

## To Kampala & South Sudan - Sheila Soper

After much fund raising & many generous donations, I was all set to return to Yambio to meet many of the lovely people I had met in my previous 4 visits to South Sudan, and to deliver workshops to Mothers' Union members in the 2 dioceses of Yambio & Nzara. All travel arrangements went according to plan and I arrived in Uganda to be greeted by a friend & taken to her house where I stayed for 3 nights. I caught up with the displaced people & Mothers' Union ladies from Yambio in Kampala, listening to their plans to support some of the 1 million refugees from South Sudan. I met with Mama Margret, the widow of the late Bp Peter Munde of Yambio, with her 15 orphans and rescued children with urgent requests for financial help. They had not eaten the day I visited & she was upset that she could not offer me any refreshment.

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) flew me into Yambio with 3 very full cases where I was met by Archbishop Samuel Peni & his wife Mama Aide. We began the first workshop in Yambio cathedral with a communion service to start the first one off. There were 120+ ladies, all in their MU uniforms who had come from the deaneries & parishes across the diocese. Most had walked or cycled the many miles from their homes into Yambio & they slept for the 2 or 3 nights on the floor of the cathedral and meeting hall. Money raised in UK was used to feed them & provide those who could write with pen & notebook. Several ladies had come with their babies but there was not one toy between them. The workshops went down well once they had got used to working in groups & listening to each other. I delivered in English & it was interpreted into Zande by Mama Aide, Mama Saba & Mama Nyemusa who also kept the groups on task! They had a new experience of role play which was great fun & there was lots of laughter! They particularly enjoyed the story of Mary Sumner, the founder of Mothers' Union. I encouraged them to take these ways of learning to their home parishes. These Mothers' Union groups meet every Tuesday afternoon to pray & decide how to support those in need. At the end I was given lovely gifts of 3 shakers, a gourd scoop, some embroidered linen & some yam. It was a really moving & spiritually invigorating 2 days for me.

The next day I visited the Diocesan Primary school & saw the new building under construction. The other classrooms were the same as before - broken & with no resources. Anything in the buildings can be stolen including the school stamp which had been taken the previous night. There is one unpaid qualified teacher and 2 helpers with 600+ children, some who come in the morning, others in the afternoon & then some adults who come after that. I had taken letters & gifts from some pupils at St Michael's Middle School & when I asked the older children to write replies, they were very willing, but they had no paper to write on! We found paper for them & I took them to St Michael's School on my return. With money generously donated by the Minster Governors, Bishop Samuel will employ 5 qualified teachers who will ensure that the children get quality education. As with all things, this money needs to be ongoing. I then visited the medical clinic & gave some donated items here.

We went on to Bp Jeremiah Bible College where we were greeted by the students who are supported by the Salisbury Education Committee. Students live in their tukuls on site & have to grow crops to feed themselves as they study. They are helped with gifts of soap & salt which is also what the pastors there receive in lieu of stipend. Even the Archbishop does not receive money but relies on what his flock give him throughout the year. There is no internet for anyone there. It is available but is very expensive.

The following day I visited the Christchurch parish in Bethlehem Deanery - a very bumpy ride but welcomed as always with garlands & many speeches. A very tidy & organised village. But tea was simply powdered milk, sugar & hot water, they had no tea.

Sunday was my visit to Karika deanery down by the DRC border, the link with St Michael's, Colehill. An indescribable road! We went by car (4WD), picking up a man with digging tools to get us unstuck, plus Richard on his motor bike to take me if they couldn't get the car through! St Michael's had raised a lot of money for me to take & I was due to preach, so I had to get there! Thanks to great driving skills & God's guiding hand, we made it. Shouts & whoops along with garlands & drums greeted me & I was not quite sure if I was the Queen or Jesus as they had laid a pathway of branches for me to walk on! Wherever I went, I was always made so welcome and given many gifts despite them having so little. Here I was given multiple gifts which included money. Unfortunately, I was unable to bring home the 2 live chickens I was given, but Bp Samuel enjoyed those along with the long sticks of sugar cane. I enjoyed the oranges & one of the chickens for my supper that night. So generous.

The next morning, we took the very bumpy road to Nzara, where I led the second 2-day workshop (once the introductory speeches had been completed!) Again, much appreciated - they are so eager to learn. While in Nzara, I visited the primary school, St Timothy's, which is thriving due to continued support by a parish in Salisbury Diocese. A new delivery from the Salisbury/ Sudan Medical link had just arrived at the clinic so I popped in there & saw a well organised system & the foundations of the maternity unit they are building.

My wonderful host in Kampala came to meet me on my return at the MAF airstrip, took me to her home, & then delivered me to the airport at Entebbe at midnight. A long flight home but as it was my birthday, the crew opened a bottle of bubbly which I shared with 2 other passengers who also had their birthday that day.

As always there is time. I have come to learn to enjoy African time - no internet so time to pray, read and prepare.

I will be sharing my journey with many people in the coming months but would like to thank you and all the many, many people who gave me support particularly with huge amounts of prayer.

1. Displaced Mothers' Union members from Yambio in Kampala
2. Mothers' Union workshop in Yambio
3. The new school Yambio Cathedral Primary School
4. My visit to Karika, linked to St Michael's Church, Colehill

