

Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference 2014

**‘Fear Not Little Flock’
The Vocation of Minority Churches Today**

Session Three : Diakonia

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Thank you so much for inviting me to attend your Conference and to give me the opportunity to speak on what I really care about, a passion if you will, God’s world and his people. I am honoured to be with you all, to visit beautiful Hungary and also to share in an important discussion, a meditation almost, on our Christian witness, socially, environmentally, neighbourly and the testing of our faith in many ways.

I see the Diocese in Europe as a Migrant Church for migrant people..... for we exist, but not exclusively so, to serve all who are of the world wide Anglican Communion of Churches. We also extend a very warm welcome to Christians of other denominations who do not have a congregation and minister locally or even within the country. Our welcome is not to ‘proselytise’ but to make available a Christian centre for as long as a particular person desires it. They do not have to become Anglican. The language we use is largely English but not totally. Some of our congregations are Anglican but of minority groups. They use not only their own language but also their own style of worship. Some of our Chaplaincies lead worship in the language of their host country particular where there is a mixed marriage or a funeral where the bereaved have little use of English. Some of our Chaplaincies, particularly in northern Europe, are presently attracting people from within the host population. These people started their Christian journey in a historical or local Church of their country and then chose the Anglican Church as their spiritual home. This is beginning to emphasis further the need of worship in a local language.

We are a minority church in Europe and because of that we have to practice our neighbourliness, our sharing with other denominations, our sharing of witness and work in Christ’s name. We own very few church buildings and are dependent on using churches belonging to different denominations, which draws us into ecumenical links and also into

sharing ecumenically important dates in the Church calendar, such as Easter, Christmas, Week of Christian Unity, Women's World Day of Prayer to name just a few.

So as you might imagine on any one Sunday our congregations are largely international and interdenominational - all who love God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are welcome, plus of course seekers. English might be their second or third language. They can be Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, of the Free Churches, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and any others you can think of. The worship is varied in style, yet liturgical and of the Anglican ethos in the hope that as many as possible will feel able to draw from it and even feel able to contribute by reading lessons, leading intercessions or sharing in the music.

I can give you a brief history of the Diocese..... how we came to be...

English churches and congregations have been established on the Continent since before the Reformation. The number of these grew to such an extent that in 1633 congregations of the Church of England in all foreign countries were placed under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London (London then being the chief port of England). Anglican dioceses and then provinces were later formed in all parts of the world outside the United Kingdom.

The Diocese of Gibraltar was founded by Letters Patent on 21st August 1842 and took over the pastoral care of the chaplaincies and congregations in Constantinople, to Syria and Malta and many places in-between. In 1883 the Bishop of London appointed a suffragan bishop, who later was given the title of Bishop of Fulham, to supervise the chaplaincies in north and central Europe.

From 1970 the Jurisdiction of North and Central Europe, together with the Diocese of Gibraltar, was in the episcopal care of one bishop, the Bishop of Fulham and Gibraltar. In July 1980 a single diocese was formed with the title The Diocese in Europe, and it became the 44th Diocese of the Church of England with representation in the General Synod of the Church of England. It is now the 42 Diocese of the Church of England, as some diocese amalgamated this year. The Bishop of the Diocese is assisted by a Suffragan Bishop and Assistant Bishops.

The Church of England maintains friendly relations with other Christian Churches in mainland Europe and is committed to the quest for the full visible unity of the Church. Other Churches "in communion" are the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Lutheran churches of Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania. Special agreements also exist with the Evangelical Church in Germany (The Meissen Agreement) and the Roman Catholic Church in France ("Twinning and Exchanges").

I have been thinking about what I would share with you today ever since I received Bishop Tamas' invitation in March 2013 and had made notes, but not until last month did I start to put my thoughts down. Since the invitation the world has moved and changed and in that time and become a time of uncertainty and concern for Christians throughout the world. I notice how my monthly column on the website and various pieces of writing for the Diocese has widened from scientists' reports to how do we care for our neighbour... how we must look at the wider picture even more and to teach people what we mean about the word Diakonia.... For many had not heard of that word.

Today Europe is being flooded by refugees, the migrant peoples who are fleeing not because there is a lack of food and water, as I thought might happen eventually, but because of terror, pain, fear and war. I see my job as trying to influence people to save water and to be careful with how they use it; to not waste food; not to be greedy, to use our voice whenever possible with regard to justice for all. For what we have we will need to share with those fleeing from war zones and not just as we have been doing.

