

## SOUTH SUDAN: A Heart Forever Changed

by Lynn H. Lawrence

Since my husband and I returned from our first SOMA mission, my heart is forever changed. As I recall the mission and all of our adventures as a team, I am continually grateful for all that I learned.

Having been a participant in other missions, I thought that I knew what to expect in many aspects of the trip. However, even though prior missions have involved much prayer, never have I been on one where so much guidance was asked for and received from the Holy Spirit. Truly, we as a team, sought to be in the will of God, during each part of the journey, as well as during the different parts of each day. After waking up each morning, we spent time in prayer, sharing with one another what we felt the Lord was calling us to do as a team that day. Oftentimes, that meant changing the schedule of who was teaching when, as well as the subject matter.

As one who considers herself organized and tries hard to make plans with a foundation of prayer prior to moving forward, stopping every few hours with the team to reassess what the Holy Spirit was telling us to do was challenging. It stretched me in ways that my prayer life had not been stretched before. In reflection, I realize that the Holy Spirit has been trying to teach me this for quite a few years. Although I felt I had mastered listening to the Holy Spirit, to do this with a team, especially a group of people I had not met prior to landing in country for our mission, stretched me to new limits. I must say that I am so grateful for the challenge and being stretched in this way, as it opened me up to listen to the Lord in ways that I thought I already was listening. I can now testify that my listening to the Holy Spirit has come to a new depth. For that, I am grateful.

Never have I felt so dependent upon prayer while traveling. Our journey involved numerous flights once we were on the continent of Africa. Not only did we have an emergency airbag deployment on one flight, but we also had a major change in our second teaching location due to the weekend closure of the Juba Airport. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 91:11: "For he will command his angels concerning you to



guard you in all your ways." God's angels certainly were protecting us.

The Lord amazingly opened up the door for us to teach at Bishop Gwynne College. Although originally we were to be with the clergy of the Diocese of Aweil for Bishop Abraham Yel Nhial, we stayed in Juba and taught seminarians at the college. This was definitely orchestrated and made possible through intercessory prayer, the Holy Spirit's power, and God's merciful graciousness. Thanks be to our Sovereign God! We were able to teach and pray with men and women from all parts of South Sudan and Sudan who were students at Bishop Gwynne College.

SOMA's means of communicating prayer needs is excellent. Each day the team would talk about prayer concerns, and our team leader would communicate these with the mission prayer coordinator in the USA, who would in turn share these with each team member's prayer coordinator. These prayer requests would then go to the dozens of supporters that each of us had on our individual prayer team. Without a doubt, I felt immensely covered by prayer for the entire duration of the mission and in the ten days following upon our return.

Another delight in seeing the power of prayer was to pray for the students one day and, on the following day, as the students were asked to share what God was doing in their

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## SOUTH SUDAN: A Heart Forever Changed (cont'd)



lives, to hear students say that the prayers of the day before had begun healing in their hearts and that the prayers had helped them to begin a process of forgiveness. This was amazing to me. So many times, when we pray with people we do not know, we never hear about what the Lord is doing. To have daily feedback that there was fruit from prayer was significant. Because of the language barrier, we had to trust the Holy Spirit as we prayed for them, that the Lord was hearing the cries of a student's heart and the pleading prayers that we prayed. Never again will I doubt that the Lord hears and understands my prayers, even when I don't.

Witnessing two men, Bishop Abraham Yel Nhial and John Chol Daau, whom I have met in my own country, operate in their areas of ministry was amazing. Having the opportunity to see their lives and their leadership and to minister alongside them was an inspiration. I now understand so much more about the difficulties of completing building projects, setting up programs, and doing anything that is dependent upon travel over African roads. When roads are washed out and a five-hour drive can take five days, it is amazing that anything gets done. My heart is touched that these two men have chosen to answer the call to live away from their families to serve the oppressed, persecuted, and those who are refugees. I can't help but ask myself, "How am I sacrificially serving the Lord?"



An unexpected blessing was the opportunity to pray for a South Sudanese priest's children and wife. During a serendipitous conversation, I sensed that the Holy Spirit was telling me that a man's family and oldest son in particular needed prayer. The next morning, the Lord opened the door for my husband and me to have a few unexpected moments alone to pray for this priest and his son. During the prayers, I felt that the Lord was saying, "This was one of the reasons I sent you to South Sudan." Amazing!

