



# Companion Links Report 2023

## Introduction

The Diocese of Winchester has had companion links at least since the time of Bishop John V. Taylor (1974-84) with five Anglican provinces: Myanmar, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and (Eastern) Democratic Republic of Congo. The cohesion of the central African provinces are founded on their common language, history, and culture and when the link was developed the whole Great Lakes region in East Africa was one Anglican province. The poorest countries are Burundi and DRC (Burundi is ranked world's poorest nation, DRC 10<sup>th</sup> poorest by GNI). DRC is recovering from political instability and conflict and is one of the foci of the Archbishop of Canterbury's personal commitment to peace and reconciliation. Schools in the Diocese of Winchester are invited to develop relationships with schools in Rwanda. Myanmar is a small church in a majority Buddhist background culture founded in the late nineteenth century by an order called the Winchester Brotherhood.

## Why do we have Companion Links?

Winchester Diocese wants to learn how to be the church in the UK whilst being connected to the worldwide church through the Anglican Communion. This is because when the gospel crosses cultural boundaries an essential dynamism of the work of Christ is opened up. This happened in the very pages of the New Testament as the gospel and epistle writers recorded the spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Aramaic/Hebrew to the Greek speaking world. Since then, the gospel has spread throughout many cultures around the world, and through history, and each society that proclaims Christ as Lord, does so using the unique gifts and revelation the Father has given that culture. Every race, tribe, nation and language reveals more of the fullness (Gk: *pleroma*) of Christ so that, as we see Christians in those cultures, we get to know Christ better, in ways we couldn't if we just stayed in our own culture. We in Hampshire and east Dorset cannot fulfil the calling God has for us, unless we are influenced, challenged, known and loved by Christians from other cultures. Building up those relationships is therefore an essential part of our joining in the mission of God.

There are three cross-cultural experiences that we can learn through our Companion Links.

The **first** experience is that of leaving our home culture and being immersed in another culture. This helps us question our values and assumptions and we begin to see our own culture from a different perspective. We come to realise that there are aspects of being a disciple of Christ that are hidden in our own culture, and revealed in another.

The **second** cross-cultural experience we can gain from our mission partnership is learning how Africans do mission with Africans, and how Asians do mission with Asians. We may be able to join in, but we are not seeking to offer 'help' or be the solution to the calling that Africans and Asians have to be ministers of the gospel amongst their own people. We reject all post-colonial paternalism and seek a humble attitude of learning. We observe the way our companion links overcome the cultural, linguistic, spiritual, institutional and organisational barriers that hinder the mission of God in their own countries.

The **third** cross-cultural experience is for us to translate appropriately what we have learnt from observing our brothers and sisters overcoming barriers in the mission of God into our own context in

Winchester Diocese. We apply our learning and seek to serve the common good, seeking social and cultural change in our own nation in accordance with the reign of the kingdom of God.

We also need to recognize that there are significant differences between the ‘cultures’ of north and south Hampshire. By bringing different parts of the Diocese of Winchester together in partnership with a wholly different culture in Asia or Africa, we also develop the potential for interacting in God’s mission at a deeper level with our brothers and sisters in Christ in another part of the diocese. We are still at the earliest stages of experiencing this dynamic, conscious of the need to continue to build unity and trust across the diocese.

## How do we Relate with our Companion Links?

Through significant investment in recent years in our relationship with Rwanda, four strands of concurrent learning are emerging:

1. Parish to parish links
2. School to school links
3. Social enterprise and social transformation (inc. prison chaplaincy)
4. Training for ministry.

Various deaneries have historic, healthy and lively links with different provinces which we continue to endorse. *Where parishes have no vibrant links*, they are invited to partner with provinces so that where relationships develop, they may do so using the theological framework above and the deanery relationships below. The World Mission Strategy Group longs for every parish to have a relationship with a church in another province.

Companion Link Province	Northern Archdeaconry Deanery	Southern Archdeaconry Deanery
Myanmar	Odiham	Southampton
Rwanda	Alresford	Lyndhurst
DRC	Alton	Eastleigh
??	Basingstoke	Bournemouth
Burundi	Andover	Romsey
Uganda	Alton, Winchester, and Whitchurch schools ministry	Christchurch

Not every country is easily accessible. Engagement must be done in partnership and collaboration with the respective bishop of each diocese, and with the approval of the Archbishop of each province.

## Developments Since Lambeth Conference 2022

### 1. Lambeth Conference 2022

The Conference was characterised by incredible warmth across the Communion, and particularly by the personal hospitality extended by Justin and Caroline Welby to all bishops whom they invited to their house. Global south bishops were driving the programme exploring what it means to be ‘God’s Church for God’s World’ in the decade ahead. Half of the time in the conference was spent in prayer, retreat and bible study. The outcomes of the conference are defined in the [Lambeth Calls](#) on:

- Mission and Evangelism
- Reconciliation
- Inter-faith Relations
- Anglican Identity

- Safe Church
- Environment and Sustainable Development
- Christian Unity
- Human Dignity
- Discipleship.

