

September 2025

Bishop Malcolm writes...

'When through the woods and forest glades I wander....

September, October – what a glorious time for trees! - transient, dancing, swaying in the equinoctial gales, their leaves a kaleidoscope of changing colours, some fading, some ever deeper red or gold, eventually and inevitably floating to and fro down to the ground.

Even now I like to kick through piles of leaves in the garden or on the footpath. Each leaf is a unique work of art telling its tale of life and growth and beauty and decay, finding its way to mulch down for the winter, ready to energise future springs.

I love that verse from Revelation 22:2 reminding us of 'the tree of life' whose leaves 'were for the healing of the nations.' In Jesus we know the faithfulness of God, and find hope in every season of the year.

This month Bishop Libby's Harvest Appeal focuses on 'Trees for Peace – Burundi'. We are working along with the diocese of Bujumbura, helping them plant trees, as we did in 2023, but this time with a fresh emphasis on peacebuilding among people living on the hills around their city.

The work we helped with in 2023 has been very effective in stabilising the slopes against mudslide risk, and has enabled self help groups amongst women and young people. Setting up businesses to grow and sell and plant seedlings has been transformative for those involved – but the church has identified further potential benefits that can spring from this working together in partnership: peacebuilding and community cohesion.

These hills are home to families divided by ethnic and political loyalties. In living memory and more recently in times of elections these divisions have been exploited by groups eager to stir up conflict, and prone to exciting violence. By bringing people together across the divides to grow seedlings, to form self help groups, and to plant young saplings, the church is learning how to help break down barriers and build strong and resilient relationships for the future.



In this new project, which the Diocese of Bujumbura have named 'Integrated Environmental Restoration and Community Peacebuilding' alongside the tree planting there will be a range of activities including 'intergenerational dialogue groups', 'Memory and Hope trauma sharing workshops' and two new 'Youth Peace Brigades'.

The focus is on helping local people of all ages work together come to terms with their divided past and look to an economically productive future – this makes young and old less likely to be drawn into political or ethnic conflict, as with an income and something worth working for there is more to lose.

I thank God for the vision of the Diocese of Bujumbura in supporting parish ministry in these hills in such a down to earth and transformative way. It is a privilege for us to be involved. Following Jesus brings people together for good.

There are pictures of these slopes torn apart by ravines created by climate change induced flooding and mudslides, physically dividing communities, literally tearing the landscape apart. Worse still are the human divisions caused by traumas from previous conflict, exacerbated by extreme poverty. This integrated programme will bring healing for past hurts and unite both land and people in hope for a better, more peaceful future.

Please give generously this Harvest time in response to Bishop Libby's appeal, <https://givealittle.co/c/593nFI0UNggytlhlrdcgxE>, and if you are able, ask others to join you in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Burundi.

Why not plant a tree where you live, to express this solidarity, and send a photo to communications@derby.anglican.org to be shared on our website and with our partners in Burundi?

+T₆ Girl Repton

Rt Revd Malcolm Macnaughton
Bishop of Repton