

Diocese of Vellore – Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Council Link Day
Sunday 19th February 2023 The Sunday before Lent.

Being Companions

'Then the disciples told what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.' Luke 24: 35

According to a dictionary definition a companion is 'a person or animal with whom one spends a lot of time or with whom one travels.' Another definition is 'each of a pair of things intended to complement or match each other'. The word comes from the Latin words 'com' – meaning with or together, and 'panis' meaning bread. So a companion is literally a 'bread fellow', someone we eat with.

In Christian terms, when we think of 'eating bread together' we immediately think of those times we share the bread of Christ's body together. We might call it different names, but essentially think about that meal that Jesus left us on the night before he died. If we dwell on that thought, we also remember all the other times Jesus shared bread and all those with whom he shared it. Sharing bread together is an important part of our faith.

For many of us, sitting around a table, sharing bread, or rice, sharing lives, sharing what is important to us, has been missing for a large part of the past three years. We've missed those times with the people we love, with our communities. They are important because, as well as sharing food, we share something essential of ourselves in those moments of interaction.

In doing that, we become that 'pair of things intended to complement or match each other'. We need one another. And we find that we need one another to learn more about the God who travels alongside us. God with us. Emmanuel, is there in all the good but also difficult times we face.

The Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Council and Diocese of Vellore have travelled together for many years – since 1992. Looking through my photographs, I have many many pictures of people sitting down to eat. 2022 was special because finally we met together again. The last time we were together was in 2019. In that time, so much has happened, and there have been so many changes, in both church communities. In the midst of the sadness of covid, we could rejoice that people were able to be companions to those we lived alongside. We rejoiced at the pictures of our brothers and sisters in Vellore sharing their food with those who had very little, and shared pictures of the way we in Cambridgeshire could work to get food to the vulnerable, or offer a hand to others who needed it.

And in the summer of 2022, we sat down together and ate meals with one another. We listened to one another's stories. We shared joy and pain. And together we realised how Jesus was made known to us in our sharing. And we signed a covenant to continue our companionship, to find ways to draw others into it by our prayer and witness and example.

On this day of prayer for the link, we pray for one another. Our prayers for each other are the prayers of those who travel with one another and those who complement and need each other. And the prayers of those who recognise the Jesus who dwells among us as we break bread together.

The requests for prayer this year show the reality of our travelling with Christ in our own areas. By praying for one another, and trying to understand each other's situations, we demonstrate how we travel together, even when we cannot see one another.

The churches in Cambridgeshire ask for prayer for:

1) **the cost of living crisis that is affecting everyone**, has led to a time of great social unrest. Please pray for a sense that those who make decisions care about people more than profits; for those who feel their only option is to leave and find more profitable work, and for a sense that we are one nation where each person is valued.

2) Under national plans, there is a vast amount of **new housing** due to be built in Cambridgeshire, on top of what has been built in the past 10 years. The CEC is involved in discussions to ensure community and faith provision, but depend a lot on the willingness of the developers. Please pray for these discussions, and ways to fund new ministries. Pray to for those who find themselves in new areas, without traditional forms of support.

3) Cambridgeshire also has a vast number of **small rural communities**. These communities are increasingly losing transport links, community facilities and places of worship. Those without transport or financial resources feel forgotten and cut off. Please pray for effective ways to support our rural communities.

The Diocese of Vellore asks for prayer for God's help with:

- 1) Legal **battle of the churches in India for minority rights and privileges** that are being withdrawn by the state and union governments, slowly and silently
- 2) **Severe attacks and atrocities on Christians and Churches** across the nation
- 3) the Medical, Educational and Child Care ministry of the Diocese. This work is a major part of the life of the Diocese of Vellore. To find out more, do look at <http://www.vellorecambridgeshirelink.org/>

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,
wherever He may send you.

May He guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.

May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders He has shown you.

May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.

(from Morning Prayer from 'Celtic Daily Prayer from the Northumbria Community.)