Hello everyone!

Rainy season is here in Uganda! And spring has sprung in the UK! With the end of one season comes the start of another…

The first rains of the rainy season always come after a long, barren dry season.
During the dry season, it feels like the place is getting hotter and hotter, dustier and dustier, day by day, until you are so used to constantly sweating and fretting in your sleep that you almost forget what it’s like to feel chilly. Then, just when you are beginning to doubt whether it will ever rain again, the rains come. The boys’ response is usually to spontaneously run outside and do a ‘rain run’, as they zig zag back and forth in the rain. Then before long the flowers start to come out!

And this year, if possible, we’ve felt this joy more keenly than ever before, because we now know that this will be the last time the children will be doing their ‘rain run’ for the new rainy season.

The main focus of this letter is to announce to you, our wonderful supporters, our recent decision to **end our time in Uganda and return to the UK**, and to try to explain the reasons behind our change in plans.
For just over a year now, I (Tom writing) have been increasingly struggling with the reality of life here as an expatriate and the older 2 boys (Ezra and Eli) have also found it increasingly difficult remaining here away from their family. I will take a few short paragraphs to try and explain a little.

My role here has always involved a combination of clinical medicine, training, administration and management. Clinical medicine here can of course be very frustrating at times, with patients often unable to access treatments due to their cost, or incorrect or delayed diagnoses sometimes having fatal consequences. Training medical staff in the disparate health centres has always been an enjoyable part of the role. However, with the 6 health centres being located between 45 minutes and 3 hours’ drive away, it has proved challenging to help them develop a Christ-centred working culture as an occasional visitor with training. Administration and management in health are both areas that require a strong knowledge of the underlying local health systems, knowledge which I’ve been slowly gaining but am still mostly lacking.

I think in summary, I’ve found it hard to come to terms with the knowledge that I’m not doing the job well. This is mostly because I am not trained, experienced or passionate in the right areas to thrive in the job roles. I don’t doubt that I’m doing the best that I can, but my best here feels a long way from what it used to be.
Alongside the challenge of the working role, I’ve also found it hard at times on a social and personal level. The local language has proved very difficult to master. Local friendships have proved extremely hard to cultivate. My concern for supporting Verity and the children at home has prevented spending time just sitting with people. The constant identification and attention as a ‘Mundu’ (foreigner) is wearing and has increasingly become a problem for me mentally. My concern for the kids’ happiness so far from family has also weighed heavily at times.

For the 2 oldest boys, a lot of the problems seem to have come from being away from family. They have always been very close to their grandparents on both sides and to other family members. We prayerfully hoped and expected that as time passed, they would find it easier living on a distant continent, but with every departure from the UK (a total of 3 now), they have found it progressively harder to stomach. Ezra talks quite maturely about his desire to be near family, his hope to support his grandpa, Chris, now that his wife Angela has passed away and his desire to play and share life with his cousins. For a long time over this last year, Eli felt unable to speak to family on Zoom, instead going to his bed to cry alone. This awareness of absence has presented itself as increasing frustration with elements of the culture.
I have some amazing work colleagues at the Diocese, holy and thoughtful in their ministry and on fire for Jesus. There are many families and individuals here as expatriates from other parts of the world doing a brilliant job bringing God’s kingdom to local people and to the refugee camps. Our children have learned so much that it’s hard to quantify and they have made some really great friendships, particularly among others in the expat community, but also with some local children, many of whom they play with on a daily basis. Verity and the 3 other children continue to enjoy the richness and flexibility of life here. I have been able to serve a good number of patients, with God using me on more than one occasion to bring a life-saving intervention and many less-dramatic but still-significant therapeutic blessings. We have been blessed ourselves in so many ways and I won’t try to list them all here.

