

# URBAN FAMILIES

## EDITORIAL

The future of cities depends on the future of young people. In particular, it depends on what policy makers can do to equip young people to break the cycle of poverty. This in turn depends on involving young people in the decisions that affect them.<sup>1</sup>

Over half the global population now live in towns and cities. Cities with over 10 million people are becoming commonplace. Elsewhere smaller settlements are exploding with rural migrants.

Cities are young places. Young adults are the most likely to move to the cities and make their new homes there. The children you find in cities are most likely to be the children or grandchildren of these migrants, growing with a different set of expectations and cultural experiences. Urban life exposes young

people to new worldviews, technologies, lifestyles. It also exposes them to frequent reminders of the inequalities of the society where they live, as bicycles jostle with luxury cars, shanty towns are over-looked by new gated communities, children in pristine school uniforms walk past those unable to pay school fees. Archbishop Oscar Romero once said 'It is the poor who tell us what the city is'.

In many countries, the majority of children will live in urban slums. Increasingly the urban dream is vanishing. The possibility of moving beyond one's parents' poverty disappears. Exclusion and frustration can lead to crime and violence. Those who grow up in slums are increasingly likely to stay there. Despite slum eradication being a key Millennium Development Goal, the projected rises in slum populations continue.

Families are faced with many pressures

and dilemmas – which children to educate, which to send to live and work with relatives, decisions often made on the basis of gender. In Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea only half the school-age girls are registered in urban schools. In Ethiopia 30 per cent of urban girls aged 10 to 14 do not live with their parents. HIV/AIDs and other health problems mean the mortality rates in poorer areas are higher than suburban and rural areas. Many children are forced to grow up quickly when they are left as the sole family organiser.

Families in other regions also face increasing strains. In London, for example, gentrification and a lack of affordable housing lead to a struggle to find family accommodation near work; over half the children in some central neighbourhoods live below the national poverty line. The city is increasingly important in global networks of survival as immigrants, often in low-paid work, make significant remittances to families in Africa and Asia.

The UN Population Fund's recent report emphasises the need for greater support for children – to stay in school and to access their right to health. It also calls on governments, local and national, to attract new investment to create jobs that will give young people economic security and encourage them to develop leadership and participation in the lives of their settlements.

In the midst of our cities are stories of hope, of risks taken in faith. When we work with families, children and young people we work with the cities of the future, with them we often glimpse a different city – one of possibility, of energy and safe spaces. We need to make those visions central to our presence and witness in the cities of the 21st century. We cannot be content with anything less than the glorious liberty of the children of God enjoying urban life in all its fullness.

*'Growing up Urban: Youth supplement, UNFPA state of world population 2007: available on <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm>*

## KENYA – KIBERA SLUM, NAIROBI

Otieno is a night watchman who lives in Kibera, one of the largest slums in Africa. He works six or seven nights a week and sends some of the proceeds back to his village where his wife and five children live. This small amount supplements whatever his wife can raise from the small plot of land, which has decreased in size with every new generation. Once a year, he goes home on annual leave and spends time with his family. He takes with him what little money he can but expectations exceed what he can provide. He occasionally thinks about moving the family to the city but school fees are too high and his three-metre square mud and iron sheet rented room would be too crowded. He is not sure he wants his children to grow up in the city. He envisages the day when he will retire from the security firm and go back to his rural home.

Mary is 17 and still in school. She lives with her parents, two sisters and an aunt in a two-roomed house in Kibera. The rooms are very small and she has no privacy but she knows she is better off than most. Her best friend has just told her that she is pregnant. She was living with her parents, brothers, sisters and uncle in a single-roomed house. In the end she needed to get out. She now lives with a man in another part of Kibera but wonders how long it will last. She thinks he has a family in his rural home but he won't talk about it.

Mary and her friends all dreamt about going to college, getting a decent job, moving to a better place, but some gave up on the dream a long time ago. It is easy to lose hope and sometimes the pressure to get out of the home is too much and succeeding in school is difficult when there is no place to study. Her mother sells charcoal for a few shillings from the roadside and cooks for her father who returns each evening from casual work in the industrial area of the city. Sometimes he has had no work and brings no money. Sometimes he says he has no work but the smell of alcohol tells another story. Her parents speak of returning to their rural home, but Mary has no sense of belonging in the village. Her future and hope lie here in the city.

Mary and Otieno are both fictional characters but their stories echo the experience of tens of thousands of people living in Nairobi's slums or informal settlements. Urbanisation has changed many things in African society but

perhaps most telling is the reconfiguring of family life as ancient social patterns give way to the new realities of the city. It is not just an issue for the urban poor. Rich and poor alike find that their connectedness to rural roots and traditional society are weakening; extended families give way to nuclear families and traditional roles for children, men and women are renegotiated in the dynamics of the city. Of course, change inevitably results in loss but also the emergence of new possibilities. For some women, the release from traditional roles is liberating – bringing with it the possibility of new horizons. For some – particularly the affluent – cities offer opportunities for recreational activities as a family, whilst for others intertribal marriages break down old barriers.

It is in the midst of this shifting cultural landscape that the Church is called to discern God's leading and respond with faith and renewed imagination. That is not easy. In some communities in Nairobi, female-headed households – devoid of a permanent male figure – are the most common expressions of family life. How does the Church affirm values of marriage and yet create much-needed communities of hope, love and acceptance in contexts where those commodities may be in scarce supply? How do you pass on some of the values of traditional society in contexts where the generations have separated – creating cultural, geographic and even linguistic distance between youth and the bearers of tradition: the grandparents?

