

RinJ report, Diocese of Mara, Tanzania

Alison Morgan, March 2011

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Following a visit from Jacob Oyange, Dean of Mara cathedral, to our office in Wells, Bishop Hilkih invited us to send a team to introduce *Rooted in Jesus* to this large diocese located on the shores of Lake Victoria. Mara is linked with the diocese of St Mark the Evangelist in South Africa, where RinJ is already in use, so it was a particular joy to be able to send a joint UK – St Mark's team to Mara. Isaiah Chambala, bishop of Kiteto where RinJ was first pioneered, was also able to join us for the second week.

We ran two 4 day training conferences, both in Musoma, using the excellent facilities of the cathedral. The first conference was attended by 60 pastors and lay leaders, and the second by 38 – a lower turnout than expected due to the unusual weather conditions. But all 20 deaneries were represented, and the participants showed a high level of commitment and ability. The programme will be overseen by Canon Jacob, who will report to the Bishop's Council; a local coordinator was chosen to represent each deanery. The local coordinator will support and encourage group leaders and produce a monthly report on the progress of the groups which will go to the area dean and to Canon Jacob. Parish groups will begin in April; and there are plans to follow the example of St Mark's and use the course for confirmation preparation as well.

Each of the conferences included the usual three elements: teaching, training, and ministry. The major teaching sessions included an introduction to the course and to the concept of making disciples through small groups (day 1) input on the person and work of the Holy Spirit (day 2); teaching on the realities of ministry from the parable of the sower (day 3); and a look at the demands of leadership (day 4). The training element was provided firstly through small group workshops on leadership, pastoral care and prayer, and secondly through practising lessons from the course itself. Participants took a little time to get used to the highly interactive and participatory style of the lessons, and in particular to the practical demonstrations and the memory verses, but eventually they got the hang of it – so successfully that at the closing eucharist one group gave a fearsome demonstration of what it means to be 'rooted in Jesus', with gunmen bursting into their small group, most members cowering and offering excuses, and a single disciple standing firm in this faith. The happy ending was of course that the gunmen tore off their disguises and revealed themselves to be Christians; 'just testing!'

The ministry part of the conferences is always a great privilege. Each afternoon we looked together at an aspect of our relationship with God – knowing the love of God; repentance and renewal by the Holy Spirit; coming to God in prayer and asking for more. As is often the case, participants had come across a confusing spectrum of teaching on the Holy Spirit, from the oft repeated 'the Holy Spirit is not for Anglicans' to 'you are not a Christian if you do not speak in tongues.' The major teaching on the Spirit was given by +Martin – it is hard to assert that the Holy Spirit is not for Anglicans if the person giving the teaching is an Anglican



bishop – and each day we invited the Spirit to minister to us as we prayed together. We used different formats, sometimes inviting participants to pray together in threes, sometimes to pray silently and individually, sometimes to pray aloud together, and sometimes to express their openness to the Spirit by coming forward to receive prayer from the team. Some experienced sensations they had not expected – tingling, partial temporary ‘paralysis’ of their legs, and an overwhelming sense of peace. One was healed of a stomach complaint, another had a prophetic dream; many said that they didn’t want to go back home because there was such a sense of peace among us as we prayed and worshipped together. In all the teaching we tried as a team to model the methods of the course itself, making use of simple practical, visual illustrations and demonstrations, inviting discussion, question and shared prayer, and emphasizing our mutual dependence on the Holy Spirit as we seek to become and to make disciples of Jesus.

The hospitality we received from the diocese was a great blessing to us. We were treated with warmth and joy from the moment we arrived, and on our rest day were taken on a special trip into the Serengeti park, where we were particularly delighted to see a leopard resting sleepily in a tree. This day was also the occasion of something of an adventure, for as we left the park it began to rain; and to rain; and to rain. The rain settled ankle deep on the fields; then knee deep for a small boy and his cows struggling to cross the road; then waist deep, at which point two men waded ahead of our vehicle to lead us through; and finally, of course, too deep to swim – at which point we came to a halt as the road ahead disappeared under a rushing river. Prayer produced a cessation of rain, and after an hour or so we were able to drive through the waters. The next day, in brilliant sunshine, God drew our attention to Ezekiel 47, not just to the account of the waters rushing from the temple but to the picture of the trees growing on the banks of the river, bearing fruit and bringing healing to the community; and to the people fishing on the shores of the fresh-water sea. For a diocese which has suffered 9 months of drought, bisected by the river Mara and standing on the shores of Lake Victoria, it seemed a fitting way of praying about the future as they begin their *Rooted in Jesus* groups.

We are grateful to all those who made this visit possible – to those in Mara who cared for us and bore the brunt of the practical organisation, particularly Canon Jacob, diocesan secretary Frances, translators Joseph, Gaspar and David, and to Bishop Hilkiah and his wife Martha. We are grateful too to those who prayed for us and for the participants during the two weeks of our stay; and to those who helped to make the conferences possible financially, in particular the Tanzanian Church Partnership Association. It was good too to see the growing partnership between the dioceses of Mara and St Mark’s, represented by +Martin and by archdeacon Jack Kudumela; and encouraging to learn that one of the most valued aspects of *Rooted in Jesus* is the continuity of the relationships which are created. But of course we are grateful above all to God, who entrusts us with the task to go out into the world and make disciples who will be able to teach others also.

Matthew 28.18-20; 2 Timothy 2.2.

Comment of the week:

“This seminar is different from other seminars. This is not a normal seminar!”