The most vulnerable country was South Sudan with bishops occupying semi-detached roles unable to always reach their congregations in refugee camps. Bishops Debbie and David were able to meet many of the bishops from our Companion Links in DRC, Burundi and Myanmar. Bishops from Rwanda and Uganda did not attend. Conversation with Archbishop Tito of Chile clarified that at this stage there is no capacity to develop this potential relationship.

## 2. Uganda

For the last fifty years many deaneries and parishes have had links across Uganda. Some of these came to a very natural end. However, it can be estimated that many hundreds of people from the diocese have been shaped in their discipleship and missional understanding through visiting. This includes more than twenty-five of our current serving incumbents, including retired clergy who hold honorary canonries in Uganda cathedrals. There has been significant investment in social transformation projects over the years and we have benefited from large numbers of Ugandan bishops who have visited our parishes, (for example, by the visit in Sept 2022 of Bishop Cranmer Mugisha of Muhabura), including significant evangelistic missions led by former Archbishop Orombi. There are various strong and healthy relationships with churches in SW and NE Uganda. We anticipate the relationships between Whitchurch deanery and Mityani diocese will continue to strengthen around education. Alton has renewed its commitment to lay training in both the Karamoja dioceses (visit made in Feb 2023) and Winchester deanery are planning a youth discipleship convention with Muhabura in 2023. The impact of climate change is evident in some communities.

## 3. Rwanda

The August 2022 visit for the consecration of a new bishop for the diocese of Nyaraguru demonstrated a renewed commitment to the province. Constructive conversations were had with three bishops on future development of relationships and issues of human sexuality. Future visits can go to three or four dioceses simultaneously thereby integrating the learning and can incorporate participants from parishes from two deaneries, students from the Winchester School of Mission, and school heads with their associated incumbents. Alresford deanery synod is considering whether to develop parish links in their October meeting. WSM placement students, Education including two headteachers and Alresford deanery visited four dioceses in Feb 2023. This demonstrates our capacity to engage with multiple dioceses in one province simultaneously. The significance of our relationships in the context of Rwanda's role in GAFCON is not to be underestimated.

## 4. Myanmar

The bishops from Myanmar were all at Lambeth (except Archbishop Stephen). Proposals have been received from three dioceses to assist in education and humanitarian assistance for internally displaced people in Mandalay, Sittwe and Taungoo dioceses. Bishop James Min Dein of Sittwe Diocese and his wife, Ruth, stayed for 10 days with Angie Smith in Hartley Wintney. Burma Children's Fund and Burma Churches Trust are run by people resident in the deanery. The Myanmar church has plans to grow more dioceses. The military regime currently restricts movement of people, so travel is difficult. John Parker is the Cathedral link person with Yangon Cathedral. There is the possibility of using the current visas for a bishop who came to Lambeth to invite them back, to discuss our relationships further or, for example, for a vocations day.

## 5. **Burundi**

The Burundian bishops are keen to welcome deepening relationships. In August 2023 Bishop Debbie, the Area Dean and a lay representative of Andover Deanery, the Vicar of Romsey Abbey and Directors of Ministry and Communications will visit Burundi, meet clergy during a national conference, and dialogue about how relationships might develop.

## 6. **Democratic Republic of Congo**

All 12 of the bishops of DRC were at Lambeth (except one who was sick). In a post-conference meeting (in Leighton Buzzard) the Archbishop George Titre Ande shared in a speech what he believes might make good partnership. The Congolese Church Association is intrinsically linked with the whole of the province (and therefore Winchester diocese) which draws in SOMA. Oxford Diocese also has a link with Kinshasa; eastern DRC relate to CMS Ireland; and there are some links with churches in the USA. Relay Trust (Australia) is a big supporter for DRC. Matthew Grayshon is planning to go in 2023 with a small UK/African team through SOMA.

## Funding

There are five sources of funding for our Companion Links: the Bishop of Winchester Uganda Trust; deanery funds for parish to parish relationships; department budgets (WSM, Education); personal private funding; grant making bodies and small charities which may provide funding, for example, for ordinands. Where possible reciprocity in supporting visits from Companion Links to the diocese is always encouraged.

## Summary

In 2022 the Lambeth Conference provided a rich environment to enhance our relationships at an episcopal level through mutual learning and collaboration around the Lambeth Calls. Generous hospitality has been offered to bishops by Odiham and Winchester Deaneries. Although not at Lambeth, relationships with the whole province of Rwanda were enhanced by our participation of and celebration in the launching of their second new diocese in two years and these have already been built on through visits this year.

The testimonies of those who have been transformed by the relationships and experiences of our companion links inspire us discern how we might continue to share the rich diversity of Christ's church.

Canon Dr Mark Collinson, member of the World Mission Strategy Group/Mar 2023