

SOMA UK visit to the Diocese of Ruaha, Tanzania 27 September – 10 October 2006

Introduction

This was the second SOMA UK visit to the Diocese of Ruaha. The first in 1997 was led by Justin Welby and was designed to pilot Alpha with a selected group of clergy to assess its usefulness as an evangelistic tool in an African context. This further invitation from Archbishop Donald Mtetemela came early in 2006, requesting a team to facilitate and speak at a Conference for the clergy of the Diocese. The specific request was to address issues relating to the pastoral ministry of the clergy. The team included three clergy (Margaret Smallman, Vicar of Holy Trinity West Bromwich; Barry Wilson, Vicar of Holy Trinity Chesterton; and myself as Team Leader) and three lay people (Chris and Kathleen Parker from Christ the King in the Parish of Meole Brace ; and Margaret Waruiru from St Philip's, Nairobi). The UK members of the Team had three preparatory meetings during July and August (one of which Don Brewin attended) and the full Team had one day together at the Kurasini Centre in Dar es Salaam before travelling to Iringa for the Conference itself.

I shall outline in separate sections 1. the overall shape of the trip, along with the transport and accommodation arrangements 2. the events of the clergy conference itself and 3. my specific observations and conclusions. Suffice it to say at this point that this was a quite remarkable visit to the clergy of the Diocese of Ruaha. We witnessed God at work in ways that both amazed and humbled us. Not only did we see significant healing and renewal in the personal lives of the clergy but we also witnessed a deep work of God's grace amongst and between the clergy that could preface a significant work of the Holy Spirit in the Diocese as a whole.

I. Practicalities

1.1 We travelled by Emirates to Dar es Salaam via Dubai. This was relatively cheap (£428 return) but is significantly longer than a direct flight.

1.2 The Team stayed at the RC Kurasini Centre Hostel in Dar at the start and end of the mission. I have no hesitation in recommending this for use by future SOMA teams. The Centre arranged to collect us from the airport and linked us up with a reliable and courteous driver, Valencio, who was very helpful to us at both ends of the mission. The Centre has full dining facilities, clean en suite single, twin and double rooms and internet access for 500TSh (25p) / half hour. At a full-board rate of £10 / night it was excellent value. The full contact details are as follows:

Tanzania Episcopal Conference Centre
P.O. Box 2133
Dar es Salaam
Tanzania

Tel 00255 22 285 1075 or 77 or 88.
E mail kurasinicentre@hotmail.com

1.3 We travelled to Iringa on a Scandinavian Express Coach. The coaches lived up to their description as "semi-luxury". They were reasonably comfortable, stopped in designated compounds with adequate toilet facilities and got us there and back safely. On both journeys we had a puncture (on the return leg this took over an hour to repair and extended the journey to 10 hours) and we were concerned to see the poor quality of the tyres on the vehicle. The journey cost TSh 15,000 (£6.50) pp each way.

1.4 We were collected from the coach park in Iringa by Mote Magomba (the Diocesan Secretary and Mission Coordinator) and transported to the Amani Centre on the outskirts of Iringa. The Amani Centre is a training institution run by the Diocese. In addition to the three year ordination training course the Centre also runs shorter Bible training courses along with courses in woodworking and tailoring. The Director of the Centre (Phanuel) had just returned from MA studies in Nottingham and the Centre was still under the oversight of Laurent, the Acting Director. The College catered for the clergy Conference and provided accommodation for the 38 Pastors, all of whom were resident for the duration. The Conference was efficiently administered and the catering was excellent throughout. The Team ate all their meals in the main dining room with the Pastors.

1.5 The Team accommodation was in a vacant staff house. It was good to be housed together as a Team and to have some living space in addition to the three twin rooms. The house had been well prepared for our arrival and was clean and tidy. The lack of electric lighting in the bathroom was really our only privation. Hot water was brought to us each morning and evening and a fresh supply of oranges and fruit juice was made available to us. SOMA Teams have to be ready for all manner of accommodation, but I have to say how helpful it was to have a good accommodation-base and to be in one venue. This helped us to relax into the week and to have good, quality Team time together at the start and end of each day.

1.6 The initial agreement with the Diocese was that SOMA UK might provide half of the anticipated costs of the Conference and that as Team Leader I would find the remaining £600. Infact, the full Conference costs of £1040 were provided by the SOMA Team (mainly from Holy Trinity Chesterton) and there was no need to draw on the SOMA UK Mission Fund (apart from the cost of 50 Renewal for Life workbooks). The full cost included reimbursement of the travel costs for each of the Pastors as well as the residential charges for use of the Amani Centre. The Team members also agreed to pay for their own costs in full. It was, though, explained to the Diocese that it was not the usual practice for SOMA Teams to pay for their own accommodation and food while on a mission and that this should be kept in mind for any future invitations to SOMA UK. This policy had not been understood by the Diocese for this particular visit. The SOMA Team had additional donations from supporters which enabled them to cover Margaret Waruiru's costs in full as well as providing a gift of APF Commentaries in Swahili for each of the clergy.

