

SOMA team visit to Maridi, South Sudan, 20 Feb -8 Mar 2018

UK team members: Rev Ron Hart (Team Leader), Credly Hart, Lindy Cameron, Rev Jane Shaw, Davi Gulmaraes. Uganda member: Rugogamu Wyclef Rushaju

This was a mission in a town relatively at peace (though the surrounding area was unsafe). We were invited by Bishop Justin Badi to lead a Youth Conference - his particular concern was encouraging Christian understanding and behaviour among the youth. The team prayed together every morning and evening and sought to be open at all times to the leading of the Spirit.

113 young people attended the conference. The level of participation by the delegates was high. We covered a wide range of topics including the life and death of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Forgiveness, Christian behaviour, issues facing youth in Maridi, Christian marriage and Bible studies on Ephesians.

Methods included small group discussion, large group discussion and lectures. We included two hilarious sessions of games. We had a short time of answering written questions each day. At the end of each day we offered prayer ministry. There was much hidden pain and loss, which surfaced in our workshops and in the ministry times.

We were supported by a team of intercessors in the UK led by Kate Brankin, and we exchanged information each day so that they knew how to pray for us and we had the benefit of their insights. The typical daily programme was:

0730 - 0800	SOMA team prayer meeting
0800	breakfast
0900 - 0930	worship & Discussion of a few written questions
0930 - 1015	small group bible study on Ephesians
1015 - 1130	teaching session 1
1130 - 1200	break tea
1200 - 1315	teaching session 2
1315 - 1430	lunch & rest
1430 - 1600	workshops
1600 - 1630	break
1630 - 1730	worship, brief address and prayer ministry
1800	supper, time to rest and prepare [SOMA team meet to review the day and pray]

To get there we flew Brussels Air to Kampala via Brussels, and stayed for two nights at the excellent Lake Victoria View Guest house in Entebbe before catching the MAF flight to Maridi, via Arua and Juba for passport formalities.

Before the conference started, we were able to have some time with Bishop Justin at Chaima College to update the assessment made in 2014, as part of the process to form the new Episcopal University.

On the Saturday we attended a Diocesan Farewell function at the Bishop's house and on Sunday we joined the Cathedral service and had supper with the County Governor. The Youth conference was from the following Monday to Friday, concluding on Saturday with the end of conference football match, Cathedral Youth vs. Lighton FC at which team member Davi scored!

On our second Sunday, Wyclef preached at the "English service", and I preached at the main Holy Communion service (the Bishop's last service). Jane met with the MU leader. Later, the Team were taken by the Bishop to visit the dam and the place where bombs fell in 1999 - my first experience of Maridi and being on a SOMA team. The Bishop led prayers for the family a little girl who was killed in the bombing just close by to where we were sheltering- we heard the whistle of the bomb coming down.

On our final Monday, we had visits to local primary school, the church sponsored clinic, Church secondary school, and again to Chaima. We finally departed by MAF and Brussels Air, who lost some of our luggage on the way home.

It was a blessed mission, and Maridi was peaceful, but the surrounding area was not, and road access was mostly unsafe. There was a lack of fuel, which meant the town power supply was out, (except for two nights to greet us) so there was no power at the Guest House and some market prices (e.g. for exercise books) were high.

We had outstanding support from the Bishop, in spite of the demands on him brought by his election as Archbishop. We had two excellent intuitive translators, and excellent help from Diocesan staff and the CMS missionary Lynn Treneary.

My thanks to our hosts, CMS missionary Lynn Treneary, our team, all those who prayed faithfully for us, Kate who coordinated the intercessors, the South Sudan Kampala embassy who went out of their way to be helpful, Stephen and SOMA and the Salisbury Sudans Education Committee for their financial support and encouragement for the SOMA Youth Conferences.

Ron Hart, 1 May 2018

Appendix 1: Examples of delegates' questions

We left a notebook at the front for the delegates to write down their questions, and we attempted to answer some of them at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions. Here is a selection of the questions they asked:

- How can a person know their faith is growing?
- Why doesn't God speak to us like he did at the time of Moses?
- What challenges and problems faced the prophets of the Old Testament?
- What is the Bible?
- Why did God not bless us all to be rich?
- Why did God put the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden?
- Why does God let people fight?
- Why is it difficult for a person to understand the word of God?