



The Soma Team, Kibondo, Tanzania

Storms Arise

***“Storms arise where the LORD walks.
The clouds are the dust raised by His feet”***

Nahum 1:3

“I was once again inspired, encouraged and challenged for my own discipleship and leadership from the example of African sisters and brothers.”

SOMA team members leap way outside their personal comfort zones when on mission. They trust God for financial and spiritual provision before they go, travel thousands of miles, spend sometimes weeks away from their families living with people they may never have met before, encounter the unexpected constantly, deal with illness, punctured tyres, changes of schedule, heat and mosquitoes. So why do they go, and what impact does SOMA have on their lives when they return? Here is what recent team members from missions to South Sudan have to say in their own words.

“...we gained so much from the faith, love and hope of all we encountered. In material terms the people of South Sudan do have little and the challenges ahead are enormous, but we felt deeply inspired by the rich spirituality and their strengths relationally and in community. As we struggle in the UK with the complexity of life, a post-Christian context, divisions over Europe etc and social isolation, their faith in God, mutual care and their aspirations testify to and challenge us.”

“The mission visit to Wau was an amazing experience as we shared so much with our brothers and sisters... We learnt a huge amount from the wonderful Christians amongst whom we ministered – their faith, love and hope, their thanksgiving, joy and laughter, commitment, sacrifice and community testified powerfully to us. This last aspect seems very relevant and speaks to our own context where there is an epidemic of isolation and loneliness; we may be wealthier in material terms, but relationally and spiritually we are poor and have a great deal to learn.”
Chris.

“Watching shooting stars, marvelling at hundreds of red kite birds flying overhead in the cool of the night, smelling of insect repellent, wondering whether my rusty brown toes will ever be clean again, holding a very welcome plastic mug of hot tea and listening to the amazing life story of the woman sitting beside me. A snapshot of a single moment during a week in Wau in South Sudan.”

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Main picture: Storms arise, Maasailand

What about missions?

Positively, the pandemic has heavily underlined the apical importance of intercession and prayer in SOMA's call and ministry, and of our long-term relationships with those abroad. It has been a delight and an encouragement to hear from those friends of their appreciation of our commitment to them in prayer and intercession.

Yet, sadly, it seems we will be unlikely to send mission teams for a while. SOMA teams will travel again when it's safe enough for those who receive us to willingly gather with team members who have travelled from abroad, there is an acceptably low level of risk of carrying Covid-19 infection to them, and governments' quarantine requirements allow. As ever, the safety of those to whom we go is of paramount importance to us.

Governments' quarantine requirements are a significant factor. What would have been 11 days away for UK team members for a mission to, for example, South Sudan would currently take 35 days: an additional 14-day quarantine on arrival and 10 days isolation on return. For team members, all of whom are volunteers, that is a lot to ask but I am heartened that numbers are still willing to travel with teams to go to the places less visited. Nonetheless, it was a disappointment to have to cancel 10 of the 13 missions we'd planned for last year.

Do please continue praying with us, for as you can see in “Prayer is our vital breath” our prayer is not in vain and is very much appreciated. One Bishop describes it as, “the love that you never cease to show for our Diocese”. Pray for us also, that we may discern the right time for the resumption of missions, to whom we should go, and how best to facilitate them.

The peace of the Lord be with you,

Stephen Dinsmore,
National Director.



“Prayer is our vital breath”

SOMA's ministry of prayer and intercession is now more vital than ever. Prayer is a 'powerful weapon' in its own right, and the foundation of SOMA's ministry. It knows no national borders and is not hindered by travel restrictions or viruses. Sincere thanks go to our dedicated SOMA intercessors and all those praying with us, who have risen to the challenge during this pandemic. Read on to find out how your intercession and prayer has opened the way for God's blessing in many situations. Please continue to pray without ceasing: use this powerful weapon to further God's kingdom of peace, love, justice and joy in the 'places less visited' to which SOMA is called. To receive regular 'Prayer for SOMA friends abroad' email updates, please simply email info@somauk.org.

“We have faith and hope, that is what is keeping us going on, with our eyes focused on the Lord” DR Congo

DR Congo continues to suffer with inter-tribal conflict, massive displacement of people, severe poverty, and poor governance. The Church here faces enormous challenges and the lives of Church leaders are often at risk, especially if they speak out about what is going on.

