

5th May 2020

Update from Uganda - Following conversations with a number of bishops and lay people in Uganda coupled with the letters received from the bishops of Kampala and Ankole.

1. Incidence of CV19 infections appears to be contained. On the 5th May official figures were 97 confirmed cases, 55 recovered and 0 deaths. While it is likely that there are more infections than recorded in the official figures the anecdotal conversations with clergy and friends in Uganda suggest that there is no obvious evidence of widespread respiratory disease and deaths in the community. The caveat is that just prior to this report we heard from Gulu that there is a confirmed case in the hospital there, a Ugandan truck driver who was tested in Kampala and then drove North through Uganda, into Southern Sudan and back into Uganda and was intercepted in Gulu following his positive test. He alone will have had multiple opportunities to spread the disease. We have also had confirmation from Kumi, via Mission Direct, that there was a confirmed case in the community in the last two weeks. A police officer in Hoima has tested positive, he and his family have been isolated. Uganda however, does have a history of being very good at tracking, tracing and quarantining people carrying infections diseases and those they come into contact with.
2. President Museveni instituted a lockdown before a single case was recorded in Uganda, and the infection rates are much lower than Tanzania where the President has refused to take any actions resulting in a growing death rate including members of the Tanzanian parliament.
3. The lockdown is having a dramatic effect on people's livelihoods. There are concerns that government food aid is being used by individuals for self enrichment (i.e. purchasing poor quality food at extremely high prices from family firms for distribution, and there is a report that a journalist who exposed the practice has been arrested.)
4. Church of Uganda - overall the impression we have received from everyone is that the church is coping well. The new Archbishop 'connects well with people, and comes across to them like a brother or a father.' The Archbishop, assisted by members of the AYF Choir are leading worship for the nation each Sunday on national TV, broadcast from his home. Dioceses are finding innovative ways of communicating the gospel. Many clergy are sharing home worship live on Facebook and dioceses are using local radio stations to broadcast worship, teaching and prayer - apparently many people are texting in prayers even the in the early hours of the morning.
5. In rural dioceses people are struggling for food, and clergy who rely on tithes and offerings for their income are particularly hard hit. Those with contacts and families in Kampala have to rely on money sent from the city. Bishop Eridard reports that people are coming daily to the Diocese looking for food, which they don't have. They have however, been able to access some emergency supplies to ensure all pastors received a bag of maize and all lay workers a bar of soap which is in short supply.
6. What has been striking is that despite all the challenges the church is facing the first concern that I have experienced in conversations has always been for us here in the UK and their assurance that they are praying for us. Uganda is a county that is familiar with suffering and struggle and as Peter Kasamba said, "God has seen us through harder times and we will do this joyfully."

Chris Dobson, 05.05.2020