

“A Provision of Angels”

Report on the SOMA Mission to the Diocese of Kadugli & the Nuba Mountains, Southern Sudan 3rd -18th March 2005

(A) Introduction

(1) A Challenge

The original invitation to take a team to this strategic but remote Diocese came two years ago – but the angels stood in the way until now! We had hoped to take a team there in April 2004, but we could not gather a suitable group, and the costs at that time were prohibitive.

There has been a peace agreement in the Nuba Mountains Region for the last three years; but with the prospect of a country-wide Peace Agreement being signed in the New Year 2004-5, the area has begun to open up. Still, the challenge of travelling there remains ... as well as the spartan conditions we were led to anticipate!

We were able to glean information about the region from some previous reports, including Archdeacon Malcolm Grundy (Diocese of Bradford) and Lord George Carey – both of whom had visited recently.

(2) The Team

There was no precedent for a SOMA-size team coming to this Diocese. We had had a clear invitation from the Bishop, and encouragement (as always) from Archbishop Joseph Marona. So we sought a mixed team of about 6 in number – with the proviso (as usual for Sudan teams) that the members had had experience of “real Africa” before ...

However, as often happens with SOMA, the original plans did not materialise. We failed to recruit any female team members, and travelled with 5 male clergy, for one of whom this was his first visit to Africa! The Lord had His plans, and we had a marvellous team: Colin Fox, Tom Gillum, Martin Kuhrt, David Maurice and myself. Colin is an ex-Army Officer & TA Chaplain, and David is a Doctor – both giftings proved essential ...

Although this was “the team”, we were supported not only by a group of tireless translators from the Diocese, a large army of intercessors, and a myriad of unseen supporters battling away in the heavenlies on our behalf!

(3) The title – “A Provision of Angels”

What is the right collective noun for angels? The team discussed this at length, but eventually settled on “a provision” – because right through this exciting mission, the Lord provided people unknown to us, to give us vital assistance at key moments!

Don’t believe it? – well, read on ...

(B) Preparation

As usual with SOMA missions, there is a sense of moving into the unknown! Although (as noted above) we had some background information beforehand, we were aware that this was going to be a stretch for each of us. No boiled water (we had to sterilise with iodine), no diocesan vehicles (actually there was a tractor, and a motorbike, but the roads are Sudanese ...), and heat (we were told 35 degrees C, but it was well above that).

The team had met together for a day, and shared together then – but apart from e-mail and telephone contact, we had had little time to gel together. The rest of the team met at Heathrow to travel to Kenya together, but I had gone out earlier to spend some time with my family members in Malawi, and to hold some key meetings in Uganda.

(C) Getting there

(1) UK to Nairobi

So the team met at the ACK Guest House in Nairobi on the morning of 3rd March – most of us already exhausted from an overnight flight. But we did not have much time to rest, because Temas & Mahmood – the first two Nuba angels, being the Diocesan representatives in Nairobi – took us off within an hour to meet the representative of the SPLM in Nairobi, and to get our permits to enter Southern Sudan. Temas and Mahmood were tireless in their care for us – we are so grateful to them. They gave us some helpful hints on the situation we were to face: still many landmines and unexploded grenades etc, virtually no schools or medical facilities, and few church buildings – yet in a background of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Moslems which bodes well for the future.

That evening we were joined by Revd Anne and Mr William Owiti, contacts of Colin Fox. Anne is a Christian entrepreneur! – she has set up an AIDS Hospice in Nairobi, as well as establishing a church in the Kibera slums. She arranged to show team members round when we returned to Nairobi after the mission.

(2) Nairobi to Loki

The following morning, Friday 4th March, we left at 0730 for Wilson Airport to catch the flight to Lokichoggio, the key staging post for all kinds of aid moving into Southern Sudan, located in the north-west corner of Kenya. A two-hour flight revealed the increasingly dry Kenyan scenery below, until we landed at the bustling airfield of Lokichoggio, to be met by our third Nuba Angel – Yumis Jamal – who took us to the Norwegian Peoples' Aid Guest House, where we were able to rest.

Lokichoggio has grown as a result of the Sudanese conflict – but it still has the characteristics of an overgrown Kenyan village, with the road to the airport and the main street on either side of the “A1” – the road from Nairobi to Juba. The NPA Guest House has grown too – with over 70 rooms filled with NGO and other aid workers moving in and out of Southern Sudan day by day.

We had been told that the next stage of our journey would be “by UN aircraft” – we wondered what that meant, especially when we saw a line of massive Hercules transport planes lined up. At 0630 the next morning we were to find out

(3) Loki to Kauda

Alarms had to be set at 0500 the next morning – and most of them worked in time for us to snatch a hasty early breakfast before the one-mile drive to the airfield for check-in. The UN aircraft turned out not to be a Hercules but a 9-seater – slightly smaller!

