



Report from the Anglican Communion News Service:

The wives of Tanzanian Anglican bishops welcomed Mrs Caroline Welby to lead a retreat with them at the Mother's Union centre in Mtumba near Dodoma on 14-16 July. There was much joy and not a few tears as the woman took the opportunity to share with one another in the context of prayer, worship and bible study.

The seed of the retreat was planted in 2013. Mrs Welby's husband – the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby – had just preached at the enthronement of the new Primate of the Anglican Church of Tanzania and was meeting with the bishops.

Mrs Welby sat down with the wives of the bishops during this time. The envisioned hour-long meeting stretched on for a second hour as the women shared and prayed about their concerns and joys.

The bishops finished their meeting and prepared for the long journey home and the women continued to talk.

When they finally concluded their time together, Mrs Mary Kwangu, wife of the Bishop of Victoria Nyanza, said to Mrs Welby: "This is what we need. We need time to talk and to pray and so we can support one another."



When the Archbishop of Tanzania, the Most Revd Jacob Chimeledya, visited the UK a year after his enthronement, he invited Mrs Welby to lead a retreat for the wives in 2015 to give them an opportunity to share their joys and hopes along with stories of tragedy.

At the retreat in Mtumba Mrs Welby led the women in Ignatian contemplative bible study and Ms Martina Kabisama, Executive Director of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition, facilitated times of sharing.

“When I first visited Tanzania in 2013, I was struck then by the fact that the wives of bishops were not able to get together for reasons of distance and cost, so I was thrilled to have the opportunity to meet with them all,” Mrs Welby told ACNS. “I hope annual retreats will become a regular occurrence for them in future.

“Soon after my husband became Archbishop of Canterbury, another bishop told me that the people who best understand what it is like to be a bishop's spouse are bishops' spouses themselves. They can therefore be the biggest support for one another.

[View more photos of the retreat](#)

“This is the same the world over so the retreat focussed not only on each person's relationship with God, with time set aside for prayer and bible study alone and together, but also on their relationships with one another, with time for sharing, learning from and praying for each other.

“It was a privilege to spend a few days in the company of amazing women, whose roles are hugely demanding and often lonely and who fulfil what is expected of them with much hard work, sacrifice and commitment - and with little training or equipping.”

Mrs Welby says that she learnt a huge amount from the bishops’ wives as they sang, danced, prayed, laughed a lot, studied and talked; and has returned enriched from the experience, “with renewed admiration for their faith and trust in God and with a far greater awareness of their prayer needs.”



The wives appreciated the opportunity to spend time together, evidenced by their long conversations over meals and into the night and by their plans to meet again. “I am grateful to them all for their welcome and inclusion and above all for their friendship, fellowship, prayer and support,” Mrs Welby said.

The bishops' wives used every minute of their three days together and went home to their respective dioceses with renewed vision and trust for their role in the Church’s ministry, along with the intent to seek training and support for their work.

Across Africa the wife of a bishop plays an important role in the life of the Church. In most dioceses, the president of the Mother’s Union, which is a major player in areas such as education, evangelism and social justice, is by default the bishop’s wife.

Many of the wives carry significant responsibilities but do not always have training for the roles they are asked to assume as the wife of a bishop. The women also feel particular pressure as they contend with arising issues while their husbands are away visiting parishes in remote, hard-to-access places.

Plans are underway for another retreat next year. The bishops’ wives hope to turn this time of renewal and communion into an annual event.

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