

Aru, Boga, Chester (ABC) Diocesan Link visit 24th July – 8th August 2017.

“so that through the church the wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10)



Between 25th July and 8th August 2017 a small team from Chester diocese was able to visit our brothers and sisters in the dioceses of Boga and Aru in the NE of DR Congo. We stayed in Bunia the largest town in Boga diocese from 26th to 31st July and in Aru itself from 31st to 5th August. In Bunia we helped lead a youth convention of about 150 from the town, and in Aru a pastors’ retreat of about 250 pastors and catechists from across the diocese, including two pastors from South Sudan.

Here is the team

Keith Sinclair (Bishop of Birkenhead), Ian Bishop* (Archdeacon of Macclesfield), John Owens (Chair of the ABC Committee), Ralph Kemp (Associate Vicar Christ Church Chester) for first week only in Bunia, Philip Alston (Kids Church Minister All Saints Marple), Ruth Abbott* (Lay Reader St Nicholas Burton) and Richard Cussons* (Lay Reader Christ Church Woodford and lay minister in local Methodist Circuit); (* Visitors to Aru and Boga diocese for first time).



Figure 1 Map of DRC showing the location of Bunia and Aru

Bunia

Meet

Moses

At about 12 years Moses experienced severe trauma either medically through a stroke or some other way; he was unable to speak and walk. He now smiles and can tell you his name. He is part of the choir. He has received significant healing through the parish and the ministry of Flame International who visit Eastern Congo regularly. His parents and family had been heavily into the occult.



Asaph

He was one of those confirmed. He has a deep bass voice of high quality. He is a graduate but has no work. He helps leads the male choir that practices behind the wall between the church centre and meeting room. The older young men train the street kids in singing at the practice and brought them into the church for the confirmation service. Where in the Chester diocese I wonder, anywhere would between 6 -17 young men between the ages of 8 and 20 be practising to sing in Church? Their song was about not being afraid to stand and live for the Lord.

Irene

She is the wife of +William and mother of their 4 children now in their early twenties, 2 boys and 2 girls. She had travelled overnight from Kampala in a “taxi” a small minibus on African



roads, a journey to the Uganda border of 6 hours and from the Uganda border 4 hours. She had been looking after her father who was in hospital and allowed home. She sang that evening at home on the sofa with the 2 boys a song of thanksgiving to Jesus. She is the diocesan President of the Mothers Union. Her immediate response to request for prayer was the major task facing MU helping women suffering from trauma, the trauma of rape, of losing husbands and children in the wars, and/or of the care of looking after the children of relatives or others who had been killed. She wants to organise groups for handicraft and sewing as part of therapy and recovery. She could do with some sewing machines.

Abigail

She is the daughter of Rev Japheth the Vicar of the parish in Bunia where the convention was taking place and where the team stayed. She translated for us. She is studying at the Church Army College (Carlisle House) in Nairobi and hopes to work as an evangelist. Her father is the Director of Evangelism for the Diocese.



3 Women

Unnamed, who we met in the Chapel of Healing, which was part of the Anglican University of Bunia, which began as a Theological Institute in 1987 and of which +Ande before his consecration had been Director. This chapel (a converted house) was set aside for people to come for prayer. The three women were introduced to us, none of them spoke. We were told one was suffering from long term illness, one from trauma, one from mental illness. I was asked to pray. I shared from my mobile phone a picture of the chapel in Magda in Galilee of the woman reaching out to touch the hem of the garment of Jesus. This was what they were doing in Bunia. We prayed. It was evident that the small congregation present, almost all women, deeply appreciated the connection. I wondered how many of our places of theological training might be improved by the provision of this kind of prayer.

Elias Mtazimana



Elias Mtazimana is from Goma, N Kivu. He is the student sponsored by Chester University this year at the Anglican University of Bunia following the visit to Chester of Rev Dr Yossa Way, the Vice Dean. Elias has completed his first year and with his wife and child was presented to us to formally. He thanks us and the University of Chester for making it possible for him to study. We wondered if the University of Chester might be willing to consider sponsoring two students a year!

Jean Bagada Kabagambe

Jean is the diocesan secretary for Boga Diocese. He looked after us, making all the arrangements for our stay and care. He arranged the programme and the team who looked after us. He is +William's right hand person. He has visited all 35 parishes: each parish has up to 8 sub parishes and each sub parish has a number of congregations of at least 25 people each. There are over 60 schools run by the diocese, 11 secondary; 1 hospital and 35 health clinics. With +William he has been working on a diocesan strategy for growth which includes asking the parishes to be accountable for the number of children and young people they are serving. + William told us 80% of the diocese is under 24. Jean is a man of quiet efficiency and hope. The problems and challenges are beyond easy description.