In the context of the city, marriage and family become terms open to greater plurality of meaning, where roles are more negotiated than fixed. Perhaps one of the great challenges of urbanisation is that the social capital of family, village and clan are no longer as available in the city. Loving the neighbour, who in the village is my relative, is very different to loving the stranger who is my neighbour in the city. As traditional ties are lost, increasingly people look to the Church as their 'neighbour'. Churches are having to find ways of supporting families where traditional systems of support are no longer in place. When faced with very diverse expressions of 'family', the desire of churches to protect values that are feared to be threatened or lost, risk actions which may hurt or exclude the most vulnerable.

St Jerome Anglican Church in Kibera particularly noted the challenges facing many young people. Overcrowded homes provide little space or opportunity for study and so many could not compete with colleagues in other areas of the city and dropped out of school even before completing primary education. In the competitive market of the city, they found themselves with stunted hope and little opportunity. The church's first response was to establish a homework club as a safe environment to study. From the start, the parents were involved. With a generator for electricity and a donation of text books, over 60 children find that for five evenings a week they have a place to study. For those like Mary it is a chance to cling on to dreams.

The club soon found that study was not the only need and it now provides recreational activities, Christian teaching and guidance. In some ways, the Church finds itself involved in shaping the lives of young people in ways which were once left to the wider family. For many families with only one parent, the income is not available for schooling and so children simply drop out for lack of funds. Where possible, the Church now finds bursaries to assist girls to pursue secondary education. For other young people, an apprenticeship programme has been developed, enabling some to gain employment. Again the training is linked to Christian discipleship as people discover what it means to live with hope in every dimension of their lives.

Cities can appear to be the scourge of families, particularly when urban life seems so synonymous with the decline in the patterns of traditional living which have sustained communities for generations. But the city is also the place where the stranger can become the neighbour, where new expressions of community can flourish and where the hope, security and love, which are the marks of family life, can be nurtured and felt in the midst of the diversity of urban life. It is for those like Mary that churches such as St Jerome's seek to support families in the challenges of city living, helping build and strengthen communities where hope becomes not a dream, but a thing of substance.

## ZAMBIA – CHAWAMA COMPOUND, LUSAKA

Chawama is a high density area (usually called a compound or slum), located in the southern part of Lusaka. It has recently been upgraded and attracted people from the middle income – and at times high income – who live reasonably good lives. However, the majority are still living in acute poverty. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in the loss of the communal life and village lifestyle when each tribe was one 'big family'. The village arrangement had everything in place for meeting everyone's social needs. One person's problem was a problem for all and a child was everyone's child. No one went hungry. But all this does not exist in an urban compound like Chawama. Life here is competitive instead of being complementary; it is each one for himself/herself. Urban areas are affected by many factors – the high cost of living, poverty, unemployment, compounded by lack of social support systems from the government.

Life in the city is very expensive because everything has to be bought. Many families can hardly survive, and the reality of people living on one dollar per day is very much the experience of people in Chawama. In Mtendere Parish, Lusaka, it was again clear from the discussions at a recent marriage enrichment seminar that the high cost of living, coupled with acute poverty, have had a telling effect on urban families. In Mtendere, too, children are sent by their parents to sell assorted merchandise. Many of these children have no time for school, and parents would rather send them to the market. Although education is now 'free' in primary schools, parents still have to buy books, pencils, uniforms – most of which they cannot afford, as their main preoccupation is to provide a meal for the family. These errands expose the children to all kinds of dangers and abuse, the commonest being defilement (rape). Because of the hardships some of the children face at home, they have resorted to begging on the streets of Lusaka and involve themselves in petty crimes. Children as young as five years sniffing fumes of glue from plastic bottles in order to 'gain' courage to survive the cold nights and rough street-life are a common sight in the streets of Lusaka.

People spend more time on making ends meet at the expense of spending time together as a family. Mothers wake up early to buy merchandise for sale and return home late from their make-shift

'market' along the streets. So children are left without direct parental guidance for a long time, making them vulnerable. Recently, the papers have been carrying headlines of one defilement case after another of the girl child.

Women also spend time crushing stones to sell with the help of children. They handle most of the house chores and at the end of a very long day are expected to fulfil other marital roles. Husbands and wives can live as virtual strangers to each other because they hardly ever share a meal together. Some mothers are also exposed to temptations, such as selling sex for money, to supplement their meagre incomes from market businesses.

The church here in Chawama has become the 'new village' in filling the vacuum created by rapid urbanisation by introducing teachings and support-systems modelled on those used effectively in the villages. Chawama Anglican Parish has embarked on marriage enrichment programmes to provide married couples with tools to help them build enduring and healthy marriages. The Parish, with support from clergy wives and others, runs a feeding programme for about 250 children, enabling them to go to school regularly. The Parish is involved in the provision of affordable education at the Parish Church School and has also allocated 10per cent of its overall intake for free education to orphans and vulnerable children. In partnership with the Council of Churches in Zambia Gender Desk, the church has trained widows and single parents in entrepreneurship skills, but the challenge

has been the lack of funds to help them with start-up capital.

The church will soon embark on helping families by training them in budgeting so they manage their finances better. I believe that the Church must model the early church, where after the day of Pentecost no one lacked anything because all believers assisted one another. Here we can do that by helping revive and preserve the African communal life and extended family system that is rapidly getting discarded in the urban setting.

IAFN International Anglican Family Network

### IAFN HAS MOVED Change of postal address

C/o Anglican Communion Office,  
St Andrew's House,  
16 Tavistock Crescent,  
Westbourne Park,  
London W11 1AP, ENGLAND  
email: mail@iafn.net  
Tel: +44 (0)7948 332697

### THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

is to be on the theme of  
**The Impact of HIV/AIDS  
on Children**

## RWANDA – KIGALI CITY

In Rwanda most cities are still young and small when compared to other cities. Yet the challenges facing urban families are multiple and increasing.

