

Dear friends

I journeyed to Brazil in July to start work as Priest Missioner in City of God, one of Rio de Janeiro's most disadvantaged communities. It wasn't all plain sailing...

■ Waiting not wasted time

Waiting in for the gas man was not my idea of mission in South America. But when I flew to Rio de Janeiro in July to start work in Cidade de Deus, the boiler in my new home was condemned. It meant five weeks of cold showers and no cooker. These were disheartening days spent eating in the streets. Even a cup of coffee meant a trip to the corner shop. Then it took three months to be licensed as the bishop retired just as I arrived. Even more testing, the daily tangle of red tape which left me with neither an

identity card nor a bank account, just a time-consuming struggle to prove who I was. A wise friend said: "In God's economy, waiting time is not wasted time." I soon saw I wasn't alone. Those I watched from my bedroom window in the slum opposite had no toehold in society either. Wasn't it just like this for people in the Parish of Old St Pancras starting a new life in London?

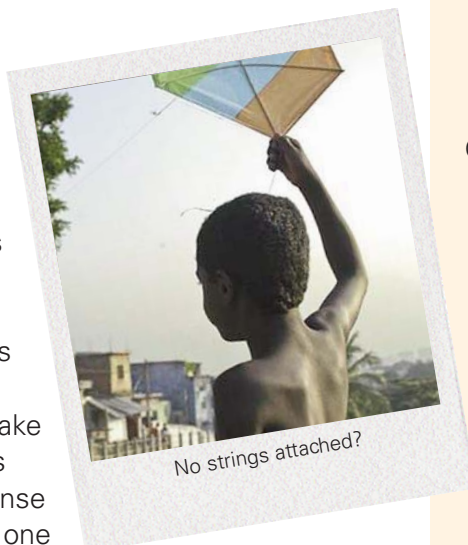
■ Flying a kite

This is my first time as a priest that I do not wake up or go to sleep in the community I am serving and it's very odd. The bishop thought that a clergy house in Cidade de Deus would be too dangerous and difficult so instead I'm living in a different part of town where wealth and poverty sit cheek by jowl. My block of flats is next door to one of Rio's shanty towns, the 'Morro do Cantagalo' or 'Cockle-doodle-do Hill'.

In the morning the sound of cockerels persuades you that you are on a Norfolk farm. At night, very different noises compete: the pastor of the Pentecostal Church screams down the Holy Spirit on his ecstatic congregation and a DJ blasts out the sexually-explicit lyrics of the latest favela funk anthem. Children spend their day flying handmade kites from rooftops. It makes me wonder whether my own fragile project will take to the air. Am I just like Mary Poppins come down from the clouds in response to a request for help only to fly away one day?



Room with a view



No strings attached?



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Nicholas Wheeler

Nicholas Wheeler was Team Rector of the Old St. Pancras Team in London for nearly 12 years before becoming Priest Missioner in the Parish of Christ the King, City of God, a housing estate on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro built in the 1960s to provide homes for the poor

Your support

By supporting Nicholas through the Mission Companion Programme you are playing a vital part in God's work in the world

Put up a copy of this newsletter in your church or pass one on to a friend!

■ **Guns and roses**

I was licensed Priest Missioner at the start of October. It was local Election Day and the climax of a long campaign to choose a new mayor for Rio de Janeiro. I walked to church through chaos and confusion on the streets past hundreds of soldiers carrying guns who had been drafted in 'to guarantee the democratic process'. I'd hoped to buy some roses to brighten up the church but the flower-seller had abandoned his stall. Cidade de Deus felt like a tinderbox that could explode at any moment. The most I had ever feared on polling day in the UK were the tellers asking me for my name and address. Now I wondered just how much it might take a soldier to pull his trigger, no questions asked. In the end, two people were shot. Thirty brave souls made their way to church to stand with me as I made my promises. We sang 'Make me a Channel of your Peace'. I prayed someone was listening.



Military rule? No, just election day

■ **All aboard**

It's a thrill to get on a bus whose destination plate reads 'City of God'. They say it's better to journey than to arrive.

Sometimes the traffic congestion in Rio de Janeiro is so bad you wonder if you ever will get anywhere.

The journey to Cidade de Deus involves two buses although I often take the faster and safer vans that provide alternative public transport. It's an excellent opportunity to say the daily office or think through the day ahead as I try to work out what an Anglican Church with a handful of members in a Brazilian backwater ought to be about. 'Last Stop 174', which opened this year's Rio Film

Festival, tells the compelling story of a young man called Sandro who survived a police massacre of the city's street children but ended up leading the notorious and tragic hijack of a bus eight years ago. As the film's tagline runs: "He who has nothing to lose doesn't know when to stop." If mission is about anything it must be about people like Sandro.

Thank you for all your support. Please pray for me as I pray for you.

Nicholas



Give thanks for

A new home and new friends and the working relationship with my colleague, Fr. Eduardo Costa

Please pray for

The discernment of the church's ministry in Cidade de Deus

An improvement in my Portuguese so that I can pastor and preach effectively

The development of partnerships with the social projects who use the church's space

Please consider setting up a Direct Debit to support Nicholas

Thank you

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