

Partnership Coordinator for Africa

Visit to Kenya

14 – 24 January 2023



Purpose of Visit:

- **To meet with Church leaders in partner countries and build relationships.**
- **To understand local context, current issues and priorities of partners.**
 - **To attend Institution of new Bishops in Kenya.**
 - **To visit partner churches and partner projects.**
 - **To meet with Mission partners ‘in situ’.**
 - **To share developments at MCB.**
- **To discuss and share vision for future partnership.**

Dr. Andrew Ashdown

Introduction

The British Methodist Church entered Kenya in 1862 through the work of the then United Methodist Free Church. It started at Ribe station which was the base from where the mission was launched. Today the work is concentrated in several of the main areas of the country as well as in Uganda, southern Sudan, Congo and Tanzania. The Church has Ministers and church members from almost all the ethnic groups in Kenya. The Methodist church in Kenya is spread across 45 counties in Kenya and efforts are being made to cover all the 47 counties.

The Church became autonomous in 1967. Membership at that time stood at about 8,000. The Church has continued to steadily grow since its autonomous state from the British Methodist Church. The Headquarters is in Nairobi and includes a University with satellite campus and a Hospital with a number of dispensaries and clinics. It has over six hundred primary and secondary schools, numerous colleges, three Guest Houses, an Insurance brokers firm, three rural training Centres, and children's homes. The Church has increased to around 1000 congregations. The Methodist Church in Kenya also 'oversees' the Synods of Tanzania and Uganda.

Meeting at Kenya Methodist Church Headquarters in Nairobi.

It was a privilege and a pleasure to join the Connexional Staff at the Methodist Church Headquarters in Nairobi for Morning Prayer and be invited to lead the Morning Reflection. Many of the staff of the various departments of the Methodist Church in Kenya were present. Despite the challenges currently facing the Methodist Church, which include some widely publicised intra-church conflict, effects of climate change, ability to fund expanding ministries across the country, the Methodist Church in Kenya has a missional focus in service, training and education and seeks to expand and resource its' ministries.

NMA Rev. Dennis Muriungi.
Boys and Girls Coordinator



Rev Dennis Muriungi is an inspiring leader for young people in the Methodist Church in Kenya. He works across the Connexion to nurture the spiritual, social and economic pillars and principles espoused by MCK amongst young people, through social activities, empowering young people in developing skills, counselling ministries, Synod gatherings and annual events. He also manages a mentorship programme in Church High Schools in work with ministering to street children and a hospital visiting programme. MCB is currently funding this post which is having a transformative impact amongst young people in Kenya. When funding ceases, the Church is committed to continuing funding the work.

NMA Emmah Mbabu
Child Rights Officer, MCK



Emmah has been working with Unicef, with government and church representatives and with women and children across Kenya teaching them about children's rights and campaigning especially for the abolition of FGM which is widespread and 'normal' practice in tribal areas of Kenya. She works with local representatives on the ground addressing cultural issues and offering training opportunities for local women and community leaders. She has initiated trained a network of local church representatives to undertake the work in the field. This work includes empowerment of women and training women in ways of earning their own resources.

SALT. ARI Graduate.

Rev. Dr. Martin Gikunda. Now Humanitarian Relief & Church Development Officer of MCK. Also Director of BioIntensive Farm, Meru.



Having been supported by MCB's SALT grant to study at ARI in Japan and having graduated, Martin is now Director of the BioIntensive Agricultural Training Centre in Meru, Kenya. He has transformed the farm in the last 2 years and has also become the Humanitarian Relief and Development Officer for the MCK. He is widely respected across the Connexion.

NMA Freda

Centre Manager.
BioIntensive Agricultural Training Centre
Meru



Supported by MCB as an NMA, Freda is working with Martin Gikunda as the BioIntensive Centre Manager. She has helped to significantly increase the efficiency of the centre and substantially increase its use by the Connexion as a place of learning for members of rural Circuits from across the Connexion.

Meru Bio-Intensive Agricultural Training Centre.

Visiting Meru in Central Kenya, it was a joy to stay at the Meru Bio-Intensive Agricultural Training Centre, set up by the Methodist Church to train farmers who own very small plots of land, in ecologically sound and economically affordable agricultural practices and livestock management. The Centre, whose Director and Manager both received training funds from MCB and which has also received support from MCB, aims to improve the quality of life for farmers all over the country and has been recognised nationally for its educational work and impact on small-scale farming. The Director, Martin Gikunda, whose training at the Asian Rural Institute in Japan was funded by the MCB World Mission Fund, is passionate about resourcing small-scale farmers, pastoralists and any individuals with a small plot of land to be able to increase their agricultural output both for personal use and income generation opportunities. Objectives include:

- To increase the livelihood of the small farmer by teaching conservation and bio-diversity.
- To demonstrate that a small family can grow food and maintain a cow and calf and other livestock on less than an acre of land.
- To provide facilities for training the small farmers.
- To create awareness of technologies that are safe, efficient, and affordable.

Areas of farming include:

- Vertical plantation of vegetables.
- Fish farming.
- Livestock. (Dairy cows, goats, pigs, rabbits and chickens).
- Producing natural compost and affordable means of irrigation.
- Greenhouse gardening.
- Conferences and Training sessions for groups from all over Kenya.