**Housing:** Traditionally, it is the practice in rural areas for young men who want to start a family to be given a plot by their father on which to build their house. In the city, plots are governed by law according to the city map. People can't build anywhere and anyhow. A few businessmen are investing in the building industry. They are building estates for the working class to rent or buy. Renting a house has become very expensive, let alone buying one. In Kigali, some people take the opportunity during the night to put up a house with very cheap materials with the risk that when discovered the house can be destroyed without any indemnity. For all these reasons, people keep postponing marriage because they are not able to rent a house. Because Kigali City Authority want a clean city, some old and unfit buildings are condemned and families are requested to move to a new location with new and unknown neighbours. They are given compensation but not enough to buy where they would like to live.

**Education and Child Care:** The cost of education keeps rising and less and less urban families are able to pay for their children's schooling. There are no public schools. The ones that are less costly are jointly governed by churches and the Ministry of Education. Both parents have to work hard in order to be able to pay for their children's school expenses and small children are left in the hands of a house girl or a house boy. Recently there have been cases of child abuse by these house girls and house boys, yet mothers are not able to give up working in order to care for their children.

Most jobs are becoming competitive in Rwanda. Someone who is not a university graduate is likely to lose his/her job even if she/he has long experience. This threat has meant that many have gone to evening classes to upgrade their education. Thus children are missing parental care because the parents are working hard, preparing for a brighter future for them. Of course at present the children are suffering. Without parental monitoring they are exposed to all sorts of influences from peer group and older children playing in the street. In the past, the grandparents and the extended family

would be a solution for child care, but often people have left their extended family to go to the city. People are busy with their own concerns and they don't have time to build relationships so that there is no one nearby whom they could trust with their children.

The Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Kigali, through its Mothers' Union, set up a crèche to welcome small children and to offer them care and education. Many parents were released by this initiative to do their job and to study. Churches and other Christian organisations are organising meetings to create awareness among parents on issues like family planning, childcare and to encourage people to set up cheap places as children's play grounds. Children and Youth camps, organised by Scripture Union and some churches, help address the problem of pupils' occupation during school holidays. There is a need for more such initiatives in Kigali City.

## BRAZIL – SALVADOR

**A conversation held in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil between the Reverend Stephen Taylor, USPG Missionary working with the Diocese of Recife and the recently ordained Reverend Bruno Almeida of Bahia (a state in Brazil the size of France):**

*Stephen: What are the pressures on family life arising from the great population migration of recent decades from the interior of Brazil to the urban centres like Salvador?*

*Bruno: For the majority of poorer migrants, family life has suffered enormously. All the benefits of living as part of an extended family have been lost. The consequent strains put on the nuclear family are obvious. City life – seeking work, work itself – takes us away from our family: we simply don't eat and live together as we did. Even better-off people who came to the city to study, with the idea of returning to the interior, have been absorbed in the great economic and social movement of the city and taken beyond their original*

intentions. Whether as a result of disappointment or success, poverty or dignified survival, a new active life-style has come into play, not to mention the distances and amount of time spent on crowded buses on crowded roads. Living these pressures close-up, perhaps we don't even know the full extent of the effects on the traditional experience of family life.

Stephen: *Could you suggest what some of those effects might be, for example, in the community where you live in the Salvador suburb of Periperi?*

Bruno: The traditional extended family model, of mother at home with the children while the father works, has gone. In a different economic context, both parents will try to work, not forgetting the great number of single-parent families. Survival is all. For the part of society that struggles here, even work – except if you manage to get into the formal sector – doesn't change the precarious nature of our situation. You see, in the informal sector one or both may work, but income is low and there are demands made on that to pay such things as childcare. This might be very little but it helps a neighbour or someone among the many unemployed. For example, my neighbour, Denise, takes care of her daughter's home which includes her little grand-daughter. This means Cristina can work. Nothing unusual in that, except it is not seen as a grandmotherly gesture but as paid work with a proper wage.

Stephen: *How would you describe your family's lifestyle?*

Bruno: I am much blessed with my wife, Bianca, and 3-year-old son, João. I teach in the informal sector on a part-time basis in four different places. My wife works in a similar way. To work informally means to work without job security, paid leave or health benefits. However our irregular hours mean we get some time – occasionally together – with João. My unpaid church commitments also take up some time each week. I try to control this and limit it to Sunday and a few mid-week moments. Church commitments for an ordained or lay person remain a priority. In this I am not untypical. This is our culture.

Stephen: *What are churches doing to support the family confronting such demands?*

Bruno: My contention is that frequently the discourse of churches is different from the underlying reality. The real interest of churches is their own survival and the maintenance of members. The neo-Pentecostal churches especially – but not just them – promote services, vigils, and campaigns of prayer, sometimes lasting for weeks, all in favour of the family. This looks good. Effectively though, there is no actual policy for the family. The effect of daily services and activities – ostensibly for the family – is to leave people with less time in their homes together. Compounding the problem, such healthy family pastimes as sport, the beach or the cinema are scorned as sinful.

