

Visit to the Diocese of Angola, June 2017

Bishop André invited me to participate in the Synod of the Diocese of Angola, which was held in Luanda from Thursday 8th to Saturday 10th June. I travelled with Emirates Airline via Dubai overnight for a week's visit. The journey was comfortable with good food and service, and the fare less than half the cost of a direct flight!

As each leg of the journey is 6-7 hours it felt rather long, however on the flight out from London I sat next to a mother with an 8 month old travelling to Christchurch, New Zealand on three planes, so couldn't complain!

Monday 5th June

The pilot announced that the temperature in Dubai was cold at 28 degrees. Not that I got to experience any of this nice cold air! With it being winter in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was also 27-28 degrees in Luanda. The passengers on the flight from Dubai were mainly Chinese so there was a long queue of foreigners at passport control, after which it was great to be welcomed by Rev. Maria Domingos with the diocesan vehicle.

Soleme Guest House is a Portuguese-style family-run house in the upper part of the city, located amongst government buildings. One normally meets interesting people there and this time that included WHO staff and a British Ugandan Mozambican health consultant also working with the Ministry of Health across the road, a French UNHCR staff member who arrived to set up refugee camps for those fleeing the political violence in DRC, the chief executive of a French NGO working with partners to support street children, and a Chinese telecoms engineer working on secure networks.

The imminent political transition in Angola was immediately obvious with the absence of José Eduardo dos Santos posters on the streets of Luanda. After 38 years there will be a change of president this August. Also visible was rubbish which has recently started to accumulate again after the clear-up last year to help eradicate yellow fever.

Tuesday 6th June

I had a couple of days of meetings scheduled before the Synod was due to start. After breakfast, I walked to the Diocesan Office where the day started with Morning Prayer led by Bishop André.

Afterwards, he briefed me on the key business of the Synod: creating a new archdeaconry in Central and South Angola, and multiplication of the diocese. The diocese will need to answer three questions in order to show that multiplication is feasible:

1. Does the diocese have capacity to create another?
A financial report would need to be produced over the three years 2017-19 to show it has capacity.
2. How many local churches are able to pay clergy?
3. How many priests does the diocese have?

There would be pastoral work too, the five archdeacons have completed their five year terms of office so the bishop needs a review with the clergy of each archdeaconry, and there would also be transfers of clergy to be discussed.



ALMA banner in the Diocesan Office from the 10th Anniversary celebration in St Paul's Cathedral.



Rev Deacon Francisco Issenguele and Francisco Pinto

Francisco Issenguele and Francisco Pinto are studying theology at the Roman Catholic University with a grant from St Augustine's Foundation through MANNA paying their course fees for four years. They shared with Maria and me that the course was going well - but it's now a five year course with a dissertation!

We explored practical challenges of accommodation, travel, resources and the need to submit work online next term. How might they access Anglican theology?

Elizabeth Thomas had given me copies of the recent MANNA magazine. Bishop André passed his copy around the diocesan office and Mama Paulina was surprised to see a photo of herself in it! Tammi Mott of ERD had taken it when Mothers Union leaders from Angola, Lebombo, and Niassa met in Luanda with ERD to work on the Savings Programme together.

Mama Kikala explained that Angola has 110 savings groups with a total of 2,683 members, and introduced me to the inspiring team of savings co-ordinators.



Mamas Paulina, Inês, Ana, Kikala, and Adelina

In the afternoon Gonçalves Pedro arrived to take me to meet Ven Dacosta Emmanuel at St Stephen's, Golfe who wanted to talk about a prospective parish visit to London next year. I also gave him a copy of the MANNA magazine as it included a picture of him and his wife, which he enjoyed very much and then gave me a copy of the parish's evangelistic material for Pentecost - we then noticed it had the same picture!



We visited the St Stephen's Anglican College which provides a significant help to local communities. This year a total of 565 students are being taught - most classes are primary/secondary age with one high school age.

Although the school has been registered by the government, they are not yet providing teachers so the church is currently paying \$5,000 per month in salaries. This issue appears to be specific to Luanda.

On Tuesday evening I was joined by Susan Lassen, Executive Director of the JC Flowers Foundation and Rebecca Vander Meulen, Director of Mission in the Diocese of Niassa in Northern Mozambique. It was great to have the opportunity of building relationships with two such wonderful people.

They were in Angola to run a training session on church involvement in community health and malaria at the Synod, and also to work on the Cross-Border Malaria Initiative between the four states of Angola, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and their Anglican Churches.



Rebecca Vander Meulen and Susan Lassen

Wednesday 7th June

After breakfast, Maria arrived and we walked to the British Embassy for a meeting with John Dennis, British Ambassador. The route past the Presidential Palace is closed to the public, so we went a longer way round and then enjoyed the embassy air conditioning!