The Pastors



A small group of about 12 met with the team after the Convention had finished. None of them receive a stipend; all are expected to raise enough to live on and support a family. Their two main concerns were funding for the education of their children, including university

education, and what they would do on retirement: there is minimal pension provision from the state. We told them about the Chester Clergy Family Trust in this diocese, and wondered if we could help them in establishing a similar fund there. But in supplementing their income, there is a catch; if they were to go into business or law (the two examples given to us) they would inevitably be mired in corruption, so these two options were not open to them (see +Ande's comment later). The average age of the pastors was over 50 (average life expectancy in Congo is 54); we were told young people did not want to go into the ministry because they saw how hard it was for those who were. There are no ordained women at present in Boga diocese.

The Women

Ruth had her own session with a large group of women; this is her account:-

“Bisoke Balikenga, the Provincial Youth Coordinator for the Anglican Church in Congo, had told me about a



Peace and Reconciliation Centre he had set up. There are 150 women attending, many of whom had been raped during the violence in Bunia, some had been rejected by their husbands because of it. Some had witnessed the killing of their families, including their children.

+William told us that because of the dowry system in the DRC many couples were unable to marry, and this left the women in a difficult position. Many of the women were also raising other relatives' children, with very few resources.

During my talk we looked at women in the Bible who had experienced fear, shame and ostracism, but God used them in a powerful way. The stories of Rahab and the Samaritan woman at the well were particularly helpful.

It was clear that they had not had scripture interpreted like that before, but in a culture which does not recognise equality for women, it is not surprising. I believe that they were touched by the realization that God uses women who are outcast for His purposes.

The women were amazed and delighted to hear that my vicar was a woman, and that we had a woman bishop.

I believe that this link will prove to be very helpful in the future for the encouragement of women.”

The Sunday School

Philip spoke at the youth conference about ministering to children, and Bible heroes. Using the story of the boy who gave his meal to feed the 5,000 from John 6, he spoke about the truth that children have a role in Christ's ministry. He wanted to encourage those working with children and talked about the call that God makes on some people's lives to focus on the children in the community. He reminded them that this wasn't a “second class” calling. Philip also spent time with the Sunday School during the confirmation service; this is his account.

“It was a genuine pleasure and privilege to spend my Sunday morning with the Sunday School children and their teachers in Bunia. There was a real sense of joy and excitement as



they met to worship their Heavenly Father and to learn more about His Son, Jesus Christ. The children listened attentively as we investigated the story of the man lowered through the roof from Luke 5. Their worship was full of energy and to hear (and see) them sing “Cast Your Burdens Onto Jesus”, the song the

Chester team had shared with the community just two days prior to the Sunday School meeting was an awesome experience. My prayer is that the children, and maybe more specifically their teachers, received at least some of the encouragement and strengthening that I received from my time with this wonderful group of people. “

+William

+William has been bishop of Boga since 2011. He was brought up in Boga as one of 11 children. Being small of stature he said he tried to get on by “being liked and working hard”; he excelled at (he speaks 5 only to be exceeded by his son Andrew who, according to Andrew, speaks 7).

He studied to be a teacher at Kisangani University and returned to teach in Boga. When the war came to Boga he had to lead his family with 4 young children into the forest with the one suitcase they had prepared for an emergency; they made it to Uganda where William was able to obtain a Masters degree. He returned to teach at Mahagi, just over the border from Uganda in Congo, now in Aru diocese. From there he came to Bunia as a youth minister (nurtured by Judy Acheson, CMS Missionary in Bunia for over 30 years, whose former house is now his home), and was then ordained. He has overseen a diocese which has struggled with significant division, partly tribal and partly financial. He has worked extremely hard with Jean to organise the diocese and Synod. His faith, joy and hope are amazing.



The team taught from Ephesians at the youth convention, our identity in Christ, and our community in him; on the change being in Christ brings between men and women, parents and children, employed and employers; and prayer. Each of us gave our testimonies. Through the gift of a lay woman from this diocese we had money to purchase Bibles which +William said should be given to the women at the youth convention; their reaction was

ecstatic praise and dancing around the church. At the site of the other part of the Anglican University (the Nickson Campus after Pat Nickson, where the teaching provided by IPASC is given in community health) we were welcomed by the Rector, Amuda Baba who is studying for his doctorate at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. In the time of worship we sang a beautiful hymn in French, which moved us all.