Samson Masereka of Kamango Diocese has written thanking us for our prayer and support, and asks for prayer that internally displaced people currently living in camps at Nobile would be able to return to their homes to work their lands. Praise God that Bishop Sabiti is now well, and that Samson has been ordained. Please pray for the Diocese's plans for church planting this year.

In Boga Diocese, Bishop William reported last June that he had been forced into hiding because of the security situation. We later received better news – although violence was continuing and about 10,000 had been killed or forced to flee, the church was providing food and accommodation to 500 displaced families, 50 church leaders had been ordained, and a new hospital had been built in Bunia by MSF. He wrote “We have faith and hope, that is what keeps us going on, with our eyes focused on the Lord”. During a recent evangelism mission led by the Bishop, hundreds came to faith including two much feared local warlords. He writes, “I could notice their hunger to release the burdens of their heart, the guilt of all the harm they have caused to their communities and the region in general. It is sweet to experience the answers to our prayers.” The main armed group has now signed a peace agreement with the Government and there are signs of a serious commitment to peace. However other dangerous armed militia groups remain a threat to the lives of the people.

From Lubumbashi Diocese, Bishop Bertin asks us to pray for an end to Covid-19 so that SOMA can again send mission teams. He writes, “we received your message with great affection for the love that you never cease to show for our Diocese.”

Please continue to pray fervently for peace and stability in DR Congo, especially in the East, and for protection for Church leaders.



Delegates in Kamango



Prayer in Kamango

“Mending the broken hearted” Uganda

Uganda endured a severe initial Covid-19 lockdown last year which was effective in limiting the number of cases, but caused huge economic and social suffering. The country also suffered flooding and locust swarms. Recently violence and conflict marred the national elections. The Church is, however, actively working to alleviate suffering.

After devastating landslides and flooding in East Ruwenzori, Bishop Turyasingura is planning to run conferences for affected people to “mend the broken hearted and comfort the flock God has entrusted to our care”.

Uganda has been less affected by Covid-19 than some, but cases are now beginning to rise. Please pray also for political stability after the general election in January.



Team member and Delegate, East Ruwenzori

“We are all well in Burundi”

Bishop Pontien in Rutana Diocese reports that people in Burundi are no longer in fear of Covid-19, and that even people who catch it seem to recover quickly. Life seems to be carrying on as normal and the Diocese is looking forward to SOMA being able to send another team. Praise God for his blessing, and please continue to pray for their five-year plan to evangelise new parts of Rutana Diocese.



Mothers' Union, Rutana

“All believers fasted for three days” Tanzania

Bishop Sospeter, Kibondo Diocese, reports that the President of Tanzania pleaded with all believers to fast and pray for three days for Tanzania to be free of Covid-19. Tanzania has avoided a national lockdown and the Diocese is continuing with plans for its Provincial 50th Anniversary celebration and Synod this year, followed by a one-week conference for all clergy in Dodoma. Kibondo also plans to start a health centre project this year.

Bishop Elias Chakupewa, Tabora Diocese, requests prayer to be able to take his hardworking clergy away for a four-day retreat. Pray also for resources for churches to be both planted and strengthened in villages in this very large rural Diocese.



SOMA friend, Kibondo



Tabora, Tanzania



Archbishop Moses Deng Bol, South Sudan

“By God’s grace, the infections are very low” South Sudan

The South Sudan Council of Churches has described the enormous challenges facing the Church in South Sudan as: Covid-19, conflict, severe food insecurity, locusts and floods. After enduring decades of war, conflict and loss of life, the Church is grateful that there is a peace process and that the peace agreement is largely holding. Peaceful disarmament is going forward albeit slowly. The Church is very active in working for peace and reconciliation among different clan, tribal and military groups. In December, a group of 10 Church leaders met with community leaders in Tonj East for a peace consultation, aimed at stopping the inter communal violence there. Primate Justin Badi Arama asks us to: “pray for the Church to continue boldly preaching the message of forgiveness and reconciliation among the warring communities to minimise inter-communal violence.” Please pray particularly for plans for evangelism in the border regions between Sudan and South Sudan, and for humanitarian assistance for those affected by flooding in Jonglei state. 350,000 people are displaced, and with the main roads impassable, it is difficult to get essential supplies to them. Pray also for training of pastors and ordinands.

