

Visit to Terekeka and St Stephen's School, South Sudan – 17th – 18th March 2020

Report by Mike Quinlan

Introduction

Following my participation in a SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad) Mission to the Internal Province of Jonglei from 7th to 16th March, I was able to make a short visit to Terekeka and to St Stephen's School escorted by the Bishop of Terekeka, Rt Rev Paul Moji Fajala. Bp Paul met me at my hotel in Juba and drove me to Terekeka on the morning of Tuesday 17th March. We visited St Stephen's School and I also saw some of the other sights of Terekeka (mainly boats on the bank of the Nile). Bp Paul also took me to see his house in Terekeka. After a night at a comfortable hotel, which had electricity and a fan in the evening, Bp Paul drove me back to Juba on the morning of Wednesday 18th March. I was privileged to be taken to meet the Primate of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECCS), Most Rev Justin Badi Arama at his office. ABp Justin is also the chair of SOMA's International Council. Bp Paul also took me to his house in Juba, where I met his wife, Edina, and had lunch before he took me to the airport to catch my flight back to UK.

Terekeka is a small town about 75km north of Juba on the west bank of the White Nile. It takes about two and a half hours to drive there from Juba on a dirt road that becomes very difficult during the rainy season. A Chinese contractor has recently started building a better road on the same line that will eventually be tarmacked and extend up to the north of the country. Terekeka is also an administrative County in the South Sudanese Province of Central Equatoria, which includes Juba.

In the ECCS Central Equatoria is an Internal Province in the Church with its own Archbishop. There are twelve dioceses in the Internal Province, of which Terekeka is one. Bp Paul is the second Bishop of Terekeka. Bp Paul estimates that 60% of the population of his Diocese are at least nominally Christian. Of these slightly over half are Roman Catholic and most of the remainder members of the ECCS .

The people who live in Terekeka are from the Mundari section of the Bari Tribe and speak the Mundari dialect of the Bari language. The Bari are the fourth or fifth largest tribe in South Sudan and comprise around 8% of the total population.

For those who know little about South Sudan, I should explain the following:

- South Sudan has a population of around 12 million in a country about three times the area of Great Britain.
- It is the newest country in the world. It was granted independence from Sudan in 2011. This followed two major civil wars from 1963-72 and from 1983-2005.
- From 2013-18 South Sudan suffered from terrible internal and largely tribal conflict with over 400,000 deaths and 2.3 million refugees.
- A peace agreement was reached in September 2018 but there has been limited progress in forming a new government and there is still tribal violence in some areas.
- There are some 60 tribal groups, all with different languages, of which the Dinka (36%) and the Nuer (16%) are the largest. The three next largest tribes are the Azande, Bari and Shilluk. Over 60% of the population are aged 25 or less.
- Over 70% of the population are illiterate. The United Nations assesses South Sudan as being one of the five poorest countries in the world.
- Religions are Christian (60%), African traditional (33%) and Moslem (6%)
- The South Sudanese tribes mainly hold their wealth in cattle and there are large herds in the villages, on the roads and in cattle camps. Parents must pay a bride price when their sons marry, which can amount to thirty head of cattle. Cattle raids between tribes are frequent and continue today.

St Stephen's School

St Stephen's School was started in around 1996 as a Nursery School. In 2001 it became a Primary School and in 2017 a Secondary School was added. It is run as a Private School by the Diocese of Terekeka. The curriculum is set by the Government. The structure of schools in South Sudan is as follows:

School level	No. of classes	Ages of Children	Subjects taught. All teaching is in English, which is the official language of South Sudan
Nursery	3 – Baby, Middle and Top	3-7	
Primary	8 – P1 to P8	7-20	English, Maths, Science, Social Studies, CRE (Christian Religious Education) and Bari
Secondary	4 – S1 to S4 (though S4 should be sub-divided into Arts and Sciences)	16-23	English (Language and Literature), Maths, CRE (Christian Religious Education), Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture, Commerce, Accounts, Computer Science, Citizenship, History, Geography, Arabic, Swahili and French

The ages of children in each class vary as children may start school at different ages. More than 60% of the pupils are boys and less than 40% girls, though the gender imbalance becomes greater in the higher classes as girls tend to leave school earlier. This is because girls are taken away by their parents to get married. Although the legal minimum age for marriage is 18, some girls get married at 14 or 16. Boys are also taken away from school to look after their parents' cattle.



