

together in Christ

Companion bishops share mutual love of God and the church

by Bishop Jane Alexander

It was an honour to be able to visit our sister diocese of Buyé this September. Bishop Sixbert has visited us here in Edmonton twice and participated in the dialogue of Canadian and African bishops. We have talked a great deal together about understanding one another's context for mission and ministry and, finally, I was able to go and see for myself ministry in Buyé.

From the beginning of the trip our time together was bathed in prayer and in our joint love of God and of the church. I would never have thought that in 10 short days I would get such a comprehensive view of everything that Bishop Sixbert and the people of Buyé are doing. It was clear that our diocesan dream of proclaiming the gospel, making disciples and furthering the kingdom is one that is shared and being lived out in Buyé.

As you may know from previous articles, the Diocese of Buyé has 28 parishes and four archdeaconries. Whilst it is much smaller geographically than our Diocese of Edmonton, it has many, many, more thousands of people. My husband Tim and I, with Archdeacon Alan Perry, were able to visit some of Buyé's farthest points. We met and worshipped with people in four archdeaconries, and met nearly all the clergy at the cathedral on the last Sunday of our visit – appropriately enough, Back to Church Sunday.

It was clear everywhere we went that this is a country and a diocese that is committed to a program of rebuilding and the strengthening of relationships through the power of Christ. The legacy of the civil war that ended in 2005 was the displacement of over 500,000 people and the destruction of national infrastructures. Nearly all communities experienced the loss and killing of church members, families were torn apart, church buildings broken down. But now God has placed a new spirit in the lives of the men, women and children of Buyé. Even though Burundi still ranks as one of the 10 poorest countries in the world and there are extreme levels of poverty, with the majority of the population living on less than \$1 a day, there was no sense of despair. Signs of hope and life are everywhere.

The Anglican church in Buyé is a critical partner in the rebuilding of community and family life. I was amazed at the tenacity that the people of the diocese showed in rising to the many challenges before them. This is a place where the church must be, and is, involved in every aspect of community life, from building and running schools and health centres, to literacy and micro finance groups, to farming and the work of reconciliation and, of course, in building strong communities of faith.

In this article I can only give a few glimpses of how we saw God at work,



We, the Bishops of the Anglican Dioceses of Edmonton and Buyé, on behalf of our people do make a solemn commitment to walk together in faith. We pray that God will bless this partnership, will help us to experience through it the grace and peace of Jesus Christ, and will use it to make us more effective in our sharing of the good news. It is our prayer that through our partnership with one another that we might grow in mutual affection and communion, seek a more profound experience of truth, build up the Church in unity and give glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour.



Bishop Jane and Tim with Diocese of Buyé clergy and their families.

Photos: Alan Perry



At this farm in Kimeza people of different ethnic backgrounds work toward peace and reconciliation.

but please visit the blog <http://www.edmontonbuye.blogspot.ca/> for many more stories and pictures.

The church is working with the government to build trust among three ethnic groups, a task which is further complicated by the mistrust between those who remained in Burundi during the war and those who left. The building of trust must address issues of extreme poverty, and like the children of Israel when they returned from exile in Egypt, the country you find on your return is not the one you left.

Two things I saw really stick in my mind. One was the farm at Kimeza where, in addition to agricultural development, there was the building of real community as people from different ethnic backgrounds worked together and found peace and reconciliation. The second thing was the incredible work of the Mother's Union in trying to

change communities through its support of literacy and microfinance projects. At the church in Bigombo parish we saw the induction of new members of the Mother's Union, and heard of the projects that they were engaged in to bring hope and healing. In Mwumba a local literacy group showed us what a typical lesson looked like, using gender issues as the theme.

We had the opportunity to visit a number of schools and bishop Sixbert told us that the government wants the church to more involved in the schools to help with moral teaching and with discipline. Everywhere we went we were greeted with enormous enthusiasm.

Here in Edmonton when we talk about building a church, or a church hall, it brings a very different process to mind than what we saw in Buyé. Building a church in Buyé is a community project in a very hands-on way.

