

St. Peter & St. Paul Parish, Tonbridge and the Church of the Good Shepherd, Kondoa, Tanzania

Today, at St. Peter & St. Paul's Parish Church, Tonbridge, we are hugely privileged to be part of a growing link with the Cathedral congregation at the Church of the Good Shepherd in the Diocese of Kondoa, Tanzania. The relationship is very much two way: we learn how important it is to trust God for our everyday provision from our Kondoa friends, and in return pray and gift what we can financially, in a small way, to help to redress the stark imbalance in our lifestyles. Bishop Given and his wife Lilian have made several trips to visit us in Tonbridge, and in 2019 we were delighted to welcome the Bishop's daughter Ihewa Gaula and her friend Scholastica, both medical students, who undertook a month's work experience with the NHS at Pembury Hospital. As a Parish we have made over ten trips to Kondoa, including three youth visits, as we seek to be with our friends in Kondoa, to encourage the link and inspire both young and old. Currently we send a quarter of our Mission Action Group (MAG) 10% tithe on annual income to Kondoa, to firstly, support Bishop Given to run what is still very much the Mission Diocese of Kondoa; and secondly, to assist the new Anglican St. Peter & St. Paul Pre-Primary and Primary School in Kondoa.

The Diocese of Kondoa is Tanzania's seventeenth, the youngest and poorest diocese, established in 2002. The Diocese is still financially assisted by its brother and sister dioceses in Tanzania, as well as actively supported by overseas links from New Zealand (Auckland), the USA (East Tennessee) and Rochester Diocese in the UK.

Geographically, Kondoa lies on the edge of the East Africa Rift Valley in central, northern Tanzania, some two hours' drive north of the capital Dodoma; with Kondoa Town itself adjacent to the trans-African Cairo to Cape Town main road. In this dry part of the Continent, but with a permanent geothermal spring, linked to deep Rift Valley faults, Kondoa has always been a focus of activity throughout human existence. It lies adjacent to the early Hominin archaeological sites of Olduvai Gorge and Laetoli where our human roots have been traced back some 2.0 to 2.5 million years. Kondoa itself is famous for ancient rock art, dated from 45,000 years ago and painted by the San People on the northern extent of their historic migrations. In recent history, Kondoa was one of the key staging posts on the Arab-led slave trade caravan route from the Interior to the slave island of Zanzibar. As a result, many of the local people around Kondoa and further west were converted to Islam. Today, Kondoa Town itself has a population which is about eighty percent Muslim. Unfortunately, during the Christianization of East Africa, Dr Livingstone and others mostly avoided Muslim-dominated areas, meaning that early education and medical assistance was focussed largely elsewhere. Thus, the Kondoa Diocese is still largely a rural community, situated in one of the driest parts of Tanzania, highly dependent on biannual rains for subsistence food, and therefore deeply affected by the growing effects of Climate Change. The small Christian community is surrounded by Muslims, generally lacking in established medical and educational infrastructure and essentially poor. The eastern side of the Diocese is now populated by the semi-nomadic Maasai, amongst whom the Bishop has reported a significant increase in Christian converts.

With the Kondoa Diocese deeply "Third World", still in its infancy, truly on the front-line of Christian-Muslim relations and significantly affected by Climate Change, there is clearly a very great need for the support of our Christian brothers and sisters. As such our Kondoa link falls

under the larger umbrella of the Rochester Diocese. In 2011, formal diocesan links were established between Rochester and Kondoa. The Diocesan Link has grown considerably in the last ten years, and now consists of more than twenty Parish-to-Parish, or School-to-School interlinks, of which ours is but one.

But how did all these links begin? Representatives of the Parish attended the first exploratory meeting of the Rochester Diocese in mid-2010 to see if formal links could be developed with overseas Anglican communions. Four diocesan links were established based on previous connections of the individuals present: links with the Diocese of Kondoa and Mpwapwa in Tanzania, Harare in Zimbabwe and Estonia. As a Parish, we chose to support Kondoa, based on our own past connections: one of our number having spent two years teaching in Korogwe, and another having attended the Anglican School in Arusha back in the 1960s.

From Tonbridge Parish, our early visits to Tanzania were made through the newly formed Diocesan Links Committee, and then three years later more directly, once one of the St. Peter & St. Paul Parish MAG slots became available. We recognised very early that successful links were being made Parish-to-Parish, but that the Diocesan activities in Kondoa itself, was struggling for any kind of regular assistance. We therefore decided to directly support Bishop Given and the Diocese with our quarterly giving, essentially to enable the Diocese to function. Our regular tithe has helped buy diesel and to fix vehicles to enable Bishop Given to travel to remote parts of his See for baptisms and confirmations, as well as to help roof over twenty new churches across the Diocese.

About six or seven years ago, St. Peter & St. Paul Parish, Tonbridge made a conscious decision to try and find a project to support in Kondoa, in addition to our MAG funding. The need for education was clear, both to learn, to evangelise and in the longer term to establish a pillar of financial stability for the new Kondoa Diocese. We discovered that the vision of a Diocesan Kindergarten in Kondoa was already well established, and indeed the Cathedral Church had already purchased a small block of land near the new road on the edge of town in 1999. Having visited the proposed site in mid-2013, we started to co-ordinate external fund raising to try and make this vision of a school a reality. After a long – eight year – and sometimes tortuous journey, with God's blessing we have successfully raised over a quarter of a million pounds to help buy additional adjoining blocks of land and to build a six-classroom school – now St. Peter & St. Paul's Pre-Primary and Primary School. The School foundation stones were laid by Bishop Given and Bishop James of Rochester on August 13th 2016, the School opened and consecrated on October 14th 2018, with formal registration by the Tanzanian Government in early 2020. Today attendance is growing, with 90 pupils, 60 in Standard One Primary and 30 Pre-Primary, receiving a Christian education even though many pupils are from Muslim families. English is taught early, alongside Kiswahili as well as learning to read and write.

Our success in land purchasing around the School site has led Bishop Given to make the decision to construct the new Kondoa Cathedral of St. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, right next to the School. From humble beginnings, this project is quickly turning into a new Diocesan centre, Cathedral and School! The Lord works in wonderful ways!



St. Peter & St. Paul Pre-Primary & Primary School, Kondoa (*looking East*) - School buildings on the left (in yellow + brown roof), Head-Teachers house in the centre (silver roof), and future dormitories on the right (brown roof)



Kondoa School, Pupils, Teachers and Youth Team from St. Peter & St. Paul Tonbridge – August, 2019



Kondoa School in Operation! With Head-Teacher Conjester (nee) Benjamin and Teachers Careem, Emabrenda and Melina *(from left to right)*



Bishop James of Rochester (left) and Bishop Given of Kondoa lay the Foundation Stones of St.

Peter & St. Paul's Pre-Primary and Primary School in Kondoa, August 13th 2016.