



## **Suffering and Forgiveness**

The people of the Diocese of Rokon have suffered greatly. The nearby front line of the siege of Juba has divided families, and left some of them in appalling circumstances.

The Bishop has been a true leader of his people, arranging food for over 5000 of them who came to him when he returned there, after they had survived in the open for three years. Now there is a secure compound, basic buildings for a school and an orphanage, and foundations for a clinic.

On the Sunday people began to arrive from all round the area - many of them had walked for several days to reach the site.

On the first day of the residential seminar we tried to gauge the level of knowledge by the group of around 70 clergy and wives, Mothers' Union workers and lay readers, including 6 from the neighbouring diocese of Lainya. It was clear that some were well taught, but others less so.

About half were able to use the English Workbooks on "Renewal for Life" we had brought. The day ended with a celebration, with some wonderful testimonies and an enthusiastic response to the invitation for prayer ministry.

Tuesday was "Holy Spirit Day", interspersed with more testimonies, and a useful time in the afternoon when men & women discussed separately a number of key questions on the effects of the war. An unexpected interruption came when a SPLA soldier, with teenaged bodyguards around, marched into the church. I introduced myself to him and pointed him to the Bishop! He was just interested to find out what was going on.

Ash Wednesday was a turning point. Up to then the atmosphere had been friendly but somewhat heavy. However, after the teaching in the first part of the day on Bible study and prayer, the topics became deeper with teaching on suffering and forgiveness.

This was clinched with the "Cross exercise" when people pinned pieces of paper to an improvised wooden cross, on which were written (or imagined) names of those we resented, or sins which needed forgiveness. Then after prayer these were burned up, and the Bishop pronounced absolution - and burdens were tangibly lifted! This was reinforced by prayer ministry at the end of the day.

On the last full day of the seminar we covered spiritual warfare, evangelism and intercession before the evening celebration when people were prayed for in the open air by all the others.

The exhausting overland journey back included an interesting moment crossing a bridge which had been half broken when a tank tried to cross - and a large lorry was stuck in the ford across the river below.

The visit made a deep impression on our team, and created a partnership with the Bishop and his Diocese which will continue. My own hope and prayer is that when Juba is finally liberated, the people of the Diocese of Rokon will not only be united, but will be a resource for the healing of a traumatised population who have endured years of suffering under this siege.

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