The centre can provide accommodation for up to 60 people, including a simple conference room and dining room.

The Centre sits in the grounds of the original two houses built by the first British Methodist missionaries to Meru in 1919 and 1926 respectively. It was wonderful to be sent pictures of the house at that time by the granddaughter of the Meru Circuit Minister at that time, who is a childhood friend from Zimbabwe. It was also a privilege to be invited to plant a tree in the garden of the original bungalow as a commemoration of the visit. The ministry of the Methodist Church in Britain over the years in Meru and the support that has enabled the continued development of this outstanding centre is remembered with much gratitude and appreciation.



Visit to Wamba, Samburu Tribal Region, Northern Kenya.

A few hours north of Meru, through an increasingly barren landscape deeply impacted by the recent droughts caused by climate change, we visited the small one main-street town of Wamba in the heart of the Samburu Tribal region. Situated 30km along unmade roads from the nearest highway, it is a leading small market town for the region and is a good base since it is home to a large Roman Catholic hospital and Mission Guesthouse where we stayed. However, beyond the town, only the Methodist Church has established church congregations in the remote tribal regions of the interior between here and the border with South Sudan, 300kms to the north.



Wamba is part of the Isiola Circuit. Isiola is 60kms south of Wamba and its Circuit extends all the way to the northern border. In the isolated region, the Methodist Church, with help from MCB grants, has established 31 congregations, served by only 3 ministers. In the Samburu Wamba region there are 12 churches. In the Samburu Maralal region far to the north there are 6 churches, and in Marsabit close to the border there is 1 church. All of these have been established since 2014 and have seen rapid growth. Most have started under trees, but in recent years, the Methodist Church has built simple Church structures for some of them, which have been used as community spaces or schools by the local Samburu people. With the help of the local Samburu minister, Rev. Jacob Pasache, who as an Evangelist single-handedly started many of these isolated congregations, the Church is training local Samburu members to be Evangelists and lay pastors in their communities. All these isolated communities have vibrant women's and children's ministries that seek to empower women and young people and address some of the cultural challenges faced by the people.



Methodist Ministry in Samburu Tribal Region, Northern Kenya.

“We are so grateful for the Methodist Church in Samburu. We are able to educate our children and to learn about God.”

I was talking with Lachin an elderly Samburu widow in her ‘manyatta’ in an isolated village, deep in the Samburu Tribal region of Northern Kenya. Like all Samburu, her tiny round hut is divided into three sections – one for the husband, the other for the wife and family, and the other as a social and cooking area. A fence is built at the centre of the village where the cattle are accommodated during the night. The external fence, made of thorny branches, protects the village from raids by neighbouring tribal groups who regularly try to steal cattle and kill defenders. Most Samburu villages consist of up to 10 ‘manyattas’ each occupied by a family. Being a polygamous tribe, each family has the same number of huts as the number of wives held by the man.



Lachin inside her manyatta home.



Lachin's manyatta.



Supported by grants from the Methodist Church in Britain, the Methodist Church in Kenya has been undertaking a truly remarkable ministry in the Samburu region since 2014. Since that time a number of simple churches have been built in remote areas to serve the growing number of Christians in the region. When a church is built, the leadership of the villages it serves choose a location that is most central to the catchment area of villages and then decides on the plot of the land where the church will be built. Most Samburu congregations still do not have a church building but meet under a chosen tree and worship in the open air. The Methodist Church, with its missional focus on reaching the most vulnerable, is the only church to have penetrated into the villages of this isolated region. But we were pleased to be accommodated in the Guesthouse of the Roman Catholic Church at Wamba, a small dusty town; 50kms from the main tarmac road, and 40kms through wilderness along rough tracks from the area where the

Methodist Church has established its ministries. The Methodist Church also has three churches in Wamba, each serving growing congregations, very popular with women and children, with active Women's, Men's and Youth Fellowships.

The Samburu ministry is part of the Isiolo Circuit. This consists of a vast area that stretches from Central Kenya to the Ethiopian border 300kms away and now hosts 31 congregations and 3 ministers. The Sambura Wamba area has 12 churches, Sambura Maralal further west has 12 churches, and far to the north, Marsabit has 1 church. Many of the churches have started schools. And in all the areas, the number of congregations are growing. It was inspiring to meet Rev. Jacob Pasache. A Samburu tribesman himself who has been working for years as an Evangelist, he is largely responsible for the growth of the church in this region, travelling between villages on foot and by motorbike. Happily, he was ordained last year and continues to serve with the Superintendent Minister. The Circuit also has another Evangelist, Eunice, who undertakes a profoundly fruitful ministry, particularly amongst women.



Samburu Methodist congregations in different villages.