We took off at 0645 for the two-hour flight to a re-fuelling stop at Rumbek, the interim capital of Southern Sudan, where we were met with the disconcerting sight of a crashed aircraft on the edge of the runway. Jokes about “yesterday’s flight” produced only hollow laughter ...

Two hours later we landed at Kauda, a basic airstrip with a number of 4-wheel drive vehicles waiting to meet or see off the various passengers. Unfortunately none of them contained Bishop Adam! So after a short wait we were rescued by our fourth angel, “St Joseph”, who had got to know Colin during the flight and suggested we wait at the HQ of the Joint Military Commission, in the “centre” of Kauda. The centre meant an open market area, which maybe had once held stalls, but now only two big NGO compounds and a small coffee stall were left.

“JMC” stands for “Joint Military Commission”. Staffed by a small but dedicated group of unarmed soldiers, JMC has been working – always with observers from both sides of the conflict – to reinforce the regional peace agreement which was signed in the Nuba Mountains three years ago. They are concerned that now the full peace agreement has been signed, the UN are sending peace-keepers to replace them – relying not on verbal persuasion but the force of arms, which may put in jeopardy the hard-earned mutual trust JMC has established. Colin, our military liaison expert, knew someone at JMC, and asked if we could wait there for the Bishop to arrive – but it was the wrong moment, as they were expecting the Bangladeshi UN General any minute, so it was suggested we sampled the Arabic coffee at the stall instead. This we did – wondering how we were going to pay for it! – and enjoyed some enlightening conversations with two JMC representatives (one being Colin’s contact) for an hour under the shade of a magnificent tree, until the Bishop turned up in a vehicle borrowed from a Dutch mine-clearing organisation based nearby.

(4) The final leg - Kauda to Kuchi

Fortified by the coffee (which the Bishop fortunately paid for!) we set off about 1pm for the three-hour journey across the dried-out track to the Diocesan Headquarters. Not many other vehicles around, so the fact that vehicles have to drive on the right in Sudan was not usually relevant! White stones by the side of the road marked areas which were mined (or cleared – we were not quite sure!). Very few crops could survive

this intense heat and lack of water, and we wondered how the emaciated cattle (still of great value) that wandered over the road could find anything to eat.

Eventually we came in sight of our destination – although we wondered where we were coming to, as apart from the notice indicating that we had arrived at the Diocesan Headquarters, there seemed nothing else that might fit our normal expectations of what such an HQ might look like. Two rows of three tukels, two half-built shelters, and a small brick building with blue doors – that was just about it!

It turned out that three of the tukels had been built especially for our visit – and they were clean, with beds and a gravel floor. We had our own shower area (two!) and long-drop (two too). We were told that there were no mosquitoes (it was “too dry” – but I think it was too hot to fly!), and that it was best to sleep outside. One of the shelters was the conference hall – the roof of straw bundles was still being completed. The other became our dining room.

(D) The first weekend

(1) What a location!

We had arrived! – but because we had spent so much time sitting, we all jumped at the offer to walk to the market, about a mile down the road, before it closed to give time for the stallholders to carry their remaining wares back home – often up the mountain-side – before it got dark.

It was only now that we began to appreciate the amazing beauty of this remote place. The “road” which went on to Kadugli (the local big town, which had been on “the other side of the line” during the fighting) was on one side of this wide valley floor, while on the other was a range of hills, scaled by a maze of almost invisible steep paths, up and down which the local inhabitants almost trot like goats, with huge loads on their heads and feet in flip-flops, but equally sure of their way.

These hills, we learnt, had been the refuge of the local Southern Sudanese rebels when the Government of Sudan forces had tried to attack. The GOS could not capture the mountains, defended strongly from impregnable caves; and the SPLA could not capture the plains – so after years of appalling conflict, which left both sides exhausted, the stalemate led to a peace agreement which for three years has allowed people to begin to reconstruct their lives.

(2) Saturday evening

During our first evening we had an introductory meeting with the Bishop and some of his key Diocesan leaders, including Revd Luka Bulus (Diocesan Secretary); Evangelist Martin Bulus (Acting Treasurer, and Evangelism Coordinator); Revd Jaffer Tingra (Development Officer) and Revd Canon Hassan Sudan (who we discovered later was responsible for planting congregations in the huge area of the Western Mountains).

This enabled us to begin to clarify the daily programme for the conference, to take account of the afternoon heat! Preaching arrangements were made for the morning of the following day; and we discovered that the formal opening of the conference would be that evening.

We were advised, because of the heat and the absence of mosquitoes, to sleep outside. Most of us did this each night, but I for one moved indoors in the middle of the night, when for some reason a strong wind got up which made the temperature drop noticeably!

(3) Sunday

The five of us had been deployed to three “local” churches: David & Martin to Hikel Jerusalem; Tom to Jemesa; and Colin & I to the nearby parish of Tingri (the church was visible from our camp, nestling under the mountain). The others had to leave early, on foot; but Colin and I were told to wait until it was clear that the congregation were gathering!