This is the chorus:-

*“Oh, l’amour de Dieu, comment les riches et pure !
Comment incalculable et fort !
Elle doit supporter pour toujours —
Chanson des saints et des anges.”*

Which translates as:-

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints’ and angels’ song.*

Aru

Since the 10th anniversary celebrations in 2015 attended by +Libby and +Keith, the site of the Anglican “campus” has become even more impressive.

The diocesan office is almost complete. A new meeting hall is under construction (the roof paid for by this diocese’s gift at the 10th anniversary), the Bible College, medical training facilities, and above



all the new dental clinic (led by Graham and Wendy Toulmin from CMS Australia) were operating well. Of the over 250 pastors and catechists from across the diocese who came, we reckoned many of their stories would be as of those in Bunia. There is at least one ordained woman in Aru diocese, and her name is Georgine.

Meet

Georgine



She works with +Ande in the diocesan office and is part of the Cathedral team. She had just returned from a visit to Ghana where she had attended the Langham Partnership Preaching Course (a ministry begun by John Stott and now working all over the world in providing theological resources and training particularly in preaching). She had been thrilled by the experience and eager to pass on what she had received. It was hugely significant that of all those working in ministry in Aru, she should have been the one

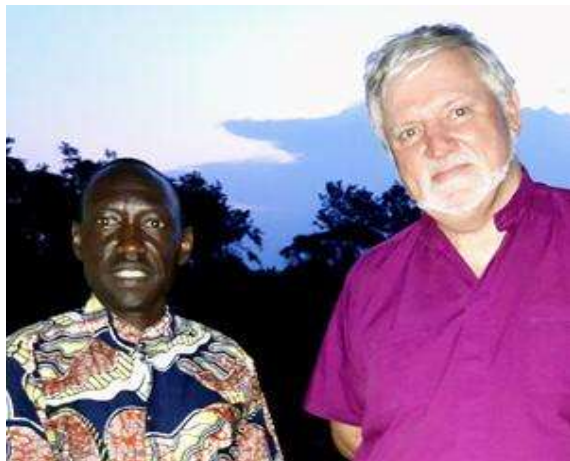
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David

David is one of the 7 Archdeacons in the diocese. 3 weeks ago his wife Helen died after a long illness and none of the clinics or medical centres to which David took her could help. 3 of his sons have died and he is now responsible for 7 grandchildren. He is nearing retirement and is trying to build a house in Aru. We were told that Archdeacon David has an extensive pastoral ministry and many of the clergy go to him for help. On the last night when we all came together for farewells and there was a great spirit of freedom and joy, David led some of the elderly men and women in songs and dances of praise.

Jean Bosco

Jean has just completed his theological Masters at Bunia. He will lecture at the university that is being established in Aru. He is married with 4 children from 7 to 1. His wife is a teacher. He is wondering how he could improve his English so he can access more resources in his training role. He is going to enquire as to whether there might be courses in Kampala. I wondered if there was any way he might be able to come to England for one or two months. He is an outstanding Christian leader.



Pastor Martin



Please see the extended note which includes a full account of the testimony he shared at the end of the retreat. He spoke of two occasions when he faced death. The details are extremely harrowing, in the first episode other passengers on the bus were killed, in the second episode he believed God gave him words which he believes saved his life. A collection was raised for him and the other pastor from S Sudan who were present and who were now ministering on the border inside Congo. I was told almost all of the 250 present could have given similar stories. In the second episode when he was on the ground with a gun

to his head and he thought death was imminent he told us of his prayer at that moment “I know I’m no longer going to live. Help me to live my life in heaven, in Jesus name”. His testimony and +Ande’s which followed and was of a similar kind made preaching at the confirmation on the Friday on John 14:1-6 “in my Father's house are many rooms.... I will come and take you to be where I am.... I am the way the truth and the life” a wholly different experience to preaching on that text in England.

Kabila

+Ande’s nephew, abandoned by his father. About to begin university he hopes but does not know what to do; there is very little prospect of a job beyond. He is a key member of the young people's' choir in Aru. He was one of those who came in the back of the truck to welcome us at Aru airfield and sang as we got off the plane and led us to the Cathedral where we were welcomed by over 100 people, singing and embracing us. In all my travels to different places in the world I have never received the overflowing generosity of the welcome I have received in Congo.