While some of us actually stayed in the homes of our hosts, all of us were welcomed there for daily breakfast, tea twice a day, and for our periodic team meetings. Their example is one that pierced my heart. I too am frequently asked to offer hospitality, and I am aware that my grumbling has all too often worked its way into my service.

My heart is forever changed, and my heart is grateful for the opportunity to have served on a SOMA mission team. While I thought I was already well grounded, I have been challenged in new ways and for that I give thanks. To be able to serve God's precious people and, at the same time, realize that He is still teaching me, nurturing my walk with Him, and taking me to new depths in my faith and trust in our mighty God, is a gift for which I am thankful, one that I will cherish and always hold in my heart.



Team List: Glen Petta, TL; the Rev. Andrew Powell, St. Andrew's Church, Grand Prairie, TX; the Rev. Bob Lawrence, St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center; Lynn Lawrence, St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center; the Rev. Patience Mwikya, Diocese of Makueni, Kenya; the Rev. Canon Francis Matui, Diocese of Makueni, Kenya.





## UGANDA: In the Spirit of the East Africa Revival

“Some years back we greatly benefitted from the SOMA ministries in the Diocese of Nebbi [Uganda] under the previous bishop. Most of the clergy have retired since then. We have a whole generation of new clergy. We desperately need the renovation of our hearts. Please come!” urged Bishop Alphonse Watho-kudi.

The SOMA conference in Nebbi was well attended by the clergy, and Bishop Alphonse was very encouraged. The team also participated with the clergy in an open air gospel rally, where many people came to receive Christ as well as others who came for counseling and prayers.

“The greatest thing about the mission was how overwhelmingly the clergy confessed their sin and came for prayer. At the end of the conference, the Holy Spirit spoke to me through the team leader. She urged me to reconcile with the retired archbishop and work in ministry with him,” Bishop Alphonse shared. “Since I had not been aware of any conflict or confrontation of any kind, I asked the meaning of this reconciliation and working together. She

told me she did not know the details, but was seeking to be obedient to the prompting.

“As I prayed for God to show me what to do, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see certain hurts I had brushed off. I met with the former archbishop and we had a wonderful meeting. We both walked in the light in the spirit of the East Africa Revival. God worked His purpose and a great healing happened in my life and in my spirit. It was a fellowship we had not had ever since I joined the ordained ministry. It was truly the Holy Spirit that prompted and directed that special message given to me at the conference. May He be praised forever! With that the Lord has released a special blessing on my life and ministry. To God be the glory.”

Team List: Edwina Thomas, TL, Trinity Episcopal, Marshall, TX; the Rev. Paul Wasswa Ssembiro, Diocese of Kampala, Uganda; the Rev. Canon Mark Mukan, Diocese of Jos, Nigeria.

## NIGERIA: Empowering Clergy and Spouses in This Generation

International SOMA Chairman, Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi of Diocese of Jos, Nigeria, invited SOMA to lead a retreat in early 2016 for his clergy and their spouses. His vision was themed “Empowered for Mission,” with the goal of strengthening relationships in clergy families to be more effective witnesses for the Gospel.

Archbishop Ben exhorted attendees: “It is important to realize that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit — and the resulting explosion of mission and ministry — is not limited to biblical times or to the early history of the church. There have been many examples since then, and there still are many today.

“We have come together in this retreat to discover our place in this generation. The Holy Spirit continues to empower men and women in history in every generation to become powerful tools in the hands of God. We need to be empowered because we cannot do this ministry in our own strength. Let us be *empowered!*”

A SOMA team member commented on the impact of the conference. “When the conference began, the clergy and their spouses were somewhat reserved. However, after some lessons and exercises they began to have fun. By the end, the atmosphere was one of great fun and joy. Knowing the long, hard hours they work, I pray the joy in their marriages continues!”

As a part of the mission to Jos, the SOMA team visited the local seminary, meeting with and speaking to the graduating class of seminarians. They also had several opportunities to spend time at the Zambiri School for orphans established and operated by Gloria Kwashi, which serves and educates over four hundred children in the love of Christ.

