

## **“Thank God for SOMA’s care for the poor”**

The founder of SOMA is increasingly passionate and concerned about poverty - and he challenges others to be the same.

Michael Harper, who founded SOMA in 1978 and is now a priest in the Orthodox Church told delegates at SOMA’s Silver Jubilee Conference he is delighted with SOMA’s concern for the poor.

Speaking to the 400 international delegates at Canterbury in July 2004 he said he frequently causes embarrassment to his friends.

Father Harper - as he is now called - said that when he sees a beggar in the street he always goes up to them; he always gives them money; he always puts an arm around them, prays for them and gives them a hug - “knowing that most of them haven’t had a hug for years.”

He added: “When I look back on SOMA, I wish I’d done more of this. I wish I had done more for the poor. And one of the things I want to express is my thanks to God for the new SOMA, the SOMA that has developed since I left. That is: I thank God for this care for the poor.

I particularly want to pay tribute to my successor here in this country, Don Brewin and the many things he has done. I’m so glad that the SOMA ministry to the traumatised people of Ruanda, where 800,000 were massacred - that SOMA went in there very soon after that. I know that Don Brewin and others were very much behind that.

“I thank God for Don Brewin and for others’ concern for Southern Sudan. I wish the world would take a great deal more interest in these things, for the horrors that take place. And I have to tell you now barely a day goes by when I don’t say: “What am I? Here am I with this money, this roof over my head, this wealth, all this security.

“And today probably a young girl in Afghanistan will die because she can’t afford a blanket. And that’s just once incident of millions and millions of people. Think of the refugees in Palestine, who have been refugees for over 50 years and think of the way they have to live year after year. Think of Northern Uganda and the serious problems of health and nutrition.

“I sometimes think: ‘What would you do if you had five minutes with George W Bush?’ I would say to him: ‘War On Want is much more important that war on terrorism.’

“Terrorism is horrible and kills people but severe deprivation is killing millions and millions of people. And the world has turned its back on such people and done virtually nothing.

“I thank God for SOMA and that since I’ve left the trend has gone much more in this direction and I praise God for that.”