Graham and Wendy Toulmin



Graham has come out of retirement to set up this dental clinic with his wife Wendy. They were medical missionaries back in the 1980’s in Butembo about 500 km to the south of Aru; in 1992 they had had to leave suddenly with their 4 young children because of violence. At the 10th anniversary celebrations in 2015

+Libby and I had witnessed the opening of the clinic and heard the horror stories of getting their first class equipment across the border.

The clinic and training school is now well under way and Graham and Wendy spoke of the quality of the students who they are training. They have established two other centres in Congo and both are going well because of the quality of the students who have taken over the dental procedures. It is a daily challenge and as well as the highs there are the lows. In God's good grace, when Graham and Wendy were visiting Keith as part of their furlough visit last year, he gave them a copy of the DVD "Marvellous", the story of Neil Baldwin, "Nello". They can watch it on their laptop and they told me that they had often done so on down days and it had always encouraged them. On the penultimate night the team watched "Marvellous" in Aru with Graham and Wendy, a truly surreal and completely wonderful moment.



+Ande

+Ande has been the first bishop of Aru since 2005. Before then he had been Director of the



Theological Institute in Bunia and gave his testimony following Pastor Martin's. CMS published an account of what had happened and it is attached to this report. If he had been killed that night, it is very likely that there would never have been a diocese of Aru, and certainly not a diocese which has achieved all that has been achieved. The peace and calm of Aru after the noise and jostling of Bunia was palpable. The Synod of the Anglican Province of Congo will take place in Aru this November. Similar issues to the ones raised in Bunia are present in Aru. A key challenge for the Bishops is how to combine their public role in the wider community, where they (and +Ande in particular) are

figures of considerable influence and respect, with the daily demands of all the churches and pastors and their families in the villages, who are often struggling. Some of the pastors and catechists who came on the retreat had never been to Aru before!

An example of the challenge is the possibility of the hydro-electric scheme the diocese has been considering with the Relief Development Fund of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). Their funding offer had in mind a small scheme which would provide power for the diocese and its colleges and workshops. +Ande wants a scheme which would bring power to the whole town. He has brought different agencies, including government agencies, together and there is much local goodwill if the funding can be raised. Hence his request to us and hence +Peter's request to the diocese here to see if there are any

significant donors who could pump prime an appeal. To see the enterprise, expertise and energy of the local Christian community given the environment they are in; if there was ever a moment for some global solidarity, now is the time. It is the churches all down the eastern border of the Congo (as in so many other places all over the world) who are taking the lead in attempting to bring some community cohesion in a context of political and economic violence and abuse. The coltan which enables the mobile phones and computers of the west to work comes from eastern Congo. As with the rubber ransacked from the forests over 100 years ago, do the local people benefit? They do not. The principalities and powers that drive global capitalism have changed little in that time. And +Ande is trying to be a bishop in the Church of God in such times.

The teaching he had asked us to lead on for the retreat focused on the text John 14:6 "I am the way the truth and the life". We spoke on being people of grace and truth, people who knew freedom in the truth. We were asked to speak on our experience here of social care and Archdeacon Ian spoke of the work of the Committee for Social Responsibility. Ruth spoke about the diocesan initiative here "Ending the silence": facing the reality of domestic abuse. Richard was asked to speak about ministry with other churches and other faiths as the pastors feel threatened by the prosperity gospel of new churches on the one hand and Islam (covertly supported we were told by the local UN forces) on the other He spoke of what it might mean to love our enemies. John led a devotion from 2 Corinthians 1 on consoling one another with the consolation we have received.

During the time of the pastor's retreat Philip had a significant meeting with the parish's Sunday school teachers: this is his account. "Five years ago during my last visit to DRC I had the privilege of meeting with the Sunday School teachers from All Saints' Cathedral in Aru. It was good to meet up with some "old" friends and to meet and make new friends. We spent two hours discussing the many things that are going



well within our ministries and we discussed and prayed through some of the



difficulties. It was very clear that there is a lack of good and meaningful resources for the Sunday School teachers in DRC. Many of the teachers didn't even have their home Bible at home. Following the meeting I managed (with the help of Wendy Toulmin) to obtain some Bibles in the local language and we presented personal gifts to a number of the teachers. These

Bibles were received with much gratitude and genuine excitement. I also met with some of the children from the local community for a short session to discover more about their daily

lives. The children have so little in terms of “worldly” wealth but they appear to live with so much joy and thankfulness. I cannot find the words to explain the impact that spending just a short time with these children had on me. They have so much energy, joy, happiness, contentment and generosity of Spirit that it cannot be anything but infectious. “

Over 100 people were confirmed in Aru; there were also admissions to the Mothers Union. On the last night the English group were asked to sing and we (with Australian help) sang “To God be the glory” and “Cast your burdens onto Jesus”. There was such an anointing of praise and joy, it truly felt like a foretaste of heaven.

