

## UPDATE ON THE THIKA LINK JANUARY 2017

Our link with Thika Diocese, in Kenya, is part of a tripartite link between the dioceses of Exeter, Thika and Cyprus & the Gulf. The covenant between us was reaffirmed during Bishop Robert's visit to Thika in October 2016.

The vision for this link between the three dioceses is one of enlivening and enriching our mutual experience of faith. Amongst many things, in signing the document the three Bishops are agreeing to commit themselves and their dioceses to developing, encouraging, helping and learning from each other in new and appropriate ministries. And they will encourage every parish or mission community across their three dioceses to look towards the future in which God calls them.



Bishop Robert, Bishop Michael of Cyprus & the Gulf and Bishop Julius of Thika in Kianjugu Church

Bishop Robert's party included clergy, parishioners and a reader, some of whom were visiting Africa for the first time. Bishop Michael had come with a similar group. Bishop Robert was very much inspired by his first visit to Africa and has said that he will make strengthening and growing the Link a priority.

The visitors took part in the monthly training day for all the clergy of Thika Diocese and important discussions were held during the visit which included ministerial development, discernment of vocations, relations with Muslims, shared goals, training placements and more.



Bishop Robert said: "I am thrilled about this because we can learn so much from one another. What touched me in particular from my recent trip to Thika was that the people in Kenya have so little and what they have they share with such joy. I have found that deeply and profoundly moving. We can learn so much from each other as well as pray for each other. We are partners in the gospel."



Bishops Julius, Michael and Robert, as well the Link representatives, planted trees to symbolize a healthy relationship.

The students from Unlimited Church were a great addition to the party and helped Thika to see a more young and confident side of the church in Devon.



Here are some quotes from Bishop Robert's blog:

'Namrata Shah Children's Home was established by the Diocese in 2003 to cater for the rising number of destitute children. Currently it has fifty two boys and girls, ranging in age from four years to eighteen years old. Most are AIDS orphans, but some are there because the poverty of their family has robbed them of the opportunity to flourish. Bishop Julius told us that the area covered by his Diocese has the highest incidence of people in Kenya living with HIV/AIDS.



'The facilities are simple and somewhat spartan by UK standards, but still a long way away from living on the streets. The children are well cared for and dressed immaculately. Most important of all, they are safe and loved. Namrata Shah is a place of hope and transformation, as street children are rescued from destitution, and given a home and an education.'



'Driving to the so-called 'dry areas' of the diocese today took on the character of an expedition. Turning off the main tarmac road we careered onto dirt tracks that wind through the plantations of pineapples and papaya throwing up clouds of dust. Not once but twice the driver had to order everyone out of the bus because he couldn't negotiate the huge ruts in the road with all of us on board. The sun burned down hot on the back of our necks as we prayed that the bus wouldn't get a puncture or we'd end up stranded in the middle of nowhere.

'Our destination was a small rural community of Kianjugu where CCMP (Church and Community Mobilization Process) or *Umoja* has enabled the local church to grow in confidence and self-reliance. *Umoja* means 'togetherness', a concept deeper than solidarity and richer than teamwork. People discover energy for developing their community through meditating on Scripture and Jesus' challenge to us to be salt and light in the world, bringing savour to what is bland, and light to situations of chaos and confusion. Rather than being dependent on hand-outs from the government with officials who tell them what they need, the local people work it out for themselves, and this process of 'awakening' begins with the worshipping community itself. Their life together embodies the African proverb to perfection: 'I am because we are'. They are the antidote to Western individualism.'



People were excited to tell their stories of transformation. 'When we did the first Bible study I saw that God gave all that was needed. When I went to my home I saw how God had blessed me like he blessed Adam in the Garden of Eden. Before I was relying on my very small salary. Now I am getting more income to take my children to school and have a balanced diet even at home. From these small things, and utilising small resources from home, my in-laws and others in my neighbourhood have been borrowing my ideas. One thing I do is collect bags to fill with soil, and now I have onions and other vegetables and I have a balanced diet. CCMP is showing us the resources we have around so we can take these resources and meet our need.'



Bishop Robert again: 'At Thungururu we were greeted with a spectacular display of dancing and singing by the girls from the local primary school to the beat of African drums. Their energy was unbelievable. 'Local farmers brought their produce for Bishop Julius to bless: sugar cane, goats' milk, gourd, beans and cassava. These were some of the fruits of 'Farming God's Way', a project designed to address food security. Farmers have been taught how to mulch the land to minimize the effect of evaporation and to harvest the rain through water pans.

'We were taken to huge artificial pond they have created. Dug out by hand and lined with silt, it is the *only* water supply for the entire community. In Devon we have fresh water in abundance and easily take it for granted. Here they raise the roof singing to the God of the Harvest who gives us not only our daily bread but water to quench our thirst.'

Rosie Austin commented:

'A water pan, preserving water when all else is dry. Rains still not arrived but the children swim. I think we take water for granted.'



The water pan, funded by the Diocese of Exeter and enlarged by the County water department, seen at the end of a long dry period



Bishop Robert greets the children of Gitwe parish

Bishop Robert said he felt a mixture of pride and profound humility to be thanked for our support of these initiatives - pride because this pattern of community development is being sponsored by various parishes in Devon, and humility because they have so little and we so much.

To read more of Bishop Robert's blog follow this link:

<https://bishoprobertblog.wordpress.com/>

Recent news from Thika tells of the October rains starting very late and drying up again very quickly so yet another harvest has virtually failed. Following several seasons with inadequate rain the rivers are going dry and many areas have drought. The changing climate and irregular rainfall demonstrate even more clearly the need for the good practice being learned through Umoja and 'Farming God's Way'.

To learn more about the link with Thika and to find out more about these projects - Namrata Shah Children's Home, Umoja (Church and Community Mobilization Process) and Farming God's Way (food security and water conservation) please contact the Link secretary Jane Inwood at [thika.link@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:thika.link@exeter.anglican.org).

There are speakers who would love the opportunity to give an illustrated talk to any group, large or small, please do ask! It is exciting to get involved, to catch something of the enthusiasm of these young and growing churches and to take the opportunity to learn from them and partner with them in their sacrificial efforts to build a better society. A little can achieve so much.