

Partners Together on a Journey

Sixty years ago, the Anglican Church of Canada, through a resolution at its 1959 General Synod in Ste. Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec, voted to formally take up Jesus' call we heard in the gospel this morning:

*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.
(Matthew 25: 35-36)*

That resolution created The Primate's World Relief Fund and for its first decade it responded to emergency and refugee situations throughout the world. Those two original commitments continue today in places like South Sudan where we most recently coordinated a food assistance program with fellow-members of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and in India and Sri Lanka with the Tamil refugee organization, OfERR, with whom we have been in partnership for 35 years. Emergency response and refugee support here in Canada also continue to the present day.

In the late 1960s, Canadian Anglicans recognized that while it was important to continue to respond to emergencies and refugee crises, it was also important to begin to address longer-term community development needs, and so the "D" for Development was added to our name. Today, PWRDF supports development partners involved in a wide range of projects and programs, with a particular focus on preventive health, food security and micro-finance. With financial support from Global Affairs Canada, PWRDF and its partners in Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Mozambique have developed and are carrying out important work in maternal, newborn and child health; a program called, All Mothers and Children Count.

Throughout its sixty years of ministry, PWRDF has been committed to "partnership" both as a way of being and as a way of working. That commitment led PWRDF in the late 1990s, to establish a program in partnership with Canadian Indigenous Communities; a program that continues to evolve in the wake of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the commitments made by the Anglican Church of Canada to ongoing reconciliation work.

The commitment to partnership has also led PWRDF to invite Canadian Anglicans into processes of learning from our partners, advocacy with and on behalf of our partners, and active and ongoing prayer for, and financial support of, our partners

and the communities throughout the world that they work with. Our work is not just about changing the lives of others. It is about changing our own.

And so 60 years on, in the words of American writer and farmer, Wendell Berry, Canadian Anglicans can look back along the path of our journey together with our partners, to see,

Blessings [that] now appear, risen
As if from sightlessness to sight, and we,
By blessing brightly lit, keep going toward
That blessed light that yet to us is dark.

But what of the future “that yet to us is dark?” We live in a world not unlike the one the prophet Ezekiel and his people were living in two and a half millennia ago. Exile is the lived reality for more people today than at any time in human history, be it caused by the violence of war, of economics or of climate change. In Ezekiel’s time, those forced to flee and those who remained in Jerusalem needed a word of hope and a vision of a future in which the people of Israel would be re-membered and made whole again. And so Ezekiel wrote about dry bones being reassembled and about God’s breath of life being breathed into them as it was at the time of the creation of the world.

Centuries later, in Roman-occupied Palestine, Jesus offered a road map for those who followed him: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner. Today, Canadian Anglicans are called to do that in our parishes and communities across Canada. Through PWRDF we are called to do that in partnership with others around the world. Indeed, PWRDF strives to be part of the outreach ministry of every Canadian Anglican parish and diocese.

Jesus called on his followers to continue the ministry he began because, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”. To continue Jesus’ ministry therefore, was to respond to the sacredness of every human being.

How are we to respond to Ezekiel’s vision and Jesus’ call today? As a farmer, Wendell Berry understands the sacred to be not only in every human being, but also in the whole created order. He says,

I think that the world is a work of God, and therefore sacred. And so how you treat this sacred work, how you make your own work in it, is a matter of the most frightening importance.

In other words, how each of us chooses to live and work as people of faith on this “fragile earth, our island home”, matters. How we each live out our baptismal covenant, “to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself”, matters. As PWRDF volunteer, Dorothy Marshall put it in “At Home with PWRDF”, a 60th anniversary video,

...there are two rules, love God and love others. And if you do that, if everybody did that, the world would be the kingdom of God, it would be the way God wants it to be. But I see ‘love’ as a verb, an action word just like ‘faith’ is. So loving others...means doing something to help that person out of love and that’s what [PWRDF] is, it’s a tool to use that love to help others in places where you can’t be.

In thanksgiving for 60 years of faithful ministry, and in hopeful prayer for the continued journey, together with our partners, Amen.