School Buildings and Playground



One of the better-quality classroom blocks



Children in one of the Secondary School Classes



Children in one of the Primary School Classes



One of the poorer-quality classroom blocks



L to R: James (Secondary Head), Bp Paul, Emmanuel (Diocesan Secretary) and John (Primary Head)

In the Secondary School, St Stephen's has 209 children enrolled in 4 classes, but they cannot currently divide S4 into Arts and Science due to lack of classroom space. They have 22 secondary teachers for 16 subjects, but currently they don't have a French teacher. There are a maximum of 59 children in one class, but the numbers decrease in the upper classes as some children leave before they have completed their secondary education. The headmaster of the Secondary School is James Ladu. They have a problem with supply of textbooks. For some reason the government have only supplied textbooks for classes S1 and S3, but not for S2 and S4. They also need a library and a laboratory, and they currently cannot teach practical lessons to the senior children due to the lack of a laboratory.

In the Primary School and the Nursery there are over 600 children, but they are still registering children as the school year only started in February. They expect to have 70 children in each class, but in the lower years some classes have 90 children. There are 22 teachers in the Primary School and 4 in the Nursery. The headmaster of the Primary School is John Luke Tutueri.

As St Stephen's School is a Private School it charges fees. Payment of fees is not compulsory and about 50% of parents are unable to pay. The fees charged for each year in school are as follows:

Classes in Schools	Fees per year in South Sudanese Pounds	Approximate Fees per year in Sterling
Nursery	4,000 SSP	£12
Primary P1 to P4	5,000 SSP	£15
Primary P5 to P8	6,000 SSP	£18
Secondary	10,000 SSP	£30

While I was at Terekeka, representatives from the World Food Programme were finalising plans to supply food to the children at the school. This was expected to start on 18th March. The food would comprise cereal (probably sorghum), oil and fuel for cooking it.

The staff at the school receive a living allowance to cover their costs. This is called an Incentive, as the staff are regarded as volunteers. The Incentives are as follows:

Grade of Staff	Monthly allowance in South Sudanese Pounds	Approximate monthly allowance in Sterling
Headteachers	12,000 SSP	£35
Teachers	8,000 SSP	£24
Support staff	3,000 SSP	£9

In addition, the staff are also given lunch by the school. These amounts seem very small. Staff in government schools are probably worse off. Although they receive salaries many of them have not been paid for over six months. Most of the teachers are married and the majority are male. The United Nations estimate that around 80% of the population in South Sudan live on less than \$1 (80 pence) per day.

The school buildings are mixed. I believe the original buildings that Wareham Churches paid for have now fallen down. There are two classroom blocks, each with four classrooms, that are built with blockwork walls, steel windows with timber shutters, timber doors and corrugated steel roofs supported by timber trusses. One of these blocks is used by the Senior School and the other by the Junior School. In addition, there is an Administrative block of similar construction that includes a staff room, school administrative office and a Diocesan Administrative office for the Bishop and his staff. There is possibly also one classroom in this block.

There are also four blocks of a poorer construction. These have mud walls reinforced with timber poles, covered in mud on both sides. They have timber windows and doors covered with metal sheets. The roofs are similar to the more permanent blocks with corrugated steel roofs supported by timber trusses. One of these buildings has three classrooms whilst the other three have two classrooms each. One of the two classroom buildings is used by the Nursery School, whilst the remainder are used by the Primary School. I asked Bp Peter about the expected life of these buildings with mud walls. Due to the prevalence of white ants, they will probably only last five years before the walls need to be re-built.