We know that many of those fleeing from the Middle East are actually arriving in countries which themselves have been suffering through economic crises over the last years. Countries like Greece, Italy, Spain, France, Malta, and all along the Mediterranean coast and we sitting in central Europe are going to have to face the necessity to share what we have and more.

How can we, minority churches go about making a Christian witness when faced with these challenges, which seem daunting?

I believe one of the hardest decisions we have to make as individuals when looking at this question is..... how powerful am I, how powerful is my voice? Can I really make a difference?

Antoine De Saint-Exupery wrote the following:

Being human means: feeling responsibility, being ashamed when observing misery, even if it is not one's own fault, being proud of the success of others, contributing one's own stone knowing that it will build the world.

Look back through history and recently, to those who have stood for something they believed in, whether justice about race, religion, politics, food, water, fracking, amongst other issues..... Look also at organisations such as Christian Aid, Medecins Sans Frontiers, Greenpeace, Tearfund, and the media people such as Avaaz.com - they have spoken out and have struck a chord with many other people, so that together the voice and the actions get louder. More than that, if we feel called to act, that we sense that it is what God wants us to do, that it fulfils what Christ pointed to and spoke about, then we are to act. We have to be brave, we have to have faith. We are called to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Who is our neighbour? Everyone near and far.....

Being a migrant church means that often our best way of starting to impact the poverty, pain and struggle of those in need is to join forces with the main Churches of the country we are resident in.

For instance, in Greece when the economic crisis broke out the Anglican Church in Athens joined forces with the Orthodox Church and together brought about the 'Church in the Street' initiative. This established a 'soup kitchen' which gave out 1200 cooked meals daily to the homeless, largely irregular migrants. Through the Anglican Chaplaincy, pastors from the African Pentecostal Churches were incorporated into this programme since they were active among the migrant population. The Anglican Chaplaincy in Athens attracted significant sums of money from sister chaplaincies throughout Europe and was able to contribute finances to the programme as well as personnel. Five years later the programme continues but now increasingly serves destitute Greeks. The same Chaplaincy has been able to give significant money to a residence for those with Down Syndrome run under the auspices of the Orthodox Church and a residence for Senior Citizens provided for by Scripture Union

and the Greek Evangelical Church. Care institutions in Greece have been hard hit by the austerity programme. The same Chaplaincy has also engaged a teacher focused upon emotional needs to provide lessons and parenting courses at a kindergarten which has been newly established by the Orthodox Church in a deprived area. It also gives English lessons to young children of impoverished Greek families at the behest of the Orthodox Church. Beyond these activities this local chaplaincy has enabled two highly qualified delegations from the Greek Orthodox Church to observe best practice in the UK in the area of the Hospice Movement (the first Hospice in Greece is up and running because of this initiative). Church schools, care of the homeless, Hospital Chaplaincies, are the Church's contribution to re-development in the inner city, together with State relations with the Islamic Communities and Inter-Faith initiatives. This Chaplaincy is also deeply involved in assisting individuals in difficulty because of austerity and has appreciated the know-how of the Greek Salvation Army. Working ecumenically in a very challenging situation has meant more has been achieved than if we worked independently as Churches.

Since writing this talk I have received the following information:

'Apostoli' the welfare organization of the Orthodox Church has passed on this statistic. 18 months ago it was giving out 1,500 food parcels (boxes with dried and tinned foods) per month. Today it is giving out 10,000 and the figure increases. This is only within the Athens region. 'Apostoli' is now focusing beyond Athens – such as Kefalonia which suffered a devastating earth quake earlier in the year. The Great Athens Anglican Chaplaincy has made a financial contribution to this programme of giving out food parcels. This programme is a sign of how the middle class in Greece has been decimated. Further cuts in personnel within the civil service are taking place this coming autumn.

In France and Spain our churches join forces with the Catholic Church and under their umbrella, are providing breakfasts for school children, food banks, clothing banks, transport needs and whatever they can help with. During the school holidays it is necessary to make sure the children do receive a good meal at least once a day. Some churches collect specific items each month to give to the local charity that cares for the homeless and those in dire needs, so perhaps the congregation donates baby items one month, the next, soap, toothpaste, toiletries, depending on what the charity requires in order to care. Many of the

churches fund raise especially for their chosen charities, aiming to give away 10% of the sum they have to raise for the living of the Chaplain. A community way of tithing if you like. It involves serious budgeting for each church has a target to reach in order to pay housing, travel, insurance and all the necessities in order to have a priest in that area. I am sure you are familiar with this. In some countries of course, it is important that the collecting and giving of monies is kept separate in order to be lawful. Again you will be familiar with what the law requires in your area/country.

