

# Rooted in Jesus in the Dioceses of Mara and Masasi, Tanzania

A report by Revd Dr Linnet Smith, RinJ Tanzania Link Officer, February 2014

Linnet is working on secondment to the Rooted in Jesus National Office in Arusha, Tanzania. She reports on her visits to the Dioceses of Mara and Masasi.

## The Diocese of Mara

Visiting different churches in the Diocese where there are RinJ groups was great. Each time we arrived at a church, after a long drive over dirt roads, we waited for a while for people to gather and then Jacob gathered the children in a group, asked them questions about what they were learning in their RinJ group and tested them on memory verses. He was so kind and affirming with them - it was a joy to watch. Then he repeated the exercise with the adults and took the opportunity to teach them more from the Word and about how RinJ groups work at the same time. Jacob and I travelled back here together and then on Friday we met with James Almasi, the other Regional Coordinator to plan for 2014 and beyond. It was a joy to work with such men of God and I think we made good plans.

I was met at **Musoma** Bus Station by Jacob Robert, the Regional Coordinator for RinJ in Tanzania. He took me to my room in the Diocesan Guest House, left me for a while to freshen up and then gave me a guided tour of the Diocesan offices around the Cathedral. And then to his house for a meal prepared by his wife, Josephine. Josephine made me very welcome to their home.

On Sunday we left early to go to **Masinono** Church for the morning service. The pastor there is Isack Karuguru whom I knew from the RinJ conference in Kasulu last year. It was a long drive over very difficult dirt roads but we were warmly welcomed with tea and chapattis when we arrived and then moved over to the Church for Morning Service. During the service the members of the adult RinJ group were given new books.

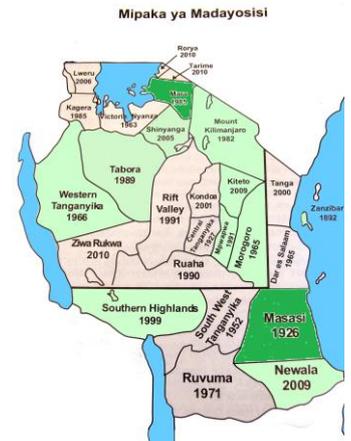
After lunch we drove a long way to a Church on the very edge of the Diocese. A group of adults and children gathered and Jacob proceeded to ask them questions such as, 'Are you saved? What are you saved from? What are you saved for?', and then he tested them on memory verses and got them to learn a verse by saying one word each around the circle several times. By the end even I knew the verse!! Then he asked questions about the group and discovered that they had not met for a few weeks because the leader had gone somewhere and no one knew when he would be back. So they appointed a local teacher as the new leader. The Rural Dean was present and it is likely that Jacob will start doing Deanery visits rather than visits to individual churches. He has between 60 -70 adult groups in the Diocese, some in very remote places, so that approach would make a lot of sense.

From there we went to **Chumwi** church where we met the people in the old cotton store. They have built the pastor's house there but not a church building yet. They were a smallish group and we were running out of time so we didn't stay long. Jacob was satisfied that the adult group there was doing well.

The next day (Monday) we visited **Kirumi** Church where the people seemed very poor –subsistence farmers with little or no cash for school fees etc. We waited quite a long time for people to gather there and Jacob said that often happens and one has to be patient and to make the most of the opportunity of just being there. People did gather eventually and Jacob gave them opportunity to talk about how their lives had changed through knowing Jesus and through RinJ. *One woman told us that before she gave her life to Jesus, her husband had left her with several children so she turned to prostitution. Then she came to Christ and gave up that way of life and prayed for her husband. Now he has come back and they are a family again.*

Our next stop was at **Buhema** church. It took a while for the people to gather there and Jacob reminded me that people were making a real sacrifice coming to meet with us when there was work to be done in the fields. In the end a group of about 60 children gathered. After playing a game with them, Jacob asked them questions from the RinJ course and then tested them on memory verses, giving each child who got one right a big round of applause. He was just lovely with the children and then with the adults. It was a joy to watch!!