The service at Tingri eventually started at 12.15pm. We processed out of the bright sunlight through a low doorway into what seemed like a totally dark church – but when our eyes adjusted we realised that it was full of people wondering what on earth these visitors were like! They received the message (from Romans 5:1-8) with great interest, many standing to receive a gift of God’s “more” from the Holy Spirit.

After lunch at 2.30pm Colin and I wandered back, the first group to arrive. We were able to get some rest before the opening of the Conference, planned for 6pm.

Actually the opening took place at 6.30pm, in the presence of the SPLA Commander and the Local Civil Commissioner of the SPLM and his deputy, as well as visitors from the local parish. The team were welcomed, and after many other speeches, commissioned by the Bishop.

After a late supper and team prayers, we were glad to get to bed, ready for the start of the teaching in the morning.

(E) The teaching programme

The programme we had drafted was based on the manual “Renewal for Life”, and each delegate was given a workbook either in English or Arabic. However we knew that the programme would change – and so it turned out! The actual timetable is set out in Appendix 1. Here we comment on the distinctive flavour of each day.

(1) Monday 7th March

The Bishop had pointed out that many of the pastors had had little or no formal training – and that in some cases their sense of commitment to Christ, and their call to the ministry, were unclear. So we were glad we had planned a “Jesus” day – reinforcing the foundation of the Gospel, leading to a call to deeper commitment to Christ in the evening, to which many responded wholeheartedly.

In the teaching about Jesus, we emphasised the total dedication he had shown to following the way of the Father, in spite of the disappointments he must have felt when the crowds left him and even the disciples deserted him at his moment of need. The call to commitment was to the church of the future, not the past – based on the pattern set out in Revelation 7:9-14, with its emphasis on vulnerability, suffering but new hope.

There were two other notable aspects of the day. First, the questions which emerged from a group discussion on “What did Jesus die for?” – raising deep issues of forgiveness and restoration, the nature of the resurrection life, as well as thorny problems such as “how did Jesus preach to the spirits in prison?” (from 1 Peter 3:19).

The other was the first workshop held in the early afternoon, on matters of Family Life. Different members of the team shared in short inputs: the meaning of Ephesians 5:21-33; the need for husbands to “make love” with their wives, not use them at will; and the changing sexual ethics in the West (not for the better) with the advent of contraception etc. AIDS is, fortunately, still relatively rare in Sudan by comparison with the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, but this will change unless Christians set a good example. It was interesting to note the contributions from some of the Mothers’ Union leaders in the conference!

During the evening we were able to send a short e-mail to our families and intercessors, via the Bishop’s laptop and his satellite phone! It was a joy to do this – but the conjunction of extreme technology with a grass-roofed hut needed some processing ...

(2) Tuesday 8th March

Tuesday was “Forgiveness and Healing Day”. Each evening, the delegates were asked to study a particular passage in their personal devotion the following morning. On this morning they were asked to study Revelation 7:9-14 – and then to share what they felt the Lord had been saying to them.

Then Colin provided a framework for the day by teaching about worship, helping the delegates to see that they were part of a worldwide Communion of Anglicans – not just on their own. We had hoped to hold a workshop on how to lead Anglican worship in a living way, as this was very much needed – but time did not permit.

After the breakfast break, David taught movingly on Repentance and Forgiveness. He then led the delegates in “The Cross Exercise”, when people laid sins, anger and bitterness (literally, using small slips of paper) at the foot of the Cross. We have done this exercise so many times, but I never cease to be amazed how, even though some start with some chattering, the whole group moves into silence as the papers are burnt and the Bishop pronounces absolution. This occasion was no exception – and we realised that the Lord was dealing with some profound issues. Those of us who have never experienced the chaos, suffering and betrayal of war can only listen to the testimonies of those for whom forgiving others is hard and real.

The Family Life Workshop today was in the form of group discussion, on two questions:

- What is the biggest problem you face in your family?
- How do you expect your children to find out about sex?

The answers are not recorded in detail – but from the vociferous discussions, the questions clearly touched some nerves!

The evening Celebrations during the week were held in the open air, with two lights powered by a generator. An increasing number of people gathered night by night from the locality – including many children – so we had to adjust our teaching and ministry to take account of this. After some lively worship, each evening people had the opportunity of sharing what the Lord had done in their lives. This is always unpredictable, and risks the full stories! – but it is worth it to hear and see the joy on the faces of those whom the Lord has blessed. Then Tom taught on healing as an integral part of the message of the Kingdom – before we lined up in five pairs to pray for the many who came forward for ministry for a wide variety of needs. As we were to hear later, the Lord answers prayer!

Supper was about 9pm, after which the team prayed briefly before collapsing into bed under the amazing star-lit sky – not quite the same as at home!

(3) **Wednesday 9th March**

Wednesday was “Holy Spirit Day”. After a cup of tea and a mandazi (sweet cake) and our team devotions, we joined the delegates for their morning worship, before hearing what the Lord had said to them about John 16:5-16.