Diocese of Terekeka

The Diocese of Terekeka has 6 Archdeaconries, 15 Deaneries, 43 Parishes and over 100 Churches. There are 65 clergy of whom about 10 are women. Some of the women are in charge of Parishes. Some parishes are up to 160 miles away from the town of Terekeka and one Archdeaconry is on the east bank of the Nile (the other side from the town of Terekeka). The Diocese only has a fairly small church next to the School. This is of typical construction similar to the poorer blocks in the school. Bp Peter is hoping that one day they will be able to afford to build a better Cathedral.



Church beside school at Terekeka



MU Office with Sarah

The Mothers Union (MU) has an office close to the church. The president of the MU is the Bishop's wife, Edina Poni. The MU Coordinator is Nora Mulai, who is also a pastor, and Sarah Jokudu (Bp Peter's eldest child) runs the Five Talents Project. This is an Anglican Charity based in Britain and delivered by the Mothers Union in East Africa. <https://www.fivetalents.org.uk/> The Five Talents include training and teaching in Literacy (Adult Education), Small Business (Farming, Sewing and Sale of Commodities), Trauma Healing and Peace and Reconciliation. They are also aiming to deliver the five objectives of the MU. From my experience in South Sudan, I can confirm that the MU is a very powerful movement for bringing change and community transformation. <https://www.mothersunion.org/our-vision>

Next to the MU office there is a separate building that houses the tomb of the first Bishop of Terekeka, BP Micah Laila, who died in 2019.

The Diocesan Secretary is Emmanuel Acheck, who has only been in post for a few months. The Diocesan Treasurer is Susan Lazarus, who is also a Pastor. Bp Paul is chair of the Board of Governors of St Stephens school.

Bishop Paul Modi and his family

Bp Paul's father was killed in 1968/69 during the first civil war. Bp Paul and his wife Edina have seven children of their own. The eldest, Sarah Jokudu is 27, married with one son (Jeshua) and works for the Mothers Union. They also have a married son, Wani Onesimus, who is 25, married and living in Juba where his wife is still in college. Apart from this there are three further sons – Emmanuel Laku (19) in Kampala University and Joseph Kije (12) and John Gere (7) and one daughter – Jessica Keji (16) who are all also in Uganda. I have no details on their seventh child.

Bp Paul's elder brother died of sickness in 1989, so Bp Paul and Edina are also responsible for their seven children – three boys and one girl at school in Juba (ages 9-18) and one boy and two girls (ages 9-14) at school in Uganda. In addition, they have an adopted son (14) who is also in Uganda. So, in total they have responsibility for 15 children, of whom only two are over 20, spread between Terekeka, Juba and Uganda.

Bp Paul did not have to serve in the army but was in the Civil Service from 1981 to 2017, finishing up as Director for Religious Affairs for Terekeka County.

Bp Paul took me to visit his house in Terekeka, which was a collection of mud huts with corrugated steel roofs. His eldest and married daughter, Sarah runs this house and it was good to meet her and her son, Jeshua, who is 18 months old and obviously the great pride and joy of his grandfather.



BP Paul's house in Terekeka



Bp Paul with daughter, Sarah and grandson, Jeshua

On Wednesday 18th I was driven back to Juba by Bp Paul and had the privilege of meeting and spending time with the Primate of ECCS and Chair of the International Board of SOMA, the Most Rev. Justin Badi Arama.

Bp Paul was also presented with a new ECCS Service book by the Primate during our visit to him.



The Primate of ECCS with Bp Paul Modi



Mike and the Primate of ECCS

After we had visited the Primate, Bp Paul took me to his house in Juba where I met his wife, Edina. His house is fairly simple in a suburb of Juba, though with block walls and a steel roof. As far as I could tell there was no electricity or running water. They gave me lunch and then Bp Paul took me to the airport.



Bp Paul's house in Juba



Bp Paul with his wife, Edina

I flew back to UK later that day arriving on Thursday 19th. It was a shock to the system to return after two weeks to a country deeply challenged by the effects of the Corona Virus and which, within four days would impose a lockdown on many activities and all social gatherings.

Mike Quinlan
29th March 2020