Our next stop was **Cruda** Church but the people were very slow coming so we went into the nearby village for lunch. Jacob again put the children through their paces.



Dioceses of Tanzania – RinJ dioceses in light green, Mara (in the N) and Masasi (in the S) in dark green

On to two churches in **Bunda**, one of which hosted a Junior conference in the past. Another warm welcome and more very pleasing evidence of the fact that they had been working with the RinJ material and learning the memory verses.

Then we went to our final Church at **Mmazame**. *They shared with us how they had benefitted from RinJ. For example, now they had confidence in opening the Bible for themselves; now they felt able to share their faith with others; now they had learned the memory verses, they could stand against temptation; now they felt able to teach others. (One man had learned 33 verses while studying 3 RinJ books – he didn't say them all but he did say quite a few word perfect.)* They were given new books also and the evangelist challenged them to start a new group each.

Nine churches visited in 4 days; some with only adult groups, some with only junior groups, some with both. A wonderful experience and a real privilege to see how God is working through Rooted in Jesus in Tanzania. It was truly wonderful to see Rin J groups in operation in the parishes - I praise God for your vision and hard work in creating something that God is using so much for the growth of the church here. And thank you for giving me the privilege of being here and of working with men of the calibre of James and Jacob.

## The Diocese of Masasi

I arrived at Mtwara airport to be met by Canon James Almasi, Regional Coordinator for Rooted in Jesus. He collected me in a very good vehicle belonging to the Mothers' Union, took me to the Mtwara Diocesan Guest House for breakfast before we set off on the 3 hour drive to Masasi. James was a very good host and had arranged an excellent programme for me.

**Mkuti** - a wonderful presentation by the children which uses Rooted in Jesus material. It included prayers led by the children ('They learn to pray in their RinJ group' said James!) a drama of the offering of Isaac, making a cross from a sheet of paper (as in Rooted in Jesus), the reciting of numerous of the RinJ memory verses and much singing. They gave a report of RinJ in Swahili (with a copy in English!); their main problem is lack of teachers – so many children and only few teachers.



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Back to **Mkomaindo** for another gathering of the Rooted in Jesus children. Sunday afternoon is their regular meeting time so they gave me another opportunity to say a few words of encouragement. Again, lots of children and few teachers and no space to meet in. Under the tree is fine in the dry season but not so good when it rains.

On Monday afternoon we visited **Wapiwapi** Church where there is also a building project – a new church building also requiring funds to finish. The choir sang, an English hymn tune, unaccompanied, in the most beautiful four part harmony I have ever heard. Another wonderful presentation with the report delivered in English this time, more children leading us in prayer, another very moving drama by the children – the illustration from RinJ of crossing the river full of crocodiles and needing something to carry you over – I nearly wept with joy when the boy who was trying to cross found the boy taking the part of Jesus, knelt at his feet and then was carried safely over the river. What a powerful illustration! Singing and refreshments followed and another opportunity to speak some words of encouragement.

Two Eucharists on Tuesday, both in village churches. The first, **Nangose** Church, is a direct result of Rooted in Jesus. An adult group was meeting there and they planted the Church in that community. What an encouragement. I preached there and, in the afternoon, at Lisekese, with James as my interpreter. There was a great sense of devotion and deep spirituality in both Eucharists.

We were late arriving in **Lindi** but a Rooted in Jesus group had gathered in the church to greet us. Lindi is 95% Muslim so the Christians are a rather vulnerable minority. I asked them to share how RinJ had helped them – amazing answers were given: the Pastor said he need no longer worry about sending them to Bible School – Bible School had come to them in their group; one lady said that she was now reading her Bible every day and it was really helping her; another said that the memory verse and the studies were changing her so that even her neighbours had noticed she was different; another said that it was much easier to invite friends to a RinJ group than to church. Such encouragement!

What a wonderful and amazing trip. How good to meet so many wonderful Christians and to see God at work! I am very grateful to James and Jacob for hosting my trips and for looking after me so well.