1.7 All in all the practical arrangements went smoothly. There was, though, very little information provided to the Team in advance of the Conference despite repeated e mails and telephone calls from the Team Leader and the UK Director. This not only made our personal preparations difficult but it also sowed seeds of doubt within the Team about the level of enthusiasm in the Diocese for our visit. It transpires that our e mails could not be attended to by the Archbishop's staff in his long absences from the Diocesan Office in the three months before our visit. It would have been helpful to have had the contact details of the Revd Mote Magomba so that basic organisational matters could have been handled by him in the Archbishop's absence, but these were never provided despite repeated requests. On the positive side the lack of advance information kept us dependent of God. On the negative side it meant that there was an unnecessary level of uncertainty on basic issues such as transport arrangements, Conference venue, Team accommodation, and the shape and duration of the Programme.

II The Clergy Conference

2.1 The Conference was called by Archbishop Donald and was attended by nearly all of the 40 clergy serving in the Diocese of Ruaha. The Archbishop himself was unable to attend the Conference because of other diocesan and provincial commitments. He was, though, fully supportive of the SOMA visit and made two visits to the Amani Centre to meet the Team and to say farewell to them on the morning of our departure. The Archbishop is clearly very committed to the ongoing training of his clergy. To this end he calls the clergy together for similar conferences about twice each year. There had been an earlier conference in February 2006 and there are plans for a further conference early in 2007. It was a pleasure to meet Archbishop Donald. He has given wise and forthright leadership in the Diocese over many years. His additional responsibilities as Archbishop are clearly putting great pressure on him and he lives his life at a considerable pace. There was some evidence that the clergy are missing his pastoral presence in the Diocese.

2.2 The Archbishop invited SOMA to lead a Conference on 'The Role of the Pastor in building up the Faithful through his personal example and his Teaching Ministry'. It was agreed early in the invitation process that we would address this broad theme through the 'Renewal for Life' material produced by SOMA UK. The final details of the Conference programme were only agreed on the eve of the Conference itself and a copy of this (further amended during the week) is appended to this Report. As a Team we felt that it was helpful to the whole flow of the week to lay down some basic foundations about Jesus and the Spirit on the first full day. We then took the '3 Rs' pattern and looked progressively at personal, church and community renewal, with one further day devoted to issues relating to the renewal of ministry. Most days had a pattern of two morning teaching talks, followed by group discussion or time-alone; afternoon workshops; and evening Celebrations with a more inspirational talk leading into ministry. It was good to be able to share responsibilities within the Team and to see some Team members speaking and teaching for the first time.

2.3 The Conference was held in the room normally used as the College dining room. It was large, cool(ish!) and ideal for our needs. It was set up with a wedding feel (drapes on the walls and rafters) and with the Conference tables covered in white and pink cloth. This seemed to promise from the outset that the room would be a place of festivity and banquet and a place of encounter with Jesus the Bridegroom. So it proved! We also decided to make an early statement that we as a team were co-learners on the Conference by moving chairs from behind the conference tables (and our top table) into a circle, with the Team sitting amongst the clergy.....a re-arrangement mid-session that also (unbeknown to us) also broke up the strict hierarchy of seating among the pastors themselves. This had an immediate effect upon the mood of the opening session. The pastors visibly relaxed and began to warm to us....and things flowed very quickly from this point on.

2.4 At the end of the first evening session (at which I spoke on Isaiah 61) we invited the Holy Spirit to come as we stood in silence. After around ten minutes (just as I was about to close things with the blessing!) two pastors were significantly impacted by the Holy Spirit (one crying out in fervent intercession for the church, the other deeply touched by the Spirit's presence, weeping). This seemed to release a wider engagement with the Spirit amongst the group and we ministered to the majority of clergy late into the evening. There were varied expressions of response, but no opposition. Some fear in some, perhaps. Something similar happened the next night following a talk by Margaret W on receiving the fullness of the Spirit. We then ministered with the laying on of hands after the morning teaching on the Wednesday and for healing after Kathleen's talk that evening, during which time we used oil for anointing at three prayer-points in the room. We had four testimonies to healing the following morning and prayed there and then for two pastors still feeling unwell, with the pastors doing the ministering. On Thursday evening Margaret S spoke on God's healing in the hurts and pains of ministry, again with much prayer-ministry following in a 'repentance area' and a 'healing area'.

