

What is in Your Hands: *Let us Use the Authority God has Given Us*

We have gathered here in Nkhata Bay for the first time as a Diocese to hold our seventh Diocesan Synod. This is the time when we need to reflect on how we have done in our mission in the past years as we look forward to the next two years. We need to ask ourselves whether we are moving along or just wandering around as the Children of Israel in the wilderness. We need to ask ourselves if indeed we are growing in our knowledge and love of God as well as standing on our feet to respond to the mission that God is always calling us to do.

In our first Charge we said “Yes We Can” in accepting the reality of our growth into this maturity. But we found out that we were still living in despondence by the spirit of poverty and the spirit of being an orphan. Our Second Charge dealt with these challenges by asking “What is in Your Hands,” as a means to grow. Here we wanted to ask the Parishes to begin taking a first step to walk on their feet building on the strength of the vision of our two leaders, Bishop Biggers and Bishop Boyle. We wanted our Parishes to look at their potential and begin to move on. Over these years, we have seen that some Parishes have indeed captured the vision and moved forward while others have remained behind. We would like therefore to congratulate the Parishes that have demonstrated the signs of growth. You have decided to walk with much courage and gained great strength through your progress. At the same time we would like to encourage those of the Parishes that are remaining behind to let them know that they can make it also.

At a Diocesan level we have also seen some improvements in our quota giving although we have not reached a safe side of it. We are happy to inform the house that we have completed a feasibility study dealing with Real Estate and Development on our properties conducted by Direction wave from Uganda supported by Trinity Wall Street from United States with the initiative from the Province.

We have also secured two pieces of land, one from the government a 3.233 hectares as you go to Mchengabutuwa around Bishop Area and another plot 0.13 hectares through the Estate Agency in

the New City Centre of Mzuzu. The two plots were paid off with a total of MK6, 568,311.70

We also purchased a duplex printer for MK5, 484,820.00 from Gestertner and we are glad to inform the house that we have completed all the payments of this machine for our printing workshop.

We have also completed the renovation of the Bishop's House and we have turned it into a guest house. We can now accommodate 16 people when the house is furnished properly. Your Bishop will dwell in the former guest house after some renovations are finished.

We have also managed to buy a 32 seat Bus for MK 4,400,000 and we have spent MK1, 515,240 in maintenance. The bus will help improve our transportation problems and also allow us to hire it out for income generation. We bought some necessary tools for our mechanical workshop. Our goal is to give some of our young people job training in mechanics and the experience in using these tools.

We are also glad to inform the house that the old printing press building on Likoma Island has been renovated and we have turned it into a Secondary School. This is a Private Secondary School and we hope to make it into one of the best schools in Malawi as time goes. The School's name is Bishop Biggers Secondary School. Our plans are to make it into a Boarding School. We would like to thank the group of people from Likoma Island in Blantyre for their support towards this project.

At our Hospital on Likoma Island we are also glad that we have seen a number of developments as you may read from the report of the Hospital Administrator, but I would like to highlight a few. We shall soon be installing Solar Electricity in all the wards and outpatient department. We are very grateful to African Steps for their role in so much of our progress here. They have indeed been our friends in our dire need to provide better health services to the people of Likoma Island.

However, most of these strides of development have been possible through the generosity of our supporters overseas. Without them we would very much be less than anything we have mentioned.

The contributions of our own parishes still present challenges. We know that as we ourselves contribute to God's work in our communities we share in the reward of seeing the work completed.

We are sometimes like the Israelites who were wandering in the wilderness fearing to enter the Promised Land as we read in Numbers. The book of Numbers tells the tragic story of Israel's

unbelief. This should serve as a dramatic lesson for us. God loves us so much and wants the very best for us. He can and should be trusted. As the story goes the Children of Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. The people received everything they needed to be strong, so as to move into the Promised Land, realizing the power of God they held in their hands. But then the people complained about food when they remembered their feasting while in slavery in the hands of Pharaoh. They complained about everything even the authority of Moses.

