

Sunday, March 25, 2007

Confronting sin of slavery

Church Leaders mark 200th anniversary of abolition act

Reflecting on the sin of slavery, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, along with Archbishop of York John Sentamu, have published an online reflection on the nature of the slave trade.

The reflection, prepared for the Church of England Walk of Witness on March 24, is available at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/> with video posted on www.youtube.com. At the Walk of Witness, Williams and Sentamu led the country in an historic event marking the 200th anniversary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in England.

The reflection was filmed at the 127-year-old Anglican Christ Church Cathedral in Zanzibar, which was constructed over a former slave market. The two archbishops and Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori joined other Primates of the Anglican Communion in worship at the Cathedral during their recent meeting.

At that time, the Primates were shown two small preserved slave pits, where up to 175 men, women and children awaiting sale in the marketplace were chained darkness, often without food and water.

"The visit to Zanzibar was quite profound," Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori reflected. "To be worshipping in a place that 200 years ago was a slave market and to see underground cells where people were held for sale was quite shocking. But also to know that the Anglican Church, especially through the ministry of David Livingstone, and Bishop Steer and others, were instrumental in ending slavery in Zanzibar. It is a great reminder of the power of the witness of our faith."

Continued, Next Page



At memorial in a former Zanzibar slave market, Archbishop of York John Sentamu reflects on suffering. Zanzibar's Anglican cathedral now stands on site of slave market, its altar marking former whipping post. Photo: Paul Feheley

Episcopal military chaplains continue ministry as Iraq war enters fourth year

While the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq was marked on March 20, prayers continue for those serving in the military. Prayers are also offered for the Episcopal chaplains who minister to the spiritual needs of the service men and women in conflict regions.

Under the auspices of the Office of the Bishop Suffragan of Chaplaincies, chaplains are deployed side by side with our military throughout the world, including Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. Currently there are five Episcopal chaplains stationed in the war area plus others serving the military elsewhere.

The Rt. Rev. George Packard is Bishop Suffragan of Chaplaincies, a war veteran who earned the Silver Star and two Bronze Stars for valor. "If you talk to anyone who is deployed or members of their family, the important date is the one when they come home," Bishop Packard wrote on his blog. "We value their selfless service."

Packard concluded, "This conflict's anniversary is really about the imbalance of sacrifice that these warriors are sustaining for the rest of the country."

Continued, Next Page

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Continued, Next Page



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Continued, Next Page

From The Film

In the film, Archbishop Williams says that the experience brought home the reality of the trade: "You see there the fetters that were used for slaves, the fetters used to bring slaves in convoy, so that they could barely stand and walk, they were so closely shackled together; and to see some of the real, the actual shackles that were used until really very recently in this part of the world as part of the paraphernalia of the slave trade, it's a reminder that it really happened, it really happened not very long ago."

He says that the instinct to enslave is still very much present in the modern world:

"It's as if slavery is a kind of compulsion for human societies, people go back again and again to treating people as objects, as possessions, and I don't think we can simply sit back and say 'it's a thing of the past and no more'. All those modern forms of slavery, economic slavery, debt slavery in effect, the slavery of sex trafficking; these things are still with us."

Archbishop Sentamu says that holding the original chains was a harrowing experience:

"I found the whole experience heart-rending...When I went outside and actually saw those figures - how slaves were tied together - and touched the actual chains that were used, I was rendered absolutely speechless."

Meanwhile the General Convention has called the Episcopal Church to confront its own history concerning slavery. (GC Resolution A123, A124, C011 and C040, <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/gc.htm>)



In Zanzibar cathedral, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori views altar above former slave market whipping post. ENS Photo: Bob Williams

During this season of Lent, Chaplain Frank E. Wismer, on duty in Iraq, prepared a Lenten Meditation Guide, along with members from various commands at Camp Arifjan. The meditations offer insights into the range of emotions shared by military men and women.



The Rt. Rev. George E. Packard

"It is difficult to think you can be comforted when you've just lost a loved one."

— COL Penelope Cook-377th TSC

"We as soldiers in Iraq are in a unique situation to be merciful and must remember that to show mercy is desirable by God; it is what he requires and will make us more Christlike."

— SGM Edward Fowler-377th TSC

"We are all children of God, but what is a peacemaker? Does it seem like an oxymoron for a Soldier who trains to kill to be called a peacemaker? Can you learn to make war and at the same time, be regarded as one who makes peace? Are these two pursuits compatible? Can peace dwell wherever there is conflict? The answer is a resounding YES!"

— LTC Lowell Bunker-377th TSC

Local Support

Congregations can support the chaplaincies in many ways. Recently, Church of the Heavenly Rest in New York City coordinated donations of blankets, hats and socks which helped US service personnel and Iraqi civilians at an Air Force Field Hospital near Baghdad. The Rev. Gerald J. Blackburn of Bishop Packard's office called this effort a "response to our Lord's command to unselfishly care for those in need." For information about the needs of the military chaplains and how you and your parish can help, contact Blackburn in the office of the Bishop Suffragan for Chaplaincies,

Please pray for all chaplains who minister to our service men and women in areas of conflict throughout the world.

Resources

- Office of the Bishop Suffragan for Chaplaincies www.ecuse-chaplain.org
- Lenten Resources: <http://www.ecusa-chaplain.org/Resources.html#arifjan>
- Bishop Packard's blog: <http://bishopsnotebook.blogspot.com>
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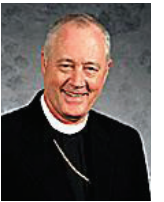
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