Stephen: *Is a different approach possible?*

Bruno: A different approach depends on a different theological view of religion and who we are. Our church, for instance, is

a tiny one with just one main service a week in the two centres – the principal church is in a more middle-class neighbourhood. The atmosphere in both is relatively relaxed and children are made welcome as part of the worship. The size of our congregations means it is easier to create closer ties expressed in family lunches on some Sundays. We also encourage people to pray at home. We are not rigid about attendance, as many of the other churches are. This can be easily misunderstood. But our flexibility means we can give space not just to the obvious families under stress – who might need Sunday time together in their homes - but also to the persons who are not members of a family in the usual sense: single people with or without children, the divorced, the isolated, those who don't fit in elsewhere. You see, as a church we must also create family to express the love of God for all. Yes, a different approach is possible; less easy to manage, maybe less structured. We are striving to discover healthier models. Going to church is a symbol of our relationship to God and commitment to family and community life, not something that should burn up our precious time. In this way we might think of our homes as churches. Surely wherever we are, it is the same God that is present, the same love, the same demands, the same peace and joy.

## BELIZE CITY

The most significant finding of a recent Synod of the Diocese of Belize, was the need for the Church to focus on family life and to establish programmes at all levels that would help to strengthen that life.

One type of family that is widespread in Belize is single-parent families – a status which arises from various reasons – and are almost invariably headed by women. There are some theories that this category of family is most at risk and is a major contributor to negative social issues such as crime and violence. Whether or not these theories are true, there is no doubt that single-parent families need special strengthening as they lack some of the advantages that are usually expected to exist in traditional



family units. A pilot project was conceived, taking the form of a workshop that would attempt to imbue single parents with knowledge and skills to help them manage the challenges of heading households alone. This would target three parishes in Belize City (the largest city), after which it would be evaluated to be a continuing ministry of the diocese.

Although successful single-parenting is attainable, it can be challenging, in particular for individuals who do not have a support system in the form of family, friends and very importantly, the Church. For some single-parents, the Church serves as a painful reminder of the fact that their own circumstance does not necessarily fit the template assumed by the faith community. Often, pregnant women absent themselves from church and re-emerge when it is time to baptize the child, reflecting the social and political atmosphere of their place of worship, or at least their perception of it. So the questions are posed: "What can we do as individuals and congregations to connect with this significant segment of our population? More importantly, what is God calling us to do in relation to single-parent families?"

The objectives of the project were:

- To develop and implement a support network for single parents in the Anglican community
- To recognize the gap between the

perceived needs of single parents and their children and their real needs

- To instil the importance of the family structure in healthy socialization and development of children
- To incorporate the Church and spirituality into child-rearing methods and techniques
- To provide single parents with effective disciplining methods and decision-making skills
- To develop and nurture high self-esteem and moral values in children through interactive sessions between parent and child

The project initially aimed for 20-25 participants in a 12-week programme. There were 16 registrations. Facilitators presented such topics as Spiritual Foundation, Parent-Child Communication, Self-esteem and Moral Values, Handling Anger and Conflicts, Sexual & Reproductive Health. Nine parents – all mothers – completed this project. They committed themselves every Saturday afternoon, taking time out from their busy schedules, since most of them are working mothers who could well have used their Saturday doing other things. One of the features of the programme were little gifts which were given at each session to bring the particular topic into focus- a Bible was

presented for the first session on spirituality, a calculator for the budgeting session, recipe books for health and nutrition, and so on. Apart from enhancing their perspectives and sensitivities on how best to manage the daily challenges of single parenting, something unforeseen happened during the 12 Saturdays – an unexpected bonding among the parents. As they became more familiar with each other, they were able to speak in confidence within the group about personal issues and concerns, share helpful suggestions and even show their vulnerabilities. In the final session, they were asked to bring along some of their children who participated in the discussions. This was a very moving session where the love between these mothers and their children was obvious.

The feedback from the workshop, not only from participants but also the facilitators and the Women's Department of the Government of Belize, is that this needs to be a continuing effort. The experience from this exercise has already taught us how to improve the next workshop which we hope to conduct within the next six to eight months.

The workshop was funded by the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG).

## INDIA – DELHI

Usman stood outside his home for nearly half an hour. He could not recognise the house. He had left his home at Moradabad (about 150 km from Delhi) more than five years ago and had been living with a group of boys of his age, 9 to 14 years old, in Delhi on the streets. Then his elder brother walked up and asked Usman what he was looking for. "I am looking for my home," said Usman. Curiously his brother inquired, "Who are you?" On the reply, "I am Usman" his brother beamed with joy and thrust him inside the house. It was a wonderful reunion. Then Usman told them of the Night Shelter and the Boys' Home of the Delhi Brotherhood Society. His mother immediately rang up Brother Raju and told him that Usman had reached home safe and sound after five years! After the summer vacation, Usman came back to the Boys' Home to join the school. He could have stayed back home but he now knows that the key to a successful life is proper education.

This successful rehabilitation of a street boy was possible due to the services of the Childline and Night Shelter of the

Delhi Brotherhood. Childline is a toll-free telephone service line provided by the government for children in distress. They can ring up and call for help. The Delhi Brotherhood looks after the East Delhi region of this capital city. The Childline

office is open round the clock and help is available all the time. The children are produced before the Magistrate immediately and the decision is made where to keep them. Usman was kept at our Night Shelter. Observing his

behaviour and aptitude, it was decided that he could be kept at the Boys' Home and admitted in the school. Now he has been studying in the school for the last two years.

Children on streets have been increasing at an alarming rate in the last ten years. One reason is the exploding population. As the economic pressure on the joint family increases, the cases of child abuse – mainly in the form of scolding and beating – also increases. This causes a deep emotional rift, especially with the fathers and elder brothers. Such children leave home and go to the metropolitan cities usually with an older friend. Here they live to grow up to become addicted to drugs and eventually die young. Their malnourished bodies are unable to cope

with the intensity of the drugs they administer. But the influence of narcotics numbs the pain and discomfort of their diseases and psychological maladies. For the sake of such children, the Childline organises regular training and building-awareness sessions every six months with the local hospitals, police and other agencies involved.

