

Message from Bishop Robert

8 April 2025



One of the things that I am deeply grateful for in the life of our diocese are our international partnership links.

We have four. Two are in India: the Diocese of Dornakal, an area of rural subsistence farming in the east of India; and the Diocese of Karnataka Central in the city of Bengaluru in the south, an area that mixes the affluence of the tech industry with deep urban poverty. Then, there is our link with the Diocese of Western Tanganyika in Tanzania, central Africa, close to the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, there is our longstanding link with the Diocese of Västerås in Sweden, sharing in our European heritage. There was also previously an additional partnership, with the Diocese of El Camino Real in California, which ended a couple of years ago, though strong friendships remain.

These partnerships matter because they are visible expressions of the universal nature of the Church and of our common faith. In our visits to each other, we share stories, we encourage each other, and we build friendships across cultural and national boundaries. As we tell the stories of those friendships in our dioceses, in our parishes and communities, we are reminded as Paul writes to the Galatians (3: 28) we are all one in Christ Jesus. The Church is of course fully present in each of our communities. When we meet, we are not a fraction of the Church but the whole, because we are connected. As we say at Communion, “though we are many, we are one body” (Romans 12:5). As one commentator once said, reflecting on our baptism, the Church is the one place where water is thicker than blood.

In our changing and increasingly divided world, I find this truth both a challenge and an encouragement. This last week has seen, some would say, the biggest upturning of an accepted economic order in a generation. It has been marked by language of dismissal, denigration, reprisal, a world in which relationship is transactional, me first, my community first, my nation first. It’s very tempting, natural we might say, to join in. But, and here is the challenge, it is not the way of Christ: Our relationships are to be those of mutual encouragement and support, the way of an interconnected body. In this latter is my encouragement, because I also know that I am healthier and happier, when I am connected, that I flourish when others flourish and as a disciple of Jesus Christ I am not to give up on this truth.

When Jesus talks of his death in John 12: 32 he says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”. As we prepare to walk the way of this coming Holy Week, I am deeply thankful that we do so in the company of Christian people in our communities, our diocese and across the world, we do so with our partners in India, Africa and in Sweden. Together we are renewed as Christ gives his life for us, defeats death for us that we may live and live together as his people. It is together that we find life in all its fullness.

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