



# INSPIRATIONAL CHURCH MINISTRY FROM UGANDA THERE IS LOVE HERE

Jimmy and Phionah Okello's student ministry in Gulu, Uganda, is a clear example of abundant life, blessed by God. BMS World Mission's Writer, Laura Durrant, caught up with them on a recent trip to Gulu, where she got to experience this wonderful ministry first-hand.

There is love here. That's what I think as we're welcomed into University Community Church (UCC) in Gulu, by the congregation and church leaders, Jimmy and Phionah Okello. Jimmy and Phionah knew from their own university days in Kampala, Uganda's capital, that

God was calling them to minister to students – and for Phionah in particular, it's a beautiful completion of her own journey to faith, having become a Christian at university herself. Phionah and Jimmy met at church, and remained involved in the campus ministry for a number of years. That's until they felt the Lord calling them to move up north and plant a church at Gulu University.

Eight years later, they've built a warm, strong community at UCC – but ministering to students isn't without its challenges. "It's so transient and it can be discouraging," explains Phionah.

"Because every three years almost half of the church is gone and you have different people." But despite the impermanence of the context they're in, they're able to offer a safe space for these young people experiencing a huge change in their lives. "What we've seen is that because of our stability, we've become a light in that community," says Jimmy. And that light doesn't just touch Gulu. The university isn't just a mission field, it's also a mission base. Jimmy and Phionah are able to disciple the students they meet to become disciple-makers, so they can continue to share the gospel once they leave university.

Many churches in the UK struggle to engage with young people, but Jimmy and Phionah don't have a secret formula when it comes to their student ministry. They simply spend their time building strong relationships, and are available to help them whenever they can. "If you build a relationship of trust, they [the students] can listen to you and bring their issues to you," Jimmy explains.

It's a principle Jimmy and Phionah also take to their work outside of UCC with BMS' partner Justice Livelihoods Health (JLH), where Phionah helps with administration and finance, and Jimmy runs outreach and training for local church leaders. "I get the opportunity to share some of my skills and abilities in leadership, which I use at UCC,

to equip other pastors in different churches," says Jimmy. "Being able to share with them from what I have so they're able to lead more effectively and be equipped is really a beautiful thing."

There is love here. Not just at UCC, but in this community, in this city. It's my main take-away from our visit to Gulu: that with God's unfailing love abounding, any life can be lived with abundance.

Want to hear more about BMS World Mission's work in Gulu? Check out their 2023 harvest appeal, Days of Plenty, by visiting: [bmsworldmission.org/daysofplenty](https://bmsworldmission.org/daysofplenty)



Laura Durrant is a Writer at BMS World Mission and Editor of *Engage*, the BMS World Mission magazine

