

# Malcolm Pritchard

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CHURCH  
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*The call in action*

Dear Friends

"I love you." In Acoli the words have a different meaning from their romantic sense in English. I had just bought some small sweet bananas from the lady with one arm. Her radiant smile puts fully-limbed me, and my standard-issue grumpy-vicar face, to shame. Humbled, I join the Gulu traffic. The advantage of riding a bicycle is the ease with which you can strike up a conversation on the streets. Or buy some bananas. The downside is that you have to weave through harum-scarum traffic a bit like those clever motorcycle display team riders I saw as a child.

I discover my front wheel has a wobble. Bearings gone. I drop it off at my usual repair shop and walk to a cafe while I wait. People-watching time. You may well be familiar with African street scenes. I never tire of the bustle, the variety, the colour. Two young ladies, short of stature, balance flat metal trays on their heads. When they turn their heads not one avocado rolls. Another lady loads a haystack of cushions on her motorcycle. It's all about balance. And life here is a balancing act. Default dress for Acoli women is a long elegant dress, often in vibrant colours. Young girls on the corner, dressed up to the nines, conduct their affairs on a shared phone. Young boys sell masks and some people wear them. A hawker completes a sale of a Barcelona shirt for a lot less than I paid at Camp Nou. Cool dudes with earbuds and multicoloured t-shirts amble past. Another rides his bicycle with half a dozen chickens dangling from the handlebars. A large sack of increasingly scarce charcoal somehow stays vertical on the back of another bicycle. All the hardwood has been burned and the softwood charcoal doesn't last as long. Many shops are now selling gas cookers.

Boda bodas (motorcycle taxis) oil the wheels of commerce. The weight recommendation of 200kg is frequently exceeded. Three, four, five people aboard. Does the infant on the petrol tank make it six? Wide loads, long loads, animal, vegetable and mineral. You name it, it's been on the back of a boda boda. Did someone say, "Cow"? You're not wrong. (Well, it was a young one!)

Meanwhile, bicycle bearings are replaced, chain tightened, and brakes adjusted, all for the price of a coffee. I leave a tip. My ride back to college takes me through shady trees and cultivated gardens and family graves. With the maram track newly graded, it is a whole lot easier. I like this part of the trip. Arriving at college you cannot fail to notice the building site for the new library, a gift from the Korean church. Construction is advancing apace and we are profoundly grateful.

After the virtual communication of lockdown it is such a joy to be able to teach face-to-face again. Mostly I

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**Name:** Malcolm Pritchard

**Location:** Gulu, Uganda

**My call:** Partnering with the diocesan bishop and college principal to promote spiritual development and a faithful understanding of the gospel in college and diocesan life.

**My role:** I am a tutor at Archbishop Janani Luwum Theological College, teaching and mentoring students. I also lead the English service at Christ Church, Gulu.



*Please pray for creation care and the preservation of Uganda's wildlife*

listen and the lively discussions persuade me that anyone who complains about my accent doth protest too much. And then, surprises: A student phones me, "Thank you for the class, sir, I really enjoyed it". "So did I. (And thank you for the chicken!)"

Many of our students have not seen an elephant, let alone a lion or a leopard. I would love to include a game park visit as part of their theological education. Tragically, oil extraction is threatening the wildlife. A new road runs right through the park. On average there are 15 roadkills a week. The park is also a seismic region. Pumping oil across the Nile – what could possibly go wrong? One of my friends is seeking to educate politicians, who are generally ignorant of the value of Uganda's wildlife. They would be guilty of ecocide if this generation cared enough to make it a crime. Tourism is the biggest earner of forex. The oil reserves will be exhausted in five years.

