

Swanwick 2006 Report

We landed home shortly after 9 pm, Saturday night. Soaked in and strengthened by what we had seen and heard. To be precise, overwhelmed.

THE CONFERENCE.

After the coming not coming debacle with our visas, we were finally there, God having used many different people to glorify himself in getting us here.

We were meeting people whose names we have seen so much in the list: we sort of knew them, yet this was the time to put faces to the names! It was catching up with old friends. We were made to feel at home. Everyone had prayerfully followed our journey.

We had had a deeply enriching time sharing with individuals and couples, in Swanwick. The theme of the conference, 'Seeing through each other's Eyes', was especially meaningful to us. This touched our lives and will be part of our reflections for a long, long time. We hope to incorporate it in our sharing on inter-church families during the Nairobi Ecumenical round table meeting in October. We have a foundation to mobilize interchurch families here to a formal grouping.

The numerous group discussions, role plays, and periods of personal prayer/reflection, as well as informal talks, made it easier for us to feel at home and be able to integrate freely. This was unlike other conferences where lots and lots of speakers spoke with little or no input from participants. Here in Swanwick the discussions were based on our everyday experiences, not on learned treatise or complicated expositions or deep theology and canon law interpretations. This for sure was *our* conference. You could walk up to somebody and just start a conversation. Things were simplified. It was our lived experiences brought to life to encourage one another. The conference did not end in the hall, the meal times were for us miniature conference sessions! For everyone we sat with, *[and we sat with different people every meal time]* had something to share, something we could learn from. Something we have taken home with us.

Our own presentation was very well received [or so we were told]. Like all our folks in Africa, we are great story tellers... we used all the question time! However the participants were able to catch up with us informally.

One of the most touching days is when the children and the young adults were given a chance to come and share what they have learnt, and the adults were asked to share with them what they had learnt. This was a place where everyone mattered. Everyone was somebody, and Jesus was Lord!

PRAYER.

The Hayes provided such a peaceful environment of quiet prayer. Walking in the beautiful gardens, one could not help but exclaim:

Then sings my soul my saviour God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art.

The young adults had selected very pertinent prayer points for the Night Vigil. We were especially moved to note that most of the prayer points centred on issues affecting our part of the world [also known as resource poor, developing, or third world countries] namely, poverty, environment, fair trade, AIDS orphans, lack of clean water, social unrests etc.

We were gratified to know that someone, more so the youth, have such a broad view of the world. Having an opportunity to pray for and reflect on global challenges helped us appreciate just how much the human family in a way shares a common destiny. Well done, young adult group!

We were involved in doing the readings and doing some Swahili songs during the services which really made us feel at the core of the gathering.

FELLOWSHIP.

It was the first time for us to meet, and share with so many inter-church families all at once. We have met individual couples, but never in a big gathering. And suddenly they were all there: more inter-church families than we had met in the past 2 years combined.

What left a profound impression on us is the power of being together, in fellowship and prayer, the strength of a common resolve to live the reality of inter-church family life to the fullest in spite of the hesitant support from our churches. You may not have said it but just by having the conference the families were making a very powerful statement: yes it is not easy, it does get complicated at times, but life as an inter-church family can be lived with abundant joy and dependence on the almighty God through whom every family derives its name. We have been strengthened and enriched by every song, every prayer and every sharing; we have been helped to see things through the other's eyes.

On the last day of the conference we all joined in the singing the Swahili version of 'Marching in the light of God'. It was an appropriate end for we all indeed need to march in the light of God as the spirit came to set us free to do just that!

THE REST OF OUR STAY.

We visited the offices of Churches Together in England and Ireland where the AIF desk is. We were so warmly received by the staff in the office. We felt so honoured being received like dignitaries. We had a working lunch with them sharing our experience of the visa application process and what might perhaps help people visiting England on church related business.

We had a tremendous opportunity to experience the generosity of all of you. We wish we could have been in different places at the same time! And since we could not, we stayed with the Finches, the Landers, and the Ballasters. They took time to show us around the sites and sounds of England. We saw the best of the countryside with pretty little villages. The English villages broadened our own definition of village! We took in the beautiful farmlands with gently rolling hills. We visited the local towns. We have never seen churches and buildings so old and so well kept! Indeed we have not seen so much history in so short a time! Then we toured London: The underground trains, the Palaces, the Parks, the London buses and all the other well known landmarks: *[and the shepherd's pies and the pizzas]* we can truly say, we have been there, done that. All our hosts were very patient with us as we stared and oohed and aaahed at rather ordinary things, like daylight at 8.30pm and places so beautiful and clean, they didn't look real!

We know each one of you would have done the same. We know there are many others around the world who worked very hard to get us to Swanwick, those who supported us in prayer, and materially. We will be forever grateful.

JOYCE AND DAVID MAKUMI

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