**The Diocesan Overseas Council is pioneering a new programme for those in the early years of ministry offering an opportunity to reflect on Mission in a world Church context. The first group composed of readers and curates visited Kenya from 1 to 17 November 2015 lead by Fr Ian Hutchinson Cervantes the Diocesan World Mission Officer and assisted by Fr. Lionel Whatley.**

Kibera - one of Nairobi’s Slums

You may well have heard of Kibera - the largest urban slum in Africa, situated on the edge of Kenya’s capital Nairobi, a couple of kilometres only from the city centre. You might not know that Kibera is one of 200 slums that are in and around the city, housing 2.5 million inhabitants.

These lawless and violent slums are characterised by the simple corrugated iron architecture of small houses, shops, and compounds that have no water, no sanitation, and where metered electrical power has only just replaced stolen electricity - as the power company realised it was losing out on a vast market. Kibera’s population is estimated at 500,000 in an area of 1.5 square miles (a population density 40 times that of Worthing). The settlements are populated by those who have come to the capital from across the nation seeking work and prosperity. Kibera, and other places like it, provide a supply of cheap accommodation, and each morning there is a mass exodus on foot as the entire population walks into the city centre in search of the day’s work and the daily wage of 300 Kenyan shillings (£2).

Many of them, of course, return home at night without having found any work. Some, over time, find jobs that allow them to move into more permanent housing. A great many choose to remain in the settlements, and raise families there. Morris, for example, was a delightful motor-cycle taxi driver, who gave me a lift from the Anglican Church in Kenya (ACK) Guest House into the middle of town.

Traffic, incidentally, in Nairobi is almost unbearable for a European driver. There are a few traffic signals that are completely ignored, and the theoretical division of road and pavement remains only theory. Roundabouts have token policeman, who are entirely immune to the gridlocked traffic around them. “You shouldn’t have come onto the roundabout” said one such Policeman to the driver of a large lorry, “Now you are going to look at me, and I am not going to do anything except look at you.” The result in rush hour is traffic that moves small distances 100m or so in pulses every 15 minutes. It frequently took us two or three hours to make 12 km journeys.

So you can understand why there is a market for motor-cycle taxis. Back to Morris. As we weaved through the stationary traffic, including a hair raising stretch on the central reservation, he told me that he lives in Kibera, and is really proud of the fact that the oldest of his four children is about to go to university. Morris has almost paid-off the micro-finance loan on his bike, just a few thousand shillings to go, and he has no desire to leave the settlement.

There are a combination of factors that perpetuate the existence of slums in Nairobi. As well as the need for cheap accommodation there are great difficulties over land ownership. Officially the Kibera land was given to Nubians in reward for their service to the crown during WW2 and was considered at the time to be of the lowest quality. Some of these dark skinned tall Africans remain in the settlement, but most are absentee landlords, making a considerable untaxed fortune from the rental of their holdings. Plot holders own letters of title that are recognised in the local community, but are not considered deeds for the purpose of raising mortgage finance. Plot owners are not even permitted to replace corrugated iron structures with anything more permanent. The politics of the settlements are complex.

The Kenyan government has begun a process of slum-clearance that involves moving a population from one part of the settlement into temporary accommodation, whilst building five-storey apartment blocks for the displaced to occupy. It is not obvious that the population who have been displaced are actually the ones who will end up occupying the new housing, or that they would want to, as dwelling in flats immediately extinguishes the community spirit that permeates the settlements.

In and amongst these extraordinary places the Church Army in Africa has initiated a fantastic programme of outreach. The Centre for Urban Mission partner with ACK churches in the slums to fund and enable an array of very clever mission programmes.The concept that undergirds each project is to provide holistic mission that attends to every part of the community’s needs.

The projects include The Samaritan Strategy that introduces local pastors to the integral mission concept, then Children’s and Youth Ministry programmes, direct support of the most vulnerable in the slums, the Christian Economic Empowerment Programme, that identifies and enables young members of church congregations to begin paid apprenticeships that equip them with skills that they can use to secure ongoing financial support as tailors, mechanics, or hairdressers.

The Centre for Urban Mission is run by the energetic and visionary Nancy Njagi, who will be visiting our Diocese next June. Working alongside her is the Rev’d Barakwho was himself brought up in the slum. He met and married his wife in St Jerome, one of the Churches in Kibera, where he now works as an NSM whilst running the outreach projects. Despite the opportunity to move out he follows his vocation to remain living in the slum with his wife and children, so he can better serve his fellow residents.

The Diocese of Chichester has been linked to dioceses in Kenya for 50 years. Watch this space for the launch of our World Mission website that will provide details of how you and your church can become involved.

Photo caption

Alison Hassell, Lionel Whatley, Philip Edell, Mischa Richards, Ian Hutchinson-Cervantes, Revd Barak from the Centre for Urban Mission, Sarah Doble, and Pam Edwards.