

Sunday 3rd November 2024

Bamenda Sunday News

50th
Anniversary
Edition

This year, Bamenda Sunday marks a very special anniversary, namely its golden jubilee. Fifty years ago, our bishop, Bishop Worlock, and Bishop Paul, of the then newly established Diocese of Bamenda, initiated the twinning as a practical demonstration of St Pope Paul VI's Vatican II document 'Gaudium et Spes'.

Bamenda is a province located in north-west of the West African country of Cameroon.



Back in 1974, the then Diocese of Bamenda was just four years old, with few priests to administer the Sacraments and share the Gospel message. Churches were few and very far between and the number of members of the laity trained in supporting the Catholic communities was low.

Initially priests from our Diocese worked in Bamenda, teaching the Faith, establishing parishes, training the laity, building schools, opening youth ministries, etc. Their mission was hugely successful and saw the young Church in Bamenda grow and develop. Many Cameroonian young men who responded to the call of the Holy Spirit to the priesthood cite one of those early missionary priests from our Diocese as an important factor in their vocation.

Today, we have the great privilege of welcoming priests from Bamenda into our own parishes. Their mission to us is one of renewal at a time when our communities become daily more secular.

We have much to thank God for from this twinning and please God, young men and women in our Diocese will be inspired by our missionary priests from Bamenda to respond positively and selflessly to God's call to them to follow His call for them to the priestly or religious life.

The Portsmouth Bamenda Committee (the PBC) was established to oversee the delivery of projects funded by money raised in our Diocese. Every penny donated is used to support projects and develop and strengthen the special relationship with the Archdiocese of Bamenda.

Operating theatre equipment being unloaded



Golden Jubilee Mass

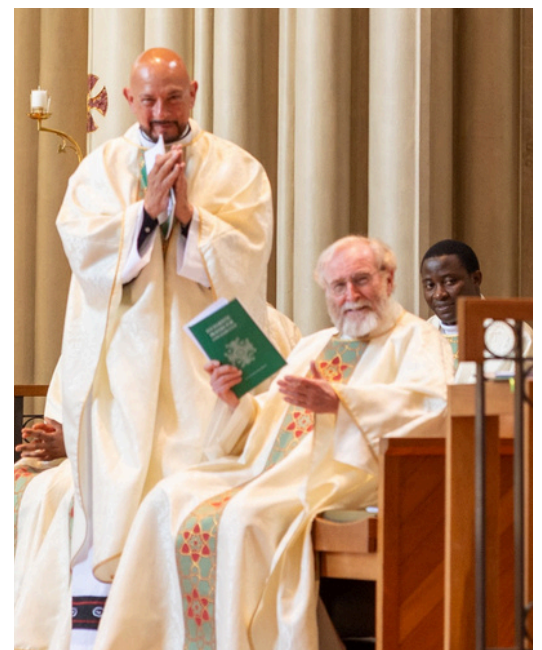


[Bishop Philip's sermon from the Jubilee Mass can be found here](#)

On Saturday 8 July 2024, Bishop Philip welcomed Archbishop Andrew Nkea of Bamenda to celebrate the Golden Jubilee Link between our two Dioceses. The Mass was concelebrated by priests from both dioceses, including the five priests from Bamenda currently serving in our Diocese, or 'the Fabulous Five' as Bishop Philip referred to them in his sermon (Fathers Emmanuel, Elijah, Gaston, Benedikt and Anthony) and Fathers Peter Codd, Tony Gatt and Ron Hishon, all of whom served in Bamenda in the 1970s. Fathers Ron and Peter were two of the first missionary priests from Portsmouth, together with the late Father Frank Isherwood.

Cameroon truly came to the Cathedral that day. Despite the unscheduled closure of the M275 into Portsmouth due to a warehouse fire, many Cameroonians from across the Diocese and past and present members of the PBC came together in the Cathedral for a truly joyful and colourful celebration of singing, dancing and drumming whilst enjoying its delicious food.

Unfortunately, the planned delegation from Bamenda were unable to travel to the UK to share these celebrations due to delays in the visa application process.





Bamenda Today Ongoing Civil Conflict

Bamenda has experienced great civil unrest for some ten years. This has included sectarian killings, the destruction of homes and community building, kidnappings by separatist rebels and has dominated daily life in Bamenda. During this period, tens of thousands of individuals have have been killed and over a million fled their homes and sought refuge with extended family in 'safer' areas and, all too often, have relied on the kindness of strangers.

