

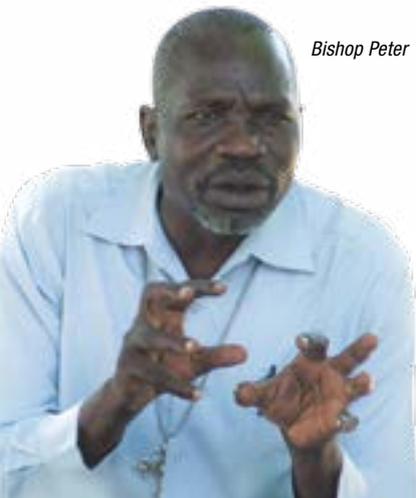
“Trees planted by streams”



Gathering for prayer and fasting at Malual Chat, Jonglei Internal Province

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.”
 Psalm 1: 1-3.

Bishop Peter



In 1905 a British man, Archibald Shaw, travelled by boat down the White Nile from Khartoum to the small settlement of Malek and established the first mission to the Dinka people. Just as described in Psalm 1:1-3 it is said of him that he did not walk in the way of the slave and ivory traders who used that river, but rather dedicated his life to making disciples, translating parts of the Bible into Dinka and establishing a primary school. He was given a Dinka name and adopted many local children as his own family. He planted several Banyan and Mango trees right by the river, next to the Church he built, some of which are still producing their fruit in season to this day. What he did prospered, and now, 115 years later, the Diocese of Malek is part of the Internal Province of Jonglei in the new country of South Sudan.

Last year SOMA received an invitation from the Dean of the Internal Province, Bishop Ezekiel Diing, and two Diocesan Bishops, to facilitate a



‘Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord’

conference this February for 49 clergy from the Malek Athooch and Wanglei Dioceses. The location? Originally planned for Bor, it was changed to Malek: right under the same Banyan trees planted by Archibald Shaw and within sight of the steel foundations of the church that he built. After their arrival, an Intercessor was given Psalm 1:1-3, which was a great

encouragement when shared with the delegates and team as it greatly affirmed and encouraged them in God’s purposes for the conference. Another Intercessor was given a word from Isaiah 61 about rebuilding and restoring, which was particularly pertinent for this area which has suffered so much destruction from
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“Trees planted by streams”

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conflict in recent years, and where unity and leadership demonstrated by the church is such a vital spiritual witness to the nation as a whole.

This was SOMA's third visit to this Internal Province in recent years, after two previous missions to Athooch Diocese in December 2017 and January 2019 (see Sharing 2018 #2 and Sharing 2019 #2 on the SOMA website's newsletter archive page at www.somauk.org for full reports.) Bishops Ezekiel Diing, Moses Anur and Peter Joh had invited SOMA to join with the delegates in exploring issues of leadership, based on the CPAS Growing Leaders course which had been carefully adapted for the context and used successfully in the January 2019 mission to Athooch. One of the team members from that mission, Mike Quinlan, agreed to lead the team this time, along with John Bavington and Tony and Jo Dixon. Together the team, and the delegates, explored themes of Christian leadership, spiritual disciplines, and vision, as well as grappling with practical issues of stewardship of church finances in a place where there are almost no banks to deposit funds and very limited resources. In particular they explored the character of Jesus and how he is looking for leaders who share his character traits of love, servanthood, humility, wisdom, compassion and forgiveness, as well as considering biblical leaders such as Gideon, Peter, Paul and Lydia. There were also four sessions based on Ephesians about discipleship and unity in the church.

Intercession important

On the penultimate day of the conference an Intercessor discerned that Psalm 133 was important: 'when God's people live together in unity... there the Lord bestows his blessing' and so the following day the team invited the Pastors to gather round their Bishops and pray for them, which they did happily.

It has been humbling to see a people in such difficult circumstances trusting God and truly being 'joyful in all circumstances.'

