



The Diocese of
Southwark

The Bishop of Kingston

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To the Kingston Episcopal Area

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are journeying through Advent, that great season of watching, waiting and longing, at a time of deep upset and turmoil in the Church of England, and also, not to be too introspective, deep upset and turmoil in God's world.

In October/November, I visited the Holy Land to further our Diocesan Link with the Diocese of Jerusalem and witnessed first-hand the consequences of war and division, particularly in a context of a deep asymmetry of power with its devastating consequences for the people of Gaza and Lebanon. But as we know, that is not the only context or situation of strife and threat.

It may be that as you journey through Advent with your communities that you feel some of the tension between a world all too ready to rush through this season to the birth of the Christ child, desperate to take a break from the harsh realities of our world and our lives, and the season's penitential demands. We all wish to take such a break sometimes, don't we?

But it is at a time like this, particularly at a time of turmoil in the Church, that the importance of the local church becomes ever more pronounced.

One of my episcopal colleagues, a fellow suffragan Bishop in Salisbury Diocese, reflecting on Makin and the changes that are needed in the Church of England, not least in the episcopate, has written powerfully of how at times like this we must return to the local church. Not mythologising it, he says, but letting ourselves "be chastened and transformed by it", "regrow[ing] the Anglican polity from the ground up."

He goes on:

"Nothing is real (repentance included) unless it is local, for only here can the Body of Christ be discerned, along with the divine value of each incarnate soul."¹

How true these words are, particularly for Bishops, underlining the importance of our rooting ourselves in the local as we repent and learn again how to be shepherds of Christ's flock.

¹ Andrew Rumsey, 'Works of Darkness', <https://andrewrumsey.wordpress.com/>

How important these words are for affirming what you do - in parishes, schools and chaplaincies across the Kingston Episcopal Area - and pointing out how it is in the local (the particular) that Christ is to be encountered and the world is to be transformed.



I have just returned from our Link Diocese in Zimbabwe, the Diocese of Matabeleland, which I visited with a team of six lay and ordained from the Kingston Area. Indeed, I celebrated the First Sunday of Advent at the Church of the Ascension, Hillside, in Bulawayo slightly struggling to accept that it was Advent as I looked out from the sanctuary onto a beautiful garden and bright sunlight! The visit was uplifting and joyful, notwithstanding the very real challenges that the Church and the people of Zimbabwe face. But again, I was reminded powerfully of the power of the local church and how it is a force for good in that country. One image in particular stays in my mind of a solar-powered bore hole sunk into the barren land, paid for by St Mark's Kennington, on the site of a planned secondary school, St Cecelia's, bringing water for the community and the local goats, and in time education for the children (see photo).

We are keen to journey with the Diocese of Matabeleland as they make that school, and other projects, a reality. In 2025, we are going to be relaunching our Link with the Diocese with a series of exciting and enriching events and ways in which churches can get involved, so I encourage you to watch this space!

“Nothing is real (repentance included) unless it is local, for only here can the Body of Christ be discerned, along with the divine value of each incarnate soul.”

I take these words with me as I journey through Advent, longing for water for those who are thirsty, the silencing of bombs and drones for those suffering the horrors of war, and for a repentant Church that is united in its love for its neighbour and each other.

I give thanks to God for you, for the local church, whether it is in the Kingston Episcopal Area, Zimbabwe or the Holy Land, for the discernment of Jesus in those places, for the way in which the church chastens and transforms us, and for your appreciation of the divine value of each incarnate soul in your communities.

I wish you, your families, those whom you love, a not-too-exhausting Advent, a very happy Christmas, and a time of rest and relaxation thereafter.

I look forward to continuing to be your Bishop, journeying with you, in 2025 (the third year of my consecration!).

Love and prayers,

+ Martin

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