The groceries for the food banks collected each week also go to the established food bank of that area in the country.

Because there are times when it is difficult to establish something new in our adopted country, this method of joining forces is the best solution and is very powerful. It could mean of course there is already the necessary building available for the purposes of aid and that all regulations are met through the local communes.

Whenever and wherever possible there is help on hand with paperwork and language translations in the churches for those entering the country and needing to register in order to live and work and this is especially important for refugees seeking to make a home in their adopted country. However, not only is it those entering the country that needs help. The economic problems over the years have yielded people in financial difficulties due to loss of income and pension failures. Some whose only asset, the house, is difficult to sell find it impossible to gather the finances needed in order for them to live or to move back to their homeland to be with relatives. Though the congregation does sometimes give financial help where possible, it is often the coming alongside and helping with perhaps reorganising their finances a little better as well as giving advice regarding benefits, and offering comfort. Shared lifts, meals and social interaction helps enormously in these difficult situations and does not always involve finance.

In the Moscow chaplaincy, which has extensive premises, they use part of the building as a daily school for orphans. It also has a daily food distribution scheme which during the harsh winter months is crucial.

I believe in answer to 'what are we as a minority church called to do', stories and illustrations help a great deal in fulfilling who is our neighbour and how we should love them. They also help us to galvanize ourselves into action.

I have a few stories for you.....

I received news from Christ Church Vienna in May of this year... The Lutheran parish in the 6th district of the Austrian capital organise a soup kitchen for those being released from prison to reintegrate into the life of the city. Eight members of Christ Church offered their services to the soup kitchen manager to help run the kitchen. They take turns and their next time is 20th September, and they carry out this help six times a year. The volunteers from Christ Church are from Austria, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa and Sri Lanka... all members of the Anglican congregation, which shows what a mixed bunch we all are PTL! Not only does the team offer their services but they donate 400€ from their sharing budget to cover the cost of the midday meal prepared by the team, plus they are also involved with other members in prison visiting. The centre also provides advice and counselling; there is permanent staff as well as numerous volunteers. The driving force behind the team of volunteers from Christ Church is an Austrian member of their congregation who is presently training to be a judge with the Austrian Judiciary. Christ Church also donates some of their sharing budget to various projects run by the Roman Catholic Church.

I recall also a story from a church in Rome, All Saints, who offered a helping hand with an overgrown monastery garden, never imagining how that would develop! This project really appealed to keen gardeners in the congregation who had no gardens, living as they do in apartments. Hours spent clearing and sorting and then someone with expertise in landscaping came along to offer a hand and so the garden started to really take shape. Many happy hours were spent digging, building ornamental walls, planting, weeding, sitting drinking tea and chatting. People of all ages were drawn to this project, including some refugees from the camp just outside the city. For them it was a chance to learn the language, to make friends and to be employed, albeit for very little money, nothing more than pocket money for travel, but it did give them work experience. They were then able to have an official reference from people living in the city, who they were working alongside.

What an amazing number of happenings came from this simple desire to make a jungle into something beautiful.

In France, a congregation has for a number of years (10?) been funding a monthly summer visit for children from poor backgrounds from Chernobyl. They stay with families but are altogether during the day and enjoy swimming parties, picnics, art sessions, music and sharing each other's traditions and being involved in family worship. These children in the early years desperately needed clean air, good food and different experiences. Whilst in France they receive dental and medical care where possible, new wardrobes and basic toiletries, many only arrive with a plastic carrier bag. When they return they are given clothes, toiletries and small gifts for their siblings. If possible they speak to their families whilst away; there are usually two translators in the party. It was necessary to send an ambassador to Chernobyl to visit the families to check they were from disadvantaged homes. Like so many places there can be problems of corruption of course. Nevertheless the results of these visits have been far reaching with some families keeping close contact with the children, some of whom are now 23 years old and earning a living but continuing to visit their adopted families, at the cost of the family now, not the church. This project continues and is funding by fund raising by the families concerned.

Congregations reaching out can be done by other means of course.....

One area that does deserve a mention is the use of the arts and music especially. In the summer months concerts of religious and light music put on by church choirs and musicians, often boosted by visiting orchestras and groups from America, UK and Russia bring pleasure. No matter how small the musical event, people are drawn and often to the Church as well.