The SOMA team were privileged to stand with their brothers and sisters from Jonglei Internal Province in prayer, study, and in fellowship. Together they sought to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for renewal, refreshing, and for their ministry and mission. This is an area where there is extreme poverty, where there is no money to pay pastors or bishops for their work and where clean water, education and healthcare is very limited indeed. Team member Jo reflected that, "it has been humbling to see people in such difficult circumstances trusting God and truly being 'joyful in all circumstances' and a privilege to spend time with them in fellowship learning together and encouraging one another. I am sure I have received more than I was able to give'.



Trees planted by streams of water, 'whose leaf does not wither'

Malek Diocese holds three days of prayer and fasting every month in a different church across the Diocese, and the team were able to join with one of these sessions at the village of Malual Chat on the Saturday before the Conference began. Team leader Mike was 'staggered and challenged' by their commitment when he entered the church and found it was packed full with people praising God and praying together. Team member Jo reflects that there was, this time, 'a tangible sense of God's presence alongside a new partnership in the gospel'. On the weekends before and after the conference, the team visited villages around Malek, preaching and sharing in the local churches, where they were given a 'tremendous' welcome, and were able to hear the people's stories of illness, death and trauma caused by the civil wars and tribal conflicts, and to see for themselves the 'staggering' poverty in the villages.

As the conference ended, one delegate commented, "I thank God that you came from England to visit our place and train us about the Word of God" and another, "I thank God for calling me to serve in His kingdom" and another, "I thank God for this wonderful conference, I have really received the Lord as my personal Saviour." They also asked for

continued prayer for South Sudan, for Jonglei Internal Province, for protection from sickness and spiritual attack, wisdom to serve in God's kingdom and to overcome the temptations of the world.

Mike concluded that, "perhaps the greatest gift that we could give to these wonderful Christians was our presence. Very few western Christians visit areas like this, and it was wonderful to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ and to let them know that they are not forgotten."

SOMA's thanks go to the inviting Bishops, with thanksgiving for Bishop Peter Joh, Bishop of Malek, who not only hosted but also provided excellent translation for the whole conference, and also to the intercessors whose faithful prayer and prophetic words brought so much to this conference.

SOMA Team: Mr Mike Quinlan (UK) Team Leader, Rev John Bavington (UK), Mrs Jo Dixon (UK), Dr Tony Dixon (UK). Bishop Ezekiel Diing, Bishop Moses Anur and Bishop Peter Joh. Intercession Co-ordinator Mrs Kate Brankin.



'There was a tangible sense of God's presence', Jo in action



'Sharing' became our watchword

SOMA, Prayer and Covid-19



'We must lead on our knees' Bishop Pontien, clergy and team outside Rutana Cathedral



This was one team member's joyful reflection on SOMA's latest mission to Burundi in February this year. Bishop Pontien had invited SOMA back to his Diocese of Rutana after last year's successful conference for clergy and their spouses (see SHARING 2019 #2). Created in 2017, the Diocese now has 17 parishes, 33,000 Christians and is experiencing very fast growth. However Bishop Pontien is concerned that the faith of many remains fragile; many are illiterate so cannot read God's word for themselves and so are easily misled by false teaching. There is also economic inequality among women and many unemployed young people.

The church is working hard to address these issues but, says Bishop Pontien, 'sometimes Christians get tired, not because they are not willing to serve and support their Diocese, but because their resources are limited.' A SOMA team with members from the UK, Kenya and Burundi was put together in order to visit our brothers and sisters in Christ in Rutana, to stand alongside them, encourage and equip them in their ministries but most of all to seek together to be

'I thank God for this wonderful conference', delegate

renewed and refreshed in the power of the Holy Spirit. A five-day conference for 50 delegates was prepared to explore leadership, faith in action, marriage and Holy Spirit renewal. In addition the team expected to also preach in the Cathedral and Parish churches.

