



Mission from all to all

Five Marks provide for inclusive ministry

By Matthew Davies, June 09, 2008

The Five Marks of Mission were "considered radical when they first appeared in 1984," notes a recent issue of the Church Mission Society's Yes magazine. "Now they are effectively the official mission agenda of the Anglican Communion."

The marks "show that God's mission is bigger and wider than we sometimes understand it, and in this sense they provide for an inclusive ministry," says the Rev. John Kafwanka, Anglican Communion research/project officer for mission and evangelism.

They also have influenced the planning for this summer's Lambeth Conference of bishops and feature prominently in a proposed Anglican covenant designed to strengthen the unity of the Anglican Communion amid differing viewpoints on biblical interpretation and human sexuality.

Developed by the Anglican Consultative Council, the Communion's main decision-making body, between 1984 and 1990, the Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
- To respond to human need by loving service;
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The marks are just as relevant today as they were 15 or 20 years ago because they "express a holistic nature of understanding mission in the Anglican Communion" and "give a diverse vision for mission, which is contextual, local, national and global," says Kafwanka, a priest from Lusaka, Zambia, who previously worked as a regional coordinator for the Church Mission Society in southern Africa.

Jenny Te Paa, "ahorangi" or dean of Te Rau Kahikatea (College of St. John the Evangelist) in Auckland, New Zealand, believes the Five Marks continue to have "an enduring and all embracing quality" across the entire Communion because they "provide a simple and yet profoundly comprehensive benchmark against which all Anglicans can constantly measure and focus our mission efforts -- this focus is beyond any arbitrarily established claims of human 'difference'."

MISSIO, the Anglican Communion's former mission commission, reviewed the Five Marks and suggested revisions in its 1999 report *Anglicans in Mission: A Transforming Journey*. The report recognized that the marks had "won wide acceptance among Anglicans, and...given parishes and dioceses around the world a practical and memorable 'checklist' for mission activities."

According to MISSIO, all mission is done in a particular setting -- its context. "So, although there is a

fundamental unity to the good news, it is shaped by the great diversity of places, times and cultures in which we live, proclaim and embody it," the report says, adding that the marks "should not lead us to think that there are only five ways of doing mission."

Working together

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori regards the Five Marks as "the best demonstration of how the parts of the Anglican Communion can and need to work together.

"It is obvious from their comprehensive and diverse nature that no one community can do all of them equally well, and that therefore the whole body is needed to even begin to address them adequately," she says. The church's evangelical wing often has focused on mission as "teach, baptize and nurture new believers" and "proclaim the good news of the kingdom," she notes, whereas other wings have tended to focus on "respond to human need by loving service" or "transform unjust structures of society."

"No well-organized wing of the church has yet dedicated itself to 'safeguard the integrity of creation,'" she says. "Only as the whole body can we begin to engage the whole mission of God in Christ."

The Lambeth Conference, the decennial gathering of Anglican Communion bishops, will be held July 16-August 3 at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England.

Meeting under the theme "Equipping Bishops for Mission," the conference program draws on the Five Marks.

The conference objectives are for all bishops to be restored and refreshed spiritually, gain deeper knowledge of each other, become more aware of the spiritual and physical resources God has given them to meet missionary challenges in different parts of the world, develop greater understanding and appreciation of life together in the Anglican Communion, address conflict, discover a new level of trust in common service to God and gain greater understanding of the contribution Anglicanism can make to the worldwide church and the world.

"We pray that through the open sharing of their experiences and concerns, the bishops will return to their dioceses better informed and equipped for their role as leaders of the church for God's mission to the world and with a clearer understanding of the Communion today," says the St. Augustine's Seminar, which brings together practitioners, theologians and academics to identify content for the conference.

Informing the work of the Lambeth Conference Design Group, the seminar has said it hopes this summer's gathering will "help the bishops to develop their skills of leadership and their understanding of their ministry and to be newly inspired for God's mission as outlined in the Five Marks of Mission."

The Lambeth Conference "is essentially about mission -- an opportunity for bishops to engage in fellowship with their fellow bishops and share information about their roles as leaders in God's mission," says Kafwanka, noting that this year's conference is intended to be different than its predecessors. "It will be much more educational in terms of bishops learning among themselves, encouraging one another, listening to each other and sharing experiences of mission in their various contexts."

Kafwanka says that he hopes this conference will be of great benefit "not simply to the bishops, but to the rest of the Anglican Communion, and that it will be a new beginning in taking mission to the center of what the church is about."

In his 2008 Epiphany letter to the Anglican Communion's primates, Anglican Church of Canada Archbishop Fred Hiltz said that his province continued to "rejoice in the fellowship we share throughout the Communion."

"We embrace wholeheartedly the Five Marks of Mission for the Anglican Communion," he said. "We value international relationships developed over many years, and we cherish the opportunity to participate in the work of global commissions and networks."

'People of mission'

The Most Rev. Phillip Aspinall, in his October 2007 presidential address to the Anglican Church of Australia's General Synod, said that the church would do well to take on board the work of MISSIO and some of its suggestions in revising the Five Marks.

"The church does not have a mission apart from Christ's mission," said Aspinall, primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. "And...whatever we do, in word or deed, every aspect of mission is directed towards making known the good news of the kingdom."

Aspinall said he supported MISSIO's suggestion that the first mark should be an "over-arching heading" and acknowledged that the marks don't mention worship.

"The very act of gathering to celebrate the Eucharist itself proclaims something to the world about the reality of God and the significance of Christ's death," he said. "It is part and parcel of the way in which the church makes known the good news of the kingdom to the world. A further mark of mission then needs to acknowledge that to worship and celebrate the grace of God is an indispensable part of mission."

Recognizing that worship is central to the common life of the Anglican Communion, the MISSIO report notes: "Our liturgical life is a vital dimension of our mission calling; and although it is not included in the Five Marks, it undergirds the forms of public witness listed there."

Mission, MISSIO concludes, "is the bedrock of all we are, do and say as the people of God. Our faithfulness in mission will be expressed in a great diversity of mission models, strategies and practices... We are united by our commitment to serving the transforming mission of God."

Jefferts Schori notes that, "in the same way that the Anglican tradition has been enriched and deepened by a greater range of liturgical life...we will be enriched as a people by engaging more of the whole mission, and the world will be better served -- i.e., reconciled to God in Christ."

The Five Marks, says Te Paa, "have always enabled and encouraged us to reach out and to care for one other as equally precious and needy human beings in the sight of God -- it is this deeply significant and indisputably Gospel sense of right relationality that we so need to collectively reclaim and to reposition as the highest priority at this time in our complex and privileged lives as God's global Anglicans."