

Diocesan Link Visit to Matlosane – February 2018



A visit by Bishop Michael and others to our link diocese in South Africa proved to be an historic occasion – marking the arrival of a new president and a new Church centre which was liberated from its Apartheid past.

A small delegation from Lichfield Diocese spent a week in Matlosane beginning on Ash Wednesday, taking part in various church services and visiting a drug rehabilitation centre and hospice.

One highlight was the unveiling of the new diocesan centre in Klerksdorp which was bought by the mostly-black diocese from the Dutch Reformed Church, which historically supported the former Apartheid regime.

Bishop Michael was joined by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Dr Thabo Cecil Makgoba, who oversees the Anglican Church of Southern Africa; the Bishop of Botswana Metlha Beleme and Bishop Stephen Molopi Diseko, who oversees Matlosane Diocese, for the event in the summer sun. Each bishop blessed a different area of the centre as the celebration began.

Archbishop Thabo, who had been at the state opening address by new South African president Cyril Ramaphosa the night before, said: "We have never in the history of

the African church bought a Dutch Reformed church. So this is historic transformation. This is historic healing.”



Lichfield Diocese contributed to purchasing the new building through a donation from the Bishop’s Lent Appeal. A new altar at the centre was also provided thanks to a gift from St Bartholomew’s Church in Penn, whose vicar, the Revd Preb Ben Whitmore, was personally thanked during the service.

Bishop Steve said: “His parish motivated us to embark on this process. Now we have a new altar it is a proper Anglican church!”

Bishop Michael told people at the service: “We enjoy and value enormously our companionship of prayer, friendship and shared mission through this diocesan link with Matlosane.”

The Lichfield group also included Director of World Mission Philip Swan, Archdeacon Sue Weller, Bishop’s Chaplain Rebecca Lloyd, Director of Communications Pete Bate and the Revd Cathy Mark. Three local Mothers Union (MU) representatives – Liz and Mike Binsley and Helen Palfrey – also came to build links with their Matlosane MU counterparts.

Several members of the group presided or preached at local church services which featured a mixture of traditional Anglican liturgy and vibrant, spontaneous worship – often led from the congregation, with services lasting up to four hours. Bishop Michael led a service at the Cathedral Church of the Resurrection – believed to be the only cathedral based in a township in South Africa.

Bishop Steve also showed them a strip of land at Desmond Tutu’s birthplace which was donated to the diocese for development, pending the necessary funds. On the way back, the travelers stopped off at Soweto, seeing the home where Nelson

Mandela lived from 1946-62 and Archbishop Tutu's home, and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.

Following the visit, more work will be done to look at potential joint benefits of the Lichfield-Matlosane link.

Quote from Bishop Steve Diseko:

'Thank you all for coming all the way from Lichfield, to come and grace the occasion of our dedication of our Diocesan Centre, and for being part of us. This is so very much appreciated and we give thanks to God. For us it was wonderful and we cherished every moment. It was very inspiring to see our Link Committee getting involved and making sure that everything went well. Archbishop Thabo was also very excited, more so meeting people from Lichfield and Botswana. It was great to have Bishop Michael come to us, and for him to participate in two different services in our Diocese. And of course his 'entourage' all went out into different directions and gained different experiences. No amount of words can explain our gratitude; we thank you very much for this friendship'.

Quote from Philip Swan:

We began the visit on Ash Wednesday with the imposition of ashes and breaking bread together. A week later we ended our time together by once again breaking bread in companionship and by being prayed for by our hosts. It was very moving and a special joy and privilege to be at the receiving end of such generous and thoughtful hospitality. Each experience enables us to take forwards our journey of friendship and partnership in the gospel. The visit helped to underline our sense of being in this together; of being friends rather than participants or observers; of constantly discerning the 'new thing' that God wants to lead us into as we learn together. Only within this context of trust and mutuality can we identify ways in which we can share together; for instance in theological education, or through our links between parishes, schools and projects, or through the Mother's Union and the St Chad's Volunteer Programme.

Read more about the trip, including personal reflections from those who went, in a blog by the Revd Cathy Mark, from All Saints, Streetly, [here](#).

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