

## Anglican Urban Network

### In the urban millennium

One of the most repeated facts of the last decade is that, at the beginning of the third millennium, the world reached a symbolic point when over half the global population could be said to live in towns and cities. Cities with over 10 million people have become commonplace. Elsewhere smaller settlements are exploding with rural migrants. The urban poor now outnumber the rural poor in many countries of the South, their number doubling each decade. The world is now an urban place. Urbanization is a human phenomenon brought about by the movement of people in search of social and economic well-being.

Growing cities hold many challenges for global institutions, for governments, for churches; but more particularly for the millions who are on the move to, or already settled in, the expanding metropolis. Those who move to the city find crucial challenges, when expectations are not met, difficulties as strangers are encountered, and received notions of status, identity and belonging fade.

Cities are the inheritors of many histories – the political narratives of colonialism, slavery, domination and corruption still shape the social structures and economies of cities north and south, as well as the relations between them. Many still struggle to deliver the promises of development, modernisation, sustainability. Alongside the often repeated clichés of urban ascendancy now goes the startling statement that, for the majority, the cities of the future will not be the towers of steel and glass but the sprawl of plastic, corrugated iron and breeze block.

Making sense of the data and images seems to be



initially a forensic exercise. Not least one is aware of what Abdou Maliq Simone calls this the 'large intersection of bodies in need'. (Simone 2004:3) South African urbanist, Edgar Pieterse, offers a stark reminder that the millennium development goal of lifting 100 million slum dwellers out of poverty by 2015 leaves '90 percent (900 million) of slum dwellers worldwide... [whose] lives will not be touched by this extraordinary global effort.' (Pieterse 2008: 113) But should the encounter with the scale of proximity and density move us to see only an impending urban crisis?

### *Mission in the urban millennium*

Urban discipleship and mission are about how we live Christ's life in an urban environment, a crowded, built environment, where issues of social justice are usually intense, where strangers are as apparent as familiars, where closeness, propinquity, is both an opportunity as well as a threat. The urban is both ordered and disordered – an ambiguous, unpredictable environment – yet it can be at its most creative when those contradictions are acknowledged. The city can be a place of struggle and opportunity where one might grasp a glimpse of community, of homeliness, of new ways of doing things, of change – of the kingdom – 'on earth as it is in heaven'. God is

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encountered, not brought into those strata of lived urban form, as human flourishing is negotiated through layers of economics, culture, religion and identity. While not lionising the conditions of the informal settlement, one is increasingly aware of the need to reimagine urban life aware of the lower environmental impact of basic forms.

Urban mission in both hemispheres has looked to integrated forms of outreach, promoting social justice and environmental concerns, as part of human transformation. Mission and evangelism must not be traded for thinly disguised forms of suburban social reproduction. As cities are encouraged to be 'pro-poor' the Church needs also to take that stance in its fundamental activities. Churches can become isolated from the



cities in which they are set, where issues of power and complicity in injustice are not addressed. We must move beyond seeing our cities as only a concentration of exclusion and despair but also as arenas of engagement where hope, and the relationships of grace can flourish. 🏡

## The story so far

The international Anglican Urban Network was formed as a response to resolutions made by the 1998 Lambeth Conference and the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council. Both resolutions acknowledge urban areas as critical sites for the engagement of the churches of the Anglican Communion in mission, ministry, social witness in the twenty-first century, as they struggle to prepare and resource ministers and church leaders for unprecedented situations in terms of both human and spiritual need.

At the heart of the Network is a recognition of the need to connect and resource those engaged in urban ministry and mission, and to use the openings available to raise these issues in the Provinces and with the governing instruments of the Anglican Communion. The global profile of the

*The real challenge to Christian mission in the twenty-first century will be that of urban mission.*

Communion also offers the opportunity to influence the forces and institutions shaping our cities.

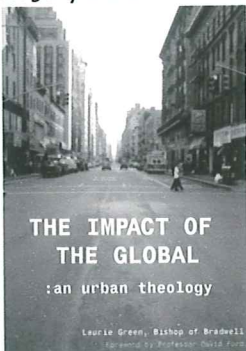
The formation of the Network Reference Group began in June 2001 with a meeting in the wake of the *United Nations Special Assembly on Human Settlements* in New York. The Group began to look at the strategies and ethos of the Network. Subsequent informal meetings have taken place on the fringes of other gatherings. A report and newsletter was published to coincide with the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council in Hong Kong in September 2002 and Nottingham in June 2005. Reports have been tabled at meetings of the Joint Standing Committee. Bulletins have also been published to coincide with the UN's International Habitat Day.

The Network has published *Impact of the Global: An Urban Theology* by Bishop Laurie Green, a short introduction to some of the issues facing cities and urban churches in an era of globalization. This was distributed

widely, particularly with *Anglican World*, and has been translated into Spanish, Tamil and Japanese.

