

Province IV Synod  
Martyrs of Uganda  
3 June 2015  
Chapel of the Transfiguration, Kanuga

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**Presiding Bishop and Primate**  
**The Episcopal Church**

We're celebrating the martyrs of Uganda tonight, but I'd like to start by inviting you to remember some of the martyrs of Province IV. These are a few who have given their lives as a witness, some actually in death, others in the purpose to which they gave their lives:

Martin Luther King, assassinated for a vision of equality. 1968

Jonathan Daniels, shot to death for believing and acting for the equal dignity of all people – he offered his life to protect Ruby Sales. 1965

The martyrs of Memphis, nuns and priests who cared for yellow fever victims and died as a result. 1878.

Manteo and Virginia Dare, the first baptized on these shores, lost in the mists of time with other members of the Roanoke Colony. 1587.

Frances Joseph Gaudet, prison reformer and educator, African American and Native American, who gave us juvenile justice courts. 1934

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (Raleigh, NC) and Elizabeth Evelyn Wright (Georgia), African-American educators who insisted on the equal dignity of all people. Wright founded Voorhees. 1964 and 1906

John and Charles Wesley, godly witnesses in Georgia – Methodists and Charles a hymnist. 1791 and 1788

William Guerry, bishop of South Carolina, who sought to bring Episcopal Church support to Voorhees, and episcopal ministry to African-Americans, murdered in his office by one of his priests. 1928

Henry Delany, born a slave, educated at St. Augustine's, educator, evangelist, and bishop for African-American congregations. Also 1928.

James Weldon Johnson, poetic witness (Lift Every Voice and Sing), as well as diplomat and peace-maker here and in Latin America. 1938.

William Porcher DuBose, theological witness, chaplain, and professor at Sewanee. 1918.

George Freeman Bragg, Jr. North Carolinian priest and writer who argued that African-American congregations should work for sustainability, rather than live on charity. 1940

Samuel Ferguson, born in South Carolina, Bishop of West Africa and founder of Cuttington College in Liberia. 1916

We have living martyrs, too, like Duncan Gray, Jr. and Chip Marble, persistent challengers of church and society toward the full and equal dignity of all human beings.

There are many kinds of martyrs, and an ancient Irish tradition tells of three.<sup>1</sup> Red ones have their lives taken from them – like Jonathan Daniels and Martin Luther King. White martyrs give witness through lives of holiness or particular sanctity – like those who tend yellow fever or Ebola patients. The Celts speak of blue or green martyrs (*glas martyrs*) who turn that color as a result of extreme asceticism or sacrifice – think of a hunger striker or the Dorchester chaplains. And in the same way that we speak of all the baptized as saints, martyrs are witnesses to the love of God in human flesh, whose lives are given for the sake of God’s world: leaders, social transformers, teachers, poets, diplomats, engineers and inventors, anyone who gives evidence of the sacrificial love of God in human flesh.

Sacrifice is part of what Habakkuk is chiding people about when he confronts them for protecting their goodies – what he calls “setting your nest up high to be safe from harm.” He’s especially concerned about unjustly accumulated goodies, but I think we’d have to say that it applies to almost anything we’re overly possessive about. The martyr takes that nest egg down off the shelf and puts it to use for the love of others.

What’s in your nest? Books? Privacy? Dollars? Particular skills and talents, creativity? Even the secrets we’re afraid to share have the potential to be liberating when the story is told. The act of giving away makes almost anything sacred when it’s done for the love of God. That is really the key to martyrdom, to being a witness.

The martyrs of Uganda were Christian converts, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, who were put to death by the king Mwanga. His father Mutesa had permitted Church Missionary Society and Roman Catholic missionaries to work in the royal compound beginning in 1876. The king was jealous enough of his territory that he didn’t let them work farther afield. Mwanga was 18 when Mutesa died, and he was curious about this new religion – until he heard about monogamy (he had 85 wives), and that England, who had sent these people, was ruled by a woman. Both ought to tell you that women in that society were little better than slaves. That status also applied to most of the members of the court. The king was also nervous about what an oracle had told him – that he could be overthrown by “a man who came to Kampala through the jungles to the east.”

Hearing of Bishop Hannington’s journey<sup>2</sup> toward Kampala in late 1885, Mwanga sent soldiers to assassinate him. A few months later, one of his pages who had become a Roman Catholic confronted the king about the murder. The king ordered him executed, later relented,

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<sup>1</sup> Cambrai Homily

<sup>2</sup> Hannington was the first Bishop of East Africa

but the message arrived too late. The king was wont to use these young pages sexually, but the ones who had become Christian declined his advances. It appears not to have become an issue until the king returned from an unsuccessful hunting trip in May of 1886. None of the pages was willing to greet him, and he killed two that night. The next morning he summoned all the pages and demanded the converts renounce their faith. The Christians all refused. He sent a number to be burned and others to be castrated. A number were marched miles to their place of execution and on the way they worked to free the Muslim among them – successfully. He later told the story, becoming a witness himself.

The boys or young men prayed and sang hymns as they marched to their deaths and as they waited for the flames to consume them – on the feast of the Ascension. The only wailing heard came from the executioner, whose son was among them. The witness of these young Christians quickly spread across the land, and many people joined this new faith. Uganda became the birthplace of modern African Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

These martyrs and their story are one of the reasons the Anglican Church of Uganda has had so much difficulty with TEC in recent years. Some in that church believe we deny their primary witnesses by welcoming gay and lesbian people. Yet there are other witnesses, including Ugandan Bishop Christopher Senyonjo, who was defrocked for his pastoral ministry with gay and lesbian Ugandan Christians rejected by the Church.

There are many kinds of witnesses. Jesus challenges his friends to recognize that they will be rejected, some will fall away, and there will be plenty of false prophets trying to lead them in other directions. Yet those who love sacrificially, who are willing to take their treasures out of safe keeping and spend it, will find what they're looking for. Life abundant comes from giving it away – whether it's our fondest political prejudice or fattest wallet or most prized possession, idea, structural conceit, favorite candidate.... Let it go and find life returned a hundredfold.

So, provincial synod, who's going to be a martyr here or at General Convention? What's in the nest you've put up on that shelf for safe-keeping?

The way to give witness most like Jesus is in openness and vulnerability. The work here and in Salt Lake will be far more abundantly fruitful if we go with open hands, open hearts, and open minds – traveling light – to discover what God is up to in all these other folks around us. Together, we can be a witness to the love of God for those who are not members of this institution called The Episcopal Church.

Desmond Tutu counts the roots of his own vocation from the witness of Trevor Huddleston, who gave him a deep sense of his own dignity and creation in the eyes of God. Huddleston's prayer is often heard in Africa: God Bless Africa; Guard her children; Guide her leaders. And give her peace, for Jesus Christ's sake.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Fr. John-Julian, OJN, *Stars in a Dark World*, Outskirts Press, Denver: 2009, from which this story is retold.

We might use the same frame here: God, bless your Church. Guard her children, guide her leaders, and give the world peace through her witness, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and redeemer.