#### **The Rescue of Children**

A man called the Childline to inform us of the children whom he had seen working in three factories near his house. They were in a poor state and were made to work for 13 to 18 hours a day. Childline investigated immediately and acting with other involved agencies, such as the Government Labour Department and the police, raided the factories giving the owner no time to shift

the children into hiding. We had to provide the children immediately with first aid and nutrients. Out of 50 boys rescued, five were from Nepal and 45 from Bihar. Fortunately, three parents also arrived at the police station. After gaining permission from the Magistrate, their children were restored to them and the rest of the children were sent to a shelter. Here they were provided with their basic needs and counselling. A report was lodged with the police for appropriate legal action against the owner of the factories for illegally engaging children for labour and for perpetrating atrocities on them.

## **JAPAN – NAGOYA (The fourth largest city in Japan)**

#### **Migrant workers and their children**

Many of us have experienced the feeling of helplessness of not being able to speak a word of the language in a foreign country. But what about not being able to communicate in your own country in your own language?

This is what many children of illegal migrant workers, who were brought up in Aichi, Japan, faced before 2002, as the Aichi government didn't allow them to attend the region's schools. They spent much of the day in the local parks without any supervision, as their parents worked at night. Their mother tongue became Japanese, but with a very limited vocabulary, and they received no education and very little knowledge of their own culture. When their parents were caught by the police, and returned to their own land, the children faced many problems adapting to living there.

There are around two million registered foreigners in Japan, mainly second, third and fourth generation Koreans, and newcomers from China, South Korea, Brazil, Peru and the

Philippines. About one per cent of the labour force is made up of foreigners. In Nagoya, Aichi, there is a big Philippine community, many of whom work as unskilled labourers in factories to earn money to send back to their impoverished families. The Japanese government won't give visas to unskilled workers, so these Filipinos and Filipinas come to Japan on short-term study or sight-seeing visas, stay in Japan over their term and so become illegal overstayers.

Many of these overstayers have been working illegally in Japan for a long time. They get married and have children, who, as soon as they are born, become illegal. The Nagoya Youth Centre, which is run by the Chubu Diocese of the Anglican/Episcopal Church in Japan (NSKK) decided, in 1998, to set up a school for these children. It is run with a Philippine curriculum, to prepare the children should they be returned to the Philippines, but with added Japanese language lessons and social studies to help them cope with life in Japan.

The Nagoya Youth Centre campaigned for the

children to be allowed to go to normal Japanese schools, and in 2002 the Aichi government finally gave permission. However, because these schools only provide a Japanese education, some parents still prefer to send their children to the Church's school so they will be able to find employment in the Philippines should they return there. As many of the parents of these children cannot pay school fees, the school is run on donations from the Mothers' Union, fund-raising bazaars, the NSKK provincial office in Tokyo, and supporting individuals.

The Nagoya Youth Centre also provides other help: student-volunteer home tutors for the children of overstayers who go to Japanese schools and are having problems with their studies; advice to the students and parents on choosing schools and careers; and loans for uniforms and textbooks.

All the overstayers have the day-to-day stress of never knowing when they will be caught and returned to the Philippines, where they would not be able to make a living, let alone support their families. Therefore, the biggest support the Nagoya Youth Centre provides is a place of safety. Although the police or immigration might freely enter a small NGO, and make arrests, if they entered the Nagoya Youth Centre or other churches where the Philippine community comes together, they would have the full force of the NSKK against them.

Please pray for this important work of the Nagoya Youth Centre and Chubu Diocese, all its supporters, the foreign community in Japan, and particularly overstayers and their children.

## AUSTRALIA – CITY OF NEWCASTLE

Most Australians live in the great suburban sprawl that surrounds the cities with a lifestyle defined by a quarter acre block of land, a motor mower, a brick veneer bungalow and a family car.<sup>1</sup> Standards of living are now generally high, and the former mix of rich outer and poor inner suburbs has been changed into a mix of suburb and gentrified inner cities.

For the most part, the multicultural experiment has been effective, but riots in 2005 showed that racial and ethnic tensions remain, despite an overt policy of multiculturalism. As in other places, the tension between integration and retention of cultural identity is drawn at different points by different people: what one perceives as a 'ghetto' is, for another, a crucial way of maintaining religious and/or cultural identity. This discussion can take place in what have been monocultures where understanding of each other's faith and culture are needed, so the churches became involved in projects like Project Abraham which acknowledges and celebrates the long history of local cultural diversity in the city of Newcastle and provides a unique opportunity to come to a deeper understanding of other traditions and build bridges for the future.

2007 saw the celebration of 40 years of the granting of civil rights and basic human dignity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders, after years of discrimination under the White Australia policy. Yet, the urban landscape is not an even playing field: reports suggest that the living standards of Aboriginal Australians in the cities have declined compared to their neighbours. Over the decade since 1991, it appears indigenous people have comprised a progressively rising share of the total population in the lowest status neighbourhoods and (since 1996) a falling share in middle-ranked neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup>

There is thus a need for churches to involve themselves in two distinct areas: the immediate alleviation of the effects of poverty; and addressing the structural issues which contribute to this without being paternalistic. There is an underlying difficulty in aboriginal affairs, analogous to discussions in the global north about slavery and its legacy: Christians may have yet to come to terms with their own – or their ancestors' – involvement in the mistreatment of indigenous people, and this can lead to a paralysis or denial in addressing aboriginal issues.