Team list: Glen Petta, TL; Casey Conine, St. Barnabas the Apostle, Fort Worth, TX; The Rev. Cinnamon Creeden, Christ the King Anglican Mission, Biddeford, ME; Guy Pharis, St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, TX; The Rt. Rev. Joseph Kanuku and The Rev. Josephine Mutie, Diocese of Makueni, Kenya.





# NIGERIA: Walking in the Strength and Power of the Holy Spirit

by *The Rev. Cinnamon Creeden*

As a team member on the SOMA mission to Nigeria, I was most impacted by several people I met through this mission -- how I saw them living fully in God's Kingdom and how I saw God working through their lives.

The first is Susan, the Dean of the Christian Institute and assistant to Archbishop Kwashi. She is a British woman who has been there for more than thirty years. What I saw in her was that, although she has been serving there a long time, every day was a fresh adventure, and she felt humbled and privileged to be doing it. She is in charge of many details, and she does them with authority. Yet underlying this is a deep, soft-hearted love for the Lord and for the students and clergy who had come there. I sensed she has a hunger for more -- that she has vision for what needs to change and expand in terms of the school and the diocese. She is a single woman who has invested her life in a place far removed from her former home. Jesus says that the one who loses her life will find it. In Susan, I found the Lord encouraging me to invest and abandon myself fully where I am and to the work of His Kingdom, and that I will be fulfilled, even as I forget about trying to be fulfilled.



Another experience that affected me personally was being with Mama Gloria and Archbishop Kwashi. As we were leaving Jos, Mama Gloria was meticulously feeding each of the students at Zambiri a bit of wedding cake, making sure that each bite had some frosting on it. She is so invested in the "little things" of the Kingdom. And yet she is an international speaker, coordinator of the Mother's Union for the Province, has sixty adopted children and runs a school, not to mention all that the Archbishop has going on. How is this possible? It made me realize that I am operating within a framework of scarcity, while they are walking in Kingdom abundance. I get caught between growing weary of the "little things," and being afraid of the "big things." They are fully present to the "little things" while fearlessly moving forward with the "big things." The Lord is challenging me and inviting me to change my way of thinking.

It was very exciting for me to meet and speak with Mark who, like me, is an evangelist and church-planter for the Diocese of Jos. When he spoke about his work, the Lord was putting into words hopes and dreams and ideas that are alive in me but not yet fully formed. It was like throwing gasoline on the fire of my own gifting and calling. I continue to pray for his work and to be inspired by it as I go about my own.

Finally, after coming to know our team leader, I have come to a wild conclusion: If we were all perfectly walking in God's will and in His power, signs and wonders and rapid Kingdom expansion would be normal in the Church. Our team leader is walking in this much more than I am. I am somewhat surrendered and am seeing fruit in my life and ministry. But at times I am also doing my own thing in my own strength, and that is a drag! God is challenging me to push into the "surrender-adventure" way of life in His Spirit. It is very inviting and comes as a relief as I take more off my own shoulders and put it on His.

This is the big-picture conclusion that encompasses the others: I will surrender more fully to God, trust Him for my own fulfillment, and be unafraid to step into bigger things as I let Him fuel me as an evangelist. This is what I learned in Jos through being with my brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. I am very grateful for the privilege of being on this mission, and if some of my colleagues get this opportunity, I will tell them: "Yes! Go!"



## SOMA USA

National Director  
Mission Relations  
Administrator  
Address

Dr. Glen Petta  
Debbie Petta  
Jane Parrott

2501 Ridgmar Plaza #99  
Fort Worth, Texas 76116  
817-737 SOMA (7662)  
office@somausa.org  
http://www.somausa.org

Phone  
Email  
Home Page

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## ETHIOPIA: The God of All Comfort



Bishop Grant LeMarquand of the Horn of Africa invited a SOMA team to bring much needed healing ministry to students at St. Frumentius Anglican Theological College in Gambella, Ethiopia. Bishop Grant described the situation: “Our people, including the students of St. Frumentius’ Anglican Theological College, are not just poor, but are people who have lived through terrible and traumatic suffering. Many are or have been refugees. Some have seen their parents or their children killed in war. Others have been child soldiers.” The students at the newly established College, despite these severe challenges, are eager to learn, but truly in need of assurance of God’s comfort, love and inner healing through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The SOMA team in Gambella included several missionaries from the US and two African clergy from Kenya who had participated in SOMA conferences previously in their own country. According to Bishop Grant, “Especially powerful for our people in Gambella was the ministry of the two African members of the SOMA team. To hear challenging things from white westerners is one thing; to hear challenging things from other Africans meant that they could hear those challenges even more clearly.” While other mission agencies and ministries had worked with Bishop Grant in Ethiopia, this SOMA mission was the first to include African missionaries on a multi-cultural team.

