

## **Global Episcopal Mission Network:** *A distinctly Anglican approach to Global Mission*

Heart-sore and discouraged from the painful divisions in our church?

Wouldn't it be nice if there were something both sides of our current great divide could agree on and work on together?

There is: it's called global mission. It is central to our call as Christians, and everyone can do it; moreover, everyone can do it in a way that accords with their principles and makes a difference in our hurting world.

In typical Anglican fashion, our church has a wildly organic, even bio-diverse approach to mission: there are literally dozens of separate agencies that send missionaries or make grants for relief or development overseas, and are affiliated with the Episcopal Church. The Lutheran Church (ELCA), by contrast, has everything centrally organized. Communication is relatively simple among Lutherans involved in mission overseas. But we, of course, do things differently.

Within any given diocese of the Episcopal Church, separate parishes, diocesan organizations and individuals often do not even know of each others' mission involvements. There is next to no sharing on the ground level. In the Diocese of X, St. Swithin's could be supporting a medical missionary to Burundi, neighboring St. Bede's could be supporting a tech support/communications missionary to the same town in Burundi, while St. Chad's is holding bake sales to support ERD, which is funding an orphanage in the very same Burundi town, and the three parishes might never know it. Neither might the missionaries themselves. Parishes and missionaries and granting organization might never talk to one another, never share experience, resources, mutual support or encouragement, training, even prayer.

Meanwhile, domestic and foreign youth mission trips have proven to be the single best tool we have for disciplining young people in our parishes. Suppose a youth leader at St. Evagrius in the Diocese of Y should decide for the first time to lead a trip to Belize for high school students to help build a church. Would that youth leader know that someone at St. Swithin's has led 15 successful youth mission trips to Belize, knows the bishop of Belize personally, and has learned all the ins and outs of running such a trip? What transportation, language, culture, training, medical care or ecclesiastical pitfalls might the St. Swithin's person spare the leader and youth of St. Evagrius'? And how are they to know of one another's existence?

Lacking Episcopal contacts, St. Evagrius' youth leader might wisely decide not to re-invent the wheel, but to turn to an outside organization that would put this trip together for her. This organization is Christian and experienced, but knows nothing about the Episcopal Church's structure or unique outlook. It will provide no contact whatsoever with the Episcopal Church in Belize, and will do nothing to develop the young peoples'

Anglican identity, much less help them to see what they are doing in the context of centuries of Anglican mission efforts.

What to do about this communications quagmire that is the dark side of our wonderful bio-diversity of mission efforts?

The Dioceses of X and Y can join Global Episcopal Mission. GEM Network is here to get all the various players talking to one another to enhance everyone's efforts overseas. GEM helps people connect within and between dioceses.

Here is how GEM works:

- **GEM is a network of member dioceses.** Like any network, the more that belong, the stronger the network. Dioceses that consider themselves strong in overseas mission and those that are just now identifying their interest in getting organized are all equally needed. Moreover, where any given diocese sees itself along the current theological spectrum is beside the point. The point is that we are all stronger when we are sharing expertise, resources, information and prayer for mission. God's world can only benefit.
- **Each member diocese makes an annual contribution** to the operating expenses of GEM. Far from being top-heavy, GEM relies on its Board of 12 volunteers to set its course and carry out its objectives. Every nickel is squeezed. The standard annual donation from a member diocese is \$500. Specific financial available on request. GEM has 501c3 status. The membership year is from Annual Meeting to Annual Meeting, or July 1 to June 30.
- **Each member diocese sends two official Representatives**, appointed by their bishop, to attend the Annual Meeting that oversees the working of the Board. At that Meeting, which takes place within the context of the annual Mission Institute, the finances are scrutinized and Board members elected. Dioceses need to plan for the expenses of sending two representatives to the Annual Meeting and Mission Institute. That cost varies by the location of the Institute, but might average out to be \$1,500 annually (for two persons – airfare, room, meals and registration).
- **GEM trains Diocesan Mission Agents** to organize for mission in their own dioceses. Lay or clergy can take the Certificate Program, in which they will be trained in organizing their own diocese for overseas mission. In truly Anglican fashion, the Mission Agent does not centralize the various mission efforts undertaken in the diocese. He or she does not control anyone's project or act as a gate-keeper. Instead, the Agent gets the players talking to and supporting each other for overseas mission, and educates about "best practices" in mission work.
- **GEM hosts an annual Mission Educational Institute** that is open to any and all. It incorporates the Annual Meeting, and typically takes place in mid- to late June in varied locations (an Episcopal seminary, cathedral or college, for example). In 2006, the Institute will be held at Kenyon College, one hour NE of Columbus, immediately before General Convention. Special guest speakers from overseas are the highlight of every Institute. In '05, Dr. Esther Mombo of St. Paul's Theological College in Kenya electrified us with her presentation on the theme Ambassadors of Reconciliation. Her addresses are available on the GEM web site.
- **GEM provides consultants.** GEM Network consultants have broad experience in both practical and theoretical aspects of mission, and can help constitute or re-constitute global mission or companion diocese committees on a sound Biblical and theological basis, and can assist with questions regarding mission sending (team orientation, organization, promotion, fund raising) and mission receiving. GEM Consulting Services are available at cost (transportation, lodging, meals and incidentals). Details are available on the web site.
- **GEM maintains its own strong connections with all Episcopalian sending organizations.** It is a member of the Episcopal Partnership for Global Mission (EPGM), and promotes EPGMs Standards for Sending Long-term Missionaries and Standards for Receiving and Hosting Mission Visitors.

- **GEM takes youth who are experienced in mission to the next level.** Through its new initiative, the Young Adult Mission Educational Institute, (YMEI – pronounced “Why me”), GEM capitalizes on the unique energy of young people returning from domestic and foreign mission trips. YMEI runs in conjunction with the Annual Meeting and Mission Institute. Through celebrating their missions, reflecting on them in practical and theological terms, and planning for their own next step in mission involvement, young adults find themselves connected in new ways with other young adults and with the larger mission community in the Episcopal Church. They also discern more of their own gifts for mission and leadership, and are empowered as leaders for mission in our church. Since most are of college age (18 – 24), their experience at YMEI will benefit both their home diocese and their college and post-college dioceses.
- **GEM maintains a web page** on which it publishes the GEM Manual. Go to [www.gemn.org](http://www.gemn.org) to view GEM’s own exposition of how to organize within a diocese for effective global mission. The Manual also sets out best practices in sending and receiving missionaries for long and short-term missions, and includes a wealth of resources both practical and theological for mission.

The following dioceses have been active members of GEM:

Alabama, Alaska, Atlanta, California, Central New York, Central Pennsylvania, Chicago, Colorado, Connecticut, Dallas, Delaware, Dominican Republic, East Tennessee, Eastern Michigan, Easton, Florida, Fort Worth, Georgia, Haiti, Hawaii, Idaho, Indianapolis, Kansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Lexington, Los Angeles, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Northern Indiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Quincy, Rhode Island, Southeast Florida, Southern Ohio, Southern Virginia, Southwest Florida, Springfield, Tennessee, Upper South Carolina, Virginia, Western Missouri, West Tennessee, West Texas, West Virginia, Western Louisiana, Western Massachusetts, Western New York,

Is your diocese among them?

Please give prayerful consideration to your diocese’ membership in GEM. God’s world can only benefit, and every nickel invested will reap a hundredfold.