I believe Environment groups started outside of the church building can draw people together from faith and no faith, for many people care for the environment and want to hand on a world which is loved and cared for to future generations. Any kind of group, whether book club, play reading, creative crafts, etc., which would appeal to those outside the church, is a boon to those people seeking companionship and friendship and is a way of handing out a lifeline, or drawing in people who truly wish to help the disadvantage but

didn't know how and would like to be involved and can use their contacts with the Church in this way. The growth from these kinds of activities can be immense and it works in both directions in the giving and the receiving of aid, help, love and friendship. Again to our neighbour...

Individually, I believe we really do need to belong to associations, clubs, and groups outside of the church. We are not called to nestle safely in the bosom of the church family but to be out there in the world. As a Lay Minister in the Anglican Church my biggest ministry has been to those outside of the church at the time of grieving and needing help with a funeral for a loved one. It is a special and wondrous ministry to come alongside those in need. I am just known out there as Madeleine Holmes, something to do with the English-speaking church!! Some have entered the church at a later date, some have grown in knowledge and others have disappeared, we never know the whole story.... of course, but God does.

It is important that we use our eyes and ears so that we might build up an intuitive way of looking and seeing with Christ's heart of love.

I am extremely deaf. I use my eyes a great deal and know that God allows me to see the emotions passing over a face or through a body, allowing me first to pray for that person and /or be able to offer an appropriate word. It might be a small act but it does mean we are being conscious of the world around us. It might only be saying thank you to the check-out girl who looks really miserable or sad today, or opening a door for a lady with a pushchair or helping her or someone onto a bus..... whatever. All these acts can be used by God to alleviate pain, worry or loneliness that we might never know about. And again the giving and receiving and the results are in God's hands..... From small acorns, large oaks grow! Learning to use our senses for God's purposes rewards us all, for in giving we receive.

In our Diocesan Synod we are now very aware of the vigilance needed for those trapped as sex workers and the trafficking of people and organs. We try to be vigilant whenever and wherever possible and there have been instances of help given in Naples, Italy and in some of the red light districts of our churches, such as Amsterdam, where we can be a beacon that can draw those in desperate situations.

As I look through the many records of work being carried out by our Diocese I can see that though it does not always centre on money or finance. Of course we need funds from time to time to make a difference. Nevertheless fund raising, in the form of bazaars, garden fetes, jumble sales/vidé greniers/car boot sales of clothing and household items at very low prices on a regular basis can be great ways of reaching people of all walks of life and offering a helping hand. Fund raising is an integral part of raising funds for our Chaplain/priest and his living, and the costs of operating the church, and they can be such fun. We do also encourage stewardship very strongly and as I said previously, serious budgeting and projection for every year in order to accomplish God's ministry and work.

Another important and unusual role has been the appointment of a member of the Diocesan clergy in place in Brussels at the heart of the European Union. Appointed to carry the title of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative to the EU where he is on call to the representatives', means there is a Christian profile present. He attends the monthly Prayer Breakfast, is on hand for debates on religion and secularism, and the representative also travels to wherever the Archbishop asks him to. There are, as you know, 27 member states. The present representative is the new Bishop of the Diocese, The Rt Revd Canon Dr Robert Innes.

We need to encourage our youth to see the wider picture:

In 2013, Alice Christofi from St Mark's, Florence represented the Diocese in Europe at the World Youth Day gathering in Rio de Janeiro. Although this is a Roman Catholic event started by Pope John Paul II in 1985 the Anglican diocese of Rio de Janeiro hosted a gathering of young Anglicans from around the world and Alice joined them. Her enthusiastic report was a joy to read and she finished by saying 'Our time there left us all with a deep sense of hope in the future of the church we are building and renewed commitment to 'go and make disciples. Newly inspired in our faith, we returned to our dioceses with fresh zeal for our gospel message, and resolve to share all that we'd seen and experienced – not the end of our journey but only the beginning!'

This Spring there was a report from The Church of the Resurrection, Pera, our Turkish-speaking Anglican parish located in the centre of Istanbul. For many years this unique Church of England parish has organised a party for refugee children and their families during the Christmas season. It is a priority for the Church's programme of 'Mercy Ministry' to help refugees in the city as much as they can. Of course finding a solution for the root of the problem is near impossible. The need is exceedingly great and complicated and worse at this time of speaking.

The Church of the Resurrection, Pera began this accompaniment of refugees in the city by providing an experience for the children and their families where they would feel special, wanted, valued and where they could truly have some fun. Every year more people join this event that has been on-going for many years now. Although an Anglican initiative, the Church of the Resurrection members are joined by other Christians in the city and the hall offered is owned by the Roman Catholic Caritas Ministry. The Priest-in-charge, Rev Engin Yildirim says, 'In the midst of uncertainty and hardship in the region, we must live the truth of the Gospel, helping the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'.

