

# Report on the Rooted in Jesus visit to the Diocese of Muhabura, Uganda

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Geoff Read, July 2009

From Kabale the road towards the Rwandan and Congolese border twists, rising and falling through the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. We have already driven over eight hours from Kampala in the most battered taxi van I have ever seen. After a further three hours of braking and swerving on murrum roads we arrive at dusk in Kisoro. It is July and we are here, a team of six, to lead conferences to introduce the *Rooted in Jesus* discipleship course in the Diocese of Muhabura in South West Uganda. Our team is a wonderful mix from around the Anglican Communion: British, Ugandan and Zambian. Kisoro is one of the most beautiful but underdeveloped parts of Uganda. As our visit goes on I am struck how powerful an encouragement the simple fact of our coming is to local Christians.

*Rooted in Jesus* is a wonderful tool, a course for small groups written with and for African Christians. It enables people to move from being converts to disciples who in turn will then make disciple-making disciples (2 Tim 2:2). The potential of that step is enormous for the individual, churches and the local community. Group members allow the Word of God to shape their lives then support and encourage one another in the living out what they have learned in daily life. Non-literacy is no barrier as the learning is through discussion. The Word of God enters into their lives by reading or listening, but most importantly through learning Bible verses by memory and then meditating on them. Key to the success of all of this are well trained and motivated leaders who will share their lives with their group members. Our visit was at the invitation of the Diocesan Bishop, Cranmer Mugishu, to lead three conferences. Two were for lay leaders and one for Diocesan clergy whose support in all of this is crucial to the success of the programme.



Kisoro is one of the most remote places I have ever visited. Iryariuvumba is another hour and a half more remote. As we drove towards the town we passed participants walking from their parishes with their bed-rolls on their way to our first conference. Material poverty is a given for people in this area and for three short days we were invited to share in their lives. This was the first major lay training in the Diocese for many years and people were so hungry to learn. In each talk and workshop detailed notes were written in exercise books, questions asked. The predominant experience of learning that delegates bring is from the Ugandan classroom. In workshops we modelled an alternative to “chalk and talk” learning. What about the learning through discussion that takes place around the fireside? In times of ministry in parish groups neighbours hands were grasped, prayer offered up fervently and altogether in a moving hubbub of voices. As together we sought to be open and available to the Holy Spirit those gifted in song led us in quiet and urgent singing in contrast to the earlier exuberance of harmony and rhythm.

This was my first trip to Africa after many years of longing to go there, and to Uganda in particular. Struck by the joy of Ugandan Christians I had met while I was training at theological college I wanted to see and experience that faith in context. Going to introduce *Rooted in Jesus* enabled me to be more than just a tourist, but to offer the training and gifts I have received in support of brothers and sisters in the wider Anglican Communion. But as always you receive so much more than you can possibly give!

While there was ample time to observe, my senses were bombarded with multiple impressions that will take a long while to digest: the beauty of this mountainous area but the challenge of making it yield basic foodstuffs, beautiful children slogging along under 20 litre yellow jerry cans of water, the openness and generosity of our hosts, spontaneous and fervent joy expressed in singing, the sweetness of pineapple, the lingering power of traditional magic.



On reflection, our programme and the constraints of language meant that on this visit there was far less time to listen to ordinary, local people. But one conversation I did return to with various people I met was to ask the question: in a place like this what is happiness? Without fail the answer was the same: relationships.

Another motivation for this trip was to move out of the familiar, beyond my comfort zone, to be open to new things that God may want to say to me. As I struggle to describe the trip to others and make sense of this experience for myself I find the words of the journalist Richard Dowden really helpful. “Westerners arriving in Africa for the first time... often feel themselves suddenly cracked open. They lose their inhibitions, feel more alive, more themselves, and they begin to understand why, until then, they have only half lived... visitors suddenly realize what life is for. To risk a huge generalization: amid our wasteful and time-pressed lives we have lost human values that still abound in Africa.”<sup>1</sup> All I can say is that for me, that is so very true.

Rev. Geoff Read  
Chaplain of the Anglican Church in Basel, Switzerland  
28<sup>th</sup> August 2009

The team was led by Revd John Lee, with Jenny Green (CMS partner in Kisoro), Claire Greaves (Holy Trinity Leicester and one of the authors of *Rooted in Jesus*), Alfred Sichone (a *Rooted in Jesus* leader from the Diocese of Luapula, Zambia) and Revd Geoff Read, a friend of ReSource through his ministry in Basel.



*Rooted in Jesus* is published, administered and supported by ReSource. For more information on the course and its use click [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> *Africa: altered states, ordinary miracles*, (London, Portobello: 2008)