I have rarely seen such a corporate response by church leaders to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. All of this is full of promise for the diocese and its constituent churches.

2.5 On the final morning of the Conference we invited testimonies from the week. We needed much more time! Each of the three testimonies led into significant times of ministry and some very clear healing.....the public reconciliation of a senior pastor with those who had accused him of financial impropriety; the giving of tangible support to another pastor whose struggles (including again accusations made against him by fellow clergy) had almost led him to suicide; and the reconciliation of a further pastor with those who had been critical of his commitment to shared intercession with leaders of other denominations in the area. It felt to us that in each case the implications of the healing could be widespread and long-lasting. It felt like the church itself was being set free and released into something new in the Spirit's purposes. A common strand in each of the testimonies was the pain of feeling misunderstood, and even directly and publicly criticised, by fellow clergy. In a gentle way we invited the clergy to renew their relationships with each other, to walk in the light with each other and to address issues face to face rather than through veiled criticism.

2.6 The final Holy Communion Service was a joyful celebration of all that we had seen God doing amongst us during the week. We also tried to demonstrate a flexible use of liturgy! The service included a symbolic bringing of our churches to the foot of the cross and a re-commissioning into the ministries to which we would be returning.

2.7 I should say as well that on the first Sunday of the mission the Team visited three local churches and spoke in their morning services.

III Conclusions

3.1 We felt throughout this mission that we were walking on ground prepared. Key to this is undoubtedly the intercession that was made in advance of and during the mission, and here we particularly thank Corinne Ashton of Holy Trinity Meole Brace who coordinated the intercession in Hilary Steynor's absence. We were also aware of the good work done by those ministering long-term in the Diocese, both in the College and in the Parishes. It was our privilege as short-term visitors to the Diocese to be able to play a small part in God's unfolding purposes here alongside those who have done the foundational work over many years and who will be around long after we have left. It has been very humbling to be allowed to make our small contribution to this continuing flow of the Lord's work in the Diocese of Ruaha.

3.2 It is important that the fire continues to be stoked. We encouraged the clergy to meet together from time to time to support each other, be open with each other and to pray for each other. It seems that there are few structures in place in the Diocese to enable this to happen on a regular basis, not least because of the practical and financial problems of clergy travelling long distances to spend time together. Maybe the regular clergy Conferences can include time and space for prayer in Deanery groups, for prayer-ministry with the laying on of hands and for teaching that encourages a balance in ministry between Word and Spirit. Archbishop Donald's role in this will be crucial, both in endorsing and in expanding the renewal.

3.3 Many of the clergy are working in difficult contexts, with little leadership support in their Parishes and high expectations on them to function well in a wide range of ministry roles. If the fire is to spread it will be important that the clergy feel able to draw other key people into their prayer and longing and ministry for renewal. To this end it may be helpful if there could be a further SOMA UK Conference in the near future to which clergy wives are invited along with Evangelists, Youth Pastors and other significant lay leaders.

3.4 I would like to record a word of thanks to the members of my Team. It was a very special experience working with them and seeing them flow in their many gifts....and discovering new ones. In each case God had given very specific guidance and confirmation in advance that it was right to join the Ruaha Team. This clear sense of call was the bedrock for the whole Team experience and helped us to bond well, to share honestly and to trust each other. We gave quality time before, during and after the Conference to minister to each other. The prominent use of the lay members of the team during the Conference was noted by many of the pastors and may encourage them to involve lay people more in public ministry in the parishes.

3.5 It was a great pleasure to have Margaret Waruiru on the Team. Apart from her very considerable personal gifts (particularly in the areas of intercession and the prophetic) it was very helpful to have someone on the team who could not only speak swahili but who understood East Africa, its people and its culture and who could keep us culturally focussed.

3.6 I am also grateful to Mote Magomba for the gracious and energetic way in which he hosted the Conference and supported the Team. He is a man of great ability and considerable wisdom who surely God will use in the leadership of His Church in Tanzania for many years to come. My only fear is that he might burn out if he doesn't take time out of work for himself and his family. I should add here our gratitude to the small team of enthusiastic and very capable translators who worked alongside Mote during the Conference. It was very helpful to have Ian Oates of CMS Australia with us throughout the week.

3.7 But thanks most of all to God Himself, who's renewing work in the Diocese of Ruaha we were privileged to be part of for this short time. He once again did much more than we could ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us....and to Him be all the honour.

Prebendary Kevin Roberts
Vicar of Meole Brace
30 November 2006