Within the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, work on poverty alleviation is assisted by the Samaritans, a church parastatal which works on issues of advocacy with disadvantaged groups of all kinds, tackling the immediate effects of

poverty through a number of care and housing programmes, assisting with education and training, and dealing with consciousness-raising within the church and local communities. Having had an enduring relationship with the indigenous community, Samaritans is entering a partnership with others in the delivery of an early intervention programme seeking to support vulnerable children from both white and indigenous backgrounds.

The Anglican Diocese is also aware of a new phenomenon: the need to assist refugees allocated to the area to settle in. A programme provides language and other skills for refugee families, and a Sudanese Chaplain has recently been appointed to work full-time with that community.

But what of the mainstream suburban landscape described at the beginning? In many ways the suburban ideal is proving more elusive: if the suburbs are Eden, there are snakes lurking in the bushes. Recent studies suggest it is getting harder for people to own their own property, and the dream comes with a huge burden of debt. It has been pointed out that, "They have to buy a house a long way away from their work, they've become home purchasers but they've spent half their lives transiting from work to home and from home to work, which obviously has a significant disruption to family life."<sup>3</sup>

The quality of family life suffers as commuting time increases and both parents work. The burden spins out onto grandparents who provide a vast and often unacknowledged pool of child care and support. Quality time gets compressed into weekends and evenings, and churches find themselves increasingly in competition with sports and leisure activities. Many urban and suburban churches try to cater for families by the

provision of services either during the week or at weekend evenings, allowing people time for leisure and worship. These services are often 'contemporary' in nature using music styles and formats familiar from CDs and satellite television. Supply and demand forces Anglican churches to examine whether their tendency ("we've always done it this way") is an adequate response to the changes in society, or merely a recipe for slow death and decline. And this can be painful and unsettling for those fond of traditional types of worship.

Many of those traditional worshippers are nearing retirement or are already retired. They also face financial stresses as pensions and home ownership both have an impact on their retirement funds. Such issues also are significant for the church: fixed incomes among the retired mean less income for parishes trying to support their running costs, which often include those for stipendiary clergy. Some dioceses, including the diocese of Newcastle, are exploring alternative forms of ministry in which there will be less dependence on a stipendiary priesthood, and more opportunities for local lay and ordained non-stipendiary leadership and ministry teams.

<sup>1</sup> Chris Baker, *Contemporary Australia 5, Sydney or the Bush?* National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 2005

<sup>2</sup> "Aborigines in Cities worse off", *Australian* 17 July 2006

<sup>3</sup> Dr Tim Seelig, ABC news, 5 July 2007



## ITALY: CITY OF ROME

Cities throughout the world – and consequently the single person households and the families who live in them – are facing a myriad of challenges. Both urban planners and urban governments are realising the emergence and growing complexity of increased multi-cultural and ethnic concentrations of peoples in more than 100 cities around the globe, which are expected to accommodate over 10 million inhabitants over the next 50 years. Increasingly, these populations include desperate displaced people – forced economic migrants and political asylum seekers. The problems and challenges facing both individuals and families, as well as religious and social institutions, in these urban environments include serious issues such as safety, equitable work opportunities, physical and psychological health, poverty, air-quality and pollution, excessive noise and traffic, and the growing need for good educational and social centres and affordable housing. All this, and much more, contributes to the unique challenges and at times debilitating stress people experience in living in an urban environment.

In this article, I would like to consider how our contemporary urban environments – focusing specifically on the multi-ethnic and inter-cultural population of the city of Rome – challenge our local and the wider Church with the baptismal vocation of spiritually nurturing a broader and more dynamic understanding of family identity and life; and also enable, through the Church's ministries and sense of mission, a global consciousness of humanity's interdependence as well as an appreciation of every individual's importance. The global concept of 'the urban family' is certainly evolving in this 21st century.

For those of us who live and minister in urban centres, it is the sacramental rite of Baptism which addresses the present-day experience of family life and communal identity within the urban context. Unlike families who live quiet and somewhat isolated existences in suburbia, those who reside in the city experience the ongoing transformations of modern urbanisation which today is attempting to create an environment of 'urban villages' within the city culture; where people are able to know and relate to each other and feel a sense of community, of belonging to a larger family network. This is where the Church has a vital role to play in providing a variety of ministries

which encourage and foster a conscious sense of an 'urban village' neighbourhood. For this to be effective, the Church needs to be a public witness and advocate. The urban church's 'public presence' – identifiable by its ministries and public mission – ought to be connected to the broad cultural life of its particular urban context. The social, ethnic, cultural, political, linguistic and religious disconnect which one can experience in city life can be overcome by a church's public presence and its clear sense of God's mission.

The mission of the Church as we describe it is 'to restore all people to unity with God and each other' (American Book of Common Prayer, p.855). This mission is one which not only enables a sense of connectedness among all people in the city but also, through urban churches, provides important places of open doors, welcome and hospitality, care, education and places of joyful worship where humanity's diversity and individuality is acceptable and honoured before God. The urban church should be a place where all people – both Christians and those of other faith traditions – feel valued and worthy of love. Those baptised in Christ acknowledge their being members of a new family, the Family of God.

In the city, the household of God includes an interfaith, ecumenical, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and ethnically diverse global family. St Paul's Episcopal Church makes a difference in the international city of Rome and daily exercises its public presence, as described in our mission

statement: "to bear witness in Rome to a dynamic and living Christian faith, open to all and rejecting none". Our church household, which is committed to radical hospitality, opens its doors daily to members of the urban Family of God: asylum seekers; political refugees and the poor, providing assistance in the Joel Nafuma Refugee Centre; to forced economic migrants in an ever-expanding variety of Latin American ministries; to elderly poor who come to our church office for food vouchers; to abandoned youth and minors who seek housing, as well as work and documents; and to many travellers. Our public presence in the city focuses not only on the poor, but also has artistic connections, with concerts several times a week, welcoming artists from around the world. Our community in this city is multi-cultural, multi-lingual, interfaith, ecumenical and embodies the 'urban village', where families and individuals know each other more intimately, where they can celebrate their diversity and their individuality as well as their membership within the urban family. The challenges of this 21st century in urban centres can effectively be met by a church which links with and reflects the culture, peculiarities and gifts of the urban context, especially as a welcoming neighbourhood family centre in the 'urban village'.

