tourist part of the town and to visit the gannet colony!"*

But with tears of both laughter and sadness he adds:

*"Now picture the scene. River valley, rugged hills on either side. From the right, on the lower slopes green lines of rooibos bushes. The Cederberg region of the Western Cape is the only place in the world where it is grown.*

*In the centre of your vision is a large lake, backed up from a dam on the Elephant River. 300 years ago large herds of elephants and the earliest human inhabitants, the hunter-gathering San people, roamed freely. All now disappeared, hunted into extinction by succeeding waves of white and coloured people.*

*On the right bank of the lake is a camping, swimming and boating area, and a wild flower garden which bursts into life in August and September when the rains come. On the left bank, climbing up the lower hills is a hotch potch of half finished mansions, holiday homes for the new rich in South Africa. Then there is a road, then there is toilet city.*

*Toilet city is an area of approximately 3 acres with white, concrete outside toilets and nothing else. In between each toilet is space for a small house. The authorities did not like the ad hoc informal settlements that were springing up, and some bright spark came up with the idea that if they built toilets people would be so grateful that they would build houses to adjoin the toilets. So, without consulting the local people, the loos were built.*

*Now they are an eyesore, a local joke and possibly a future World Heritage Site.*



*The owners of the holiday homes want a 6 foot high concrete wall build around toilet city to shield it from their eye line, but the local people have threatened to tear it down if it is built. They are fed up with decades of division. Now they yearn for equality, not least in economic terms.*

*Have the loos ever been used? I didn't check!!"*

## **THE EFFECT**

The team of ten all returned different as a result. Some met with the Holy Spirit in a quite unexpected way. Others learned things about themselves which they had not before realised. Several came back vowing to be more honest about their own Christian faith and relationship with God, seeking to be much more dependant on Him. Some grew quite visibly in their confidence and character.



What we will seek to avoid is boring people with presentations which have not been sought. The team themselves are all sharing their experiences within their own networks of churches, deaneries, schools and youth groups as well as secular clubs to which they belong and church organisations such as Mothers' Union meetings. They will, however, respond to other invitations if at all possible.

What this trip was certainly not about was becoming a financial link. Having said that, some of us have returned just wondering whether we might be able to do something given

that Saldanha Bay is such a new Diocese without the historic resources which we so easily take for granted. For example, one of the team is wondering about supporting a children's centre for orphans for under the age of eighteen who have HIV/Aids. Another possibility is to help refurbish a Retreat Centre to which some of those clergy suffering from fatigue and burnout could go for refreshment and renewal. But these are early days and we would need to get this right.

## **THE FUTURE**

As far as the future is concerned, we would not anticipate such a large group travelling again in either direction, but to have begun in this way really has established a host of new relationships and opened the door very wide for future development. We wonder about possibilities such as, say, two clergy travelling each way on alternate years but always for a particular purpose. Could it be that each year a curate from each of the two Dioceses arranges an exchange for three weeks as part of their Initial Ministerial Education?

What was remarkable was that of the ten who travelled together, the Bishop was the only person who knew each of the team, and yet they gelled very quickly into a beautiful advertisement for the Archdeaconry of York, for the Diocese of York, for the Anglican Communion and for the Kingdom of God. Conversely, we have all come home with our experience broadened, our faith deepened and having learnt so much from our Christian brothers and sisters who live thousands of miles away in the Southern hemisphere.



## OUR RELATIONSHIP IN CHRIST

Jenny says it all:

*"The gracious hospitality of people was overwhelming. We were made to feel very much 'at home'. It was a real privilege to stay in people's homes sharing something of their lifestyle and having opportunities to talk about the things that were important to them, their present situations and their hopes and dreams. It helped create friendships rather than just being treated as visitors"*

It is an old truism but it holds good:

**"you can be physically near someone and yet spiritually far away;  
and you can be physically distant from someone and yet spiritually very near".**

The second of these is certainly true for us. Our friends in South Africa will remain in our hearts and minds for a very long time, and the pictures of their faces and congregations will be very much in our prayers – prayers especially of thanksgiving.

+Martin Selby  
December 2009

