



Portsmouth - Sunyani Cathedrals' Partnership

Summer 2016

Our prayers are solicited by Bishop Festus and St Anselm's Cathedral (Sunyani) as they prepare to give the departed Rt. Revd. Thomas Ampah Brient, (Second Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese) a befitting burial this weekend 28 – 31 July

This provides me with an opportunity to share some of the differing customs followed by our partners in Ghana.

Great attention is paid to Christian funeral arrangements in Ghana. Funerals are usually at the weekend and often extend over three days.

~Walk along any town street and you will see posters depicting a photo of a deceased local resident and giving notice of the funeral arrangements.

~Walk along any main road on a Friday and you will see large crowds of mourners, usually clad in dark red or black & white, gathering in readiness along the roadside for a funeral.

~Walk along any village street in Ghana and you will find a carpenter's shop with coffins of various styles outside on display. Some can be quite elaborate. (*Google Ghana coffins or Ghana funerals for examples.*)

The arrangements for Bishop Thomas will follow the traditional pattern.

Bishop Thomas passed away in Accra on 31st March but in Ghana there is frequently a gap of several months between a death and the funeral, in order to allow time for appropriate funeral arrangements to be made and also for chief mourners to make the necessary travel arrangements. The schedule is as follows:

Vespers and Wake keeping Thursday 28th July 6.00 pm at Francis Anglican Church, Mamprobi, Accra

Funeral Service Friday 29th July 9.00 am at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Accra

Internment Saturday 30th July at Anomabo (Central region)
*Anomabo is a village, some distance west of Accra, where Bishop Thomas was born.
(Note: cremation is very rare in Ghana)*

Thanksgiving Service Sunday 31st July 9.00 am at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Accra
(This is usually in part a celebration of life but also a thanksgiving that donations have been sufficient to cover the costs of the funeral.)

There will previously have been bedside prayers at the time of death and other prayers after seven days. There was also a Memorial / Requiem Mass on 28th April at St Francis Anglican Church, Mamprobi, Accra. Another Requiem Mass was held in Virginia on 28th May where his sister Juliana and brother Rev Benedict Mark Brient now live.

Condolences have been sent to the family from Portsmouth Cathedral together with a letter of tribute which will be printed in the order of service.

See over to read more about the role of Bishop Thomas in the growth of the Church in Sunyani

A short history of the Anglican Church in Sunyani ***Its recent origins, growth and the role of Bishop Thomas Brient.***

The Anglican Church gradually spread to Sunyani during the 1950s, meeting initially in family homes. When Sunyani was declared a regional capital, Fr E. Brient moved to Sunyani from Nkoranza (where Anglicanism in the Brong Ahafo region was first established). Church numbers grew and the small St Anselm church building was completed and dedicated in 1962. Primary and Junior High Schools soon followed. Fr Brient's son Thomas, having initially pursued a career in banking, followed his father into the ministry and later became Archdeacon.

Sunyani Diocese was inaugurated in 1997, following the division of the much larger Sunyani-Tamale Diocese whose Bishop, Joseph Dadson, remained Bishop of Sunyani for just one day before being succeeded by former Archdeacon Thomas Brient. (Interestingly Joe Dadson also died earlier this year.)

Following his consecration in 1997, Bishop Thomas Brient visited Portsmouth in 1998, prior to the Lambeth Conference and later wrote to Portsmouth IDWAL asking if Portsmouth Cathedral would link with St Anselm's Cathedral Church in the Diocese of Sunyani. And so it was that after an exploratory visit by Dean William Taylor in 2001 Portsmouth Cathedral was able to say a joyful 'yes' to this request. A partnership agreement was written and signed in both Cathedrals in 2002, with its emphasis on love and respect, prayer, encouragement and fellowship, listening and learning from one another, and mutual challenge in involvement in mission in our different cultures.

By 2002 the building of the new Sunyani Cathedral was well underway. Bishop Thomas was surely the right man for the role at that time, with his experience, vision and energy. Portsmouth Cathedral was honoured to play a small part in the provision of the doors for the new Sunyani Cathedral and to be represented at its consecration. Since that time there have been numerous visits in both directions and, thanks to Bishop Thomas, we in Portsmouth feel greatly enriched by this link which has added a breadth and richness to our awareness of together being a part of the gloriously diverse Body of Christ.

On the tombstone of the Late Sir Christopher Wren, who built London's St Paul's Cathedral, is written "If you want a monument – look around you". The same might be said of Bishop Thomas. He has left the Anglican Church in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana with a lasting and precious memorial, namely that of an, energetic and growing Church and of a beautiful and modern Cathedral building in which to worship. So, I would say to our Christian brothers and sisters in Sunyani, if you want a monument to Bishop Thomas Brient – look around you.

We at St Thomas' Cathedral in Portsmouth were saddened to learn of the death of Bishop Thomas, whose last visit to Portsmouth was in 2008, before his retirement in December that year. It had been a great pleasure to welcome him together with Mother Catherine to our Cathedral and to host them in our homes. His winsome personality & kindness has left a lasting impression on all our hearts. *Marion Syms Link Officer*