We had a very good conversation around the political transition and how messages from Angolan politicians on continuity and social justice aligned with changes necessary for diversification of the economy, and the social realities with which the Anglican Church is engaged. The recent Angola Forum at Chatham House had identified corruption, investment, education, health, and demining as all related to diversification; although Government agendas don't include all these themes. We made the connection with the Anglican Church's work in providing primary education and community health care with support from her partners.

This was also an opportunity to express our thanks for the embassy's help with obtaining visas for the visit from Uíge to St Marylebone in January - and to express concern that the outsourced visa application process requires payment by credit card which is very difficult in a rural cash economy with exchange controls.

Thursday 8th June

The Synod of the Diocese of Angola met at St Stephen's, Luanda from Thursday 8th to Saturday 10th June. The theme was "Strengthened through Grace" (2 Tim 2.1) with the key business being the consideration of a proposal to multiply from one diocese to two, and associated strengthening of diocesan infrastructure.



The Synod Banner



Rev Kiakumbanzila Mvumbi (Dean), Bishop André, Rev Filomena Teta (Registrar), Antunes Mários (Chancellor)

Unfortunately a stomach bug attacked me overnight on Wednesday, so I stayed at Soleme to recover on Thursday. This gave me an opportunity to meet with Toni Cusso who will be managing the church building project at St Simon & St Jude in Namacunde near the border with Namibia. The parish is linked through ALMA with St Nicholas, Chiswick who are fundraising for the project. The church building is being funded jointly with MANNA from a legacy for building the church in Angola. Toni is from Ondjiva and was in Luanda to collect a new vehicle for the malaria programme. We reviewed the project plan and budget, and confirmed that the project is now ready to start.

In the evening, we learned about the work of a French NGO [samusocial International](#) in supporting street children in Luanda. Their director who was visiting a partner NGO in the city, and explained that there are 700 known street children in Luanda, so the real number is probably two or three times this.

Friday 9th June

The Synod had a busy day with debates being structured into three themes:

- Expansion of the Church
- Administration and Finances
- Projects for Self-Sustainability



Synod members and visitors



Rev. Julieta Fernando

When the Diocese of Angola was founded in 2002 it became a Missionary Diocese of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. Since September 2016, it has been a full diocese and with the Church expanding geographically, the Synod wants to multiply into two dioceses of Uíge and Luanda.

Missionary areas have been established in the centre and south of the country in Bié, Benguela, Cunene, Huambo, Kuando Kubango, and Lubango. With membership and congregations growing in these areas, the Synod agreed to create a new archdeaconry of Central and South Angola.

Administration and Finances started with a proposal to double the diocesan quota from 500 Kz per family member per month to 1000 Kz (about £5) because the level of income being received by the diocese is inadequate. Whilst this was agreed, it was a very close vote because parishes in Northern Angola were concerned about poor people not being able to afford the proposed level of contribution.

The difficulty with this model of diocesan financing is that people's income varies considerably, however a different model considered on Saturday addressed this problem but will take longer to implement.

A proposal to align financial reporting across the diocese based on consistent financial management models was agreed unanimously. At present each parish, missionary area, and archdeaconry uses a different approach so local finances are very difficult to understand, and this proposal will bring transparency.

Pastoral Health

A special training session on Friday evening on pastoral health was led by Dr Matondo Alexandre who is a public health specialist and Rebecca Vander Meulen, Director of Mission for the Diocese of Niassa.



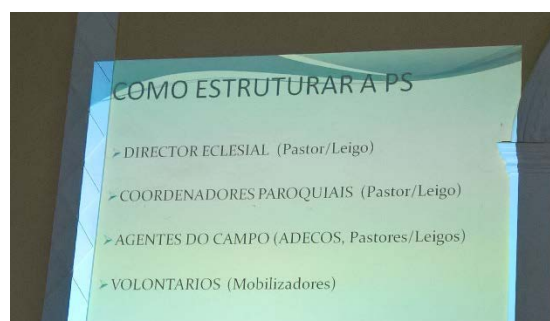
Emilia Wime (Cross Border Malaria Initiative), Dr Matondo Alexandre, Bishop André, Susan Lassen (JC Flowers Foundation), Rebecca Vander Meulen (Diocese of Niassa)

Expansion of the Church started with Julieta Fernando proposing that parish leadership teams include the MU, Youth and congregation leaders, which was agreed subject to leadership teams having a maximum of 11-12 members.

This debate highlighted for me that collaborative leadership in parishes is built into Anglican Church structures in Angola - unlike in England where parishes aren't required to have leadership teams that involve lay members in ministry decisions.



Dean Kiaku and ministers of missionary areas in Central and South Angola discussing the proposed new archdeaconry.



Dr Matondo Alexandre outlined ways in which churches could organise themselves to respond to community health needs.

