



Name: David and Heather Sharland

Location: Arua, Uganda

Our call: To use our skills in the service of God's people, enabling them to live healthy and fulfilling lives and to know Jesus as their saviour and friend.

Our role: David is using agriculture to serve struggling and marginalised farmers in the name of Creator God; Heather is a community health coordinator.

"After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands."

Revelation 7: 9

Dear praying friends,

We pray for you, that you know the power of God in your lives as this year unfolds. May he be seen in you day by day.

Our year has started well, although a little over busy! We seem to have a lot on our work plates this year! But, as those who know us know, we thrive on being busy! We are celebrating the centenary of the Christian faith being brought to West Nile. Both of us have been busy researching and writing articles for the centenary book. There have been many events leading up to the climax on 24 June, 2018. You are welcome to join the celebrations. May we know God's equilibrium in our life this year!

Tribe and belonging...

All of us belong to a tribe, one that defines our outlooks, our

attitudes, our loyalties, our values, all that make us who we really are. Sometimes our attitude to money sets us apart, sometimes our way of parenting may be distinctive, sometimes we show our prejudices when football or cricket are in the news. But we are all called to belong; to belong to a new tribe, that of Jesus' people.

Tribal belonging can be good! Every one of us longs to be connected to some tribe or clan; as independent as we might be, or as self-reliant as we think we are, all of us long to be an insider somewhere. It's a great feeling to be in the cheering crowd watching Chelsea win! It's so good to be in a huge, united worshipping group singing your heart out! It's so special to wait in a crowd to see the Queen at a great occasion. Tribe gives us a sense of identity, of belonging, of shared traditions and rituals. We feel safe and "at home". Heather feels a sense of belonging when she meets with a fellow Irishman; even though they have never met before, they quickly start talking using colloquial idioms,



Top: Heather enjoying fellowship with women and girls



Above: David teaching about natural medicines



Above left: Bishop Emmanuel



Above right: Enjoying food together, different cultures connect

sharing stories and laughing about places they know. If they happen to bring Tayto Cheese and Onion or a Veda, the joy is ecstatic. David relishes good English humour and craves a piece of Stilton and a cox's orange pippin apple.

Crossing cultures in Jesus' name can be both invigorating and painful at the same time! The isolation of being away from family is an ache that never goes away. And yet there is a richness, joy and sense of beauty learning about a new culture and worshipping Jesus together. There are days we love Africa so much that we do not want to leave. As we work and serve in Uganda, we step out in faith trusting in his power and that good fruit will be born in his time.

As we live in a new place, part of our old culture is being pulled away, leaving us feeling exposed. Sometimes we struggle against it, always being looked at for having pale skin and fair hair, not fully understanding what is happening around you, not getting the local jokes and humour. Each place we live leaves an imprint on our identity, ensuring that when we go back to our home culture we also find it difficult there to have a sense

of belonging. We are square pegs trying to fit into round holes!

Tribe can also divide, separate, breed superiority, encourage isolationism. Bridges can be broken, walls erected and canyons exacerbated! We see that through the tragic events of recent years in South Sudan. While struggling to push out a common enemy, the people united under a shared flag but once the young nation was secured, differences divided and enmities grew. We see such tragic fall-out from that enmity in Uganda, where so many have fled for refuge, telling horrific stories of loss and death.

However, we have seen some remarkable reconciliation and love-building among mixed groups of South Sudanese people in Uganda. God has enabled a deep forgiveness to take place, a change of attitudes and a growth of unity, all of which is both surprising and beautiful! We wrote last year of the spontaneous dancing at Kiryandongo Settlement. And in small ways, we are also seeing that unity growing in the camps in West Nile. God's people are the pioneers, as differences become irrelevant at the foot of the cross of Calvary.

We had an amazing journey to Rwanda in November last year,

and really appreciated the will to build a strong, united country. We saw evidence of a lot of hard work and spiritual determination to move forward, learning from the tragic past. People talk about being Rwandese rather than their tribal identity. We often heard Christians say: "We are committed to being peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation. We may not agree with everyone on every issue, but we have committed to love like Jesus loves." May God continue to bless peace builders like Bishop Emmanuel, Pastor Elson and so many others in Rwanda, busy building bridges and removing walls of division and prejudice.

In Uganda we see a rather alarming trend in the Church, as dioceses are divided along people group lines. Within our diocese, Bishop Collins has taken bold steps to reduce this trend, by moving archdeacons to different clan areas. This is not easy, but it is already helping to bridge gaps of perception. The gospel is one of reconciliation, uniting different groups, building something beautiful from diversity. May we be able to be channels of uniting peace in place of division.

To be a Christian is to live out the richness of our ethnic origin and culture, and yet experience



Above: There is a unity and belonging when we worship Jesus

Below: Worshipping with the congregation at Emmanuel Cathedral

at the same time an even deeper unity with those of other races and cultures, because we have been called to be disciples of Jesus Christ together, part of the same family. We are all born of the same Spirit. There is one God, one Lord and one faith. It is one of the joys of living cross-culturally – when we meet together with other brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what nationality, clan or tribe, we have a real sense of belonging. In Arua we feel at home in the local

church, which preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, enabling us to grow in Christ together.

As God's chosen people, we are called out of every tribe, people and nation to

build a new people, Jesus' people. This is our new identity, our tribe. We are called to celebrate diversity rather than just tolerate it because God loves diversity. Imagine if Christians devoted themselves to the work of reconciliation that Jesus commissioned us to do.

The cross really does have the power to break down barriers and bring unity. May each of us fulfil this call to unite, build bridges, break down walls of division and build a beautiful edifice of praise to the Lamb, as we unite under his cross. What does that mean for you? How can you make a difference this week, this month, this year?

2 Corinthians 5:19: "For God was in Christ reconciling the world

to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation."

Much love to you all,

David and Heather

PRAYER AND PRAISE...

- Pray for all the preparations for the centenary celebrations including the book.
- Thank God for hopeful signs of rain after a very long dry season.
- We thank God that, when a lorry ran into the side of our car, we were not injured. We pray that the major repairs to the car will soon be finished and we are road worthy again.
- Praise God that we are now connected to mains power. It was a long wait the house was wired when it was built 18 years ago!

You can give online at:

churchmissionsociety.org/sharland

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