David led the first session of teaching about the Holy Spirit – “Who is he ...?” and “The fullness of the Holy Spirit”; then Colin spoke about the Gifts of the Spirit”, emphasising the inter-relatedness of the Christian community, the Body of Christ. This led to many questions, which we tried to answer in as practical a manner as possible.

The final teaching session of the “morning” was by Martin, emphasising the importance for the Christian of daily Bible study and prayer. In this isolated environment the necessity for daily fellowship with the Lord in this way takes on a new depth of meaning.

The Workshop session on this day took the form of discussions in three groups:

- Questions on the Bible, and prayer (Martin)
- Questions on the Holy Spirit (David / Colin)
- Questions on Family Life (Don / Tom)

For pastors who rarely get the chance to meet together (indeed some had never met before), these discussion times were vital.

The evening celebration was designed to give an opportunity for people to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and how to lead others into this experience. Don led some simple teaching on this, before praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit in various ways:

- “Knife” – cutting people free from unhelpful influences from the past
- “Wind” – corporate, on the whole gathering
- “Water” – prayer for one another, in groups of three
- “Fire” – individual ministry

It was clear that this was new to many people, but many people responded positively.

(4) **Thursday 10th March**

One of the key concerns in a situation which has known conflict for generations, is that of the transformation of the community. The passage the delegates had been asked to read was 2Chronicles 7:11-22, which includes the phrase “heal their land”. Teaching on this, and other factors which can inhibit the spread of the kingdom, formed the input in the first session. It was clear that much of this teaching was new (as we find in many places), but equally, that it touched many chords in the delegates.

This teaching was followed by two powerful topics which follow on from the theme. The first was on “Claiming the Victory of Christ” by Martin – which focussed on two aspects: the need to discern and resist temptation; and the need to set up good models of ministry in the area of deliverance.

The second was a powerful teaching on “Power and Pain” (suffering) by David, coming out of a tragedy which hit the family recently when one of their grown-up children was killed in a car accident. The openness that David demonstrated touched many of us deeply; it revealed also that while we can never understand the depth of other peoples’ suffering (such as that experienced by so many in Sudan), suffering is the experience of many people – Christians and others – all over the world. (It was part of God’s planning that two of the team members have grown-up children with learning difficulties.)

After such teachings, it was important that there was a time for discussion and questions – so the Workshop time was in three groups, one for each topic, where delegates could explore these subjects more deeply, with us and with one another.

After the lunch break, various conversations developed, often involving prayer for pastoral situations which we, as short-term visitors, could only begin to enter into. These breaks also gave opportunities for the Bishop to share his hopes for the development of the Diocese in the future. Some of these are summarised in Section H.

We praise God that the number of visitors coming to the open-air celebrations in the starlit evenings was growing by the day! It meant however that we had to give some teaching that somehow related to this widely varied group. On this evening, after some powerful testimonies, Tom engaged people’s interest by telling two parable stories: “The Ladder” (based on the story of Jacob’s ladder), and “Three Houses” (the poor house, where Jesus was at home with the children; Philip’s house; and Nathaniel’s house). It was not possible to follow this up with formal ministry, but we pray that the seeds sown will bear fruit in due time.

(5) Friday 11th March

The final full day of the Conference was focussed on “Continuing the Ministry of Jesus” – how the delegates can act in their own parish situations, on what they had learnt and experienced through the week. In preparation for this they had been asked to read one of Matthew’s “summary passages” on the ministry of Jesus – Matthew 9:35-10:14 – which makes it clear that a Jesus-centred church will be involved a three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching & healing. That is what Jesus did; that is what he sent out the disciples to do (Luke 9 & 10) and that is what the Church is commissioned to carry on.

In preparation for this, the morning focussed on two aspects of ministry which have been demonstrated to be essential for any work of community transformation to take root. The first is Intercession, which Colin taught; and the second is Leadership, where Don focussed on the servant pattern indicated in the example of Jesus, and the New Testament teaching about the Church of the future.

One aspect of the three-fold ministry of Jesus had already been given emphasis – the ministry of healing. So the final teachings of the Conference were on “Reaching out to the Lost” (by Colin) and “Teaching the Truth” (by Martin).

As soon as this session was finished the Bishop and Colin set off for the JMC office on the way to Kadugli. One of the vital things all SOMA teams need to do when they enter a country, is to make sure they know how to leave it again! The Bishop was concerned about the need to ensure we were at the airfield in Kauda in good time the following Tuesday to catch the UN flight, as the timing of this was uncertain and road travel unpredictable. So it was suggested that we might be able to stay at the JMC compound in Kauda on the Monday night – but this required high level permission from JMC (before the office closed for the weekend!), the leverage of the Bishop, and the personal contact provided by our own military liaison! We prayed for them and sent them off with anticipation and photographs! They returned, after a longer interval than we had expected, with the news that a request had been sent up the line, but we would not get a reply until the following afternoon! (We prayed hard, as there were not many alternatives in Kauda ...!)