INDICADORES NACIONAIS	
• Esperança de vida (2012)	51,5 anos
• Tax. Mort. Neon.(2012)	45 /1000 NV
• Mort. < 1 ano (2012)	100 / 1000 NV
• Mort. < 5 anos (2012)	164/ 1000 NV
• Mort. Mat.(2010)	450 / 100.000 NV b

*Dr Matondo explained the national indicators
- Angola has the worst infant mortality rates in the world!*



Rebecca Vander Meulen described community based mission in Niassa - "We invest principally in PEOPLE, not in stuff." followed by training on how the church can combat malaria.

Saturday 10th June

Self-Sustainability was the third section of the agenda. Firstly, taking account of weaknesses experienced in project management, it was agreed to restructure the department for community development projects to include internal projects belonging to the church as well as external projects. This was followed by two major debates on acquiring land for a cathedral and on implementing a process for managing tithing.

Following previous synod decisions, the diocese had negotiated with the government to acquire land in Luanda for a cathedral and an Anglican Higher Institute of Education (polytechnic). The government has offered to provide land in the new city of Camama for a diocesan complex: it would give land for the polytechnic and provide infrastructure (roads, power etc.) with the diocese paying for the cathedral land.

Architects plans were presented to Synod for the polytechnic on one site, and for the cathedral, diocesan office, and ten units of housing on a second site. The housing would be for rent as an income generating project. Synod authorised the purchase of the land for 25m Kz (£120,000) with an initial deposit of 5m Kz. The intention is to raise these funds over the next year.

An excellent presentation by Filomena Teta and Abrão Dongala followed on how to transform the church's financial health from constant financial difficulties to tithing being a source of great contribution to the church - by encouraging 10% of member income to be given to their congregation, 10% of congregation income to the parish, 10% of parish income to the district, and finally 10% of district income to the diocese.

Insights from the recent young people's conference on giving were particularly significant:

- 10% give regularly
- 40% give irregularly
- 20% already contribute to their group
- 5% don't see it as relevant
- 25% have concerns over transparency



Rev. Filomena Teta and Abrão Dongala

Based on theology, research, and analysis, the proposal was described by one synod member as 'A holy gift from God to the house of God'.

Bishop André announced that the five existing archdeacons had been reappointed and that the new Archdeacon of Central and South Angola would be Rev. Pedro Jamba of Benguela. The Synod then closed with the receipt and sending of messages, including to the President, National Election Commission, Bishop Richard Chartres on his retirement as Bishop of London, and to the partners of the diocese.

In conclusion this had been a Synod in which it seemed to me that the Church had grown up through the full participation of the young people of the Church. I was very impressed with the development of collaborative leadership in parishes, with the new approach to stewardship supported by a short term increase in quota, and plans to purchase land for a church complex. It seemed to me that the Synod had taken major steps towards enabling the vision of multiplication to become feasible by working on how to create capacity.

Sunday 11th June

My programme for Sunday was morning worship, followed by an afternoon meeting with Bishop André and Maria on ALMA and MANNA activities in Angola before leaving for the airport. After a long day on Saturday, I opted for walking to the city centre church of Cristo Rei (Christ the King) next to the diocesan office and attending the Portuguese Congregation at 10.30am rather than the English Congregation at 8am, and was very grateful to Jeremias Soares for translating the Trinity Sunday sermon for me. This opportunity to reflect on my experiences and conversations during the week in Luanda led me to three conclusions.

Synods are an example of the Holy Trinity at work in the life of the Church. They enable the Church to discern where the Spirit is leading. They are created so that church members can speak and be listened to; so that people can be advocates for a particular view and offer counsel. It's as though Creator, Word, and Spirit are present and through their presence a Synod symbolises what being Church together is like.

Confidence in God was exuded by those I'd been amongst, they are people with a passion for doing Church and a commitment to doing it together.

The active involvement of young people is breathing new life and energy into the Church.

Solidarity had been expressed throughout the week with the people of the UK in respect of the terrorist attacks on Manchester and London. I had visited Angola wanting to encourage and express support for the Church, but I had also received.

Glenfell Tower caught fire a day after my return. Bishop André immediately sent a message of solidarity, which we shared with the Bishop of Kensington who was in the midst of leading the church response.

It seems to me that this sense of *solidarity* builds on our *partnership* in the Gospel. As we are present to one another, our *partnership* is deepened and, as we take responsibility for recognising the social realities of the lives of our partners and their longing for transformation, so we create opportunities for the Mission of God. A few days after my return, I introduced into the consultation on the appointment of the next Bishop of London, the importance of having a bishop who expresses *solidarity*.



Wonderful Sunday School choir at Cristo Rei
- with a gift for making music

.John Tasker

Bishop of Angola's Commissary in the UK
ALMA Twinning Officer and MANNA Trustee