For these past 18 years we have been wandering around as though in the wilderness. The Israelites were afraid standing on one side of the river Jordan unable to cross with courage or eagerness into the Promised Land. So too, our faith fails us, when we lack courage in attempting intimidating but necessary tasks for growing as a Church in Northern Malawi.

When the nation arrived at Kadesh they sent the spies into Canaan to assess its strength. Ten returned with fearful stories of giants. Only Caleb and Joshua encouraged the nation to go at once to take the land (Numbers 13:30). The minority report, which was a true report full of faith, fell on deaf ears full of the ominous message of the majority. The ten said “We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are! The land we travelled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers and that’s what we thought too!” They spread their bad report about the land among the Israelites.

Because of their unbelief, God declared that the present generation would not live to see the Promised Land, thus the wandering begun. While wandering in the desert the Israelites were continually grumbling, defiant, and faced God’s disciplinary measures and death. They were unable to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief and then they were subject to forty years of hardship.

What are the lessons and possible applications for our Diocese in this important story? First, the negative opinion of ten men caused a great rebellion among the people. Because it is human nature to accept opinion as facts, we must be especially careful when we voice our negative opinions.

Negative and fearful perceptions often travel faster than the truth. Do we have such men among us who will stand up to the negative opinions and will go with me in faith to possess the land and use what is in our hands through the authority we have in Christ? The ten reported back to the people about the giants they saw. Instead of focusing on how big the giants are, we must face our giants and tell them how big our God is. Our churches must say: Yes! We are ready to be a church that pays a full stipend of our Priest, Yes! We are ready to be a church that fulfils our mission. Yes!

We are ready to be a church that lives out our teaching and sees our people grow in their relationships with the Lord and with others. Yes! We are ready to be a church of people whose faith is attractive to others and who radiate love courage and the grace to persevere.

The second application I believe we can make is this: Although the Israelites were subjected to waiting until the first generation of unbelief completely passed on, we do not need to do the same. We do not need to wait for those who may be stuck in unbelief or fear to vanish for us to understand that we have the authority NOW in our hands to make a difference. We can move forward today, this month, this year, with our parishes and as a Diocese in faith in the initiatives and with the opportunity we believe God has set for us and for our parishioners.

Now the time has come, we need to cross the river to go to the other side and begin to work with our hands to earn a living. We are going to do it in two ways. The first and most important way is how we will respond to the Great Commission of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The second involves our goals for greater financial sustainability through Real Estate Investment and development as well as enhancing our stewardship while we give thanks to God for our supporters overseas.

In our response to the great commission ladies and gentlemen we need to rediscover who we are as a Church. In (Acts 1:6- 8) the Bible says, “So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, Lord has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our Kingdom? 7.

He replied “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witness, telling people about me everywhere in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the

ends of the earth.” In (Mathew 28: 18) we read that our Lord Jesus gave us the authority in heaven and on earth to go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We also must teach these new disciples to obey all that he commanded us.

We have the mandate for mission and this is to be part of the mission of God. The mission of God is based on salvation of mankind from the slavery of sin. Yes it is not our mission but the mission of God and we are but the partners with God in his mission.

We are called upon not to make members of the Church but to form disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our mission is to help form Christians not church members, as we sometimes say membership formation. I have am convinced that in our Diocese this year we must reclaim our teaching role as the Church after winning people to Christ

The first field according to Acts of the Apostles in mission is to minister in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of those Jews who were believed to be the most religious among Jewish people everywhere. Jerusalem for us is those who are in the Church, but are not yet doing the will of the Father. They are in the Church but are not yet saved. Yes they are members of our local Parish, They may come to Church, they may participate in everything the Church is doing, but they are not part of the Church. They are not living their Christian faith. When I look at our mission field here at the local church level, the Jerusalem level, I primarily see a deficiency in teaching.

What is currently happening is that with only a small amount of teaching, perhaps as youth or in a short confirmation class, many people figuratively “leave the house and go to eat from the house next door.” They are eating strange food from our neighbour. Should we blame the children when they are doing this? As in the Psalms, as maids in the house of our Father (the Priest) we need to ask ourselves hard questions on what is wrong. What kind of nourishment are we providing – or not providing - for our people that they find no substance but go out to search for other forms of nourishment from other worldly sources.