Everyone is involved in digging the trenches for the foundations and digging up the large stones, making mud mortar, making and baking bricks and carrying them long distances to build the church. We were honoured to lay just a few stones in the foundation of the Ngoma subparish. What joy there was in building the church, the whole community turned out – mothers with babies tied on their backs, children and youth, old and young were all there singing songs of praise and building their church with great pride. The diocese helps with the final part of the project – the roof, by supplying tin sheets, and when it can, helping with cement for the floor. Cement costs about \$17 US a bag.

Many of you have contributed to health related projects in Buyé, malaria nets, medical supplies and the HIV/AIDS clinic that is a joint project for Buyé, Edmonton and the PWRDF. It was wonderful to see how very real steps are being taken in safeguarding healthcare for the people of Buyé.

It seemed to me that wherever we went we met people who lived out their faith with joy and with deep commitment. As we saw young people inducted into the diocesan youth movement, women becoming full members of the Mother's Union, and shared in the confirmation of some 170 young people ('a small group' Bishop Sixbert said), all I could see was a joyful hope that God was present, blessing the people. There was no doubt that they were held in the palm of God's hand.

My hope for all of us in Edmonton and in Buyé is that we can find ways to learn from one another and to share the gifts we have been given. Here at home we could take notes on the profound sense of hospitality and welcome in Christ that is part of daily life in Buyé. We uphold one another in prayer, every week the people of Buyé pray for us, and we for them. It is my hope that each parish in our diocese will become in the very least, a prayer partner with a parish in Buyé. I hope that the ACW and the Mother's Union can develop close ties and pray for one another's ministry. It would be a blessing for our youth to share in some way.

I know that God will continue to guide us in this partnership. There will be opportunities for material support in the area of health, education and church building. The people of Buyé and of Edmonton have been blessed in so many ways and we will, with God's help, find ways to share the blessings we have received. I think we can make a real difference in one another's lives. I believe that our proclamation of the Gospel is at the heart of our partnership. We, as a diocese, turn 100 next year, and in 2015, Buyé turns 50. I wonder if we can share a time of jubilee and how that might look.

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Bishop Jane witness to Buyé diocese living Marks of Mission

The following travelogue is excerpted from Archdeacon Perry's EdmontonBuyé blog, which can be viewed online at: www.edmontonbuye.blogspot.ca.

Monday, September 24 "Amahoro!"

("Peace") is the usual greeting in Kirundi. We have heard it (and said it) a lot the past several hours.

After a 24-hour trip from Edmonton, Bishop Jane, Tim and I arrived just after nightfall at Bujumbura airport for a visit to Buyé. Bishop Sixbert, his wife Clothilde, and our old friends Dominique and Deo greeted us with a warm welcome.

Tuesday, September 25

One of the highlights of our tour of the Diocese of Buyé was the opportunity to see a new HIV/AIDS clinic that is nearing completion. Buyé diocese is building the clinic in partnership with the Diocese of Edmonton and the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund.

The clinic will provide health services, such as testing, pastoral counseling and treatment follow-up to approximately 3000 patients.

Later that day we visited Mwumba parish. Here, the diocese teaches the members of a micro-finance/savings group to pool their savings. Individuals can then borrow money from the savings for small businesses. One man invested US\$40 in a goat, which has since given birth to three more goats. Profit from his business has allowed him to improve the lives of his family. Similar transformational stories were told by several men and women.

It was a real privilege to see the Diocese of Buyé living out the Marks of Mission in so many ways.

Wednesday, September 26

Wednesday's excursion was to Gitanyiri (Bishop Sixbert's home parish), where northern Burundi shares borders with Tanzania and Rwanda. Here we visited the Kimeza farm. An extraordinary operation, the farm employs over 300 people who raise superior variety banana seedlings. They also produce

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope...
Ephesians 4:4



organic fertilizer which is used on the farm and in the surrounding area to replenish the depleted soil.

The banana seedlings are distributed among the local populace for commercial production. People from different ethnic groups work together on the farm, which develops trust and a peaceful and harmonious community. Kimeza farm is truly a success story in the ministry of the Diocese of Buyé.

Thursday, September 27

Thursday we travelled to Kirundo for a confirmation service. The path to the church had been lined with banana stalks, a sign of welcome to dignitaries.

As we entered the church we could see that it was packed and everyone was singing joyfully. We had expected to confirm about 70 people, but there must have been at least 170. The confirmands surged forward in groups to be received into the Anglican Communion by Bishops Sixbert and Jane.

