

AFRECS E-Blast: March 25, 2015

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Message from AFRECS Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Several days ago we received the news that yet another attempt to bring the South Sudan's two intractable adversaries to the peace table had failed. This sad news is countered in the **Gospel message** for the fourth Sunday of Lent (John 3: 14-21) where Jesus tells us that his ministry was to bring light to a world shrouded in darkness. It was the **gift of love as expressed in Christ's sacrifice that results in the abiding love that dispels the darkness and brings new life to God's people.**

I framed a sermon around this message as I spoke to St. Francis Parish in Great Falls, VA on a Sunday when the church was affirming her ministry to the Diocese of Ezo in South Sudan. As I reflected on this passage, what came to mind was the **situation in South Sudan.** There seems to be **an impenetrable shield in the country that inhibits the "light" from dispelling the darkness which has plunged South Sudan into another horrible struggle.** The conflict that continues in such places as the Upper Nile militates against even the slightest illumination for many of our South Sudanese friends.

Our prayers are that thousands of war weary Sudanese sisters and brothers will soon get a glimpse of light that will burn brightly enough to put an end to a conflict that has inflicted untold suffering upon thousands of innocent people. The light of which the Gospel speaks is the unconditional love expressed in **God's gift of His only son, the true messenger of peace, forgiveness and healing.** Tragically, that gift is being rejected by the political and military elite of South Sudan as they pursue war rather than peace. The Gospel message also notes that there are those who shun the light even after having seen it. Possibly this applies to **South Sudan's political leadership who seem to prefer darkness and, in so doing, condemn a vast portion of the country to that same darkness.**

But there are **some glimpses of light shining through** which hopefully will become a glow that can **eventually overcome the darkness.** In the coming days an **ecumenical delegation** representative of South Sudan's faith communities **will journey to Rwanda to gain understanding of what Rwanda's faith leaders experienced as they helped their country recover from one of the most horrible genocidal experiences of the twentieth century.** Joining the delegation will be the leader of the South Sudan Council of Churches as well as women representatives from both the Episcopal and Roman Catholic traditions. Hopefully, inspired by what they learn and the bonds formed from the sharing that occurs during the trip, the **Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission,** which organized this

journey, **will be able to undertake some solid peace work.** This will initiate a process intended to reach many parts of South Sudan. Your prayers for this journey are urgently needed.

We also were privileged to learn of the **powerful witness of Mother Harriet Baker of the Mothers' Union** who proclaimed that **her tribal identity was that of a woman.** In so doing **she rejected the toxic ethnic tribalism that continues to condemn South Sudan to untold suffering** and, if not checked, to a perilous future. We know from other conflict situations that the mobilization of women's voices can be an effective way of halting the blood letting that has engulfed such places as Liberia and Rwanda. It is important to remind ourselves that **women's leadership is a vital resource that can have a similar impact in South Sudan if given a chance to be heard.** Our prayer should be that the Mother's Union and the witness of other women are respected and used to **light a pathway to peace.**

The occasion of my being at St Francis's parish was the observance of South Sudan Sunday - a time when that church affirmed its commitment to help the Diocese of Ezo build upon a light that they have already ignited through a school project in Juba. **There are parishes and dioceses throughout our church kindling embers of hope for their Sudanese sisters and brothers.** More such lights are needed to ensure that the darkness does not overtake those places which have been spared the darkening shadows of civil conflict.

As we continue our **journey to Holy Week, let us pray for a light that will soon eclipse the darkness** that has brought sadness and despair to many South Sudanese. We look forward to the **dawn of Easter.**

Faithfully,

Richard Parkins

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South Sudan

'OUR TRIBE IS WOMEN' - As referenced in the above message, see this statement and video, posted on the website of the Episcopal Church of Sudan & South Sudan (ECSSS) and reported by the Anglican Alliance. On the 2015 International Women's Day (March 8th) the women of South Sudan spoke out: "As the women of South Sudan, we abhor tribalism and the division it causes.

We therefore call upon all the women of South Sudan from all walks of life to forge a common agenda for peace." The video features Mama Harriet Baker, President of the Mother's Union in South Sudan, who speaks out and calls for peace.

['Give Peace a Chance'](#) urges the Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn. who is also the Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD) Assembly. The message, addressed to the People of South Sudan on 6th March, is posted on the 'Strategic Thinking on East Africa' website. It concludes: "We want you, the people, to be unequivocal with your leaders: choose reconciliation and not injustice; choose dialogue and not rigidity. Choose peace and not conflict. My dear brothers and sisters, do not lose hope. The region and the world, stands with you. Peace is our only priority. Peace will be achieved. You, the people of South Sudan, need and deserve no less."

On March 17th, The Sudd Institute posted a Policy Brief that advocates ["Building a Culture of Peace Through Dialogue in South Sudan"](#). This thoughtful article is written by Benjamin Machar, a visiting scholar/fellow and a Ph.D. candidate at Howard University. In part it concludes with this point:

"One ought to understand that the people of South Sudan are very forgiving. This is validated by the previous broad-based societal dialogues ... that have brought peace among the warring parties. The past dialogues were intended to achieve peace and a united southern front against Khartoum. The above-mentioned dialogues in South Sudan have brought an unsustainable peace. Peace is only sustainable through justice and accountability."

On March 19th, [Voice of America](#) posted this story "Population Under Pressure in South Sudan Opposition Territory" that ends with this statement: "A vulnerable population losing patience and hope, remains stuck in the middle."

On March 22nd, [Voice of America](#) posted this article, "UNICEF: Hundreds of Child Soldiers Freed in South Sudan". The UN Children's Fund reports that the Cobra Faction, one of South Sudan's armed groups, released up to 250 child soldiers on Sunday. It's the third release by this group and part of a larger demobilization effort to free some 3,000 child soldiers held by the group.

UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, recently posted [updates on South Sudan and Sudan](#). Highlights on the South Sudan situation include: "On 05 March, the South Sudanese President...and the opposition leader failed to meet the deadline set by regional mediators...to strike a...peace deal. On 03 March, the (UN) Security Council created a system to impose sanctions on those blocking peace in South Sudan."

Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.

We invite you to visit our [Website: http://www.afrecs.org/](http://www.afrecs.org/)

Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor

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If you'd like to be doing more to help address the crisis in South Sudan, **please consider the following:**

***Pray for peace and deep healing** of the conflicts and rivalries in South Sudan.

***Join AFRECS** or renew your annual membership on line at <http://www.afrecs.org/getInvolved.htm>

* If you have contacts in South Sudan and are able to get news of various parts of the country and the church from them, **keep AFRECS in the loop** by replying to this email or using our main contact email address: info@afrecs.org.

* Be prepared to **advocate** for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

***Donate** to support the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan's efforts to provide solace and encourage reconciliation.

***Urge others** to support [AFRECS](#) as well.