Relying on the Holy Spirit

At the beginning of the conference the team noticed that many pastors seemed very tired, and so asked the SOMA intercessors to pray, both for themselves and the pastors, that they would all be able to keep relying on the Holy Spirit and not on their own strength. The intercessors reminded the team of Psalm 23, "the Lord is our Shepherd", and encouraged them to rely on Him. The next day the team re-enacted the account of Moses interceding for Israel during the battle with the Amalekites, having his arms held up as he prayed, and sought to demonstrate servant leadership by helping to serve the food at lunchtime. Bishop Pontien summed up the first day: "we must lead on our knees, so



'The people of Rutana are a joyful lot'



Stephen Dinsmore

Stephen Dinsmore the National Director of SOMA UK, writes:

As a result of Covid-19 we are postponing all our mission visits until it is safe enough for delegates to be willing to gather and for teams to travel.

This has underlined the important part of SOMA's Call to continuing relationship, active prayer, and focused intercession for those we have visited in the past, had expected to minister with now, and had planned to visit in the future.

During this time we are urging everyone involved with SOMA to join, with us, in fervent prayer and concerted intercession for our friends abroad. They are telling us that they are facing the challenges of floods, locust swarms, inter-tribal conflict, international sanctions, and food shortages, as well as Covid-19.

To inform your prayer and intercession do sign up to receive our special Covid-19 prayer briefing emails. They give you the specific prayer requests from our friends. In the words of Bishop Moses Anur of Athooh Diocese, South Sudan, "Thank you for your prayer. Let's keep asking the Good Lord for rescue in this critical condition, where the whole world is under threat."

Please email info@somauk.org to request these special briefings.

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Team members Mark, Edward, Christella, Jean-Claude, Margaret and Melanie

we know from God what we need. As leaders, we need to weep, then our people will come to Jesus." Another delegate reflected, "I appreciated all the teaching, summed up by the love the team has for us – they have come far to share – the most important thing is to encourage this love to continue" and another that, "we are learning how to build a family."

Focus on marriage

Wednesday and Thursday of the conference were set aside for a focus on marriage, with the Alpha marriage resource adapted, translated, and made available for further use in the Diocese. Initially reluctant delegates were encouraged by Jean Claude and Christella's candid presentation style, and examples from their own marriage, and at the end there were many messages of thanks to them.

'I laid down my burdens and lifted my life to God'

The final day was set aside for prayer ministry, with delegates praying for each other in pairs and being prayed with by the team. One delegate reported, "Thank God. I felt suicidal in the night, many problems. I saw someone standing by my side, praying for me. I laid down my burdens and lifted my life to God. When I awoke I couldn't see the person. I decided to serve God."

*I saw someone standing by my side, praying for me.
I laid down my burdens and lifted my life to God.*

Bishop Pontien kept receiving messages from delegates saying they were blessed and team member Mark was pleased to see the once-tired pastors now 'joyful with a spring in their step.'



Praying together

Kenyan team member Edward reflected at the end of the conference that, "we experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in touching not only the lives of the delegates but also of the team members. So, He worked and indeed continues to work in both the delegates and the team member's lives, which is a blessing... the people of Rutana are a joyful lot, who live in an admirable Christian fellowship. Their hearts are always open and ready to receive the Word, just like the fertile ground. They have an encouraging eagerness for the things of God and seem to yearn for more. During worship they exude joy and excitement in God's presence." Bishop Pontien was asked by a Christian from another local church what the SOMA team had come to build, to which he replied, "they haven't given us any money or built anything but they brought Jesus." Team member Melanie concluded, "I was touched by the warm welcome we received, the generosity of the people we met, their faithfulness and love for God."

Please do continue to pray for this young and growing Diocese, Bishop Pontien and all the delegates, for continued fruit from this mission and for protection from Covid-19.

SOMA team: Team leader Revd Margaret Simmons (UK), Mr Mark Cosstick (UK), Mrs Melanie Dowden (UK), Mr Edward Kireti (Kenya), Revd Christella & Revd Jean Claude Ngijimbere (Burundi). Bishop Pontien. Intercession Co-Ordinator Helen Foster.

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