



## **Report by Gwen Stavely on the Maridi, Sudan SOMA mission, Spring 2003**

**'When a man's ways please the Lord  
He makes even his enemies to be at  
peace with him.' Prov 16:7**

I arrived back safely from Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya just under a week ago now. I apologise that this report is rather belated, but I had to go to work straight after I got home, and I am taking longer to catch up after this trip, than I have after the other ones.

It is with a deep sense of **gratitude to God and to you** that I recall all the events of this latest mission to Maridi, Sudan. There was victory and battle in probably equal measures! Two of the main prayer requests for every mission are for safety in travel and for good health for all the team. I am pleased to report to you that your prayers on these two counts were abundantly answered, for which we give praise and thanks to God for His faithfulness. I will try and cover some of the main points under relevant headings rather than give you a day by day diary type report.

**TEAM** - as you probably know, there were 4 Africans and 4 Europeans on the team. This turned out to be an excellent balance. From the beginning, even before we reached Sudan, God was guiding us in our prayers, showing us what to pray for. Margaret, Carol and I spent our first afternoon together in Kampala praying together for the mission. One prayer was for tears to flow, to bring about a softening of people's hearts to prepare them to receive the Word. This became one of our main requests. From the second and third day, we saw first the women, but then some of the men also, weeping as they encountered God in their lives.

Team unity is essential in every mission, and we were all careful to maintain this bond of unity between ourselves. There were times when we realised that this was being challenged, but we give praise to God that not only did we not experience division, but we found a real bond of friendship developing between us all. The African group, who did not know each other before hand, were by the end swapping addresses and emails and making plans to meet up again before too long.

**SEMINAR** - I had the doubtful privilege of starting off the seminar by taking the first session which was on the subject of Worship. We each had an interpreter who translated into Juba Arabic. Although I felt distinctly disappointed with the small amount of ground I was able to cover, I was reminded that God is the one who brings out what He wants to say, and my job is to trust Him.

There were three themes to the overall teaching, the other two were Stewardship and Marriage & Family matters. The Ugandan pastors, Charles and Felix were responsible for the Stewardship teaching and we were all very impressed with their presentation, which was clear, with good notes (which everyone loves to copy!) and very applicable to the situation in which the pastors and lay people at the seminar found themselves in.

The Marriage and Family sessions were led by the Sharlands and Margaret from Kenya. Margaret was able to make a very important contribution being African and well aware of the African way of thinking. There were a number of things which she was able to say which would not have been possible for Europeans to say. PTL for all that was shared and for the Celebrations in the evenings during which testimonies were given of how God was speaking to individuals. It was very moving to hear both men and women standing to share their lives with us and what God was teaching them.

**PRACTICALITIES** - ie. Food, travel and transport, accommodation, clothes and water for body washing etc. The Maridi

ladies and men served us well in all these ways. There was the added excitement of a rat in the bedroom which made its presence felt particularly at night, though I never actually saw it, I saw evidence of it!

**BATTLES AND VICTORIES** - Before we left Uganda for Sudan Margaret, Carol and I had great joy and unity in prayer for the seminar. We reached Maridi a couple of days before it started. This time was used to walk around and meet people and have God-initiated conversations to sense what was happening and listen to God.

Out of these conversations two things became clear – firstly that the budget was a matter of contention in the minds of the leadership of the Maridi Team, and secondly the number of young girls between 16 - 17 yrs who were unmarried mothers, and the practice of tying charms on newly born babies to ward off any evil. These matters were both part of the planned subject matter of the seminar, and we realized that we needed to maintain our unity as a team, supporting Don and David especially as they faced enormous pressure from the local leadership to give them more money for the seminar costs. It was a matter of constant prayer for the week, we were determined that the delegates should not lose out as a result of the spirit of contention and complaint which one or two of their leaders were showing. The question of superstition and idolatry was tackled head on, with a Joshua-type challenge being issued, choose whom you will serve because you cannot serve both Satan and God at the same time.