Bishop Jane and I were invited to distribute communion. Many people switched lines so they could receive the sacrament from the visiting bishop from Canada - the first female bishop they had ever seen. Again the faithful surged forward to participate in the sacrament, the newly confirmed for the first time.

Friday, September 28

Friday's excursion was a two-hour voyage to Bigombo parish for the induction of new members into the Mothers' Union. The entrance to the church was blocked by an enormous greeting party. They sprinkled flower petals on the car and sang and danced and blew whistles and horns. Eventually the group parted just enough to let us through to the church.

The highlight of the service was the official presentation and induction of some 57 new members of the Mothers' Union. This group of women does amazing mission work across the diocese, supporting the life and work of the church, and reaching out into the community with a variety of development projects.

After a delicious meal of chicken, goat, rice, peas, bananas and cabbage, the archdeacon expressed joy and hope for our diocesan partnership. He said that we were the second foreigners ever to visit his parish. He also asked us to tell the people of the Diocese of Edmonton that the people of Bigombo are praying for us.

Sunday, September 30

Sunday morning started sunny and bright. It was a taste of things to come. Arriving at All Saints' Cathedral in Buyé to a warm welcome, Bishop Sixbert, Bishop Jane, Tim and I each said a few words to the congregation. Then five different choirs began singing and people came forward to dance, even the bishops joined

in. It was an incredible experience.

Bishop Jane preached on the life of the church based on the letter of James. At the end of the sermon the congregation applauded enthusiastically. At the close of the service a talented group of traditional drummers and dancers entertained the entire congregation outside the cathedral. Again, even the bishops joined in.

During lunch at the bishop's house with all the diocesan staff and clergy, the Edmonton and Buyé bishops shared their vision and hopes for the development of the partnership between their dioceses.

Edmonton Synod

Rallying the courage to continue in God's mission

Welcome to the 63rd Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton. It is good to be together for worship and prayer. We have a very full agenda before us and it is grounded in our Christian life together. I think that our agenda is a good reflection of what we have been doing over the last two years since the 62nd Synod. It concerns the *Five Marks of Mission*: evangelism, partnerships, discipleship, church growth, congregational development and our witness in the wider world. Our agenda looks at how we live out our faith. It is built around our current ministries and our dreams for the future. Our theme of "Be not Afraid" comes from the enormity of the task of the church. The church has always had an enormous task, but I think that sometimes, as when we are meeting together at synods, when we gather up all the things we are doing, hope to do and look at questions we are asking then the task at hand can seem just too big and we retreat into inaction. So tonight we take our faith, we proclaim it and we will not be afraid to think of the future as God would have it. We listen to each other with ears of faith and hope and we find direction in our scriptures.

What a great reading we had in Romans. We are told we are to have lives of hope, in fact how could we not have lives of hope when God gave his Son for us? We are reminded that there is nothing that this world can do or hold that can separate us from God. Christ was given up for us all. All of us are in Christ whether we agree on everything or not. All of us are in Christ whether we are in Cold Lake, Wainwright, downtown Edmonton, Jasper or Buye. All of us are in Christ whether we are starting our walk with Him or are experienced pilgrims. As the church, Christ's own body we know that we do not ever want to be separated from one another. The call of God is a call to unity. Our hope is the hope of perfect community such as we see in the Holy Trinity.

As I said, our synod agenda reflects the work of the diocese over the past two years – please note I said the work of the diocese not the work of the bishop. Although those two things are intricately related the synod looks at the ministry and work of many people who have faithfully served Christ in their parishes, in the diocese, nationally and internationally. We listen to stories of individuals young and old who are proclaiming the gospel, making disciples and furthering the kingdom. We will hear challenges from our young people to take a stand on poverty, and we will hear how people are living out their faith in relation to the *Five Marks of Mission*.

Over the past four years we have taken some risks together in new approaches to ministry with the Barnabas Initiative, the Rural Ministry Initiative and the Indigenous Initiative. We have had the opportunity to evaluate how we have done. Some projects saw the growth we had hoped for and others did not. We have learned so much. We have now completed our feasibility study for our ministry campaign and those results have been shared in the circular and will be discussed tonight. Thank you to everyone who helped plan the study, those of you who facilitated interviews, and those who took part in the interviews in person and online. The funding of new ministries always presents fiscal challenges and the proposed ministry campaign that will be before you involves parish, diocesan and national initiatives.