From Maridi Diocese, Bishop Moses Zungo writes to his friends in the UK, “Despite the hardship we all faced this year, we are honoured by you to celebrate victories and accomplishments for the year 2020. The success of the Diocese of Maridi in the year is based on the effective and vibrant relationships with you.” Please pray for training of local ordinands, the Mothers’ Union conference and the General Synod, all taking place in early 2021. Pray also for successful renovation work on Maridi Cathedral and associated buildings. Praise God that the Chaima Christian Institute has now reopened so education for Christian and business leadership continues.

From Northern Bahr el Ghazal Internal Province, Archbishop Moses Deng Bol writes, “We thank God for the successful year despite the Covid-19 pandemic.” He has plans for seven conferences in 2021 for various groups of leaders, aiming to “plant new churches, deepen the understanding of the word of God among the believers and to empower all the different groups with knowledge and skills for peace building, community development and business... we want the Church in South Sudan to be empowered in order to transform the nation.” His prayer is that SOMA would be able to facilitate at least one of these conferences every year.



Port Sudan

‘Historic democratic transition’ Sudan

Praise God that following Sudan’s ‘historic democratic transition’ it has finally been removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism and that, as a result, international sanctions are being lifted and much needed international financial aid is now being received. Pray that aid reaches those who need it quickly. The economy remains in a very weak state, with 10 million Sudanese needing immediate humanitarian aid. Give thanks that Islamic courts have been abolished by the new Government. Sudan is now hosting more than 60,000 Ethiopian refugees, has reported 29,000 Covid-19 cases and has also suffered severe flooding. Christians are a tiny minority and tend to be last in the queue for Government assistance. Port Sudan Diocese has asked us to pray for peace, for the construction of the Bishop’s house, for protection from Covid-19, and for revival within the Diocese and the country as a whole.

Storms Arise

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I return with images and words imprinted in my mind, some beautiful, some pretty awful. At times there were no words to express what I felt, just tears for this new nation. But where Christ is, there is hope. We sang, we danced, we prayed, we studied God's word and asked for His Spirit to fill the Church and fill the land. We asked God to bless, heal and protect the brave men and women leaders of his Church in South Sudan, as they speak truth and justice into a fragile peace. It was an honour to walk alongside them for a brief time." Anne.

"I always find that Africa brings me back to basics in my spiritual walk, and this was no less the case on this mission. I was reminded again of the importance of prayer and my personal devotional life; of the reality of the spiritual battle and of the value of close fellowship with team colleagues." Kevin.

"The experience was 'fantastic, exhausting and eye-opening' and ... 'heart-opening'. It has been humbling to see a 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." Jo.

SOMA team members donate to SOMA an amount equivalent to their airfare and cost of en-route accommodation, and few of them have significant financial resources themselves, so raising the money can be a real test of faith. One team member was struggling to find the finances needed before the mission. She was out of work and had limited savings. Eventually one Sunday she prayed, and decided that the following day she would draw out the last of her savings to fund her airfare donation, but she didn't tell anyone about this. The next morning she awoke to find an envelope at her front door. Inside was the exact amount needed for the donation, with a short note simply saying "God told me to do this". In fact, God is so faithful that SOMA has never had to postpone or cancel a mission for lack of financial resources, including for overseas team members where SOMA often assists with sponsorship.

SOMA's experience over 40 years is that the Lord always honours the faith of those who decide to step out in obedience to His call to go to the 'places less visited', with spiritual and financial provision. If you would like to serve on a SOMA mission be encouraged. God will provide all that you need. SOMA missions also carry a warning: you won't be the same when you return. Your pre-SOMA mission comfort zone may not feel quite as safe and normal.

As the Lord walks, keep watch for the clouds that are 'the dust raised by His feet'.



Prayer, Maridi

SOMA 2021 UK Residential Conference

"I enjoyed the atmosphere of welcome, friendship, zeal and the presence of God"

Tuesday 18th – Thursday 21st May 2021, lunch to lunch inclusive, High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts

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The conference will be hosted by our National Director, Stephen Dinsmore, who very much looks forward to welcoming you. We will also welcome Richard Moy, who will succeed Stephen as National Director in September.

"I love the encouragement of being with such a humble group of solid Christians with hearts for mission."

"It instructs and encourages one praying."

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