I believe we must do a much stronger job in teaching the principles of Christian faith, historically known as Catechesis. I believe we can love and witness to these in our parishes that they should

receive the power of God and grow deeper in their faith. Then, as they grow stronger we will also see our entire churches grow more unified and capable of achieving great things. As we provide more and better teaching our people will be better prepared with useful tools for growing in their Christian lives and carrying out the Christian mission.

The second place of our witness is Judea. Judea was a home to those who were like Jews in Jerusalem but not Jewish. Judea in our society might be those who profess interest in the Christian faith. We need to go to them and bring Christ to them. We need to have good evangelism program that will bring many to Christ. The focus here is not to bring many into the Anglican Church but bring many to Christ.

Examples of this mission field in our Diocese are creating and translating liturgies into Tumbuka and Tonga. We are glad that we have now launched the Tumbuka liturgy to help those among us who speak Tumbuka at Home. We are thankful for and continually encourage the team that is working on the Tonga Liturgy to work with great efficiency so that we can also be relevant among the Tonga speaking people. We would also hope to develop a liturgy for the Nkhonde speaking people so that everyone in the Diocese can hear and access the Gospel in their own language, fulfilling the gift that we received on the day of Pentecost.

The third mission field is that of Samaria. In Samaria most people were not Jewish but were like their cousins. We need to reach out to those who are not Christians. You will know them by their fruits.

In the fourth and final field the Lord exhorts us to reach out to the ends of the world. Often times we fear going for foreign missions because of funds. We will say that we have no money for foreign missions. We need to go there. We can do it through our mission partners throughout the world or sending out mission to go to them. This is the reason why we have priests in the US who are associated with us for the advancement of the mission. Who are living and preserving the faith like ours.

Call for Action

The church in the Diocese of Northern Malawi is going through a season like that of the Church in the fourth century that was becoming luke warm, with nominal Christians. There is a need for the Church leaders to develop strategies to reclaim our role as teachers of the faith. Our church leaders need to lead from the front and not from the back. The church needs to reclaim her saltiness and be the light of the World presenting Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The Church needs to strive to make the world a better place because as Kenneth Leech in the Soul Friends observed, “There will never be a better world until there are better people in it.”¹ If we want once again to become the church of the people, as in the Gospel, living with the same poverty, simplicity and struggle, then we need to work extra hard to bring about the Kingdom of God through better catechesis. We need to focus on understanding and caring for the needs of every individual member of the church, through helping people get to know each other in small groups, and also through introducing and training spiritual directors at parishes who may help those who are growing in their faith and needing direction in their lives.

Learning from Leech, we need to perform according to the level of our calling as clergy: “One calls a plumber because he understands plumbing, not because of his wide experience of life ...modern Christians are suspicious of clergy who are forever engaged in something other than prayer.”² Does this describe us? Are we too busy with something other than prayer and caring for our people and teaching? Some of us stopped practicing our own discipline of the daily office and other prayers years ago. How are we giving the Lord the opportunity to speak to us and to answer our prayers for our people if we do not ourselves practice private prayer? We too must be continually engaged in furthering our OWN relationships with our loving Lord if we are to lead and love and teach our people effectively.

We need to do something before we hear from the Word of God that we are rejected as his servants. “You have rejected knowledge, and I will reject you from serving me as priest” (Hos. 4:6). Your people look to you, their priest, as their spiritual physician, leader and shepherd. They need you.

¹ Leech, Kenneth, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World*. Harrisburg PA: Morehouse, 2001.

² Ibid

The people of God at worship are in the process of being fashioned, we pray, for eternity. Public prayer in liturgical worship and an individual's private prayers are both necessary for a mature and balanced worshipping life. Too often, though, the way both aspects of prayer complement each other are not realised. A complete dichotomy can occur when some reduce the practice of religion entirely to going to church, while others regard a spiritual life as a purely private and interior matter.