There are shifting centres of population in our diocese. It would be a blessing to be able to be proactive to ministry opportunities rather than finding ourselves in what has become the wrong place for the present time. Therefore I am very grateful to Neil



Bishop Jane Alexander delivers her charge to the 63rd Synod.

Calhoun who will be sharing information on Edmonton's growth and development with us. We have had to find new and creative ways of looking at providing ministry in rural areas. We have two Lutheran/Anglican shared ministries one in Edson and one in Sedgewick. We have a new year-round worshipping community in Wabamun. We continue to look at the development of strong parishes both rural and urban. We are consolidating our efforts in congregational development and in the Natural Church Development project so that we can be better equipped to build and strengthen our parishes. 2013 will see our third Vital Church conference bringing opportunities to share new ideas and create supportive networks.

In recent years we have tried to find new ways of engaging young people and families in the church. Messy church – which goes by many names – is continuing to build bridges between local communities and parishes. The University Chaplaincy has a well established weeknight Bible study and Sunday night worship and goes from strength to strength. We now have a youth cohort in the diocese of leaders of youth ministry who get together for mutual support and to plan events during the year. I thank all of them for their ministry and I look forward to the second Bishop's Youth Day on October 20th. Our diocesan wide discussions around human sexuality identified a wish for more resources for parents, youth and children and I hope to see these developed and shared across the diocese.

If God is for us... well is He? Of course He is. And if God is for us then we must be for one another, however difficult it is, however unwieldy the church can seem to become. Biblical scholar Robert Gench has said that "the ministry of the church is a complex and combustible concoction of fear and joy." I think this is true, we swing from fear for the future to joy in the present, or visa versa, quite easily. Over the years the church has weathered some pretty divisive and combustible issues

Remarriage after divorce

Slavery

Ordination of women

Residential schools

Religious wars

Persecution

Same gender relationships

Contraception

End of life issues

Development of church doctrines

The inner life of the church has never been static. Each of the topics I mentioned have been greeted with both fear and joy in the same church. The relationship of church and state has often been what we might call lumpy. But we persevere. We persevere because we believe that God is for us. We persevere because we believe the best in each other since we

recognize the face of Christ in one another. Can we be bridges for one another to find deeper communion, deeper faith, deeper love of God? Whether the person sitting next to you right now is opposed to fair trade coffee; or in favour of the ministry fund project; or supports one of the motions around human sexuality which you do not support – can you see only Christ in them and they in you? Can we see each other as Christ sees us and resolve to be together, to talk together, to pray together?

At Lambeth in 2008 at the Bishop's retreat, after one session the bishops were told to find someone with whom you were pretty sure you disagreed, and go and talk to them, pray with them. It was challenging for each one of us to find that we were a stumbling block for someone else. It was humbling for all of us to find that the love of Christ brought a healing balm to our conversations and enabled us to find common ground. It was beautiful for all of us to see the face of Christ in our brother or sister. The ongoing dialogue of Canadian and African bishops, of which I am proud to be a member, continues the conversations begun at Lambeth. Those conversations are not unlike the ones we will have at this synod. We talk about how we engage in mission and evangelism, how we plan for the future, we try to understand one another's contexts for ministry. This desire to understand one another and to walk together is at the heart of our conversations around rural and urban ministry, around our diocesan partnership with the diocese of Buye, and also around issues such as social justice and human sexuality. Perhaps some of you found yourselves in our deanery discussions in a group with people with whom you disagreed. Yet all our discussions to date have been filled with grace and with respect. That respect for the other and the grace that can only come from God are the common ground we seek.

I believe that we cannot overestimate the importance of centering our common life upon those things upon which we agree rather than picking the things on which we disagree as our defining characteristics. Sometimes we must ask not WHAT will separate us from the love of Christ but WHO. Heaven help the church if we separate people from their hope in Jesus and in His promises. The groaning of the spirit in our prayers gives voice to our longing to be one in Christ.

