

The Adventures of the Magnificent Seven!

(or Swindon Deanery visits Uganda).

Ugandan Christians are openly generous with whatever they have, whether they are affluent or poor. They truly reflect Jehovah Jireh: God our Provider. Their open-hearted generosity underpinned the visit of seven Christians from across Swindon from 11th – 26th February 2017, firstly in Kampala and then in Luweero.

Kampala is a very busy, affluent city. Having experienced their 'anything goes' traffic system, we will never again moan about traffic in Britain. The seven of us were spread out across the city, but were cared for very well by our hosts although our accommodation varied from a gated mansion with amazing views to a new-build in the bush. We weren't allowed to part with our Ugandan shillings, which ironically made us millionaires (£250 = 1,105,000 USh), as we visited the source of the Nile at Jinja, the Equator and the Martyrs Museum. When we protested they said, "We will stop paying your bills when you stop being our guests." The only concession we could get was, "You can have your revenge when we come to Swindon."

We were taken to an outreach project at the Women's Education Centre that is helping young people from the shanty towns to learn life skills such as hairdressing, dress making, sandal making and wafers for Holy Communion. The rooms in which they learnt these skills and the equipment they used was very basic, but it was making a considerable difference to these young people. We also visited Sanyu Babies home where visitors are asked not to pick up the babies, as they have to get used to living without being held.

After 4 busy days, we said goodbye to Kampala and travelled about 50 miles north to Luweero where we stayed in the Diocesan Guest House. While Kampala is a bustling city with its memorable traffic we were now in a more rural part of Uganda. While in Luweero we visited 3 contrasting schools and a hospital:

Bwaziba Primary School has strong links with St. Francis School, Taw Hill and St John's Haydon Wick. The school has no electricity and some pupils travel on foot for two or three hours each way to get to school;. Sekamuli Secondary School are building a girls dormitory helped by funds from St. Michaels, Highworth; Balita School and blind centre caters for children with a variety of disabilities - despite the lack of facilities the school is carrying out good work. Kiwoko Hospital, is an excellent Christian teaching Hospital

We were also taken to a fishing village on Lake Kyoga in Nakasongola District. Here we were made welcome in the 'ot' (traditional round thatched hut) of the local lay reader. The village toilets were some half a mile away due to the nature of the ground. We created a bit of a sensation among the local children most of whom had not seen a muzungu (white person) close up. This was as far from the wealth of Kampala as it is possible to imagine. People live by fishing. There were no gardens or vegetable growing. We were shown around by a very intelligent young Vicar called Isaac who had a huge parish to look after and at the same time was educating about 14 teenagers, who were all living in his small home.

He had many sad stories of the reality of life away from the capital. One of the big social issues he was constantly confronting was the purchase of young girls by wealthy men. These girls aged between 12 and 15 would be sold by their families, becoming concubines. There were also stories of a culture of hard drinking every evening with men forming drinking clubs on the shore of the lake. There is much hostility to the church particularly by men.

Four of us (in two pairs) had the opportunity of staying overnight with a local family, which was a valuable experience. The ladies stayed in a well-furnished 3 bedroom house complete with T.V. We enjoyed another full plate of meat, potatoes, rice, matoke and beans, which also became breakfast alongside boiled eggs. Just before bedtime we had a time of bible study. Meanwhile the men experienced a small two-roomed house for a family of five, plus foodstuffs and visitors.

At the end of our stay, we visited Murchison Falls National Park where we went on safari and visited The Falls by boat. This game park is considerably bigger than Wiltshire. We travelled 80 km in our first evening. Lions, elephant, giraffe, hippos, Cape buffalo, wart hogs, hyenas, – and later on – four grazing rhino were all visible from close up. We even went off road to see a pride of nine lions with the cubs playing in the grass like kittens.

Exhilarating as it all was, it is the people who will live longest in our memories. The hardworking Godfrey – vicar, pig farmer, geography teacher, school governor, and on top of all that, Diocesan planning officer in Luweero. The hard pressed staff at the Sanyu Babies Home in Kampala. Who will regularly receive babies picked up from the road-side and care for them until a home can be found.

Report written by Raymond Adams, Judith Mumford and Tony Prichard , edited by Sally Robertson.

If you would like more information about the visit or the Swindon Deanery link with Uganda please contact Sally Robertson sally.robertson27@btinternet.com



The Magnificent Seven with some new friends near Luweero