

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Report of the Church of Ireland Council for Mission Proposer: The Revd Patrick Burke

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Bishop

One of the great buzzwords of late when it comes to mission is ‘missional’. I’ve heard all kinds of people use it – even Bishops; and all kinds of people wonder about what it actually means – perhaps especially Bishops! One definition I came across online says that it is, for Christians anyway adopting the posture, thinking, behaviours, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the Gospel message. It is as useful a definition as any, so far as definitions go; and yet, since a person might easily write a book on what missionary thinking, behaviour, or practice is – and perhaps only begin to scratch the surface – it leaves us mostly as much in the dark as we were without it.

So I thought I’d try to illustrate what I think it is to be missional is with a story. It is one that should be familiar to most of you, as it received some news attention when it happened around 18 months ago – even though not so much as a story like this warranted – yet since with the passing of time the details will have faded in the minds of most, I thought I would run through them again.

In 2014 a number of men from a variety of different villages in Egypt went to work in Libya. They were fairly ordinary men – sons, husbands, fathers – who simply wanted to earn the money to provide a better standard of living for those they loved. In late 2014 and early 2015 twenty of them were taken captive by the forces of Islamic State. Why did they take prisoner these poor, working class men, who were ethnically Arabic? It was because they were Coptic Christians.

Their captors set up a video camera and beheaded the men one by one and later placed the video online. They did so to send a message to the Christian West – that what they did to those men they hoped to do elsewhere until all Christians were gone, converted or dead. Before they killed each man, they gave him a chance to renounce his Christian faith. Each refused and died. When the 20 were gone, there was one more man left, a man from Chad, Mathew Ayairga. Matthew wasn’t a Christian; but when his turn came and he was asked if he rejected Jesus, having witnessed the great faith of those who had already died, his reply was ‘their God is my God’. He did this even though he knew they would kill him for it. And so he died, a martyr who had been brought to faith by the death of others who were willing to die for their faith. The courage and faith of these 21 martyrs sums up, I think, what it means to live a missional life. It means being willing to die for Christ. All around the world new martyrs are being created every day.

They are mostly in what we in the West sometimes condescendingly call the 'third world'. Yet that is where the Church grows fastest, adding thousands of new brothers and sisters in Christ every day; while we in the West agonise over our declining attendances and falling numbers.

Perhaps it would not be so if we were more willing to follow the example of Matthew Ayriga and his 20 companions, and those like them who are added to the number of martyrs each day, if we were willing to be missional whatever the cost?

Bishop, it gives me great pleasure to propose the report of the Council for Mission.