During Lent 2003 the Reference Group met in London within the context of a consultation on *Urban Mission in Globalizing Cities*. The context of London was a vital part of the meeting with members visiting parishes, NGO and academic sites, gaining insights of good practice, struggle and reflection, enabling the group to reflect on their own contexts, activities and resources. The group also met with the members of the steering groups of other Anglican Communion networks and identified possible areas of collaboration. The model of connecting with local, higher education and other allies was felt to be one that could be offered for regional consultations and others working in this field.

In July 2004 members of the Reference group took part in a week of activities organised by the Institute for Urban Ministry and Pretoria Community Ministries on training, networking and developing those involved in urban ministry. Anglicans from South Africa, Kenya, and Mozambique are already



involved in programmes run by IUM. The Network looks forward to participating in the research programme initiated by IUM and UNISA on *Doing Urban Public Theology in Africa: In Conversation with the Global Household of Faith*.

In September 2005 a visit was made to the Methodist University in Sao Paulo for their Congress on the *Public Presence of the Churches in Urban Areas: Discourse and*

*The destiny of humanity is being played out in urban areas, in particular, in the great metropolises.*

Manuel Castells

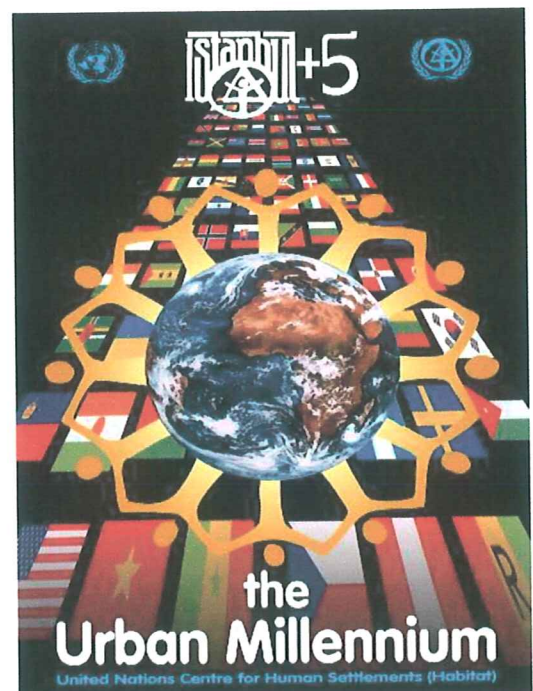


*Practice* and to consider partnership opportunities with their *Urbi et Orbi* Network.

The Network played a full part in the 2007 pan-African consultation on *Reimagining the African City*, organised by Centre for Urban Mission, Carlife College, Nairobi. This was followed by an important consultation on the future of urban mission training in Africa. The work of the college's training centre in the Kibera slum has acquired an international reputation for its engagement within one of the largest slum communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

During 2007 Network members (from Japan, Kenya, UK, India) contributed to the Anglican Family Network *Anglican World* supplement on 'Urban Families'.

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A Network consultation on *Faith, Action and Transformation in Indian Cities* was held in Madurai in January 2008. The consultation attracted a broad participation from agencies, NGOs, churches, and colleges.

The Network has provided a framework for consultation and exchange within the Anglican Communion. Resources, models of good practice, areas of concern for prayer and other means of support have been shared informally and formally. The Network has developed good working relationships with other Anglican networks, particularly the peace and justice, and the family networks. 🏡

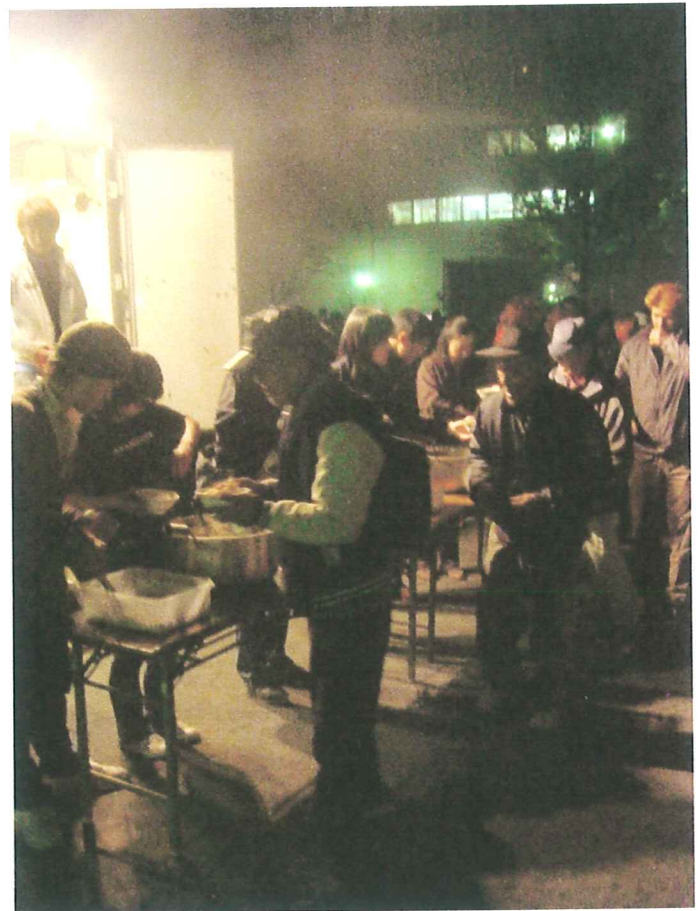
*The most extreme health differentials are no longer between towns and countrysides, but between the urban middle classes and the urban poor.*

