

Sudan Journal
by the Revd Chris Tebbutt

Monday 21st January – Entebbe, Uganda

We have a welcome arrival at the J Reservation Guest House in Entebbe after a 14 hour journey, including five hours on the tarmac at Heathrow. However, we're here, in Africa, and it is pleasantly warm and the room is basic but very nice, with a proper shower.

After a late start, we have a lazy afternoon, only venturing out on to the main road into Kampala where the buses and cars, motor bikes and bicycles run up and down relentlessly, trying to avoid each other as everyone wants to overtake.

Thanks to everyone for their prayers for safe journeys. Early to bed, as it's an early start at 5.30 am (2.30 am UK time).

Tuesday – 22nd January – Kajjansi Airstrip near Kampala, then Yambio

It's early morning. The sun has just risen and the mist over the airstrip gives it a surreal look. I meet a young teacher who's going back to Sudan to spend the rest of the semester there. He will have served one year. He will miss his shower in the UK, he says. I also meet two Asian businessmen who are teak dealers. Teak was planted by the British in the colonial times and has been farmed by the locals in Western Equatoria for many years. Nowadays most of it is shipped out to India or China. The dealers are meant to plant five trees for every one felled – this agreement exists on paper according to the Bishop! Before we take off, Joel, the MAF pilot, prays.

After an uneventful flight where we stop off briefly in Maridi, we land at Yambio airstrip. Both Bishops Samuel (Nzara) and Justin (caretaker bishop of Yambio) are there to greet us. It is great to see Samuel again. We first met in 2005 when he came over to the UK for 6 months and he spent a few days in Devizes. We met up again in 2011 when he was visiting the UK and met the Sadlers in Hinton Martell as Robin was over in Yambio and Nzara with the Sudan Medical Link.

We travel to Yambio and settle into our accommodation at the Guest House, on the ECS campus. This contains the diocesan office, the development office, the guest house, a significant number of teaching facilities and the Cathedral.

Wednesday 23rd January – Yambio

We are awoken by a drum which calls the faithful to worship in the Cathedral next door. We say our prayers and have a basic breakfast of bread and tea and sugar.

Vanessa and I have put together a programme for the day, covering the first three parts of The Lord's Prayer; the Introduction, Our Father in heaven, and Hallowed be thy name.

We are introduced and the bishop leaves. We are about 50 clergy in the Cathedral. Our first session is low key as we begin to build relationships with many clergy who have questions about issues in the diocese. We try to say the Lord's Prayer in Zande and another local language, Moro, which causes some well needed laughter. After a short break, we begin teaching on 'Our Father in heaven' and this session goes well.

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Sudanese people are great singers and after lunch they gather with a song. As the 'Hallowed be thy name' session is about worship, we teach them "I will worship", which is a call-and-response song. This works quite well and we are beginning to build relationships.

We share the news that we had significant funding for the clergy transport project and Bishop Justin discusses with the Yambio staff how best to spend it. By evening, four motorcycles and eight bicycles are purchased. That's efficiency! The clergy are delighted and especially the archdeacons and rural deans who were many miles from Yambio and need the transport urgently for getting to the ECS 'hub' and around the parishes.

Thursday 24th January - Yambio

Today Vanessa and I do the next three sessions of The Lord's Prayer. We begin with 'Thy Kingdom Come', with Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom. After break we do further teaching on 'Give us this day' and we teach them "Seek ye first," getting them to sing in two parts. After lunch we speak on 'Forgive us our sins,' beginning with a very animated drama of The Lost (Prodigal) Son. I wasn't sure we'd get much participation, but in fact we have an amazing reaction and willingness to participate in the drama.

Friday 25th January – Yambio and then Nzara

This is our last session at Yambio. We have had a great time doing the workshops but we've seen little of the Diocese. We finish the two last sessions, 'Deliver us from evil' and 'the Kingdom, the power and the glory' and the Landcruiser arrives to take us to Nzara at 1pm. We drive through the dusty and bustling market on our way to the main highway out of Yambio and the 15 mile drive to Nzara.

We say our goodbyes to the people at Yambio, who have shown us good hospitality given their limited means. Sheila decides to stay on and come to Nzara on Monday as she plans to visit a family in Karika.

The atmosphere is very welcoming in Nzara and the accommodation seems comfortable. We meet two folk, Scott and Fran, from The Falls Church, near Washington DC who are out here to do trauma prayer and counselling.

We get settled into our rooms and hope that we can have a bit of time off tomorrow. On our arrival we meet Dr Alison and her nurse Georgia who are over from Wales to work in the health centre, teaching dentistry.