The final Holy Communion service was the first of its kind for many of us! The crowds had gathered in even greater numbers, and we were intrigued to know how the mechanics of communion would be handled – but we need not have worried! The first part of the service was led by Luka Bulus, the Diocesan Secretary. The Bishop preached – on Jesus calming the storm – challenging people with Jesus’ question “Why are you afraid?” Don had been asked to preside, but the only version of the consecration prayer in English was in Tom’s Book of Common Prayer which dated from the time of Queen Victoria! We are still not sure how the familiar but 16th Century words translated into Arabic ... The juice ran out more than once, as many were thirsty – but there were enough biscuits; so as always, the Lord won through and the service provided a fitting end to a memorable Conference.

However this was not the end of the evening! We did not know (and still do not know who provided it), but there was a plan to show the Jesus Film, with the sound-track in the local language of Moro. So the large crowds sat on mud bricks which had been made nearby in preparation for a new building, and watched this amazing film on a double-sided screen! It made us realise afresh the power of the story of Jesus’ life and teaching, especially to those who hear it for the first time; and why the Jesus Film has been watched by more people than any other film ever made!

(F) The Second weekend

(1) Saturday 12th March

It was sad to see the delegates leave for their homes this morning – some walking, a few on valued bicycles, and the fortunate ones getting a lift on the tractor trailer! Some were staying on for another seminar the following week.

The team divided into two groups for the morning. Tom and David accepted the challenge of accompanying Martin Bulus, and Boutros the cook, to go up to the top of the nearby hill. (We were not sure whether the Bishop believed that “hawajas” (westerners) could actually achieve this ... so some at least had to show the flag!) They set off early to try to get the majority of the climb done before it got too hot.

Martin, Colin & Don went to the nearby Hope Tomorrow Primary School, which had called its pupils in specially for the occasion. Children from one of Colin’s schools had made up a picture booklet to give to the school, and Colin and Martin had brought pencils and balloons to give to the pupils. We were moved and impressed by the welcome we received from the 500 or so pupils, aged between 5 and 28 (some were actually married), who were divided into 4 classes and a nursery, studying in classrooms with no other equipment than a blackboard, and only logs for seats. Would that children here at home were equally desperate to learn! The Diocese subsidises the school fees to the tune of 50%, so the parents have to find money equivalent to USD\$5 a term. As the SPLM had decided that the language of the teaching in schools should be English, teachers were

being recruited from Kenya and Uganda. One of the teachers at Hope Primary was a Kenyan Christian, who attended the conference sessions whenever he could.

The mountain team returned soon after we got back to our tukels. We then had some rest and lunch, before going to the market with the indefatigable Martin Bulus (another angel if ever there was one!) in the afternoon. Tom shopped for some walking sticks, and we were chastened to visit the butchers' stall ...

At 4pm the Bishop and Luka Bulus set off for JMC to get the decision on our request to stay in their Kauda compound on Monday. To our relief the answer was positive!

At 6pm we had an meeting with the Bishop, when he enlarged on some of the projects he had in mind (see Section H below). We were hoping he would give us his evaluation of the conference, but that had to wait until the following Monday.

We were then allocated to our preaching assignments for the following day, which left little time after supper for preparation – we had to trust the Lord!

(2) Sunday 13th March

At 0800 the two Martins set off up the mountain, where Martin (Kuhrt) was to preach. Needless to say he did NOT climb in his clerical gear!

As the others were in two pairs, and going far, the only available transport was the faithful tractor. At 0930 Colin and Tom set off with Luka Bulus to the evocatively named “Mount of Olives” Church (was this near Jerusalem, visited last week, we wondered?). David and I waited with the Bishop for them to return, so that the tractor could take us to the parish of Nubra.

However, by 1100 there was no sign of the tractor, so the Bishop set off on the motorbike to find out what had happened. 30 minutes later the tractor returned, full of people with jerrycans and drums of water. It was not clear whether they had seen the Bishop! – but anyway we set off as soon as we could, perched on the tractor mudguards, with the Bishop's staff in its box in the trailer. After half an hour or so the driver decided we would get on faster without the trailer, so we left it near the well and drove on – suddenly remembering that we had left the Bishop's staff in the trailer! There were very few other vehicles on the road, so we took note of the few that passed us – then one stopped, turning out to be the DCA vehicle, with the faithful Mohamed (could he, as a Moslem, be another angel?). It seemed that someone (we assumed it was the Bishop, but he denied it; was it another angel?) had asked him to come and collect us. So we gratefully jumped down from the tractor and relaxed into the relative comfort of the Land Cruiser. 45 minutes later we arrived at Nubra (did the Bishop actually say we could have walked? – and how long would it have been by tractor?), to find the congregation patiently waiting! The Holy Communion service eventually started at 1.30pm, when David skilfully retold the story of the Prodigal Son, in a Sudanese location.