Mike Davis

## The next decade

The Reference Group has identified a number of key themes for future work, but realise that the sustainability of the Network does depend on establishing a more realistic basis of support and financing. These themes are:

- Training for urban ministry/mission
- Empowerment of the poor
- Interchange and communication
- Theological reflection and social analysis.



We are aware that there is not a consistent understanding of urban mission issues across the provinces. Initially the Network was conceived through provincial nominations – these have not always been those who are most active or engaged in their urban contexts and it has been difficult to maintain a current database for such nominations. We have found, however, a vigorous constituency of practioners and institutions wanting to depend their understanding of the urban challenges of the twenty first century. This constituency includes a number of key resource people, or institutions, who are not Anglicans but are resourcing a spectrum of churches.

The urban context is an essential arena for collaboration. We are therefore proposing that the Network is known as the *Urban Learning Network* and that resources are concentrated on developing resources for educators and practioners, and networking as widely as possible. In the next section we highlight some of the trends and issues which our urban churches are likely to face over the coming decade, and the Network could address. 🏡



## Emerging challenges

The Network exists to resource, to make connections and enable mission in and between some of the most challenging contexts. The life of the Kingdom, which we seek to draw others into, is found in the possibility of being salt and yeast amidst the crowd. It is not rejecting the city but loving it, through refusing to accept that which dehumanises and desecrates creation. We often will have very different stories to tell, to those of government, the private sector or the NGO sector, as we seek the transformation of communities and individuals.

**Beyond targets** The UN Millennium Development Goals emphasize 'slum reduction' – with targets that many governments will fail to meet. Even if achieved it is along way from complete slum eradication – people will continue to live, work, seek education, form churches, in such places for many years to come. *How might the Network share the learning and connect Christians in these communities?*

**Another city is possible** We are aware that significant restructuring is happening in many cities which impacts on the most vulnerable poor communities. Significant eviction and relocation happens around big events such as the Olympic Games, but also in the cause of urban renewal and gentrification. City authorities compete for global positioning, often cutting welfare and education budgets to become 'lean cities'. *Christians are involved in movements for change and solidarity: how might we enable inclusive debates about – what makes a good city?*


*It is the poor who tell us  
what...the city is and what it  
means for the church really to  
live in that world.*

Oscar Romero



**Resisting harmful urbanisms** In some parts of the world new forms of city are emerging, often based on the knowledge economy or financial services. These cities take their toll on the world's poor – many become migrant workers in the construction of new cities and face conditions of exploitation, and physical danger. New cities often 'design out' the poor – pushing them to periphery communities, elsewhere their presence is monitored through technologies of surveillance and control in public spaces. *What are our strategies for supporting migrant workers? How do we begin to understand the new urban forms we find in places like Dubai and China?*

**Seeking the peace of our cities** Urban space is increasingly violent. From the micro violence of the gang, through the intertribal violence of the slum, to the technological warfare and the showcase terrorist atrocities. Domicide (the destruction of homes) and urbicide (the destruction of settlements) have become routine strategies for governments and insurgents. Urban security has become a major business. *How do our strategies for urban engagement contribute to a culture of peace and reconciliation? In what ways do our public interventions resist and condemn domicile and urbicide?*

**A new people?** Evangelism and church planting can be coupled creatively with community development and popular organising. Peace making, mediation and reconciliation work will become critical as difference become exaggerated, particularly in cities coming out of civil conflict. It is in the midst of the urban throng that worship and the sacraments can be offered, as acts of proclamation and solidarity (Ps 109.30), as new communities are nurtured and God's new urban order is glimpsed. 

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*The Church exists to connect people at the level of their hunger for a new world. [...] how does the Church live as if the Kingdom was real?*

*What we have to offer in this time of slowly growing awareness of global solidarity is not a programme of solutions but a way of walking steadily with each other, held by a vision.*

Rowan Williams

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## URBLOG

*Comment & resources on urban theology, life, faith & action*

<http://www.urblog.typepad.com/>

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## RECOMMENDED READING

AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*, Duke UP 2004

Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World*, Princeton Architectural Press 2008

Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* Verso 2007

Stephen Graham *Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* Blackwell 2004

Edgar Pieterse, *City Futures. Confronting the crisis of urban development*, Zed Books/University of Cape Town Press 2008

Jeremy Seabrook, *Cities (Small Guides to Big Issues)* Pluto Press 2007

David Satterthwaite, 'The Transition to a Predominantly Urban World and its Underpinnings' available at <http://www.iied.org/pubs/display.php?o=10550IIED>