

Rooted in Jesus Junior Seminars in Masasi, Tanzania

Monday, 22nd to Saturday, 27th September, 2014
Report from Jonathan Rendall

“Children are a very, very, very good thing. We must care for them, teach them properly and teach them very well”, said Bishop James Almasi, as we prepared to leave for the Mkuti seminar.

In the week following the Consecration of Bishop James, I remained in Masasi to lead two three day seminars for Rooted in Jesus Junior leaders and Sunday School teachers. The first was at Mkuti: a parish that holds a special place in the annals of Rooted in Jesus Junior; it was from this parish, one of two in Masasi - Mkuti and Mkomaindo - that Sunday School teachers came to the pilot Junior conference in 2010; returning here for the first of these seminars was a privilege and joy. The event was held in the now completed Rooted in Jesus classroom: a splendid brick building especially built and set apart for children – probably the only one in our RinJ dioceses! The priests of each of the five parish represented had been asked by +James to develop Junior groups.



Seminar 1 at Mkuti: one of the Masasi town parishes saw 29 Sunday school teachers attend. The seminars were facilitated and led by Edna Nachingulu, Sophia Mung’ong’o and Jonathan Rendall. Both Edna and Sophia have led groups in their parish churches since 2010; both were at that very first pilot training for Mkuti and Mkomaindo parishes in 2010 and the diocesan Junior conference in 2011. In those days, +James Almasi was the parish priest in Mkomaindo.

Bishop James in opening the seminar emphasised the place of Rooted in Jesus in the mission of the diocese and of his heart’s desire to see children disciplined for Jesus. He also reminded us of the place of Mkuti in the history of RinJ Junior in Tanzania. The first session gave opportunity to reflect and report back on the RinJ Junior groups and on children’s growing discipleship. After some discussions amongst the group members, the responses came and the impact of the episcopal interregnum and the study leave of the Rooted in Jesus coordinator became very clear. The support, training and encouragement needed to maintain the groups had not been available. However, the Sunday Schools were being effective and there was clearly enthusiasm for children’s ministry and +James wanted Rooted in Jesus to be at the forefront of children’s ministry again and this was to be his re-launch of Junior.



What followed was a slimmed down version of the three day Junior conference – key parts of the content in reduced form without the Devotions and the Ministry Time. Junior was received well and with enthusiasm and the activities were fully engaged with by everyone. Edna and Sophia led the session on Pastoral Care, partnered in other workshops and gave an introduction to how a RinJ Junior group was led through the Demonstration Lesson. Ministry and healing prayer was offered at the close of Day 2 after the teaching session on the Holy Spirit: 19 people asked for healing so the other 10 gathered round those needing healing. Several testimonies of healing were given the next morning and one at the Sunday Service at Mkuti.



+James returned on Day 3 to close the event and answer questions put by the group. The chief issues being diocesan support for Junior and payment for leading RinJ Junior groups. He challenged us to remember again that Jesus himself commissioned us to go and make disciples. He then presented RinJ Junior Book 1 to each person, commissioning them to go and do just that: to go and disciple children giving to God freely of their

gifts and skills in this work for the children of the diocese. As a seminar group we so appreciated the opportunity to gather round our new Bishop and pray for him.

Seminar 2: Mpindimbi, a very rural parish some 16 kilometres from Masasi gave opportunity for people from very rural churches to attend the Junior training. The seminar was opened by Fr Thadeus, the Bishop's Chaplain and parish priest of Mpindimbi. Fr Thadeus and his wife gave us, and our translator Fr Phares, warm and generous hospitality.



The enthusiasm of everyone present was palpable and their commitment so encouraging. The seminar took the shape and form of the three day Junior conference again without the devotion talk and the ministry time. Two of the seminar members had been at the 2011 Junior conference but both had grown disillusioned and disappointed with no diocesan support so had stopped their RinJ Junior groups; now to their delight and joy this was an opportunity to regain enthusiasm and new passion. At the close of Day 3 they declared that on return to their parish they would re-start the groups. No one else knew of Rooted in Jesus or Junior.



Sophia and Edna again led their workshop, partnered in the work and led the demonstration lesson; so contributing from their experience to the training. The response from these Sunday School teachers on hearing about Junior was one of joy and delight; "at last we have a curriculum and we can teach our children"; this was the prevailing attitude and encourager throughout the three days. There was an enthusiasm to return to the parishes and churches to start Junior groups.

The demonstration lesson 2a was amongst the best I have ever seen at a Junior training event; Sophia had worked with the trainees on the previous evening while Edna had returned home to Masasi feeling unwell. The Lord healed her headache but not the pain in her side. Ministry was offered after the teaching session on Holy Spirit; everyone stood for prayer to receive and be filled with the Holy Spirit. One person came forward for healing prayer; she had an ulcer - clearly blessed, she reported a real sense of the Spirit's presence as she received prayer. For us all there was a profound sense of the presence of the Lord as we met for teaching and prayer. Fr Thadeus closed with a commissioning prayer and blessing.



The challenge of Junior for those in these seminars, indeed all parishes is the same: this is a small group interactive style of nurturing children into Christian discipleship. While the interactive training always inspires and equips Sunday School teachers to disciple their children, on return to their parishes this will mean some internal changes to the structure and management of the Sunday School and a whole new style of leading and teaching. This was the prevailing issue for Mpindimbi but their enthusiasm and determination, commitment and prayer (theirs and ours) will see them succeed.

End note: It is with deep sadness that I write of Edna's death in the week following the seminars. She had the discipleship of children in her heart and Junior was for her a wonderful tool for Sunday School teachers. It has been a very great privilege to serve the children of Masasi alongside Edna (right). She was Bibi Ishirini to me – grandmother twenty: a tease she loved the memories of this past week are even more precious. Thank you Lord for Edna: her infectious enthusiasm and strong faith, her friendship and love, her deep commitment to children and to Rooted in Jesus Junior.



Jonathan Rendall
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