God will take all our various gifts, skills, faith, doubts, agreements and disagreements he will take the whole lot and make it work together for good. God will do it, not us, but God. God searches the heart and helps us in our weakness. Even when we don't know ourselves how we should pray God will guide us in our prayer. To quote Zechariah's canticle in Luke "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Our God is a God of hope, a God who will not abandon us to our fears.

Continued on page 11.

diocesan synod

Bishop's Charge to 63rd Edmonton Synod cont.

Continued from page 8.

In our reading from Isaiah we learned that God's mercy is to be relied upon and that we have nothing if we don't have faith. I have recently returned from the diocese of Buye as many of you know. There will be a full report on our partnership later at Synod, but I want to tell you now how much you are loved and prayed for by your brothers and sisters in Buye. We have riches upon riches in comparison. The majority of the population lives on a \$1 a day, and that includes the clergy. There is incredible material poverty from our perspective, and incredible challenges that come when you are trying to rebuild a country after a civil war. The rebuilding is of roads, schools, hospitals, churches and families. But your brothers and sisters in Buye diocese are rich in faith. Their worship is spirit led and full of joy and hope. Over the next few months we will be offering to match each parish in the diocese of Edmonton with a parish in the diocese of Buye for mutual prayer support and a strengthening of our ties in the global Anglican family. I hope that each year we can devote 1% of the diocesan budget to ministry in Buye. Tomorrow we shall hear what this could look like and I would welcome your input as we put roots down in the partnership.

In Isaiah and in our psalm we heard of the power of God to call people home. As I thought on our own diocese I gave thanks for all the work being done in the area of reconciliation with our First Nations brothers and sisters and also with our participation in the campaign to end homelessness. In Psalm 91 we find our comfort in the presence of God – is God present in our lives, in our thoughts and in our actions? Is that apparent to the people we meet? Is it apparent to our brothers and sisters we do not live beside, those who don't sit next to us in our parish?

How does our faith take shape on issues such as poverty, safeguarding creation, transforming unjust structures of society? Are there areas of our lives where we do not give room for our actions or spending to be shaped by our faith?

Faith does not help us to avoid doubt, fear or difficulty, rather, it equips us to experience an even greater sense of God's presence so that we can say God is here – even in this place, even in this situation. For many people, the choices of what we eat and drink are faith based choices. We will be hearing a presentation on fair trade tomorrow from students at the University of Alberta. The invitation from our youth to stand up against poverty is to say 'God is here'. The invitation from the ACW to wear a white ribbon on November 25th to stand up against gender violence is to say 'God is here.'

Every day, every week, every month, all across the diocese faithful people are showing their communities that God is here and that He cares. The love of God is shown in community suppers, in pastoral visits, in food banks, in discipleship programs, in bereavement programs, in Christian care centres, in our participation in the Welcome Home program. In all these ways and in all these places our faith propels us into the middle of the community and takes a stand. I give thanks to God for the ministry of faithful Christians in this diocese.

Another reason to give thanks and to celebrate what has been done over the last four years is around the theme of hospitality. I am so grateful that Back to Church Sunday has become a fixture in the diocese. Grateful, not just because of what happens on that given Sunday, but also because we have taken seriously our call to be invitational and to look at our parishes and ask ourselves how we can let people know that we are there, how we can invite our friends to worship. We have been blessed to have ongoing visits from Michael Harvey, founder of Back to Church Sunday. He has spoken at Synod, had training days and led a leadership seminar for the archdeacons and regional deans. Perhaps the Back to Church Sunday Initiative has helped some of us to rise to the challenge to bring someone to Christ by the time of our Centennial which we begin celebrating on the feast of Pentecost 2013. We will hear more about the centennial plan tomorrow but let me say that in addition to the celebrations I am excited by the opportunities for study through the visits of the Archbishop of York and of Diana Butler Bass.

We continue to explore ways to proclaim the gospel and to be equipped to do just that, each and every one of us. I hope that you are looking forward to the presentation tomorrow on a possible lay evangelist program in the diocese. We have many lay ministry and education programs such as our Lay Readers, Hospital Chaplains, EFM, Cursillo etc. and I am pleased to see the expansion of this ministry.

