

UMOJA UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2017

Salaam (Greetings)

We are joyful and thankful for our fellowship and unity in the co-workmanship, with God and you, in this ministry of **reconciling God's beloved creation to Himself**. Your unrelenting passion for the expansion of God's kingdom is recognised and deeply appreciated.

We continue working with an unfailing commitment to ensure we do our part on this side of God's earth, in Thika. **Receive our love**, together with that of those whose lives are being touched by your support.

At the end of this noble cause, we shall be like Him, Christ, and reign with Him in the world to come. Shalom.

URBAN TRANSFORMATION

One of the biggest hurdles Thika Diocese has faced since starting to implement Umoja in October 2014, has been its breaking through to an urban setting. Its design, which works especially well in a rural context, required adjusting to bring the fullest impact for the urban church.

MOVING BEYOND THE URBAN BARRIER

Thinking on this issue, led Thika to pilot of a variation of Umoja through ACK St Luke's Church, Makongeni, a large, urban church.

The first thing they had to consider was how they should arrange the Umoja meetings. To enable everyone to participate in meetings and ensure a critical mass, activities like Bible studies were usually suggested for a Sunday, when church members were available.

However this posed a challenge at St Luke's - there were too many Sunday attendees for Umoja sessions to work properly. So the team decided to pilot the meetings in two of their 12 home churches, Bethsaida and Bethlehem.

With each congregation meeting during the week in the estates where they live, **the new process has enabled them to bring immediate impacts to their local communities.**

TREMENDOUS TRANSFORMATION

After an in-depth journey through the first phase of the Umoja process there has been tremendous transformation at Bethsaida. Only 20% of members (up to 10 people) attended each week, but **since the process started enthusiasm has been renewed. Now the average weekly attendance has increased to between 30 and 40 each week. This has mainly been attributed to the way members identify with what they are discussing.**

A COMMUNITY THAT SPARKLES

The community's hope is that their future is one lived in a clean environment. They confessed how they would leave public spaces unkempt and unclean - places which no one person was willing to take responsibility for as they were communal. This led the members of Bethsaida and Bethlehem to make a decision, a vow to bring about a change.

...the church is the salt and light of the community.

By disposing of waste properly and maintaining cleanliness in their shared washing areas, the churches hope to set an example that will start to bring this hope to fruition. **They are organising regular litter collections with residents, sustainable waste disposal, and litter picks around the neighbourhood by two young people - which in turn enables them to have a regular income source and a livelihood.**

The wave of activity sent a lasting impression, that indeed the church is the salt and light of the community and has already resulted in further community litter collections. On one major occasion, members from Bethsaida put on a special collection, wearing white outfits to exemplify the sparkling 'white' of a clean environment.



JOBLESS WOMEN FIND WORTHWHILE VENTURES

Some of the women in the fellowship were relying on their husbands' income and meagre earnings from casual labour; they therefore struggled with life. After **dreaming about their desired future and deeply thinking about what they could do to change their situation they decided to join hands** and prepare the Swahili doughnuts in the morning.

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They pooled their little savings and bought the necessary equipment and, while one would be taking care of all their children, the rest would be preparing and selling the doughnuts. This golden step of togetherness gave them a new sense of hope and confidence that they were well able to own and transform their situations for the better.

STARTING AT THE DOOR

Within St Luke's, one of the Umoja facilitators, Leah, noticed an issue affecting some of those that serve their community the most - the compound's security guards. Leah says it was their look of hopelessness that drew her to them. It was when speaking with them, that she found out more. The untrained guards shared how people would order them to do things in a way which implied they were not competent for their work. They confessed to her how they felt looked down upon by others, and that **they themselves felt no hope**. As they were unable to attend church themselves due to their busyness working in the church compound, Leah decided to help in the one way that she knew she could.

Leah started a Bible series intended to help them discover their importance and self-worth in God, as well as the honour and privilege of their role. Taking them through a five stage Bible series, together the group explored topics that included Guards and Family, Who am I?, Guards and Stewardship, The Attributes of God, and Guards and Investments. After just the 'Guards and family' study one of them confessed, *'The Bible has helped me to reduce conflicts with my wife - these days we don't fight'*. The most recent Bible studies about 'Guards and Investment' have led the group to begin a savings plan amongst themselves, which allows each guard a share of the money!

