

Happy 25th Anniversary DONA!

On Sunday, 15th June 2003, DONA celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a Thanksgiving Service at the Acton Hill Methodist and United Reformed Church. Darren Sylvester gives a synopsis of the Service together with his own suggestions as to how DONA can successfully exist for a further 25 years.

Introduction:

It was in June of 1978 that DONA was founded, an association formed specifically to meet the needs of Dominican Nationals in the United Kingdom and in the Commonwealth of Dominica. Amongst other things, DONA has continually sought to assist with the development and welfare of Dominican Nationals for the past 25 years and, as an association, has been extremely successful, receiving its due recognition and praise.

Thanksgiving Service:

The service opened with the singing of "Majesty" by the Acton Hill Gospel Chorale, followed by the welcome by Reverend Eglan Graham. Mrs E. Brand M.B.E. unexpectedly led the congregation into prayer and confession. In my view, bearing in mind that the prayer was made extemporaneously, was better than anything that could have been scripted or planned in advance.

The five-minute prayer and confession gave sincere thanks to God for bringing the association through times of adversity; but also gave thanks for its success. The congregation were reminded during the prayer that the association could not have done all it has to date without the presence and spirit of God coming through members' hearts, minds and actions.

Ms Josephine Moise gave an excellent solo that was accompanied by the Acton Hill Gospel Chorale – then subsequently conducted the same choir when they sang "The Lord is my Shepherd". This, for me, was sung in a way which I had never heard before; and, it seems, neither had anybody else. The powerful voices when synchronized moved and captured not only the congregation, but also Reverend Eglan Graham.

Revered Eglan Graham, at the conclusion of the song, began taking offers for £10/= so that the choir could sing the last verse again. While the congregation [conveniently] went deaf at this point, the Acton Hill Gospel Chorale did sing the last verse, as requested, which was also to the delight of the congregation. Appreciation and gratitude was shown to the choir by many cheers and a deserving round of applause from the congregation.

Ms Eleanora Royer read the First Reading from Chapter 2, verses 1-18 of the Philippians. This conveyed to the congregation that one should try and think of others before ourselves, to strive to be humble and to do acts without arguing or complaining as it is in this way that we become pure children of God. The fitting song of "To God be the Glory" was sung before I delivered the Gospel reading according to Saint John, taken from Chapter 15, verses 1-17.

This Gospel reading was very suitable as it reminded the congregation that we are nothing without God. Similarly, the parallel could be drawn that DONA would also be nothing, but for its clear and ascertainable association with God in all it seeks to do and undertake. This Gospel reading also commanded us to love one another as Jesus has loved us: a simple message that seems often impractical for so many to effectively adhere to.

Revered Hewie Andrew's Sermon:

It was Reverend Hewie Andrew's sermon that gripped the congregation. His powerful oratory combined with experience and deep belief penetrated through members of the congregation as they listened attentively to what he was saying. While Reverend Hewie Andrew touched on many salient and pertinent issues, his main theme, however, did not follow the Gospel reading – but focussed on another important issue in that, "Man (or woman) cannot live on bread alone".

This wonderfully delivered sermon was again appropriate to the theme of DONA's Thanksgiving Service. The sermon provided the congregation with food for thought, illustrating how irrelevant it is to be concerned with how much money one has; or how successful one is; or how popular one is; or how many material objects one possesses as the spiritual realities must also be apart of such an equation.

Reverend Hewie Andrew provided the congregation with two contrasting ideas, but where one principle clearly shone through: He said, as Jesus did, "For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world, but then to lose his own soul".

For the avoidance of doubt, he gave a further example of Breadfruit, saying that one would usually eat Breadfruit with Cucumber (or, if you are Reverend Eglan Graham, with Ackee and Saltfish). However, and irrespective of what other foods may compliment Breadfruit, Breadfruit is not usually eaten alone: neither then, can man (or woman) live on bread alone.

The problems of Black pupils in schools was raised, especially as to how they are being treated by teachers and their White counterparts. He urged all parents', grandparents' and family members to give support to Black children, many of whose needs are going unnoticed, and, if noticed, in some cases, are being totally ignored.