In liturgical worship, each person is of value, and each has a contribution to make. We are gathered together as the family of God in our Father's presence to offer him praises and thanksgiving. We gather as though at the traditional Indaba, where the saying "you are because I am" is prominent.

Spirituality and worship are different but complementary concepts, and interaction between the two is essential for the spiritual health of Christian people. The Body of Christ, where we are one with each other as the parts of one body. We depend on the inner life of each other more than we realise. If my life is going through a difficult phase, I may need to lean on the prayer and worship of people around me in church, letting them carry me. I also benefit from the prayer of my neighbour in the pew in more subtle ways, simply by being part of the same act of worship. The ongoing prayerfulness of each person is for the community as well as for the individual. When the congregations work and witness together in their neighbourhood such as the Milaga or Malimana (Home Cells) during the week, this should also enhance their Sunday worship.

At the end of the service, a deacon or a priest commissions the congregation to go forth in peace and serve the Lord so they can give account of their mission the following Sunday.

Conversely, you may have the most beautiful Liturgy in the world, but if there are bitter and unresolved conflicts within a congregation, a negative energy will be present and affect both the atmosphere and the authenticity of what is happening. The public prayer therefore becomes ineffective; the body is ill and needs healing as soon as possible.

An individual who faithfully prays alone, sometimes wondering if it is of any use, needs the encouragement of knowing that they are before God on behalf of the community and the wider world. Similarly, in congregations, we need to remember that the church worship is for others as

well as for ourselves, in the priesthood of all believers. We bring with us the community in which we live, and we are part of the human brokenness and sinfulness that we are holding before God. As such, each local church needs to know that what they do affects the whole community of faith and therefore there is a need to be accountable to each other as people of the same Diocese.

Our Worship to God

I would also like to thank our youth, Mother's Union and Daughters of the King Choir groups. You have such an important responsibility to bring beauty to our worship through your music. You lead us in praising the Lord and remembering He is King. Thank you so much for such an important contribution to our church communities.

This next two years we would like all of our choirs to return more to our Anglican music traditions. Often we are bringing all kinds of songs and music into our worship services that do not work together with the church seasons or the pattern of the service.

The Book of Common Prayer as designed by Thomas Cranmer brings together Catechesis within the context of Liturgy. Throughout the book we pray scripture. It is through our practice that we are formed and are expressed in worship, *Lexorandi, lex credenda, lexvivenda* (As we worship, so we will believe and so we will live).

We therefore would like to remove music that does not have Anglican roots or relate to the liturgy. Although all kinds of spiritual songs are important and have value to us, in church services every hymn or song that is sung should reflect the Anglican liturgical worship. Within the Anglican worship we have so many beautiful hymns, psalms, canticles and Biblical verses from which to choose.

Your composition should be around those areas and not copied from other groups. Church elders and priests please do not allow any choir group to sing songs from outside the Anglican ethos. It adds so much to our worship year when we begin to remember certain songs that we sing only in Advent or Christmas or Lent or Easter or Pentecost. Your people remember, "ah, yes, this is the hymn from Lent I always love."

Please also take some time to consider the timing of the liturgy, when you sing before preaching, select hymns or songs that will lead people to hear the word of God. During offering, choose songs that prompt people to give and during Eucharist, sing only those songs that discuss the body of Christ and communion.

We want worship to explain who we are and what we are doing. For this to happen Church elders and the Priest should take a deliberate action in teaching the groups and we shall also help bringing the choir Masters to a training session.

Greater Financial Sustainability

I would like to now review some of our goals for improving our financial sustainability through our giving, Real Estate Investment and Development.

How do we move into the Promised Land in the area of financial sustainability? Like Joshua, we sent the spies to go and check what the Promised Land is like. What we believe God's financial initiatives for us are as terrifying as the results the Spies returned in their survey of the Promised Land. I cannot imagine how on earth we would ever build a five story building in our plot in the New City Centre, How on earth can we build a Secondary School and Conference Hall of the international Standard in our Mchengawutuwa 3.4 hectares plot, How on earth can we build a Garage with a hardware shop and a gas station, How on earth can we build a two story guest house in our plot near the office. With this report we feel like the Israelites did, like grasshoppers in the eyes of the people in the Promised Land. We know that we are in the third world and that Malawi is one of the poorest nations in the world. We know that we are also in the North and not in Blantyre or Lilongwe where life commerce is vibrant.

