



# Being Propelled



*Bishop Subi, Katanga, DR Congo*

**What may the Spirit be saying to the Church through SOMA's experiences abroad?**

**By Stephen Dinsmore, National Director of SOMA UK.**



From its birth in 1979, SOMA's calling swiftly grew into a ministry of relationship, expressed by both intercession and sending and receiving short-term multicultural, cross-cultural teams across the Anglican Communion. SOMA facilitates encounter with the Holy Spirit to empower and equip leaders for their own mission and ministry. SOMA's priority is to keep in step with the Spirit.

In the West, as in many countries with the pandemic, the future is as yet unclear, a timely reminder of the 'now and not yet' and the liminality of the Kingdom, both disturbing and at the same time full of exciting potential. So, what may the Spirit be saying to the Church through SOMA's experiences abroad?

*Lindy and Sarah, Peshawar (below)  
 Peshawar Delegates (above)*



"Why have you come here? Nobody ever comes here" greeted us in Bentiu, South Sudan. Is it that the little, local and ordinary churches here in the UK have corresponding feelings, of being forgotten, out of the way, unimportant? Maybe they would echo the sentiment of a Congolese Bishop to SOMA: 'Just you coming, it was very special, I from the heart felt blessed.' It seems one simply cannot replace face to face relationship, whether in the Democratic Republic of Congo or a parish in the West.

Called to 'the places less visited', we at SOMA can find ourselves among those with few material resources and functioning institutions, where there is little to fall back on but a reliance on the Spirit. As one Bishop in Southern Africa said "No, we've no strategy document, we're too busy trying to keep up with the Holy Spirit." In our UK context of plenty, we are challenged by those overseas. With their apparent lack comes a deep commitment to prayer and intercession. They said: "They built a clinic, there's no money to run it." I asked, 'What do you do for the sick?' Answer: 'We pray.'

I asked, "how many congregations in your parish?" The priest answered.

I replied: "nineteen, wow!"

He responded "no, not nineteen, ninety, but I've heard there's another, I'll go to look."

In so many of the places to which SOMA is called, evangelism and church planting are strong.

Yet the depth of the converted is a concern. When asked "how are your people?" one Primate's reply was, "Well, my people can dance and sing, but they need discipleship." So, how do we best enable discipleship? What might that look like now here in the UK?

*We've no strategy document, we're too busy trying to keep up with the Holy Spirit*

In 2012 I preached in All Saints, in the heart of the old city of Peshawar, on the north west frontier of Pakistan. Just a few weeks later 80 of that same congregation were dead and many wounded – two Taliban suicide bombers had entered the church compound and, as worshippers streamed out after the service, detonated their bombs. In the UK we neither experience persecution like that, nor the pressure to convert nor the discrimination daily faced by Christians across the Subcontinent. Yet most of them stand firm in their Christian identity. As the global north becomes increasingly post-Christian, and popular and Christian cultures further diverge, how firm will our stand be? There's always a cost to ministry, how will it increase and what provision needs be made?

Unsettling as the current crisis is, I praise God that as we seek to discern the way ahead, including the recruitment of a new National Director ahead of my retirement in 2021, SOMA is being propelled into an increased attentiveness to the restless, redeeming, creative, doing-a-new-thing Spirit. After all, 'to whom else may we go?'

# 'Praying without ceasing'

SOMA's ministry has always been both sending teams abroad and intercession. During the Covid-19 pandemic we haven't been able to send any teams. However our ministry of intercession has carried on and deepened; travel restrictions do not prevent prayers being effective! We have been sending out regular emails to our friends in East Africa, India and Pakistan, asking for their prayer requests. These have then been collated and sent out regularly to our dedicated intercessors and supporters. Thank you so much for your fervent prayers, which are effective and a great source of encouragement and support during these times of crisis.

Here are some updates on how 'those to whom we go' have been getting on, country by country, based on the prayer requests we have been receiving from Bishops and church leaders.

## Uganda

The Government imposed a severe lockdown early on, closing schools, churches and shops. This did stem the spread of the virus but in doing so caused many to go hungry as they couldn't obtain food or work.

The Church used local radio and social media to spread messages of hope to their people, and prayed fervently. Then there was enormous devastation in Karamoja caused by massive swarms of locusts which destroyed pastures and crops. The Bishops feared that the locust swarms would spread westwards towards the huge refugee settlements and West Nile and asked for prayer as they feared that hunger would weaken the population still further and make it harder for people to fight off the Covid-19 virus. Our next prayer update from Bishop Kosea in Soroti gave the good news that the locust situation was under control there at least and hadn't caused any serious damage. Christians were also learning to share what they have with those who don't have enough, and Bishop Kosea summarised with 'God's love is with us.'