At the confirmation service in Bunia (6+ hours of it!) I noticed that in the normal communion service they had inserted the General Thanksgiving. I could not remember the last time I had used that in a service in England. It seemed to me significant and symbolic of a whole spirituality and Christian culture that majored on trust, faithfulness, humility and thanksgiving. I wondered if those would be the marks of Christian witness they would find if they were ever able to visit us here.



+Keith

Pastor Martin's Testimony



Pastor Martin is from South Sudan and has ministered in his parish for the last six years. He has lost three sons to the conflict in South Sudan. He finally left the Sudan for the DRC refugee camp in January after his wife was killed by stepping on a landmine.

He recounted an event that happened whilst he was travelling on a bus. The bus was stopped by Sudanese rebel fighters who told everyone to get off the bus. The rebels were particularly targeting the Dinka tribe and have systematically killed many people.

The rebels killed eleven people on the bus, seven of them Dinka and four from the Baganda tribe (a Ugandan ethnic group).

During the attack which lasted two hours Martin had a machete placed in his hand and he was told to kill others in the group or be killed. He was in a terrible position. As they were pressuring him to kill another person from the bus, there was a shot fired and one of the rebels was hit. It gave Martin the chance to lose the knife and merge into the crowd. A Ugandan woman was then given the knife and for two hours was pressured to kill another man. Eventually after two hours she did so and that seemed to satisfy the rebels. They stripped everyone and left them naked. Everything was taken from them and they had to walk back to the road for help. No one would stop because they thought it was an ambush but eventually they managed to stop a car and they said 'take us or kill us now.'

Pastor Martin then talked about how you must stand firm in your faith at these times of testing.

Sometime later, in November of last year, Pastor Martin was digging in the compound next to the Church when the rebels came again. They told him to lie down on the floor and they asked him whether he wanted to live or die? Martin said, 'I want life'. The rebels asked him 'what would you do to live? – would you take another life?' Pastor Martin wondered, 'if I take another life to save my life would God forgive me? '

He thought 'God must forgive because it is who he is, but I cannot do it.' Before he lay down on the ground Martin was praying because he knew that this was too hard a test and he couldn't manage to stay faithful. Then he realised, 'if it is my time to die I will keep my life when I go to the Kingdom of Heaven and God will forgive all I have done wrong.' And God helped him.

The rebels demanded the money in the Church. Pastor Martin knew that if he told them where the money was he would have betrayed God and his brothers and so he looked to God for help. Pastor Martin replied that he had only just been brought to the Church by God and that he had no money because he was not yet employed to work at the Church. He added that he didn't yet even know the people who he would be working with or what they did with the Church funds.

They said to him that they knew him and whilst some held him down and sat on him, one of the rebels stepped on his head and began beating him with a gun. Someone said, 'let's cut off his leg.'

Pastor Martin began to pray, 'God if this is your will help me to pray.' Then he prayed, 'God you created everything, all power comes from you and even though I know I am no longer going to live, help me live what life I have left well and receive me into heaven in Jesus name.'

At this one of the rebels said. 'Leave this man alone.' He had heard the prayer. The man said, 'If we happen to kill this man it will be bad juju.' They then turned to Martin and said, 'You can go.'

Martin said 'On the ground I was sweating and urinating for fear that my time had come. But I got up and left.'

Pastor Martin said, 'You must hold to the truth before God. It was God's grace working in the hearts of the rebels that saved me and he will never leave us. If you pray God will hold you. We who are God's servants will hold the truth in our hearts.'

He finished by saying 'it will help us in his work if we stand firm – may God's name be praised.'

Pastor Martin is now ministering to the Sudanese refugees in the DRC.

Footnote.

What quickly became clear was that whilst Pastor Martin's story touched everyone's heart, his story was not unique. As +Ande said, 'I know many of you will have experienced similar challenges', there were nods of agreement all around the room.