One of the African team members spoke of the personal impact of this mission: “From my participation in the mission, I learned that God can use me more than I had ever thought. This being my first time to go for an international mission, I felt the presence of God moving throughout the mission, enabling me to grow in faith and a deeper desire to serve God through ministering his Word. As a pastor, I experienced firsthand God working to heal His people. I also grew spiritually from the teachings of the other team members, because it was a learning experience for me as well. This was also an opportunity for me to be exposed to people from different social and cultural backgrounds. This was my first time to board an airplane and also to travel outside of my home country.”



The mission team brought teachings on evangelism to reach the next generation of children and youth, a needed initiative in the Ethiopian Church. Because of the language barrier among the diverse student population, team members adapted their talks to make use of images, drawings and diagrams for conveying biblical truths and concepts. Participants were given effective strategies for communicating God’s Word orally and in pictures and drawings, taking into account the challenge of different languages spoken among the local congregations where the students will serve, which include refugees from other countries.



The SOMA team’s work in Gambella was critical and life changing for those in attendance. Dean of St. Frumentius Theological College Rev. Johann van der Bijl said, “...watching SOMA team members minister to each and every one of (the students) very specifically in the power of the Holy Spirit and watching the Holy Spirit doing his deep cleansing and healing work was such a blessing for us here.” Bishop Grant added, “The SOMA team was clear in their teaching – but also very gentle and understanding in their presentations and in their prayer ministry. The message that came across was that God cares about them, that God wants to heal and restore them, and that God wants to use them to minister to others. I am told that some of the students held meetings after the SOMA conference was over, that sins were confessed and agreements made to pray for one another and support each other. The ministry of the SOMA team in Gambella was very powerful. As their Bishop, I am overwhelmingly grateful for your ministry!”

Team list: Glen Petta, TL; The Rev. Bob Lawrence, St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center, SC; Lynn Lawrence, St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center, SC; The Rev. Patience Mwikya, Diocese of Makueni, Kenya; The Rev. Canon Francis Matui, Diocese of Makueni, Kenya



SOMA USA  
2501 Ridgmar Plaza #99  
Fort Worth, Texas 76116

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## **DIRECTOR'S CORNER** *by Dr. Glen Petta*

One of the distinctive aspects of SOMA is that of cross-cultural missions and teams that include individuals who are from a culture similar to the one the team is serving. I'd like to share one story of a priest who participated on a SOMA mission team and the impact upon his home diocese.

The Reverend Canon Francis Matui had been on the receiving end of SOMA missions where he experienced spiritual growth personally, as well as the transformation of other clergy who attended the SOMA conference. As I visited his diocese over the past year, I had an opportunity to hear him speak of the importance that SOMA has had on his personal life and ministry. I have been able to encourage him that I too have seen integrity, passion and great personal qualities in his life.

Recently, we asked him to be part of a SOMA team to his neighboring country of Tanzania. Francis had never been out of Kenya, and he experienced the importance of the model of SOMA's team building and the benefits of cross-cultural mission. During that mission, Francis shared that he was challenged by preaching the gospel in a culture different from his own. In doing so, he discovered fresh approaches to share the gospel at home.

When Francis returned to Kenya, he spoke with his bishop about his SOMA mission experience. Discussions with his bishop resulted in Francis leading a team from his home diocese to a different area of Tanzania. The value of cross-cultural mission became very evident to his bishop – so much so, that his bishop served as a team member soon after on another cross-cultural SOMA mission to Nigeria.

Francis has been a team member on several other SOMA missions and brings his knowledge and enthusiasm to both the team and the conference attendees. His life and witness embody the name of SOMA: Sharing of Ministries Abroad!

