



# URBAN CURRENT

## Tale of two cities

**T**hick black diesel smoke envelops the front of our vehicle. Moments later it clears. I can read the bold letters on the back of the bus in front of us, “Jesus is King of Kings.” A motorcycle whizzes by on our right between two lines of traffic. Its handlebars are almost touching the vehicles on either side. Rich, British-accented tones of the African Christian radio host speak to us while red dust from highway construction insists on blanketing us. Inches from the traffic on the dirt next to the highway, hundreds of people walk in both directions. Suddenly a man bolts through traffic endangering his very life, running away from a stunned woman waiting for a bus. He has just snatched the phone out of her hand.

What am I doing here? I am in Nairobi because a man from this city came to Chicago. In the late 80s, a young John Opiyo came to study at the world-renowned Moody Bible Institute. He joined Armitage Baptist Church and spent the next four or five years with us. He completed our urban ministry internship. Making it clear that God was leading him back to Nairobi to plant a church, we felt we could do nothing less than offer him the fullest support possible. He returned and on our faithful prayers, if feeble support, planted the Kahawa Sukari Baptist Church. These days, under the shepherding of Pastor Simon Oriedo, the church continues to be a strong witness and a bright light at home, with mission ventures to neighboring countries as well. The congregation is presently involved in constructing a new building that will serve hundreds. I am here for five days of preaching and teaching.

Our congregation has had teams on the ground working with our daughter church on four separate occasions. Twice, their leaders have visited us in Chicago.

We are committed to a relationship that involves free-flowing communication and builds trust. Hopefully this fosters availability to work together as God leads.

I am struck with the Christian presence throughout the city. The Baptist Bible Fellowship International has been active in Kenya for a generation. Presently, there are 34 BBFI missionaries in the country. Schools, churches, and various ministries of one evangelical stripe or another abound. It's noteworthy that the Anglicans in Kenya are more conservative than some strands of Baptists in the U.S. Nairobi boasts a handful of Christian radio stations. In the face of a generation of maturing African leaders, what is the best function of American presence and resources?

One of the griefs of visiting cities overseas is learning of the corrupting force of American evangelical excesses, not to mention out-and-out heresy. Pretty much everything seen on American “Christian” TV is available in a city like Nairobi. Oh me, oh my.

It's always fascinating to gain insight into local realities from the people on the ground. Kenya is one of the more free and stable nations on the continent, making Nairobi and its nation a critical base of operations for evangelism and ministry. With South Sudan becoming an independent nation, Kenya and its Christians are critically positioned to be a major resource and influence.

Even with its relative stability, Kenyans face staggering challenges and negative influences. Big money from Saudi Arabia is backing Islamic proselytization. Somalian money, legitimate and illegitimate, has a significant place in the economy. With unemployment over the 50 percent mark, one wonders what an economy would look like that was able to employ even 70

or 80 percent of the population.

While one of our teams was serving with Kahawa Sukari in 2002, an early morning gospel message by an Armitage member sounded out over the slum in Mathari. This effort resulted in a convert. Within weeks this new believer became a church plant, Hope Baptist Church. Now, with two daughter churches in Nairobi, one in a middle-class area, the other in a slum, we take even more seriously our connection to this African metropolis.

It was so exciting to cut the ribbon on the new two-story building of Hope Baptist Church. It was a privilege to help them rent their first 15-by 25-foot space, to assist them in buying the land for their new building, and to play a small part in the erection of the new structure. It's thrilling to see Pastor Wandera and the congregation owning their mission in one of the toughest neighborhoods in all the earth.

We have so much to learn from our brothers and sisters in these two very different local assemblies 8,000 miles away. We know that we are the richer for this relationship. If we had more money, we would give it. Maybe it's a good thing for our brothers and sisters that we don't have it. This relationship is first and foremost about partnership for the gospel's sake.

This is the tale of two cities; the story of three churches.

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