The stress caused by the lockdown and the consequent lack of work and food also caused an increase in gender-based violence, which several Bishops included in their prayer requests to us so please do keep this issue in your prayers.

By July Bishop Reuben from Rwenzori Diocese reported that God had graciously sustained them through the lockdown but that there had been floods causing displacement of people and many church workers were struggling economically.

## Tanzania

Tanzanian Bishops were very concerned for their people as many of them cannot afford soap or sanitizer, and "as we eat what we collect daily, you either die of 'Covid-19' or die of hunger". Children were kept out of school but churches remained open. Bishop Sospeter reported that his Diocese were doing fine with God's help and asked for prayer for completion of their health centre. However as the lockdown went on many of the Church's plans had to be put on hold as their resources became very limited. By July, Bishop Elias of Tabora Diocese reported that the infection rates were reducing and that they were doing well despite challenges.

## South Sudan

South Sudan was very quickly severely affected by the pandemic. There was a

limited lockdown, with many shops and businesses closed. This resulted in an increase in women and children begging on the streets and many families found it hard just to put food on the table.

In Eastern Equatoria their main source of food was from over the Ugandan border, so when Uganda closed her border early on in the pandemic Archbishop Bernard reported that the "cost of food items have risen to the extent that only God can save us should the situation continue for another month". After this Eastern Equatoria also suffered a locust invasion, making the situation even more difficult. Their Bishop became ill and lockdown prevented the church from gathering.

The Diocese of Maridi was still able to celebrate Easter in a limited way, and quickly organised its Mothers Union to make face masks for clinics, provide soap to the elderly and also to communicate news about the virus to communities with no access to local radio. They asked for prayer for their pastors, many of whom were left without any income after churches closed as they depended on the weekly Sunday collection. Prayers were also requested for the Provincial Taskforce



Uganda, Karamoja



SOMA Delegates, South Sudan



SOMA Delegate, Sudan

for Coronavirus who work tirelessly to give spiritual and physical help to those in need.

Athooch Diocese suffered from inter-tribal conflict as well as the virus. Bishop Moses Anur wrote, "God only knows how we will make it. We really need prayers from you and SOMA."

### DR Congo

The security situation in DR Congo was deteriorating before the pandemic and has now worsened. In his first prayer request, Bishop Cyrille (Beni Diocese) wrote: "We really need your prayer here. People are being killed every day."

After this there were severe floods in Katanga, causing 'immense losses', as well as inter-community conflict. Many people were displaced which increased the risk of the virus spreading and other infectious diseases. There was inter-tribal conflict leading to people being displaced from Nyunzu, as well as in Manono. Despite this the church continued to pray and pastors continued to use local radio stations to broadcast messages about resolution and reconciliation of ethnic conflicts. Bishop Sabiti (Kamango Diocese) was also very unwell in Uganda and separated from his people.

By June, Bishop William (Diocese of Boga) had been forced to go into hiding and reported that Covid-19 had not stopped the insurgency, killings, looting, abducting and many other crimes, and that more than 600 people in his area had been killed by militia and armed groups. He said, "we sleep with one eye closed and the other open" but that "people are thirsty and hungry for the word of God".

By July, we heard from a long term SOMA friend and team member (now exiled in Kenya) that his people in DR Congo were in a 'critical situation'.

The Government itself had 'turned to the destruction of the people'. He prayed, "So, may the Lord God of all the earth make a way where there seems to be no way and create a future and security and identity and a place for all of us and keep us walking in the way of heaven". However Bishop Sabiti had recovered and returned to the Diocese, much to the joy and encouragement of his people.

### Burundi

Early on in the pandemic, life went on as normal but many people were very afraid and Bishop Pontien reported that lots of effort was put into prevention, with a national 'no contamination' slogan. Many Christians fasted and prayed for released from the pandemic. The next prayer request reported that people were starting to suffer food insecurity and that there were fears that social distancing measures wouldn't be sufficient, and there were concerns about lack of unity. By June, Bishop Nijimbere from Buhiga Diocese was reporting that Covid-19 was making the situation much worse, as Burundians were already suffering from sanctions and the consequences of the civil war. Thankfully the General Election happened without unrest or conflict. By July Bishop Pontien from Rutana reported that "we are fine", the country was very peaceful and that he was moving his whole Diocesan team

to a new area to start implementing a 5 year plan to evangelise that area. Meanwhile in Muyinga, Bishop Paisible reported that many poor people were dying and that the situation would deteriorate fast if they had to go into full lockdown. The Government was supporting people in fighting the virus so that they could avoid a full lockdown.