Like the Israelites I would like us to move on into the Promised Land with faith and courage, looking at the might of our God and not the apparent might of the demons who appear to us like giants. Even a small amount of negative thinking and self-defeating talk will affect our faith. Let us say, like the Israelites when they finally forty years later followed Joshua into the Promised Land, yes, we will obey. Yes, we will have faith and courage. The Lord is with us.

It is true that these things are not simple that we can be excited with. I also doubt that we can manage it. I also have the same feelings that it is simply not possible to achieve these things.

However with the Lord everything is possible. He Himself pointed out that the tiniest of seeds, the grain of the mustard seed, grows into a mighty tree. He encourages us, a tiny Diocese in a tiny, poor country, that we, too, with our eyes on Him and what He wants to do with us, we too can grow into a mighty tree providing fruit for many. It may be that I will not be able to see these things happen in my lifetime. If this is the case, I will still be thankful and rejoice to know that we, all of us, have laid a plan for the future generation who will come after us. They will say we loved them for we set aside a plan for them to build upon. However, we have put forward these things as prayer items with God. We are affirming our faith in Him, God our Father, the maker of heaven and earth, when we tell Him that we would like to see these things happen for and in His Church. We are not going to fold our hands but we will continue asking God to glorify Himself and provide for us, providing the way toward strong financial sustainability through these Real Estate Investment and Development plans.

Current Affairs

Next year Ladies and Gentlemen we shall have the first ever Tripartite Election in which you are going to elect your President, Member of the Parliament and the Ward Councilors. This is a responsibility that you have as your right to vote. You cannot assume this without registering. We encourage every one of you who have reached the constitutional age for voting to go and claim your right by registering.

It is not our duty to tell you who to vote for. Doing so would be to deny your right to choose but we can ask you to vote not because of person's tribe or region but for the person you think will do the very best job. As Christians it is important for us to vote for good leaders. How do you know if someone will be a good and ethical leader? The Bible tells us that you shall know them by their fruits.

Vote of Thanks

Above all we would like to thank our brothers and Sisters overseas for their support in helping us

achieve everything we say we have done. Our partners have always been faithful in supporting our work and we are very grateful because without them we would have been less than what we are today. Our Partners to include, Bishop Iker and the people of the Diocese of Fort Worth in USA, Bishop David and the people of the Diocese of Birmingham in UK, Canon Greene and the people of the St. John's in Canada, Christ Church Deer Park in Canada, Fr. Robert Davenport and Church of the Good Shepherd Norfolk USA, Fr. Gemenda, St. Mary's in New York USA, St. Mary's in London UK, African Steps in England, Likoma Link Trust in England, Prof. Harry Heaney UK and the group that meet in his house.

Conclusion

In summary, it is my hope that you will take back to the people in your parishes that, like the Israelites, God has not forgotten them but is even now preparing great things for them, great things for their church and for their Diocese. He is calling the Diocese and its priests to provide better catechetical teaching to help our people grow stronger in their relationships with the Lord. He is calling our people to be better equipped to look at their potential and use what is in their hands to love their neighbour.

He is calling us to pay attention to our different mission fields and be ready to bring our neighbours to Christ. God is leading your Diocese toward creative and important means of financial sustainability that will provide jobs for our people and long term financial stability for our churches and their staff. God is leading us to envision what our churches and Diocese would look like with trained and empowered spiritual directors to help teach, love and strengthen those who need guidance and help in our parishes. God is calling us to be a Diocese of caring priests who say their prayers and are growing in their own relationships with Him, and grow in equipping and shepherding and loving our people. We want to be a Diocese of priests who teach the people about the purposes of public and private prayer. We want to stand and say, like Joshua and Caleb, “If the Lord is with us, who can be against us? Yes, let us cross over into the Promised Land in faith and courage. We will follow You, Lord.”

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