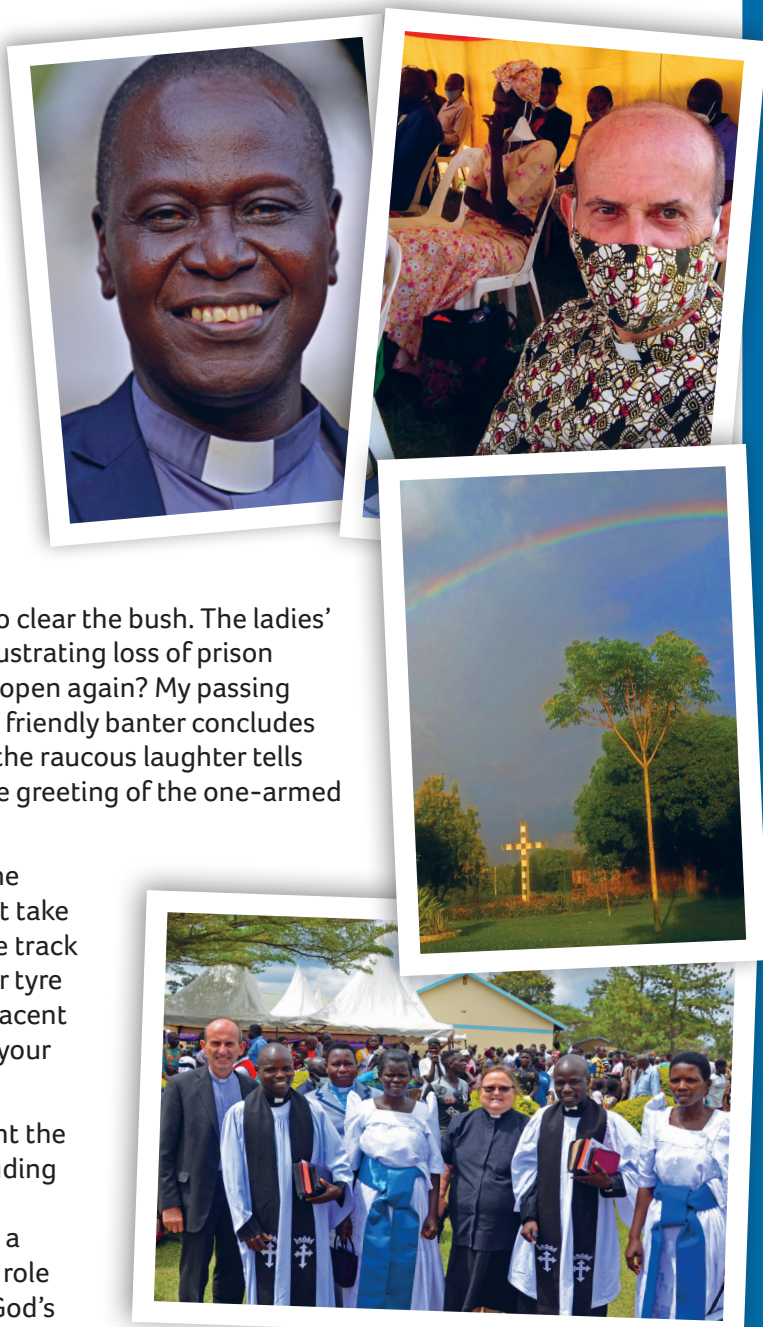
Churches are open again. We are grateful the consecration of Bishop Godfrey Loum went ahead peacefully after the horrific suicide bombs in Kampala. The wonderful Canon Ayela succeeds him as vicar at Christ Church for one year. Typically self-effacing, he describes himself as the spare tyre you use in an emergency. So a permanent appointment is needed. Similarly, the appointment of a successor to the retiring principal at college is a vital need.

So, I am back on my bicycle again and heading off to the diocesan office. The prison has sent a work party to clear the bush. The ladies' distinctive bright yellow clothing reminds me of the frustrating loss of prison ministry during the pandemic. When will prison doors open again? My passing presence provides their afternoon entertainment. The friendly banter concludes with an anonymous and enthusiastic "I love you" and the raucous laughter tells me it means something different from the affectionate greeting of the one-armed lady selling bananas.

In places the maram track is wide enough for only one vehicle. A car is coming towards me at speed. You don't take a bicycle to a game of chicken with a car. I move off the track as far as I can. Suddenly, a loud bang, and the car's rear tyre blows out. The car comes to a halt, the front wheel adjacent to mine. Such moments underline the crucial value of your prayers for me. Thank you!

Love for the early Christians meant Jesus and it meant the cross. Christ lifted up draws all people to himself. Including every man and woman in prison or in college or newly graduated to minister in tough locations or arriving as a new student this month or taking up a new leadership role in church or balancing life out on the streets of Gulu. God's radiant "I love you" is for everyone.

With love,  
Malcolm



*Photos from top to bottom: Bishop Godfrey; ordinary cleric taking a fashion risk at the ordination party; God hangs up his bow in the sky and makes peace with people; the priesting of former students in Nebbi diocese*

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If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email [supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org](mailto:supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org) or call 01865 787400

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