

Report on the TEAM Conference to IAWN

March 2007

Greetings from Boksburg, South Africa

After eight days of hard work the TEAM Conference – Toward Effective Anglican Mission: Prophetic witness, social development and HIV and AIDS – came to an end on 14 March. More than 400 people from 32 of the 38 provinces of the Anglican Communion, gathered together in Boksburg, South Africa, to discuss our call to God's mission in the world of today. This conference has energized all of us, as a Communion, to seriously contribute to the achievement of the MDGs and, more importantly, to do so in the context of God's mission.

We began each day with eucharist – led by a different region each day, with great variety in style and song – then Bible study, in the same small groups, after breakfast. These discussions, focusing on the Bible and the day's theme, provided our foundation for the day. We heard excellent presentations and panels, beginning with Archbishop Ngongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, who grounded our deliberations in the theology of mission. Plenary sessions were followed by a group of workshops to choose from. Conversations around meals gave an opportunity to talk to some of the many people we met in more detail. The days were long, full, and inspiring.

Sunday fell, happily, in the middle of the conference, providing a welcomed change of pace. We were invited to attend one of about a dozen churches around the Johannesburg region. Wherever we went, we were uplifted by their warm hospitality and the varied expressions of faith lived out in their worship. The church in Daveyton had much wonderful singing, in four languages simultaneously and alternating quite naturally between hymns most of us would recognize from *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and hymns from their own musical traditions. The sermon was made even more interesting by the synchronized interpretation and, before the rector blessed the children as they went to Sunday school, he told the congregation that they were struggling with the passage: “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”, asking for their prayers, that the Holy Spirit be with them.

There is very good news and audio coverage on the Episcopal News Service at: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_23466_ENG_HTM.htm so rather than giving you more details on the conference here, we urge you to read the articles and listen to the audios. For some of the presentations, the full text is available through the news story. We especially recommend the coverage of the opening eucharist; Archbishop Ndungane's opening address; Archbishop William's presentation: Knowing the Lord; speakers set MDGs in theological context, which includes Hellen Wangusa (excellent); but they are all well worth reading. The keynote address of the Archbishop of Canterbury is on his website at: http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/070313.htm

If you read nothing else, the must read is Archbishop Ndungane's concluding remarks, which amount to the executive summary of the conference and its conclusions and call to action, at:
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_83593_ENG_HTM.htm (If you are unable to access this, let Helena know, and she will send it to you in the body of an e-mail.)

There is much from this conference that we, as women, will want to advocate and pursue. More to follow as we review the summary and reports. Suffice it to say now that it was a superb and inspiring conference.

Networking and links

There was excellent opportunity for networking and we were able to speak to many, both men and women, lay, clergy and bishops – even archbishops – about IAWN, the gathering in New York and our statement, giving out the brochure, statement and resolution ACC13-31. Jenny Te Paa included the statement in her presentation on the second day and it was very well received and sparked a lot of interest. We had a surprise parallel event on the UNCSW experience where several talked about how they brought it home and the experience in New York.

A number of parallel events were led by other delegates who have been at the UNCSW/IAWN sessions, including Lisbeth Barahona (Parallel event) on Gender, Trade and Entrepreneurship; Claudette Kigeme (Seminar) on Investing in Human Security to Prevent Conflict and Promote Peace Building; Hellen Wangusa (Workshop) on Education as a Basic Human Right; and Martha Gardner (Seminar) on Climate Change. Mugisa Isingoma, from the Anglican Church of the Congo, was to lead a fully signed-up seminar on "Bottom-Up Solutions: Grassroots Women Participate in Post-Conflict Reconstruction", but was unable to attend due to visa problems.

We are hoping that many of the women will join the IAWN network.

Meeting of ACC network representatives

Kenneth Kearon called a meeting on Saturday, March 10, of all the representatives of ACC networks. We found this very instructive and helpful. In the course of this discussion we realized that in fact IAWN is doing quite well. The discussion centred on how each network was doing, its structure and succession. All of us have problems of communication and funding. Most of the others meet very rarely, while others have big meetings every 3-5 years. Some are more active than others. Kenneth said JSC is very supportive of the work of the networks. All networks are expected to submit yearly reports to the JSC as well as a triennial report to the ACC.

The Anglican Communion website is being redone. All networks will have a link on the site and the IAWN Steering Group will be updating our website over the coming months. (More on this as it develops.)

Conversation with Hellen Wangusa

We had a delightful and informative conversation with Hellen one evening. She very much regretted not being in New York for the UNCSW but visa problems (still unresolved) and other matters made it impossible. Hellen has an amazing grasp of both the UN and the ACC, and a real sense of what she wants to do. She strongly believes that we should always keep what we do in a theological context, and not be just another NGO, but a strong FBO (faith-based organization). We feel it will be a joy to work with her.

Our comments and reflections

Discussing all this with Lisbeth Barahona one evening, we agreed that there are exciting possibilities ahead. And that our work has more direction and clarity after being here.

The Anglican Communion rarely has meetings that bring so many together from across the Communion. As those of us who have been in New York for the UNCSW know, there is great and wonderful diversity in our Communion, and a deep commitment to the mission of our church. The same was true in Boksburg. It was a wonderful opportunity to get to know others, share concerns and joys, and build and strengthen relationships across the Communion – a significant outcome in itself. Everyone there was deeply committed to furthering together the work of Christ in the world.

In mission,
Esperanza Beleo and Helena Mbele-Mbong
IAWN representatives at the TEAM Conference
14 March 2007