The number of Christian marriages in the church in the last 12 months is now 87. This was from an initial figure of 6. Most people had only had traditional marriages which were less stable, and seemed to be rather porous in their boundaries, with in-laws being a troublesome influence in the long term because of their demands for more and more dowry. While we were there the 87th Christian marriage was conducted. This is cause for **Praise to God** and a

source of great joy to the new bishop, who has insisted that no more pastors will be ordained until their marriages were blessed in the church. **PRAY on for Bp Justin** that his stand on this and other principles will be supported by his team.

The bishop had seen a witchdoctor gloriously saved earlier in the month and some of her artefacts for use in her practise of magic and spell working, were brought for burning. This was done one afternoon about 5pm. We brought them to the cross to which were pinned pieces of paper on which were written sins for which we were seeking God's forgiveness. As the fire consumed the papers and the other items, we sang songs extolling the power of the cross and the blood of Jesus. These then became songs of victory sung by the people as they danced round the cathedral. Not many minutes following the burning and during the dancing and singing there was a tremendous clap of thunder and a brilliant bolt of lightning simultaneously right over the cathedral. There was no rain and we felt it was a sign of the power of God. We recalled the Scripture 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven' and we redoubled our singing and dancing!!

It is not the time for rain in Sudan just now, but following this we had several heavy rainstorms. Rain is a sign of God's blessing and we took comfort from this demonstration of God's presence and blessing among us.

### **PERSONAL**

One very happy event was the birth of a baby girl to one of the pastors in the seminar, (he had acted as midwife for his wife). He took me aside the next day with one of the translators, to explain that he wished to name the baby after me! Of course I was thrilled, especially as I recalled the meaning of my Welsh name which is 'purity'. I asked if I could visit him and his wife and see the baby. We did this on Thursday afternoon. I went along with Heather Sharland, a midwife from UK who, along with David her husband is working as a mission partner with the ECS. Heather loves

babies and was able to cast an expert eye over her to make sure all was well with baby and mother.

When we arrived I was asked to supply two names, one was to be mine and the other a baptismal name, a Biblical one. It didn't take me long to choose, I have always loved the name Lydia, so Gwen Lydia it was!! We then had prayer for the blessing of the baby. I thought that if she could live up to both her names that would be a wonderful gift to that community. As '*Gwen*' she would have a reputation for purity and as *Lydia* a reputation of an astute and successful business woman.

If any of you would like to **PRAY on for Gwen Lydia** I would be so grateful and so, I am sure, would be her parents, Alfred and Jester Alowia. Please remember her health, - her physical life, but also to pray for her spiritual life. If she is going to be a light for God in the community she will also be a target for Satan.

From what Alfred was saying he is a truly born again man with an enlightened understanding about the dangers of witchcraft. I believe that though Gwen Lydia has been born into a poor home materially, yet she has a good chance of being encouraged and taught the ways of the Lord.

The final day of the seminar saw the welcome return of the Bp Justin and also of Rhoda. Some of you may remember that Rhoda was the one who started a school under the trees after our first visit to Maridi in 1999. We asked Rhoda to show us the school, which one report said had now got solid mud walls. We found no walls at all and the grass roof in very poor repair, with half of it on the ground. Rhoda assured me it would be ready for the start of the next term in a few weeks. However, I am making sure that this time the money I leave is spent on something that benefits the children. **Please pray for the school and Rhoda too.** As you can see a common theme for prayer is in the use of money at all levels in the diocese.

I may have mentioned to some of you before I left about my concern for Andrew. He was one of the original Maridi team members from the first visit I made there in 1999. Shortly after that mission we heard that he had become mentally unbalanced, we met him on the second occasion when we were in Maridi and prayed for his healing/deliverance. I felt quite concerned for him this time and asked some of you to pray that he might be healed during our visit this time, as a sign to the people of Maridi of God's power.

We did have Andrew with us a good deal of the time. He would come in and sit for a while, and sometimes walk about restlessly, but he was not an interruption. This was an answer to prayer which we made continually on his behalf to God. If you wish to share in the ongoing work of this mission please remember to **pray for Andrew Taban.**

This letter must stop here! I hope you enjoy this little taster and I trust you have a sense of having shared in a significant way with all that went on in Maridi during the time you were praying for us. You certainly were for us very present and a vital part of our experience. I trust that the church in Sudan will know peace in increasing measure just as the Scripture quoted at the beginning of this letter implies.

Once again thanks for your support. May God Bless you abundantly.

With love