On the way back we called at the house of the Pastor, Hassan. He was brought up in a Moslem family, but found no assurance of salvation in Islam so turned to Jesus. The remarkable thing is that although his parents (and all his brothers and sisters except one) are still Moslems, they were pleased that he had found his vocation as a Christian pastor. The mutual respect and cooperation between Christians and Moslems that has traditionally been the pattern in the Nuba Mountains area (in contrast to many other parts of Sudan) is very encouraging.

We arrived back in time to share the stories from the rest of the team, about what had been an exciting last day in Kuchi. After supper and praying together, we were glad to get to bed – sleeping outside for the last time!

(G) Getting back ...

SOMA teams normally find that when we have been to a very remote or challenging location, we need to re-enter in stages. Fortunately, although it seemed as if it was going to be a long time from leaving Kuchi to reaching home (5 days and a night) we realised as we went through these days together, that we needed all that time to readjust to the prospect of normal life.

(1) Monday 14th March

The DCA vehicle had been booked to collect us at 1245, so there was time in the morning to have a final meeting with the Bishop, when he gave us his helpful evaluation of the mission. Here are the headlines of what he said:

- The team worked well together – no grumbling!
- The teaching was relevant to the needs of the delegates (many of them needed to hear the Gospel for themselves)
- Many people testified to being healed

- The delegates saw a new model of “power through servanthood” in the team [and the Bishop!]

After an uneventful journey to Kauda, we arrived at the JMC compound at about 4.15pm, only to be told (again!) that our arrival had coincided with that of a senior UN officer! So we sat under a tree and watched people collect water from the nearby well, including two young boys with a patient donkey towing a water trailer. 30 minutes later we were warmly welcomed, and shown to our rooms. We were more interested, however, in the showers, and the ice-cold juice in the dining hall – we realised how dehydrated we had become when we drank several large glasses of juice, with remarkably little later output!

It was good to have time to unwind, and listen to the stories of the JMC staff over a wonderful supper. The sense of “going home” was evident in our evening team meeting, as we began to look forward, rather than backwards. We realised that we had been privileged to encounter real spiritual riches in an environment of material poverty – a total contrast from our own country, where things are the other way round.

(2) Tuesday 15th March

The following morning we met together after breakfast to pray. Tom reminded us from John 11 that “the resurrection changes everything!”

An hour later we were taken to the airstrip to catch our flight to Lokichoggio – which we thought was scheduled for 1130. We did not realise that this would be the first of several journeys the vehicle would have to make between JMC and the airfield that day! When we arrived at the airstrip we realised that the plane waiting there was not ours after all.

While we were waiting for developments we went over to look at a crashed Antonov plane on the other side of the airfield. I hoped that the crew and passengers had escaped unharmed, but in a curious way I wondered if it was the same plane which had bombed the SOMA team in Maridi 5 years ago (it wasn’t!).

It became clear that our flight was not going to leave until 1.30pm, so we returned to JMC with two female USAID workers who had just arrived there, but (like us over a week before) had not been met as they had expected.

After more cold drinks and a chat, the two girls left for their base, some 30 minutes away. It was about 15 minutes later, as we were about to set off for the airfield again, that we discovered that our luggage was missing! After some enquiries it became clear that – although it was in a separate pile – the girls’ driver had loaded our luggage in with theirs. Immediately Angel René jumped in another vehicle and set off to find our bags. We prayed – and then with Andy set off for the airfield again, to meet the re-scheduled flight, hoping that it would be late.

We stood tensely at the airfield, urgently watching the approach road for René’s vehicle, and praying that he would arrive before the plane. Andy tried to get through to him on the radio, but they were not working. Eventually, just after the plane had landed and they had started to re-fuel, we got news that René was “two minutes away”. To put it mildly, we were relieved to see the cloud of dust that presaged his approach, at speed! As Tom put it, the Lord wanted us “to go right to the wire ...” I doubt if he would be glad to be described as an angel – but to us he most definitely was!

After all this drama, we were quite relieved to see our luggage onto the plane, and to take off! We landed for refuelling at Mabior – notable for flies (all of which entered the plane!), heat and rain! – and arrived at Lokichoggio towards the end of daylight. We were relieved to see Angel Yumis there to meet us!

The Guest House was full, so it was good that we had confirmed our bookings before we left for Kauda. A relaxed supper, and team prayer time, and the end of another day!

(3) Wednesday 16th March

We had been led to believe that we needed to be back at the airport for the 1130 flight to Nairobi – but Yumis left a message saying that we had to be there at 0900 instead. He also said that, in spite of checking the bookings in advance, we were on standby for this flight, and might have to wait until the afternoon. When we got to the check-in desk, this proved to be the case. Margaret behind the desk saw and heard a slightly different side of the Team Leader, but could only show us the passenger list and plead “not me guv”.