## SCOTLAND – HAMILTON (a large town near Glasgow)

Within three years, a well-respected local service has developed, enabling family/school liaison with two secondary schools and their local primary schools. The work based at St Mary's is key to improving opportunities for disadvantaged families; for children at risk of school exclusion; children experiencing neglect, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse; children and families affected by parental drug and alcohol misuse. It has also helped fathers who shun other services, and the project is currently looking at how to engage with workforce development for parents and esteem-building with older teenagers through a mentoring programme.

*“Thank you... I would never have done it if it weren't for you! You have made me see sense and helped me overcome my fear of not meeting him. You have played a big part of my life.” “The parent group helped... I know what to do now.”*

These are just two comments from clients of a service which began when St Mary's Episcopal Church in Hamilton began to listen to its local community. Head teachers at two local primary schools were concerned that some children, and their class teachers, were being overwhelmed by serious family problems. The plea was for a place, and skilled staff, where families and children could work through their problems with holistic and intensive support over many months.

The people of the church rallied to decorate and refurbish a former Caretaker's apartment near the church hall to create office space and excellent facilities, providing a pleasant environment; a neutral space for children. After much fundraising, two aspects of work were developed.

First, in 2000, a Contact Centre was created for children to meet their non-resident parent. Run by volunteers from St Mary's, this project has enabled children in the midst of family dispute and broken relationships to be supported and helped to build a lasting relationship with the parent.

Secondly, a partnership was formed with the children and family charity Circle Scotland to create family/school liaison work. It was also important to have the close co-operation of the local education authority and children's services.

Partnership with the voluntary sector and public sector is an opportunity for the local church to develop respected services for the community. In the midst of relationships that have lost trust, and where reconciliation is needed for a child to feel progress and new hope, the Church (building and community) can offer a different environment from the social work or voluntary sector. Often, the Church and Christianity is an unknown to many of these families with profound needs, apart from cultural preconceptions and prejudices. Here, sectarianism is a real problem. This project has offered something different because more time is given to working out the many complex problems that interact within a family.

There has been a new social and political environment in the past decade for such valuable work to be part of an integrated service. The challenge, as always, is to make sure that funding follows this coordinated approach. The cost-benefit analysis indicates that the volunteers a church provides, together with a professional service offering intensive work in its local premises, can prevent major cost for the future in terms of crime prevention, as well as creating many health and welfare savings.

Our intention is to make the church a resource for families in difficult social circumstances and allow the work to speak about the value of a living faith.

## ENGLAND: CITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

The Bishop of Newcastle recently dedicated the new St Martin's Centre in Byker, in the east of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a parish church, a centre for children and their families and a place of the local community – one building but serving three purposes. It emerged out of the needs of local children and their families but also out of an embryonic vision long held by committed church members.

The east end of Newcastle upon Tyne is a post-industrial community. The cranes at Swan Hunter's shipyard on the river, which dominated the skyline for over a century, are now being dismantled. They will be reassembled for use in a shipyard in India.

Accompanying 'post industrialism' has been depopulation as families have moved for better accommodation or to follow jobs, with a resulting decline in services. It is now well appreciated that the teenage pregnancy rate in Byker is high; that the unemployment rate among young men is high; that there is an above average rate of ex-offenders living in the community; and that over half the adults living round St Martin's are on some form of benefit.

The global market works in unhelpful ways. On the one hand, there are new jobs in retailing, yet on the other the businesses providing the jobs send ambiguous messages. In the main economic hub of the area the two most visible eating places are fast food outlets – not exactly helpful in a society that is struggling to combat rising child obesity.

Such is the force of the global economy that the east end is in danger of becoming an inhospitable place for families to grow up and flourish. For too many, school

seems an unattractive option and inadequate to address low aspirations in families that are now experiencing the fourth generation of unemployment. This is despite the efforts of many professionals and some heroic work at local schools.

Those selecting the new priest for St Martin's in early 1999 were aware of these issues. Facing a smaller number of people attending church and a general feeling of helplessness in the face of so many economic and social changes, they had the courage to say that they wished to work with children, young people and their families. Their tenacity on this issue and their insights into their local community were crucial.

Three important things laid the foundation for the new Centre. First, St Martin's opened its doors to local residents' groups which were working hard to counteract the pressures of increasing crime, and also to the 'Sure Start' network assisting young children. Second, young children began to attend a poorly-resourced Sunday school: there were behaviour problems; the local police were involved in protecting the regular congregation; the leaders discovered the children were being sent out on a Sunday morning without breakfast. Through a great deal of pain, relationships were formed and a greater understanding of the needs of young children was gained. Thirdly, as the church opened its doors to children, so the number of baptisms steadily rose, the pastoral contacts for ministers increased and so did the knowledge of the problems being faced by young mothers.

Gradually, a vision was developed with the local community for a place that would enable residents, parents and young people to work together in partnership with statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations so that the needs of everyone could be more effectively met. A partnership group was formed, in which the local church was a key partner but not the dominant voice. With the encouragement of the Diocese, the old church was demolished and the new Centre built, at a cost of some £1.8 million, all raised within 12 months.