### Sudan

Sudan was excluded from international aid, as it was under crippling US sanctions, so suffered more than most countries right at the start of the pandemic. Sudan's death toll was higher than any of its immediate neighbours, and the Prime Minister warned that without financial help all the recent social and political progress could be lost. Inflation rose exponentially, and many Christians relied on day wages so were more vulnerable than most. However by July the new Government had passed laws ending discrimination against minorities, including Christians, so there is new hope for the Church in Sudan. At the time of writing the transitional government has signed a declaration, separating religion from state, which ends 30 years of Sudan as an Islamic state. The Prime Minister declared that Sudan should be a democratic country in which the rights of all citizens are enshrined.

*DR Congo, Kamango delegates*

## SOMA 2021 UK Residential Conference

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## *“We are those swimming in the river calling for help”*



*“You coming here gave me hope”*

*“We will not keep this knowledge to ourselves”*

This was the heartfelt plea of one delegate during SOMA's latest mission to Juba. To find out why, read on. Firstly though, consider this. Can a group of 14 young people gathered together in a room for a few days change a nation? Of course not. Unless they are empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit for mission just as the disciples were at Pentecost. This was the vision which inspired this February's SOMA mission to Juba. South Sudan has suffered decades of war, the death of millions and the untold suffering of many more. There are so many people who are “swimming in the river calling for help”.

Although the Anglican church covers all the States and there are 6 million Christians, there is deep spiritual need. The young people in various parts of the country have been living and working in isolation from each other as a result of the conflict. They do not know each other and the series of internal conflicts have further divided them along tribal lines, making it difficult for them to unite as Christians of the same denomination and citizens of one nation. For this reason 14 Internal Province Youth

Coordinators were gathered together for a week long SOMA mission. The purpose was two-fold. Firstly, for Holy Spirit renewal, so they could be equipped and empowered for the mission to which God had called them, which was to work for peace and reconciliation and provide leadership in their communities. Secondly, so that they could work together to develop a National Provincial Youth Strategy. They would then go back to their Internal Provinces and share this with all the Diocesan Youth Coordinators who, in turn, would then share this with their Parishes. In this way the message of reconciliation and unity in Christ could be shared among all the young people in the Anglican church across the Nation.

### **Personal devotion and prayer**

During the six-day mission the delegates and team spent the mornings in personal devotion and prayer, learning together of the work of the Holy Spirit and exploring the theme of leadership. The afternoons were set aside for working on the Strategic Youth Plan, facilitated by Bishops Enock and Wilson. Each day finished with worship and prayer ministry.

Over the course of six days the delegates became more open with each other, more engaged with the process, and were willing to receive from the Holy Spirit. New friendships were formed among them. Much intense work was done on the Provincial Youth Strategy. On the penultimate day an Intercessor sensed that Isaiah 43: 18-22 was relevant – the former things (war and tribal conflict) were to be forgotten, God was doing a new thing, making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. This was shared by the team with the delegates for their encouragement. One delegate said, “we are those swimming in the river calling for help”, another “the eyes of our heart have been enlightened” another that, “we are changed people by the power of God” and another, “you coming here gave me hope” and still another, “We will not keep this knowledge to ourselves but take it out to our youth.”

The conference end coincided with the official launch by the Archbishop of a new national prayer book for the Episcopal Church of South Sudan which is the first to be published with the same liturgy translated into

multiple languages, so that for the first time Christians from different tribes can worship together each in their own language in a single congregation.

This vision for young people to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to work for peace and reconciliation will be deeply opposed in this nation riven by war, and will require the fervent consistent prayer of Christians around the world in order to be realised and established. Since the mission the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented much of the planned work in completing and implementing the Provincial Youth Strategy from going ahead.

Please do set aside time to pray for these delegates, and the Bishops and leaders of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, as they work to bring the message of the gospel of peace to their young nation in the face of so many challenges and so much opposition.

**Team: Revd Stephen Dinsmore (Team Leader) (UK), Mrs Kate Brankin (UK/South Sudan), Mr Evans Gogonya (South Sudan), Bishop Wilson Kamani (South Sudan), Bishop Enock Tombe (South Sudan), Archbishop Justin Badi Arama. Host and Coordinator Mr Bausumo Abiuda. Intercession Coordinator Kate Brankin.**

*“The eyes of our hearts have been enlightened”*



### **Thank you**

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