There was no explanation from the airline office in Nairobi – we could only assume that we had been bumped off by “big men” whose custom was more valuable ... Our only recourse was to return to the Guest House, where we used the time until the afternoon flight to begin our team evaluation and debriefing. Some of what we shared was personal to the team, and some things confidential – but some of the lessons learn are set out in Appendix 2.

We enjoyed a relaxed time over lunch, and continued our team sharing in the early afternoon. We were concerned to make sure we were the first to check in for the afternoon flight to Nairobi, so we asked

Yumis to take us to the airfield more than an hour before the scheduled take-off time. Margaret could not have been more polite, and paid for us to have sodas as we waited in the open-air “departure lounge”.

During this wait Don had an opportunity to converse with Bishop Benjamin Mangar from Yirol, who was flying to Nairobi on a different aircraft. He said he had not been informed of the ECS Provincial Synod in Juba as he had been in his Diocese. He would like SOMA to come to Yirol, but we need to check the situation of his Diocese first.

After what seemed a long wait, we were glad to be invited to board, and took off at 5pm. An uneventful flight brought us to Wilson Airport in Nairobi at 6.40pm, to be met by our two Nairobi angels – who then accompanied us by “special hire” to the ACK Guest House. We were glad to be back!

We were tired after a long day and a late supper, but (although we were going to be doing other things tomorrow and the next day) the mission itself was now over – and we marked this with a simple act of de-commissioning, a vital part of the de-briefing process.

(4) Thursday 17th & Friday 18th March

On the following two days each team member had planned to do different things unconnected with the mission – so we went our separate ways, meeting up for breakfast! Don ate something on the Thursday which violently disagreed with him during the night, but a regime of drinking water and food starvation the following day left him empty but stable!

Our final farewells were with Temas and Mahmood, who could not have done more for us; and the Guest House Staff who always make SOMA welcome. We arrived early at the airport to check in (Don had reconfirmed our flights the previous day), but there was a huge delay as Kenya Airways had overbooked another flight (to Dubai) by about 30 people, and a group of irate Asian travellers made their feelings very evident.

We were as always relieved to settle down into our seats on the aircraft, and at least two of us were so much in need of sleep that we managed to rest through the night, ready to meet our families at Heathrow the following morning ...

(H) The Future

(1) The Bishop’s Vision for the next 5 years

- (a) A meeting was planned for 16th & 17th March to review the vision
- (b) 2011 is the year when the citizens of Sudan will decide in a referendum whether or not Southern Sudan will become an independent country
- (c) The Nuba Mountains Region may then become a third independent state
- (d) Those from the Nuba area who are now in Khartoum have to return in order to take part in the referendum process.

(2) Projects being planned

- (a) Drilling wells for more accessible water
- (b) Building schools – with the possibility of Christian teachers coming from Kenya or Uganda, as the teaching throughout the age-groups will be in English
- (c) Providing bicycles for some of the pastors
- (d) Encouraging the teaching of women in areas of family life
- (e) Building a Diocesan Centre in Kadugli
 - The cost of renovating the existing building (alone) is estimated at USD\$5,000
- (f) Medical centres
 - Bp Adam thought a link might be established when he talked to a visiting Bishop at the ECS Bishops’ Retreat in Kampala – but nothing has happened
 - There are virtually no clinics in the whole region
- (g) The SPLA are encouraging the setting up of “model villages” under 1 Governor – each with its own school and clinic
- (h) Setting up small businesses through micro-finance projects (eg embroidery, sewing etc)
 - Buying 10 sewing machines & training operators would cost USD\$1,50: maybe for 1 year only?
 - Setting up a shop in Kadugli?
 - A restaurant?
 - What about “boda-bodas” ?
- (i) Training for a cattle project
 - Buying 5 cows for a diocesan herd would cost USD\$1000

- They would provide income for the Diocese
- (j) Improving the Diocesan Financial Management
 - Training a Finance Officer would cost USD\$2000
 - Need for computer training
 - Training in English needed: a 1-year course in Nairobi costs USD\$1000
- (k) Loudspeakers
 - Needed for evangelism
 - Cost USD\$2000 but could then be rented out

(3) Potential Partners

- (a) Education:
 - Diocese of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
 - Deanery of Bradford-on-Avon, UK
- (b) Family Life, role of women etc
 - Mothers' Union Uganda (Hellen Oneka)
- (c) Building Projects, such as Diocesan Offices
 - West Runton Camp (Scripture Union)
- (d) Spiritual warfare
 - Vanguard Ministries, Kenya (Elizabeth Kamau)

(4) Possible SOMA involvement in the future

- (a) Tom will offer a format for the writing of Project Proposals
- (b) Colin & Martin will explore ways to develop schools partnerships
- (c) Don will ask Hellen Oneka and Elizabeth Kamau if they are open to an invitation to come to the Diocese
- (d) Don will explore with the West Runton leadership the possibility of them providing a team to work with a local foreman to build the Diocesan Centre.
- (e) Colin will seek to raise USD\$1000 from his parishes, for bicycles for pastors
- (f) Finance should be channelled through the Diocesan Account in Khartoum, rather than the ECS Office in Kampala.