Deeper into Turkey, the Anglican Chaplaincy in Ankara is doing notable work among refugees from Syria and Iran. It has had a long friendship with monasteries of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Eastern Turkey whose experience has been quite chequered.

These few stories I have shared with you are repeated from Moscow to Tunisia I know and many more beside. Each Chaplaincy is finding where the needs are and doing whatever they are able.

The Diocese is growing continually which would indicate that with God's hand upon us we are doing something right. Sometimes though we can feel overwhelmed but we must not lose heart but continue to reveal the scriptures to each other and to seek God's guidance for ourselves and for our neighbours and He will show us.

I do include in our actions, work on our environment, much of this in our daily lives in the simple act of appreciating what we have and caring for it. I also believe in using our voice in

petitions, especially with regard to what large companies and politicians seem to think is good for us! If you use media you will have seen that there are times when millions of voices have sought to change the minds and actions of governments. Campaigns continue regarding the plight of women in many countries, forced marriages, the destroying of parts of our forests, the air we breathe and the desire to continue to seek for fossil fuels, instead of alternatives, and many other issues which have an effect on our lives and our planet.

Recently I was part of a team which launched a prayer line – it is called **Ourvoices.net** and we are asking for prayer for the next big meeting of governments which will take place in Paris in 2015. We are praying for wisdom and discernment that all the governments will make the right changes to how we invest and use our planet, you too might like to add your name. Perhaps you would like to put a prayer and a photo online showing your commitment. I have some flyers for you. This is appealing to all faiths and none to act. The Anglican Communion is involved in holding hands across the world to bring change to save our environment and I have no doubt, in fact I know, Muslim and Jewish faiths are just as environmentally keen... we must work together.

Lastly I would like to refer you to a translation of the Beatitudes which I found recently. It comes from an Archbishop, a Palestinian Christian, Elias Chacour who believes The Beatitudes are calls for action. They are very challenging, but there are times when I feel we must be challenged and discuss in love, even if we differ in opinions. The following reflection on the Beatitudes comes from his book *We Belong to the Land* (pp 143 – 144).

Matthew 5:1-11

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain and sat down. They all gathered around, and Jesus taught them.

Elias says, 'Knowing Aramaic, the language of Jesus, has greatly enriched my understanding of Jesus' teachings. Because the Bible as we know it is a translation of a translation, we sometimes get a wrong impression. For example, we are used to hearing the Beatitudes expressed passively: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.'

“Blessed”, he says, is the translation of the word *makarioi*, used in the Greek New Testament. ‘However, when I look further back to Jesus’ Aramaic, I find that the original word was *ashray*, from the verb *yashar*. *Ashray* does not have this passive quality to it at all. Instead, it means “to set yourself on the right way for the right goal; to turn around, repent; to become straight or righteous.”

Elias continues, ‘When I understand Jesus’ words in the Aramaic, I translate like this:

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied. Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God.

Rise up and take action, you who are poor in spirit, heaven is yours!
 Rise up and take action, you mourners, comfort will come to you!
 Rise up and take action, you meek, the world is your inheritance!
 Rise up and take action, you who hunger and thirst for justice, you will be satisfied!
 Rise up and take action, you who are merciful, and mercy shall be yours!
 Rise up and take action, you who are pure in heart, and see God!
 Rise up and take action, you peacemakers, you are God’s children!
 Rise up and take action, you who are persecuted for doing right, heaven is yours!
 Rise up, when people curse you, persecute you, and slander you because you follow me. Laugh it off and keep going, heaven is yours! They persecuted the prophets before you, too.

To me (says Elias) this reflects Jesus’ words and teachings much more accurately. I can hear him saying, “Get your hands dirty to build a human society for human beings; otherwise, others will torture and murder the poor, the voiceless, and the powerless.” Christianity is not passive but active, energetic, alive, going beyond despair.

“Get up, go ahead, do something, move,” Jesus said to his disciples.

And now we know why Jesus was executed as a revolutionary... He was one.

Do visit the following website for pictures and information of where this came from:
<http://ukashray.wordpress.com/new-church-ibillin/>

Even if we do not fully agree with Elias Chacour, and I think you will certainly let me know, I believe I can imagine Our Lord saying, get up, go ahead, do something Madeleine, move.....!