LEAH AND THE LAMP STAND

Leah, who is also the children's minister at St Luke's, has developed a version of Umoja for even the youngest at the church - the 600 children that make up their congregation. They are known as 'The Lamp Stand'.

The children's version of Umoja was first piloted with a year 9 class, made up of 60 children, but has since been shared even more widely. This resulted in a complete change of the children's behaviour in the way they take care of their environment. During previous vacation Bible clubs the children had been known to litter the church compound with milk packets and no amount of requests to stop would change this, **until they discovered God's purposes for taking care of the Garden of Eden**. Now they have all stopped littering. The hope is that the next generation will, through the process, be equipped with the tools that will help them light up their little worlds.



PERSONAL POTENTIAL

In her passion to see lives transformed, **Leah wants to make the most of the discoveries she is making through the Umoja workshops she is taking part in**. She doesn't want it to remain a personal encounter. Realising the incredible potential that God has put in everyone she wished to explore this further. So, because of her natural liking for children's ministry, she had an idea to write a Sunday school manual that could be used by other children across the diocese. Leah says that she has managed to sell a good number of copies. This earns her extra income and is resulting in other opportunities across the diocese to train Sunday school teachers.

Leah explains, *'At one time I never thought that I had writing skills which would position me rightfully where I am in children's ministry. So far this talent has earned me KShs 70,000.'*

CHANGING HORIZONS

DEVELOPING NEW WAYS TO WORK ALONGSIDE COMMUNITIES

Over time, **the nature of community in Kenya has been changing**. Umoja, or the Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP) was designed to mobilise churches and then communities to bring whole-life, lasting change enabling people to break free from cycles of poverty.

Its design called for large community meetings to discuss issues. But **community dynamics in Kenya have been changing, and the former model has become increasingly difficult to implement** in a way that will bring the best support for each community. A change was needed.

Those implementing the process in Kenya developed an alternative way of working, integrating the original model with an aspect of reaching and/or entering the community through small Self Help Groups.



SELF HELP GROUPS

This new way of working first targets the poorest in a community by organising them into groups. The group then journeys together to learn the skills that will allow them to bring a response to the issues they face. **As each small group takes their own journey, and begins to see successes from working together in this way, they will reach out to the rest of the community.**

Involving stakeholders (for example the Umoja technical support staff of the diocese) two comprehensive Manuals were created to help people implement self-help groups across the diocese. One was about bringing socio-economic transformation and the second on building firm foundations in Christ. The involvement of technical staff in the process means that Thika Diocese has the capacity to integrate this new way of working in many new places.

PLEASE PRAY

Please continue praying for **peace in our country Kenya**. In August 2017 the country held a general election. The campaign period and the election day were very peaceful. However, the process of counting the votes for the presidential election was disputed. This brought demonstrations in some parts of Kenya. After being taken to the supreme court of Kenya, the election results have been annulled and new elections are planned for 17th October. Kindly pray for a **peaceful conclusion and the avoidance of the destruction of property and loss of life**, as was seen in previously disputed elections.

In some areas of Kenya there was moderate rainfall last season. This has produced a reasonable harvest compared with last season, when it failed altogether. Please pray that there is **sufficient rainfall to support crops** between October and December.

Continue to pray for **Umoja facilitators who are mobilising churches and communities**, that their passion to mobilize and empower community members to meet their felt needs in a holistic way is sustained.

Continue to pray for **our children**. The schools have just opened for the final term of this year. Kindly pray for the Kenya certificate of secondary education and Kenya certificate of primary education examination candidates.

Kindly pray for our **training workshops and reflection forums**, follow-ups, monitoring and mentoring and sessions to facilitate churches and mobilize communities.

FOOTNOTE

Bishop Julius recently visited Exeter and told us more about the amazing transformation he sees in the ten churches taking Umoja forward. He said how grateful he is for the support of donors who are facilitating the Umoja journey and how he wants to spread it to all the 200 plus churches in the Diocese.

For more information or to book a speaker: thika.link@exeter.anglican.org