Having acted on God’s established call on our lives to serve him here, we have tried to serve Him faithfully. We have wrestled with these challenges over a long period, pressing on and pressing on and praying for God’s strength in our
weakness. We have tried changing my Diocesan working role and tweaking the way in which we communicate with family in the UK to help the boys. We have continued to submit to God’s sovereign will and seek him for his wisdom. At what point should a difficulty to thrive for some of us lead to a change in environment? What level of challenge or distress should trigger a drastic change? How do we respond in unity when some of us are thriving and others aren’t?

Well for us, after talking and praying through the issues again over recent months, we feel that God is now saying that it is the right time to go back. It is earlier than we had initially planned and in many ways it feels like we haven’t finished what we set out to do. But we also know that God is leading us and has always been faithful to us up to this point.

Eli (8) and Ezra (9) with some of the footballing neighbours

... and the start of another
So we are now in the process of telling all our friends and colleagues, both here and in the UK, that our time here is coming to an end.

We are planning to fly back to the UK in early July, giving us another 3 months to handover and to ensure that we end well. We plan to be based in Sheffield after we return, where several of our family members are already based and where several more will be moving shortly.

We are praying that God will provide the right place for us to live, as well as a single school with places for 4 (!) primary-school-age children.
Joel (4) and Simeon (5) will be entering Reception and Year 2 classes in September.

We will continue to work with CMS for 6 months. I will receive my CMS stipend until I start GP work (likely in September, as my GP registration will expire in October, if I don’t start before then) and Verity will continue to receive a stipend for 6 months until the end of 2023, with CMS encouraging departing mission partners to split the 6 months equally between church visits, training and
holiday.

We are making plans on how to hand over the Wise Choices for Life programme, which many of you have supported this year, and we will update the supporters of that project by email when the details are in place. Esther Longo, the Assistant Diocesan Health Coordinator, continues to be employed by the Diocese and will be in charge of overseeing the programme after we leave.

For those people who support us financially (thank you!), there will be a specific link letter going out in the next month or 2 announcing our plans to move on and explaining what you may want to do about your giving.
I really want to thank you so much for all of your prayers and support during our time in Uganda. Sometimes we feel like our prayer update emails aren’t as God-filled and hopeful as they should be, but we appreciate the many replies we get from faithful pray-ers as we try to share a realistic picture of what we’re going through, the peaks and the troughs all together.

Looking back on our time in Uganda, we are both overwhelmed with thankfulness to God. We are thankful for the beauty of the sunrise and the fresh chill of the new rains. We are thankful for the inspiring example of hardworking local women and the faithful, Christ-centred church leaders with whom we’ve worked. We’re thankful for God’s provision for us as a family at every stage. We’re thankful for the many friends and family who saw our calling and supported us in prayer and in giving. We’re thankful for our children and the great blessing they continue to be to us and others around us. We’re thankful for so many more things than we can succinctly list here. Most of all we’re thankful to God who sees us, who knows us, complete with all our weaknesses and walls, yet still loves us enough to send Jesus as our rescuer.

Ps 139:1 and vv 23 & 24:

“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

...Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

God, we thank you for who you are. Thank you for loving us, for rescuing us, for transforming us day by day. We dedicate our lives to you and we ask that you would continue to reveal yourself to us more and more every day wherever we may find ourselves serving you. Amen

Thanks again so much everyone! We hope and pray you all enjoy God’s goodness today.
Prayer points

- Thank God for enabling us to come to a decision on leaving Uganda with clarity when there are so many factors to consider
- Ask God for unity after making the decision as we process the reality that we feel differently about the prospect of leaving
- Ask for God to be our identity and our strength as we share the news and process the reality of leaving
- Ask for God's wisdom and motivation in handing over our work to the local Diocese and in ending well relationally with local and expat friends
- Ask for the children to know God’s presence with them and to discover that their identity is found in him rather than in any one nationality, home town or people group
- Ask for God to provide a home for us and school places (hopefully all in one school) for the 4 boys in the right place for our next phase of mission in the UK
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.