

Brief Report on the SOMA Team visit to Wonduruba, October 2013.

Introduction

Wonduruba Diocese is located 85 miles West of Juba, but the journey there is currently longer as access is via Lainya. Wonduruba is currently under Bishop Enoch Tombe of Rejaf, but expects to become a Diocese in 2014. The suffragan Bishop responsible is Bishop Matthew Taban Peter. During the war, the LRA were active there before being expelled by the SPLA. Gold was discovered and the SPLA mined and exported it to Uganda to raise money for weapons. The gold field is now being developed by the Chinese.

Wonduruba has had a reputation for being a troubled area. In colonial times, the British split the administration of the local Pojulu tribe between Juba and Yei. After the CPA there was a strong desire among the tribe to be reunited under a single administration, but the size of the area did not allow for a County and sharp disagreement arose about whether they should be under Juba, or Lainya, which erupted in violence. An attempt to hold a SOMA conference there in 2011 had to be abandoned because of the insecurity. The political issue has now been resolved, and the area is now peaceful, but there is an aftermath of bitterness. The new Bishop, Matthew Taban sees reconciliation as his primary objective, and he saw the SOMA Conference as an opportunity to bring everyone together and forward the process of reconciliation. The workshops were designed with this in mind.

Travel was difficult. We took over six hours to get from Juba to Wonduruba, having lost time when the lorry carrying the food and baggage became bogged down and had to be rescued. The journey back was easier, though we did have to register on the Monday with immigration, somewhat ironically as we were flying that afternoon! Gogonya dealt with this for us, but had to take \$60 per person plus the usual passport photo.

The Team

In Wonduruba we were a team of seven -

Five from UK: Rev Ron and Creddy Hart, Mrs Janet Darg-Forsyth, Rev Ann Fielden and Rev Malcolm Pritchard. (The invitation from Bishop Peter being actively supported by Bishop Enoch Tombe),

And two from South Sudan: Evans Gogonya Israel and Charles Alfred William Lasu (who everyone knows as Lobalang, meaning "Salt").

In UK there was a large team of people interceding for us, and we attempted to stay in touch with them by sending and receiving regular texts and e-mails.

The Conference

The Bishop had invited 277 Youth from all five archdeaconries, as well as some clergy, women and laity representative to make a total number of 350 participants. In the event, youth from two of the archdeaconries were prevented from coming by local chiefs, but other took their place and a total of 370 people attended (321 at the beginning). The ages of the youth ranged from 12 up, with the majority in their late teens, and the oldest of the adults was 90 as far as we could tell. Some were illiterate, a few had had educational opportunities, others could write. While some spoke English, the common language was Bari, and the Bishop kindly provided two interpreters. The cost of food and transport for the delegates was met by a grant from SOMA, with the help of a substantial grant from the Diocese of Salisbury. (The Team met their own costs as far as Juba).

The Bishop was present for the whole of the conference, often joining in from the front, and also joined the team to make our own group for the Ephesians Bible Studies. This meant that the conference had a strong feel of a ministry being shared with the local church, and we were glad to encourage this by being sensitive to the opportunity. The local Paramount Chief (a Christian),

attended some of the conference and made a valued contribution, as did the local Payam Director, so there was also the feel of the whole community being involved. The local army chief called in to greet us and assure us that we were under their protection.

The major theme running through the conference was reconciliation. The teaching programme included teaching on the life and death of Jesus, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, healing, outreach, prayer and bible reading. There were workshops on reconciliation, drama, marriage and the issues of early marriage. The original programme was adapted to cater for the younger element present, and in general the youth were looking forwards rather than back. We had a daily Bible study on Ephesians in small groups with a plenary discussion. We also had two joyous sessions of games, and to the delight of all ages we played 'balloon volleyball' and balloon relay races – quite a feat given the large numbers involved.

The final session each evening included times of ministry, sometimes with symbolic acts. We wrote our sins on small pieces of paper, placed them in a bowl at the foot of a wooden cross as an act of confession, and then processed outside with the cross for absolution followed by burning the papers in the bowl - a ceremony which was very moving. On another evening we prayed for healing - many people came forward for the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. On another evening we prayed for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. On the last night we processed outside behind the cross, and formed a large circle around the cross where we had previously 'burnt our sins,' before linking hands. The linked hands were raised to form the shape of a crown, and we proclaimed together "Jesus is Lord of our church and Lord of Wonduruba" and the Bishop said the final prayer.

On the final Saturday we had a question and answer time, opportunity for feedback and testimony, and then the presentation of certificates. And of course there was much singing and joyful dancing, before the delegates finally left for their various archdeaconries. Sunday was our last day - Ron preached in the pro-Cathedral, and the rest of the team was divided between four local churches and so had the opportunity to see more of the area.

Feedback

We were the first visitors for very many years, and our presence generated excitement and curiosity. Bishop Matthew and the delegates all spoke with warmth and enthusiasm for the conference - it had come at just the right time for them, and they said it had greatly helped the reconciliation process. Many delegates said they would leave with a renewed determination to forgive and to love.

Some people received healing, including one elderly man who came with a walking stick, and left having been dancing. A young girl we prayed for after she became ill with fear having seen a bad omen on the ground which foretold her imminent death, left feeling well and smiling. Many others spoke of being healed or of having received the Holy Spirit afresh. One woman who had harboured unforgiveness towards her husband and had found it hard to receive ministry felt she had been set free - "my heart is now open". One woman accepted Christ as saviour for the first time. Some more comments are shown in Appendix A.

What next?

- If possible, the Bishop would like a follow-up conference in November 2014 and will make renewed efforts to invite everyone. Meanwhile the work of reconciliation will continue.
- The delegates have committed themselves to sharing the teaching with others when they get to their home parishes, and also to forgiving those they had been distrusting.
- The Bishop would like a link in the Salisbury Diocese.