Appendix 1

Teaching Programme – actual!

References are to the teaching manual “Renewal for Life”

Sunday March 6th

1830 Conference opening & commissioning of team All Team

Monday March 7th

0930 Session 1:
 A(1) What did Jesus do?) Don
 A(2) What did Jesus teach?)
 [A(3) Who do YOU say that Jesus is?]

1145 Session 2:
 A(4) What did Jesus die for? Tom
 + Group Discussion

1330 Group Reports

1430-1530 Workshop – Christian families (1) All Team

1800 Celebration
 A(5) What does it mean to become a Christian? Martin
 + Testimony & Ministry

Tuesday March 8th

0730 Personal devotion, on Revelation 7:9ff

0900 Worship

0930 Session 3:
 D(1) What is the Anglican Communion ? Colin
 D(2) The Church’s primary task – worship
 1030 Questions

1145 Session 4:
 C(2) Repentance and forgiveness David
 “The Cross Exercise”

1230 Testimonies on forgiveness

1300-1500 Workshop – Family Life (2) Don
 + Group Discussion

1800 Celebration:
 D(5) Healing & Wholeness Tom
 + Ministry of healing

Wednesday March 9th

0730 Personal devotion, on John 16:5-16

0915 Worship

0920 Session 5:
 B(1) What, or who, is the Holy Spirit? David
 B(2) The fulness of the Holy Spirit

1130 Session 6:
 B(3) The gifts of the Holy Spirit Colin

1230 Question time on gifts of the Holy Spirit Don

1315	Session 7: C(4) Going on growing – Bible Study & prayer	Martin
1530	Workshops: (a) Discussion on the work of the Holy Spirit (b) Family Life (c) Bible study and prayer	David / Colin Don / Tom Martin
1800	Celebration C(3) Leading people into the fulness of the Spirit + Testimony & Ministry	Don

Thursday March 10th

0730	Personal devotion, on 2 Chronicles 7:11-22	
0930	Worship	
1000	Session 8: E(1) Healing of Community Memories E(2) God's purpose for our communities E(3) What is God saying about our community?	Don
1145	Session 9: B(4) Claiming the victory of Christ	Martin
1330	Session 10: C(5) Power and pain – testing and stretching	David
1530	Workshops: (a) Renewal for the Community (b) Claiming the Victory (c) Suffering	Don / Colin Martin David
1815	Celebration “Parables of a ladder & three houses” + Testimony & Ministry	Tom

Friday March 11th

0730	Personal Devotion, on Matthew 9:35-10:14	
0915	Worship	
0930	Session 11 Intercession	Colin
1145	Session 12 E(4) What kind of leadership does the community need?	Don
1235	Session 13 D(4) Continuing the ministry of Jesus - Reaching out to the lost D(3) Continuing the ministry of Jesus – Teaching the Truth	Colin Martin
1400	Feedback & Questions	
1745	Holy Communion + Certificates etc + Recommissioning	Don
[1945	Jesus Film shown in Moro version]	

Draft Daily Programme

- 0730 Morning Devotion (on an agreed scripture passage)
- 0800 Tea
- [0830 Team Meeting]
- 0900 Morning Worship
- 0930 Teaching session
- 1030 Breakfast
- 1115 Teaching session
- 1215 Group Discussion
- 1330 Workshops
- 1430 Lunch & Rest
- 1500 Team Meeting
- 1730 Celebration
- 1930 Supper
- 2100 Team Meeting

Appendix 2 Team Evaluation

(A) Signs of God at Work

(1) Healings:

- People sweating profusely but unusually
- Archdeacon Barnabas – sleeping peacefully
- Lady working in the kitchen – stomach healed
- Yacob – eyes, chest pain, legs all healed
- Nema – pains all over body relieved
- Adam – stomach healed

(2) Gradual lessening of tension

- People relaxed more and more
- The numbers increased each evening

(3) Balance of teaching

- The team came over as “real”
- Team members were willing to share their own pain
- They saw us as part of them, not separate

(B) The Diocese

(1) Generosity of their relationships

- Their view of “church” was open, non-exclusive
- Christians and Moslems typically accepted each other

(2) The Fellowship in the Diocese

- Many of the delegates had never met each other before
- So they had a lot to catch up on
- We were not sure how the “exiles” and “non-exiles” were interacting
- How will the church in the Diocese react under persecution?
- Some people (mostly around Khartoum) are still loyal to Bishop Adam’s predecessor

(C) Lessons for the future

(1) Model a “pilgrim theology”

(2) Be vulnerable

(3) Remember that leadership that works from below is more amenable to building community