Saturday 26th January - Nzara

We had hoped for some time off, but instead we head out to two villages about 20 miles away. We are introduced at each village and pray with the people. We listen to their response to the Bishop's Visitation. They seem very happy to see the bishop and greet his guests!

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Sunday 27th January – Nzara

Today, I am preaching at the Cathedral in Nzara and Vanessa is preaching in a village nearby. We go over to the Cathedral at 9.15 and leave about 2pm. I preach at 1pm after a long service which includes many choirs. Another action packed day!

Monday 28th January - Nzara

We begin the day in cool conditions (about 70 degrees) with a walk down to the new School which has been built with funds from Pewsey Deanery and Barnabas Fund. It opens on Monday 4th February and everyone is very excited about this new facility for young people.

Next we walk down to the medical centre. This again is a very good modern facility but we're reminded of the needs of the community when we encounter the HIV/AIDS testing facility which is government funded but run by the ECS. We are teaching today with the Nzara ministers.

Bishop Samuel opens the meeting and we introduce ourselves. After quite a slow start we warm up the clergy and lay ministers and by the end of the day, have good feedback on the first two lines of The Lord's Prayer.

A message is given to us by one of the Archdeacons – we need teaching on Management, Administration and Finance. During the "Our Father" section, we speak about Leadership, covering spiritual gifts in Romans 12 and leadership in Ephesians 4, talking about Pioneer leaders and Settlers. The room has fans, which is good because the temperature has soared to 96 degrees outside (about 39 °C).

We finish the day with 'Hallowed be thy Name', teaching them the David Ruis song "I will worship". At the end we call out the names for God, and the Holy Spirit takes us into a time of ecstatic praise – another wonderful moment.

By 3pm we're ready to break. At 4pm, a Flame International team lead by Jan Ransom returns from Ezo, which is right up by the borders of Central African Republic and Congo. They speak about the very poor and desperate conditions there and how the medical centre is in severe need. The staff are all volunteers and the conditions are filthy. There are few drugs and it's a last resort for local people. They minister to 100 soldiers in barracks there, doing healing and forgiveness ministry as well as prayers for healing the land. A very inspiring team.

I go to write this journal as the rain starts to hammer down. A mouse runs in under the door to escape the water, but decides it's better to brave the elements than spend a night with me, and returns back to the wild.

Tuesday 29th January - Nzara

For Vanessa and I, this is our second day of workshops in Nzara and they seem to have been well received. It's really great for us to concentrate on such a central part of Jesus' teaching.

It is mercifully cooler today after last night's thunderstorms and really rather pleasant, around 80 degrees. The leaders want us to do more teaching and we rapidly put on a session called "Management, Leadership, Administration and Finance", which is right up my street. We get through the first two and they would be happy if we went on and on, but we are exhausted.

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After the workshops, about 5pm, we go out to see the presentation of the motorcycles and bicycles which Wimborne Deanery's donations have paid for. The bishop gives a great speech and many people want to pray and speak. We end up laying hands on one another- and those allocated the transport- and pray. Another great day.

We are beginning to feel really close and connected with the people in Yambio and Nzara. Although the conditions are always a little tough for visitors what we receive in terms of friendship, appreciation and faith building witness always outweighs those few lost home comforts.

Wednesday 30th January - Nzara

For breakfast we have "scrambled eggs" – actually omelette and a very nice change to the peanut butter and hard boiled eggs we've had most days. The coffee is locally made and delicious if you like it black and strong!

We spend the whole morning teaching the final two sessions of The Lord's Prayer. We teach them 'Our Father, who art in heaven' which is also in the English section of the Cathedral hymnbook. We then have feedback from both the women and the men clergy, lay ministers and Mothers' Union, who are very gracious and appreciative and want us to come out for a full two weeks' teaching workshop next time! We have a group photo outside.

In the afternoon, we visit an amazing place only 5 minutes walk from the Nzara ECS campus: a former colonial cotton factory full of miles of machines from Rochdale, Burnley, Manchester and suchlike. When the SPLA invaded South Sudan in 1990 and pushed back the Khartoum government, production stopped, 3000 workers lost their jobs and now there are just a handful of workers from the original team now employed by the Juba government. It's got its own power station and warehouses, but with only a few places hired out to a teak merchant it mostly stands idle. I have extensive pictures and video if anyone is interested.

Later on we return to the Bishops House. Two UN representatives are there to talk about his ministry to LRA defectors and traumatised families. Bishop Samuel's chairing of the interfaith group which helps in this area is about to come to an end after three years.

Another warm and action packed day almost over. And tomorrow is our last day which is about 20 hours of travelling. I'm certainly looking forward to a day off on Friday...!