He stated that such behaviour can not be tolerated as Black school children are thus more likely to under-achieve, and as a consequence will turn their attention to drugs, sex and violence.

Liked in with this thesis, Reverend Hewie Andrew expressly stated that respect and discipline of young Black children needed to be addressed, as this was, in

his view, another area where young Black children are failing. He urged parents and family members to instil the correct ideals and standards into their children from a young age. He then subsequently amused the congregation by giving an anecdote from his own childhood where, when hit by his parents for misbehaviour, his mother often hit him “it is good for you”!

Prayers of Intercession:

Mrs Sylvia Smith-Joseph led the prayers of intercession, praying for members of the association who were not able to attend the Service; those members of the association who had passed away; those who were currently sick together with those suffering from the affects of war, poverty and other disasters.

Prayers were also made giving thanks for the work DONA has achieved since being founded as an association and, accordingly, prayers that such work would continue in the forthcoming years.

High Commissioner’s Address:

His Excellency, Mr Brain Belvue, started by thanking Mrs E. Brand M.B.E. for inviting him to attend the Service. He then continued to say how proud he was of the work that has been undertaken by all Dominican associations on Dominica’s behalf.

While slightly disagreeing with Mrs E Brand M.B.E. in stating, that in his view the “pioneers” of the association were not in their twilight years, he also recognized the need for the younger generation to take up the challenge to assist Dominica.

Mr Belvue concurred with that enunciated by Reverend Hewie Andrew as regards the issue of discipline of the young Black generation. Furthermore, he also urged parents and family members not to succumb to their children’s desires of having “Nike trainers”, or other material (and sometimes expensive items). Instead, he suggested that parents’ should seek (but, at the same time, recognizing that it can be a difficult challenge) to instil within their children other essential values that will be of greater benefit to them in later life.

There was a brief account of how Mr Belvue was raised and how his own parents instilled within him an important set of values that he still possesses today. Mr Belvue’s overall message to parents’ was that material goods, such as Nike trainers, when arising as a primary purpose could be deemed as an irrelevant consideration; but reminded us that such goods ought to be ancillary to a special set of individual beliefs, values, standards and ideals.

Vote of Thanks:

Mr Hayden Francis, Chairperson of DONA, gave a Vote of Thanks well-suited to the occasion, thanking Guests: The Mayor of the London Borough of Ealing, Cllr Gurcharan Singh, Cllr Bertha Joseph and the Acting High Commissioner of Dominica, His Excellency, Mr Brian Belvue.

Thanks were also extended to the Acton Hill Gospel Chorale, Dr Jane Schopf, organist, Revered Egland Graham for the use of the Church and to Revered Hewie Andrew for his exceptional and thought-provoking sermon.

Mr Francis gave a special thank you to the executive committee of DONA who had worked behind the scenes, making the day as pleasurable as it was. The Thanksgiving Service ended with the closing hymn "Now thank we all our God" and which was followed by Dominica's National Anthem.

The next 25 years?

Having been a paid-up member of the DONA for just under one year, but supporting its activities continually for the last ten, it is my opinion that DONA's foundations are firmly fixed.

However, that being said, future executive committees of DONA will have to ensure that the association not only continues to build upon what it has been successfully achieving for the past 25 years; but also that suitable, sensible and stable programmes for youth involvement and development are incorporated within its long-term plan of objectives.

It is trite knowledge that God is, and will always be, apart of DONA. While God has provided strength; motivation; determination; courage; knowledge; wisdom and understanding to those that have run DONA over the last 25 years – what is now needed in the coming months, is the creation of a well-thought out, carefully planned and persuasive marketing technique that will finally secure youth involvement in DONA.

Persons reading this article ought not to wait for DONA's proactive agenda vis-à-vis youth involvement to take full effect; instead, parents' and grandparents' can educate their children and grandchildren about Dominica, and, whilst so doing, to invite them to take up the challenge to assist DONA with its diverse range of annual fundraising activities.

If DONA is to look forward to continued prosperity over the next 25 years – then young, committed and forward-looking individuals need to become involved in the association. Only once this is achieved will DONA definitely have a Golden anniversary to celebrate!

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