In 2013 I hope that the diocese will be part of an Alberta Alpha initiative that seeks to offer ecumenical Alpha programs in every Alberta community. It would be a wonderful sign of Christian Unity to see churches of all denominations working together to invite their friends and family to come to know Christ more deeply. The parishes in our diocese are very familiar with the Alpha program and I hope that each parish will take part in this exciting initiative. By the way, the speaker at the Bishop's Youth Day next weekend is Shaila Visser, the national director of Alpha Canada, and we will be blessed to host her.

So as you can see there is a lot to be thankful for in the diocese and there is a lot happening. We have

strong ties with one another and with the wider church, here in Canada and internationally. A few years ago Staples started using a Christmas song for their back to school ads - you may know it 'the most wonderful time of the year' well, contrary to popular opinion synods can also, in a bishop's life, be the most wonderful time of the year or even two years. They can bring out the very best in people or they can be the very worst of times – it was the best of times it was the worst of times - sounds like a book I know.

As we have seen, at this Synod we have many, many, things that we will be discussing. Despite what you may have been told by a few people this is not a ONE issue synod. I pray that all of us agree on that. If we come thinking that there is only ONE issue then we do a great disservice to the church and to the faithful witness of so many of our brothers and sisters. I would like to thank you all for coming and to say to you that everyone here is a faithful Christian leader chosen by other faithful Christians across the diocese. There are no superstars at a synod, everyone has the same voice and the same right to speak. We all acknowledge God's presence here and that knowledge guides our prayers and our words to each other. I pray for a vigorous synod in our passion and our debates and I pray for a holy synod, and a gracious synod, with no demonizing of people who might hold different views on any of the many items before us.

The diocese of Edmonton is a place of deep faith in Christ. We are surrounded by opportunities to make Christ known. In 1997 the Virginia report from the Anglican Consultative Council said that “ (3.4) At best, the Anglican way is characterised by generosity and tolerance to those of different views. It also entails a willingness to contain difference and live with tension, even conflict, as the Church seeks a common mind on controversial issues. The comprehensiveness that marks the Anglican Communion is not a sign of weakness or uncertainty about the central truths of the faith. Neither does it mean that Anglicans accept that there are no limits to diversity.”

My dear brothers and sisters, let us show the best of the Anglican way at this synod. Over the course of this evening and tomorrow let us we proclaim our unity in Christ and our willingness to engage with one another. May we listen and speak with faith. May we show the love of God and neighbour in all our doings. Tomorrow, as we focus on the mission of God and of His church, may we be strengthened in our hope for the church, Christ's own body. As your bishop, I ask for your continued prayers and support as we work together in the service of Christ.

AMEN

St. John's to host Welcome Home volunteer workshop

Continued from page 9.

Synod welcomed Sister Mary Clare and Jackie Bass of Catholic Social Services to speak about the "Welcome Home" program. Welcome Home partners volunteers from the interfaith community with newly-housed individuals to share meaningful activities once a week that might include going for coffee or a walk or attending a community festival or event together. The program provides volunteers with orientation, training and support. "At the moment, we have four times as many participants as volunteers," said Sr. Mary Clare. If you are interested in helping individuals and families transition from homelessness, there will be a Welcome Home

congregational workshop at St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, November 13, at 7 pm; or visit: www.catholicsocialservices.ab.ca for more information.

The synod agenda featured several insightful presentations. The Rev. Tim Chesterton, rector of St. Margaret's, Edmonton, spoke about a program to recruit, train and deploy licensed Lay Evangelists. Synod passed Resolution G-2 requesting that the bishop proceed as soon as possible with the development of a licensed lay evangelist program.

Neil Calhoun, a member of the Diocesan Administration and Finance Committee and Edmonton a real estate developer, looked at how the parishes of the diocese are positioned to serve the residential

boom in the west and south corners of the city.

Diocesan archivist and Centennial Planning Committee member Kathryn Ivany revealed plans for the diocese's centennial year (www.edmonton.anglican.org/centennial), beginning with a visit from Primate Fred Hiltz for a Pentecost eucharist service on May 19, 2013. Please look for more information about these presentations next month.

Brief reports were given by representatives of various diocesan committees and programs, including: Natural Church Development (NCD), Stewardship, Legislative, Cursillo, Education for Ministry (EfM) and the Diocesan Advisory and Response Team (DART).