The Samburu people follow traditional customs. Many of these are profoundly beneficial to the society and communities. However, one are of the customs which the Methodist Church is working hard to address is the issue of Circumcision (FGM) of all girls from a young age and the social customs that make marrying off girls at a very young age an acceptable practice. By working with local leaders and through local evangelists and ministers, the Methodist Church is having some success in this ministry. The other key issue for all the Samburu region is the availability, collection and storage of water. Successive droughts have devastated the landscape and the peoples' livelihoods. Last year, a whole village lost nearly all their livestock due to the drought, one man losing 200 head of cattle. The drought has also increased violent incursions by neighbouring pastoralists in search of pasture and water. (We had to travel with armed protection for that reason). Women have to walk miles in many cases to find any water source, and usually, the sources that exist are inadequate and dirty. It is the hope of the Methodist Church that it can help in finding some practical and cost-efficient solutions to this major problem.



Water supply in riverbed.



Travelling in Samburu Region.



I was deeply moved and humbled by the warmth of the welcome from the Samburu people and inspired by the resilience and dedication of those ministers who are serving them. This is a grass-roots ministry of the church that celebrates and respects the contribution of isolated communities to wider society, whilst

seeking to bring life and hope in situations of great hardship. In response, one finds people who are dedicated to loving and serving God and who rejoice in the blessings that they have, even amidst the considerable challenges that they face. They are an example to us all.

Church and Community Development Training in Northern Kenya

Travelling across Africa, it is inspiring to see so many initiatives that are seeking to empower people to harness local skills and resources to serve and develop their churches and communities. And it is clear that, as external resources become harder to source, this movement is vital for the sustainability and development of local churches and communities. It was therefore an honour to be invited to lead a training workshop for Ministers in Northern Kenya on Church and Community Development and Empowerment. In so doing, I focused exclusively on examples from across Africa to encourage and inspire the participants.

So it was that on Saturday 21 January, some 40 lay and ordained ministers, women and men, from across northern Kenya, many from challenging rural contexts, gathered together at the Miathene Synod Office, north of Meru. After an Introductory session that set the scene with stories from within Africa, we lay the foundations for the day by breaking into a group Bible Study session on passages that highlight the nature of mission, community and discipleship. Rooted in the biblical mandate and recognising that the participants are the experts in their context, this participatory activity set the positive tone for the whole day.

The content of the rest of the morning looked at the principles and process of Church and Community Transformation and we looked at the signs of a 'healthy' church. I am grateful to Tearfund for their brilliant material on this subject. Again, using examples from across Africa, we explored the importance of working with the community and with other 'stakeholders' in whatever context, including other churches. There followed an exercise in 'mapping' the local community in identifying 'partners' with whom we can work in order to serve the community's needs. It was moving and encouraging to see the excitement with which the participants embraced this approach.

In the afternoon, I led a session sharing inspiring illustrated examples from across Africa in both rural and urban settings, of how the local church, often with minimal resources, is empowering local people to achieve great things, often through very simple strategies and utilising local skills and resources. In the plenary session, the excitement was palpable as ideas emerged in abundance from the ministers in how they might be able to apply some of what they had learnt, in their local contexts.

It was humbling to see the enthusiasm and gratitude at the end of the day. Afterwards, I was asked if I could stay in Kenya to repeat the day at the National Synod, and have been invited to repeat the workshop in other synods in Kenya and in Uganda. Just a few days later, I was told that quite a few Superintendents had already started preparing strategies for Community Development Initiatives in their Circuits.

Such initiatives are one way in which partnership can be so constructive and positive. The expertise for this day lay in the participants themselves. All that was needed was to inspire and nurture what was already there and to 'light the spark' that I hope and am told will bear fruit and nurture a greater sense of capacity and sustainability in all parts of our church family.



Conclusion.

Unfortunately, a minor cut on my leg developed into an ulcer which quickly grew into an open, infected wound which showed signs of extending further down my leg. The wound was carefully tended by our Mission Partner, Dr. Claire Smithson whilst I was in Meru, but eventually she advised that I end my visit and return to England for further treatment. I am very grateful for the care that Dr. Smithson provided. My planned visit to Uganda had to be postponed and I made a hasty return to England where with antibiotics and further treatment, the wound has made a gradual recovery.

My conclusions from this brief visit are as follows:

- Notwithstanding highly publicised challenges at a leadership level, the Methodist Church in Kenya is committed to a missional ministry that reaches and serves the most vulnerable persons in its society.
- The contribution made by individuals who have benefitted from the NMA and SALT grant schemes, to the life of the local church is immense and bears considerable fruit.
- Grants provided by MCB to the MCK have been constructively and beneficially used and have had a lasting impact on the initiatives that have been supported.
- Mission and Evangelism in the tribal regions of northern Kenya is resulting in rapid growth of congregations in that region. This is raising challenges as to how to serve that ministry and also how to address the specific and considerable needs of the communities, particularly in relation to the impact of climate change and the empowerment of women and children.
- The workshop on Church and Community Development and Empowerment with ordained and lay ministers in Northern Kenya was extremely well received and it is recognised that these principles need to be a priority for future Church vision and strategy.
- During the Workshop, everyone appreciated and learned much from hearing of the ministries, examples and practices of other Connexions across Africa. This intra-continental networking and learning has enormous potential for the future.
- It is clear that the partnership and relationship between Kenya and Britain is highly valued and human connection and interaction – both ways – will continue to be an important part of partnership in the future.

