

BISHOP PATRICK KOROMA - May 4th, 1950 - December 14th, 2018

I first met Bishop Patrick in 1982, during my second visit to Bo. He was teaching - as well as being Chaplain at CKC secondary school. He was later Parish priest in Bo and then moved to Freetown and took over running the Catholic Education Service as well as managing Caritas.

My first sight of him was at a prayer meeting during that visit. He was jingling his car keys as he came in, and smiling so warmly through his twinkling eyes. He had been ordained for just 4 years. Straightaway, he seemed to appreciate the potential value of the linking idea, and from then onwards, he helped us to think through the issues arising from trying to cross cultures and understand each other, with amazing wisdom and lots of laughter.



Fr Fabian, Fr Patrick Koroma and Jane Knight, 1985

In 1985 Fr. Koroma came to Leamington for a month and visited all the churches and later asked Fr. Fabian (his host) to make a reciprocal visit to run retreats for him in Bo. From then onwards, he regularly visited us en route to conferences and meetings from Rome to South America and many other destinations.

Just before the civil war broke out he was taking a break in Leamington. But as the news of impending attacks came through, he changed his flight and dashed back to Freetown. The stories of Patrick's fearless care of his people during that war, and his narrow escapes as he kept the teachers paid, interacted with the rebels, and sheltered nuns and parishioners, are so inspiring as was all his work.

So in 2002, it was no surprise when the Church appointed him to be the 3rd Bishop (first African) of Kenema (his home area). He was tasked with rebuilding the diocese which had suffered some of the worst pounding from the war. He took me to see his newly built churches, convents and schools and the restored Mission hospital, which he project managed from scratch. Had he not been a religious, I think he would have been an engineer. He loved gadgets and managed to get an IT system going in his office in the earliest days of computers in Sierra Leone. He also loved flowers and cleared a large acreage of bush surrounding his residence and developed a beautiful garden. It was sad to see it getting overgrown when I last visited.



Bishop Koroma and local councillors with visiting experts Clive Harridge, Richard Hall, Glenn Fleet and Phil Triggs

Having survived a brutal war and having driven across his diocese on some of the worst roads in the country to do all his building, the Bishop was then confronted with the terrifying outbreak of Ebola. As a major leader in the diocese, and knowing nothing about the disease, he worked fearlessly with some of our contacts and the local hospital and agencies, and many of his flock survived. He cared for them all even when they died, making sure they had a name attached to everyone's grave, so that they could be found by their relatives and not become anonymous. He also visited the burial places to bless the deceased.

Sadly in 2008, Bishop Patrick developed a serious chest infection and he later collapsed in Rome while he was attending a synod meeting. Fortunately there were all the required facilities in Rome and he was fitted with a defibrillator. He was also instructed to have it checked every 6 months, but being the man he was, he failed to return regularly to Rome, being more concerned about caring for his diocesan flock. There were no available heart surgeons in Sierra Leone so in the last 2 years his health began to deteriorate as the device became infected leading to sepsis, and more recently he lost his sight. This last was such a blow as his greatest pleasure was to enjoy the sight of all his flowers and plants and reading was essential to him..and of course he could no longer say Mass or do his pastoral work.

So it is with deep sadness that we have lost this amazing man, to me he was as close to a saint as I have ever met. I pray that he is now by God's side looking over us and will continue to inspire us in our linking work.

Jane Knight,
December 21st, 2018