Many local people now use St Martin's. The nursery run by the charity Barnardo's gives local parents greater access to daycare and education for one-to-four year-olds. Many local families, once classified as 'hard to reach', come to the Centre for all sorts of activities, gaining pastoral support including training. Some

experiencing domestic violence have found a refuge at the Centre. Local residents groups continue to meet at St Martin's and receive support for their activities in combating low level anti-social behaviour and issues to do with private landlords. Local health trainers hold sessions, as do counsellors and professionals working on mental health issues. In partnership with the local secondary school, who base staff at St Martin's, successful work is being done with children who find attending school problematic and with their parents.

For the church community, this is a new alignment of its efforts for mission and ministry around the focal point of children and their families. The embryonic vision has come into being but in a very different way from that first envisaged. New ministries of welcome and support are being developed, members of the congregation are assisting as volunteers and the weekly

Eucharist is changing its feel as gradually more families begin to attend.

The church is making an increasingly significant contribution to Byker being a place where children and young people flourish. The church could not have done anywhere near as much on its own. In a curious way, it was when the local church came to the point where it realised that on its own it had little to offer that it was at its most effective and new ways of working with partners in all sectors began to emerge. God works through our weakness and when we form effective relationships with those who share in the ethos and value system embodied in the good news of Jesus.

## CHILDREN IN URBAN SITUATIONS

Being a parent is not easy. Parenting in an urban setting presents even more challenges. There are the positive aspects. Many communities are organic: life is flexible and informal, perhaps chaotic but real and immediate, blurred at the edges. There is a communal spirit: we're in this together. In many areas, there is the richness of lifestyles and traditions brought by the new communities. But there are also the negative aspects. The urban environment is concentrated and dense, space is limited, facilities may be poor, street culture is powerful, vandalism an issue, there may be racial tensions. Many families in such areas exist under great pressure. This may come from poverty, unemployment, substance misuse (including alcohol). It may come from reconstituted families, live-in partners, promiscuity, teenage mums, lone parents. It may come from a sense of isolation and loneliness – of being nobody in the midst of a crowd. Low self-esteem is a big issue among many children, leading to behavioural problems. Schools need teachers to be counsellors, law enforcers, negotiators, skilled in conflict resolution, understanding of racial and cultural issues – and teachers.

How can churches even begin to respond to such issues? CURBS (Children in Urban Situations) was set up in 1996 to support, train and provide resources to help churches respond to the needs of inner-city children. Over the years, we have developed a strong theoretical framework which underpins our work and marries up three elements: the developmental needs of children, their spirituality and the urban context. We recognise that the child in our church or group is part of a set of wider systems: a neighbourhood, a school, a peer group and, most importantly, a family. A survey conducted amongst those who use our resources, indicated that family issues were the key concern in their work with children. If we can learn how to support families effectively, then we will be supporting the child.

At the heart of all we do, is the building of quality relationships and we have learned that this is one of the greatest needs of urban families. Many mothers in particular are isolated. At a recent fun day in a local park, the mother of a pre-schooler whom we invited to a parent and toddler group commented that she'd been living in the area for three years but didn't know anyone and hardly ever went out. In an attempt to build relationships with such families, a local church has for several years organised a weekend away at a holiday camp for families on the fringe. These may be families who have never been to the church, but with whom friendships have been built up through the local school, as neighbours and so on. Several of them have now started coming to the church. The church has also organised groups where parents can come and chat about issues around bringing up children. These are not formal parenting classes, but an opportunity to share concerns in a friendly, informal and non-judgmental setting – often leading to opportunities to talk about much wider issues.

Within some of the Asian communities in our inner cities, women do not have many opportunities to mix freely with others in a social setting. The expectation that they should remain at home limits their ability to feel a part of the local community, their circle of friendships, their opportunities for learning English. Activities held in a 'safe' place such as a school tend to be more acceptable. We recently ran a 'Meet and Greet Club' at a school to help parents (primarily from an Asian background) learn about the importance of talking with their child. Over the course of the five sessions, mothers who had been silent, talked and learnt from the materials and advice on offer and also from each other. They had never before realised the importance of talking and listening to their children.

There is a saying that 'it takes a village to raise a

child'. In other words, the child grows and develops through all the varied relationships within his environment. In our work with churches, we adapt this to say 'it takes a healthy village to raise a healthy child'. Our churches need to be healthy villages in order to raise healthy children, and for this to happen they need to offer support for the child and support for the setting. The child needs support to develop in healthy directions – to be listened to, valued and accepted unconditionally. But just as important, the setting within which the child operates (the family, school, peer group, neighbourhood) needs to be supported itself if it is adequately to support the child. A key aspect is the family. Churches need to offer space, time, a listening ear, practical help with child care for an exhausted parent, a meal provided at a crucial time, help with filling in a form, support on a visit to social services or the school, a holiday for a family which never has one – the possibilities are endless and the potential for building long-term relationships huge.

However, the church itself needs to be healthy, and for this it needs to have a strong focus on relationships, to develop a child-centred attitude, to be a place where children – and families – are truly 'seen', to be a place where the leadership take time to explore and seriously consider the issues involved in understanding the child as a sign of the Kingdom, and it needs to be a place where those who work with children and families are valued, affirmed and supported. Where the church is healthy, children and their families will have a setting in which to flourish.

O God, give us vision for our cities, that they may be cities of justice, cities of prosperity and cities of peace, in which vice and poverty cease to fester, children play in the streets in safety and the elderly walk without fear.

Grant to our urban communities respect for all peoples and families and that education and health may be available for all.

Enlarge our minds, our wills and our hearts that we may dream great dreams and have the boldness to bring these into effect.

Hear thou, O Lord, the prayer of all our hearts.

**Amen**

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