Today the situation remains unstable and incidents of violence between the many separatist groups remain frequent and commonplace. Across Bamenda daily life is challenging and on Mondays Bamenda City is a 'ghost town'. These lockdowns are often violently enforced, part of Operation Ghost Town Resistance, a campaign of mass general strikes instated by Anglophone activists in 2017 in protest of discrimination faced by English speakers in the majority-Francophone country.

Sadly, the civil unrest has made it unsafe and so impossible for anybody from our Diocese to visit the Archdiocese and renew old friendships and strengthen the special relationship.

Project Funding

A core aspect of this special relationship are the practical projects that have been funded by money donated at the annual Bamenda Sunday collection. This remains an important and tangible part of the relationship as they

provide a lasting and tangible expression of the affection in which parishioners throughout the Diocese of Portsmouth hold the special relationship with the Archdiocese of Bamenda.

The ongoing conflict has meant that it has slowed the delivery of development aid projects. The frequent periods of lockdown due to civil unrest and Covid-19 have disrupted the daily rhythm of life and so delayed build-focused projects and made those involving training and skills development almost impossible to deliver, as it is often unsafe for participants to travel to training courses.

The last twelve months has seen a gradual improvement in the civil situation and the worst impact of Covid-19 has abated through a government delivered vaccination programme. This has enabled the PBC to restart its programme of funding projects in 2024.

Projects are proposed by the various Catholic parishes and communities within Bamenda to Archbishop Andrew. Those projects identified as being well suited to funding under the special relationship are then forwarded to the PBC. Following scrutiny by the PBC, the projects recommended for funding are presented to the Diocesan Trustees, in accordance with the PBC's term of reference, for approval. Although the current civil unrest prevents any members of the PBC travelling to Bamenda to oversee the delivery of these projects, the satisfactory delivery of each project is monitored by periodic update reports and regular updates via What's App with the project leads in Bamenda and staff from the Archbishop's office.

In the past year, money raised from last year's Bamenda Sunday collection has paid for:

- Solar power for St Bede's Secondary School
- Fitting out apartments in a new retirement home for clergy
- Providing theatre equipment for the newly extended St Blaise Hospital
- Assisted with the training of youth workers.



Refurbished operating theatre at St Blaise hospital

Future projects currently going through the assessment and approval process include:

- Building of a new nursery school in St Felix Parish
- Sponsoring training of youth leaders and facilitators
- Supporting the strengths of the community health worker service.



St Felix Nursery School - demonstrating urgent need for new facilities'



Looking Forward The Next Fifty Years

Looking to the future and to the next fifty years of our special relationship, both Bishop Philip and Archbishop Andrew are keen to make their relationship even more special but identifying opportunities for parishes in both Diocese to twin, either as a whole parish or as a school or other groups within the parish.

During the coming year, the aim is to pilot twinning in a few parishes and increase the number of Diocesan schools partnered with schools in Bamenda. In the last year the following schools have approached the PBC to be twinned with a school in Bamenda:

- St George's Secondary School, Southampton
- Notre Dame du Rosaire Primary School, Guernsey
- St Mary and St Michael Primary School, Guernsey.

If your parish or school is interested in learning more about being twinned with a parish or school in Bamenda, please contact any member of the PBC (email addresses for PBC members can be [found here](#)).

Developing this type of close partnership was far from easy in 1974 as communications were difficult, costly and took a long time. Back then sending letters via the postal system was the only real option and it took several months before letters were delivered, if at all!

Thank you in advance for your generosity...

But now, the positive impact of social media means that parishes, schools, groups can link via FaceTime, What's App, etc easily and cheaply. So although the ongoing civil conflict continues to make visits to Bamenda very difficult, we can still visit 'virtually'!

Please give as generously as possible to the Bamenda Sunday collection, every penny will go directly to an approved project aimed at cementing this twinning.

[Donations can be made online here](#)

Alternatively, you may wish to make a regular donation to support the project work the PBC oversees. If you would like to do so, further details can be [found here](#).

But above all, please pray that the special relationship with the Archdiocese of Bamenda continues to grow and strengthen over the next fifty years.

We thank God for all He has given us throughout the fifty years of our special relationship with the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Let us pray for the people of Cameroon, for a solution to the civil unrest and for the faithful of our sister Diocese of Bamenda. And please pray too for our own Diocese of Portsmouth, for the renewal of our clergy and laity, and for ourselves that we may bring many more people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church.

Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church
Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth

