

ROOTED IN JESUS CONFERENCES

Dioceses of Lango & Karamoja, Uganda
February/March 2016
Rev Derek Price: Team Leader's Report

INTRODUCTION

The team

Ben Beecroft (Vicar, St Paul's, Addlestone); Jeannetta Stokes (Priest-in-Charge, St Peter's, Worfield); Sarah Richardson (a GP from Barrow-in-Furness); Andy Douglass (a retired GP from Bridgwater); James Tumwesigye (a priest from Kamwenge, Uganda [Week 1]); William Musisi (a priest from Bwera, Uganda [Week 2]); Clark & Carol Smith ('equipping of the saints' missionaries – E412 Ministries – from Savannah); and myself as Team Leader (Vicar, St Paul's, Barrow-in-Furness).



The mix of age, nationalities, testimonies, gifts, experience, and personalities brought such a diversity and richness to the team. The breadth and depth of their love for and relationship with God and His Church was clear for all to see. They showed such grace and tenderness especially in the midst of the unexpected and challenging circumstances we encountered. The ease and unity with which the team worked, ministered, and laughed together witnessed hearts surrendered to God and their desire to fulfil His will. God hand-picked each of them and I am so thankful to Him for their love and friendship, laughter and tears, selflessness and giving, risk-taking and trust.

LANGO

We arrived in Uganda at a difficult time.

- National elections had just taken place and results were announced the day we landed. There was a level of unrest, government shutdown of social media, some demonstrations and violence, and the opposition leader was arrested. Schools were being kept closed until after the elections.
- Added to that a young ordinand, Bosco, and his daughter were 2 of 11 people who had died the day before we arrived when their vehicle carrying 14 passengers hit a tree. The funeral would need to take place in Lira Cathedral, which was the venue for the RinJ conference. We planned around this, were invited to his funeral, invited forward during the funeral so each of us could introduce ourselves, and I spoke of standing with them in their loss, and the assurance of resurrection life.
- Finally, on the day we started the conference, a priest, Rev Robert (who no longer works for the church but is in politics), was abducted. He was released the following day, very badly beaten. We were able to spend some time with him and his family, without affecting the conference.

We stayed overnight in Entebbe and Ronald Eguny, the Diocesan RinJ Coordinator, arrived to drive us to Lira – a 6 to 7 hour journey. Upon arrival at Lira, we were overwhelmed with the warmth and hospitality of Bishop Charles. After some food, we were taken to our accommodation (the Bishop's retirement home). It was comfortable, quiet and peaceful. There was even a spacious room we were able to use for our team devotions, preparations, and debriefing. On our Preparation Day, we visited Lira Cathedral (the venue for the conference) and the surrounding area to discuss practicalities. Initially, we spent much time walking and praying around every part. When we finished, the whole atmosphere physically and spiritually had changed. We returned to our accommodation and finished our preparations.



On Day 1 of the conference, 134 participants arrived. They relaxed into the teaching, groups, workshops, and ministry time with relative ease. There was an openness to the Spirit and, clearly, they were used to praying for healing. From Day 2 onwards there were 182 participants (all of whom received certificates) which meant using every team member so groups were a manageable size. We had plenty of willing and able translators throughout and Ronald used a bell to ensure people turned up on time.



Lango diocese is big and very active in many ministries including: HIV Aids Project; Community Recovery Programme; Vulnerable Groups; MU; Youth; Healing & Intercession; Education; Children; Inspector of Schools; Health Education; Health Centres. It has 11 Archdeacons, 51 Parishes, and 678 Sub-Parishes (each with a Catechist & Lay Reader).



The one area of concern I had over RinJ is in its implementation across a diocese. I decided for these two conferences I would spend focused quality and quantity time with the Bishops and/or Co-ordinators learning about their structures, boards/committees, strategy, other ministries, communication, mobility challenges so I could be more pro-active in helping facilitate a simple method (using their existing set-up) to maximise its implementation and minimise additional workload for all concerned. I spent 2 hours with Ronald (Ben was able to come for the final hour) until we arrived at a plan that we thought would be effective. This included placing four of the participants, one in each of the Mission Committees, whose sole responsibility is to represent RinJ and look for/suggest ways the RinJ Course can support/follow up mission activities. Ben, James, and I then spent an hour with the 11 Archdeacons, presented this to them and asked for their views, checking with them that we had understood correctly the set-up within which they work. This was a very constructive time too. I then presented it to all the participants explaining how, with God's help, we had arrived at what we hoped would be a simple way of receiving ongoing feedback and giving support to them as group leaders. The participants seemed engaging and enthusiastic. I anticipate well over 100 RinJ groups will start in Lango Diocese within the next 2-3 weeks.

I discussed a 'Follow-up Conference' for Autumn 2017. Both Bishop Charles and his staff were keen this should happen. I did have a preliminary chat with Ronald about running a RinJ Junior Conference parallel to the other. I think it's worth exploring this. It would be great if Jonathan Rendall could do it.

I am so thankful to and humbled by Bishop Charles and Rev Ronald Egony whose passion for God, servant leadership, vision, commitment, recognition of the need to grow disciples, and enthusiasm for RinJ as a resource gives me much hope for its potential impact.

We started Day 4 of the conference earlier as Bosco's burial was at 10am. It was vibrant and celebratory. We said our farewells which included 'goodbye' to Andy (he had to return to the UK), and James (who had committed himself to a two-week mission elsewhere). He would be replaced by William Musisi for the conference in Karamoja Diocese.

KARAMOJA

We arrived to a really warm welcome from Bishop Joseph and John Onyao, the appointed RinJ Co-ordinator.

This was very different to Lira. Hot, dry, intermittent water and electricity supply, no fruit. People are very poor. We learned that many of those coming to the conference lost one, or multiple, family members/people they knew during the insurgence in 1999. Curfews were still in place in 2006. If you were out walking, during a curfew, you were likely to be shot. Bishop Joseph described their past as a 'bloodbath'. That's why he held a Convocation last August 2015. He expected 4,000 people to come but 7,000 arrived! He



wanted to draw a line under the past, to see God give Karamoja 'a new name'. This RinJ conference felt God's timing for them – a new beginning. We prayed that God would do a deeper work of healing from the effects of trauma.

We also learned that there is a significant demonic stronghold in the area. People visit a shrine that has been set up to a goddess. If they are ill, many people go to make a sacrifice as they think their illness is punishment for displeasing her – the sacrifice is to appease her. We learned from Bishop Joseph that he had to challenge the clergy last year over their own behaviour concerning this shrine/goddess. They were allowing/participating in shrine sacrifice partly out of fear and partly out of misguidedness. They thought if they joined the people in their idolatry they, likewise, might join them in church. We kept spiritually alert! Actually, I sensed a wall of protection around the whole conference so that nothing of the enemy was getting in. We would be woken up at 5am each day by the sounds of participants worshipping God. This would go on for at least an hour or more. I believe their praises were creating/maintaining that wall of protection.

We were shown to our accommodation which was comfortable. We checked out the venue which was on the same site. It was much smaller than Lira but we were expecting less numbers – a maximum of 90 participants. As we prayed around the building, there was a sense of peace and celebration about it.

Day 1 of the conference began with very vibrant spontaneous worship. There were around 80 participants but 95 by Day 2. They were made up of all the Clergy, Lay Readers, MU, Fathers Union, Wardens, Sunday School teachers, Youth leaders, and parish mission coordinators. During ministry times, the Spirit worked very slowly and gently but went deep – He gave us a sense of them being very fragile. Experiencing the Spirit in their lives seemed unfamiliar to them, so we provided more opportunities each day.



Karamoja Diocese is much smaller than Lango. However, the Bishop has a huge vision. A new Cathedral is partially built alongside the church venue we were using. He shared with me more of his vision. He is from Karamoja, it's his home, its in his heart. The diocese is active in numerous ministries including: Education; Mission; Sunday School; Youth; MU; Fathers Union. It has 7 Archdeaconries, 1 deanery, 11 Parishes, 7 Sub-parishes, and 34 congregations. There are 10 priests in the Central Offices and 15 in parishes.



I spent 1½ hours with John Onyao and Bishop Joseph until we arrived at a plan that we thought would be effective in implementing RinJ. Being a smaller diocese meant less levels with which to work. Group leaders will send the information to their priests, who will forward it to John along with those from other groups within their parish/ congregations.

Bishop Joseph told me that nearly half the participants are not literate, and many of the young leaders will be going away to school for 5 months and unable to start a course. John made a list of those who could read either Karamojong or English. Those unable to read, but who had been at the conference, would be in the initial groups as helpers. That would grow their own discipleship but also the enthusiasm that God had sown within all the participants. The bishop and he spent the rest of the evening interviewing those who were able to read and therefore start a group. It was typed out by breakfast time the following morning – they would start with 49 groups within the next 2-3 weeks. I discussed a 'Follow-up Conference' for Autumn 2017. Bishop Joseph was keen this should happen.

PRAYER SUPPORT

What more can I say about the prayer support? I and the team were overwhelmed by the level of commitment to prayer that so clearer was happening, whether through Rooted in Jesus intercessors, individuals, prayer groups, weekly church services, home groups, others. We felt surrounded, undergirded, protected, informed, cared for, empowered, affirmed, strengthened, full of hope, and encouraged. We are so very grateful.

Thank you too for the huge level of support from Alison and Kinga throughout. Your knowledge, experience, wisdom, practical common sense, follow-through, commitment, trust, and reliance on the Holy Spirit at work in you/me/the rest of the team, equipped and enabled us to step out with confidence.

TESTIMONIES

From LANGO:

- Woman whose name we do not know. She was slain in the Spirit during the time we ministered to the women and Jeannetta felt the Lord wanted her to know He had taken away any reproach/shame. She also sang over her during one of the ministry times. This lady was visibly transformed through the conference, and became completely radiant with joy. She grabbed us up in a big embrace at the end, though we can't confirm what happened as she didn't speak English.
- A woman called Joyce – as we Jeannetta & Sarah prayed for her knees, she said the pain went. She was certainly dancing on them for the rest of the conference.
- Thompson - stomach pains were healed
- Ronald - stomach pains were healed
- We also had various people complaining of back pain, chest pain, stomach pain who were healed either in the ministry times or in the workshop.
- James, Head Lay Reader - Trouble. My neighbour spoke directly to my life. Battle affected family. Problem with abdomen. Daughter sick, had surgery. Her ten-year-old child was also affected. Yesterday I got relief. Yesterday I forgave my neighbour.
- Lay Reader - Yesterday my daughter disappeared. Second daughter disappeared. Yesterday committed them to prayer. Daughter called, asked for forgiveness. Kept meditating, "Where is my daughter?" Help from the prayer.
- Josephine (MU) - Freed from a serious headache. Slept well. Received healing.

From KARAMOJA:

- In groups, as we (Sarah & William) were leading a prayer session, we prayed for Monica. She was suffering from backache and the pain stopped immediately.
- On 2nd March, we had no water and the leaders said that we will fast. But we praise God that people prayed and water came and we had food.
- In groups, when we asked people to listen to God, Philip saw the army men coming to attack him. But while he was thinking about that, he saw a certain Rev came and rescued him and untied the cows. This was interpreted that God is going to restore the land of Karamoja with peace. And the cows, which are surrounded by the army men, are going to be free.
- Christina was particularly touched that her back/leg pain had been healed as the course participants prayed for her.
- Woman - Yesterday I was not well. Today I am fine.
- Another person - glad we are here. Woke up and prayed. Raised hands up. Thank the Lord for releasing me from pain.
- Another person - Remembered sister-in-law was disturbed by a spirit. Prayed. Dreamt I saw a lady coming. Pigs came out, then piglets. Cut off the neck of the pig. Heard she is now released. The Holy Spirit can come in.
- Woman - A lot of pain where she was operated. Prayed. Gave heart to God.