Appendix A: Feedback from some of the delegates (mostly verbatim)

1. In a letter from Rev Ekelia Poni Zakara, MU Leader

“We will like to express our self for these enjoyfull days of SOMA work shop, which has teach us many things which has transforms our lives in Wonduruba as a whole

- taught us Bible Studies programme*
- they also taught us how to forgive one another*
- early marriages, which is very commonly happening in our community in Wonduruba*
- they also taught us how to pray which is communication with God and prayer is also a weapon of cheating of demons*
- united in the body of Christ which is the best life in Christianity life*
- peace and reconciliation, which bis newly introduce this SOMA team in Wonduruba Area Diocese, and we thank God for his plan for us , as people of Wonduruba. NB We thank God for your coming here to the people of Wonduruba which has transformed our lives and this is the right time for our communities to come together. Then as you go you can remember us and don't forget us in the spirit of God.*

We wish to see you again.

Regards: Rev Elkelia Poni Zakara. Mothers Union Leader.”

2. In a letter from Lomeling Elias, Youth Leader

“We thank God for the victory He has given us though his servant Rt.Rev. Matthew Taban Peter our farther in Christ ...and the Lord has sent us his servants from the United Kingdom, particularly England, who have come to empower us and has built our faith integrity. The holiness of the Lord is seen on our faces since our SOMA (Sharing of Ministry Abroad) has taught us many topics that have changed our lives, we believe 99% of the total attendance has changed many of us into Christ....We believe the Spirit of the Lord is with us because he has sent his children to teach us about the Good News. In the book of Hebrews 13:14-16, 18 let the brotherly love continue.”

3. Other comments, when asked ‘how will you put what you have learnt into practice?’

“I am going to teach those not here.”

“God help us through prayer of healing. I was ill for a long time, but when I received prayers, I myself received healing power. I am now healed.”

“When we leave here I will put into practice. We are going to forgive our enemy. We can reconcile with them and love one another.”

“Continue to pray, forgive those who do wrong to me, help those who need God's word.”

“Preach the message in a right way. Loving one another, forgiving one another.”

“Speak the good news to others. Pray for the sick.”

“I am going to teach those who were not here. To love one another as we love ourself. To forgive somebody who do wrong to us.”

Appendix B. Programme, amended while we were there

Monday 21 Oct 13

Introductions & welcomes and -1000 with Praise & Worship

1000-1130	Teaching Session 1: 'What did Jesus do and teach?' (RfL A1-2) - Ron
1130	Tea break
1200-1330	Teaching Session 2: 'Why are we called 'Christians'?' (RfL A3-4) - Malcolm
1330-1500	Lunch and rest
1500-1545	Group Bible study* (Eph 1:3-14) - Janet & Lobalang & team (brief intro; set questions for small group discussion)
1545-1630	Teaching session 3: 'What did Jesus die for?' (RfL A4) - Ann
1630	Tea break
1700	Celebration & talk: 'What does it mean to become a Christian?' (RfL A5) - Gogonya, then Prayer Ministry
1830	Bathing & Supper.

Tuesday 22 (same daily timetable for the rest of the week)

0845-0915	Praise & Worship
0915-1000	Group Bible Study 2: 'United in Christ' (Eph 2:1-22) - Lobalang
1000-1130	Teaching Session 4: 'The Holy Spirit' (RfL B1) - Malcolm
1200-1330	Teaching Session 5: 'The Holy Spirit' (RfL B2 & B3) - Ann
1330-1500	Lunch and rest
15.00	Games - Ron, Creddy & team
1700	Celebration & talk: 'Take our sin and pain to the cross' - Creddy and Gogonya, then Prayer Ministry

Wednesday 23rd

0845-0915	Praise & Worship
0915-1000	Group Bible Study 3: 'Promoting harmony' (Eph 3:1-4:16) - Malcolm
1000-1130	Teaching Session 6: 'Growing up into Christ' (RfL C2-4) - Janet
1200-1330	Teaching Session 7: 'Reaching for love' (married relationships) - Lobalang
1330-1500	Lunch and rest
1500-1630	Reconciliation Workshop: 'Hearing the issues'
1630	Tea break
1700	Celebration & talk: 'Be filled with the Spirit' (RfL C3) - Ron, then Prayer Ministry

Thursday 24th

0845-0915	Praise & Worship
0915-1000	Group Bible Study 4: 'Break with the ways of the world' (Eph 4:17-5:20) - Gogonya
1000-1130	Teaching Session 8: 'Living in the Victory of Christ' (RfL B4) - Ann
1200-1330	Teaching Session 9: 'Teaching the Truth' (RfL D3) - Malcolm
1500-1630	Drama from Scripture workshop - Janet
1630	Tea break
1700	Celebration & talk: 'Healing' - Ron, then Prayer Ministry

Friday 25th

0845-0915	Praise & Worship
0915-1000	Group Bible Study 5: 'Building Christian homes' (Eph 5:21-6:9) - Lobalang
1000-1130	Teaching Session 10: 'Reaching out for Christ' (RfL D4) - Janet
1200-1330	Workshop: 'Early Marriage' - Lobalang
1500-1630	Games - Ron & team
16.30	Tea break
1700	Celebration & talk: 'Take the Armour of God' (Eph 6:10-24) - Creddy, then process outside for the proclamation of glory

Saturday 26th

0845-0915	Praise & Worship
0915-1000	Teaching Session 12: Question & Answer Session - Ron & team
1000-11.00	Preparation of delegates' reports
1100-1230	Celebration with presentation of Group Reports, Testimony & Certificates

Sun 27th – local churches am, depart for Juba pm