

In Search of Diamonds

Report on a Visit to South Africa

Richard Higginson recounts his experiences in visiting a South African diamond mine and the social projects around it. He witnessed the tension between the difficult past and aspiring present, and the ethical issues being faced.

From July 27 to August 3 2015 I was in South Africa, taking part in the business–church initiative *Mining in Partnership: an Empowerment Agenda*. This resulted from two consultations at the Vatican and Lambeth Palace that brought chief executives of mining companies together with faith leaders. Mining in Partnership aims to help theological colleges and similar institutions to equip pastors and church leaders to serve communities affected by mining. This initiative is being spearheaded by Dr Esther Reed, author of the preceding article. She is putting together *Resources for Teaching and Reflection*, designed for use by churches situated among mining communities world-wide.

To increase understanding, groups of church leaders are being invited to visit major mining sites. I was one of a group of 10 from a variety of countries who visited the Anglo–American Venetia diamond mine, operated by De Beers, in northern South Africa near the border with Zimbabwe.

I subsequently wrote a report for Anglo–American which took the form of answers to questions set.

1. What were your expectations before the visit?

My expectation was of a well-organised corporate visit. Multi-national companies have the experience and

expertise to make such a visit run smoothly and enjoyably, and neither Anglo–American nor De Beers disappointed. The hospitality was warm, generous and genuine.

Two things did surprise and, to be honest, slightly disappointed me. The first was the relatively short time we spent at the Venetia mine compared with the region surrounding the mine visiting local community projects. I would have welcomed opportunity to talk with employees who are physically involved in the process of mining. The second was that, though corporate executives expressed the desire to engage with leaders in the faith community, and did so with the ten members of the visiting group, they did not appear to be reciprocating this locally. The community representatives at the Musina meeting did not include any who introduced themselves as local church leaders. Perhaps the latter had been invited but shown no interest; if so, that would be very regrettable.

2. Why did you agree to participate in the visit?

I speak and write extensively on business ethics and the theology of work. The activities of companies are of great interest to me, especially where they impinge so heavily on social wellbeing. Mining is a primeval industry which positively bristles with ethical issues. When I was

