

AFRECS E-Blast: March 4, 2016

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Messages from Executive Director, Richard Parkins

FORGIVENESS

Dear Friends,

Even as the conflict in South Sudan refuses to end, there are some encouraging signals to give us a modicum of hope. However, we are trying to absorb the news of violence in Western Equatoria. We have accounts of suffering in Nzara and Mundri, areas that have only recently become centers of upheaval. Our hearts are heavy as we take in this news. Let us pray without ceasing for the peace that they, and we, have long awaited.

As the war continues, one must ponder the incredible challenge of peace making and reconciliation. A key component of peace making is forgiveness - a task that becomes more difficult as more people experience the wretchedness of war. This realization should prompt earnest prayers for the Church and the JPRC as they tackle what surely must be a formidable task. It is, after all, the Church that is called to be the sure purveyor of peace.

We have a Biblical injunction about forgiveness that is worth bearing in mind. We are told that there can be no limits to how many times we forgive those who have wronged us. We have our Lord's own words from the cross as in his unspeakable agony he forgave those who subjected him to a most wretched death.

Even in our present day, we encounter instances of amazing forgiveness. The other evening there was an account on The News Hour of a white South African who had aided and abetted apartheid. Later, he sought out a victim of a heinous act which he had committed under apartheid and ask to wash his feet as an act of forgiveness - an act which allowed him to seek redemption for the wrongs that he had committed and had encouraged others to commit. It was powerful to see this perpetrator embraced by those whom he had harmed and to hear their acknowledgement that forgiveness is possible, even when the act for which forgiveness is sought is profoundly evil.

We all know about the power of forgiveness as expressed by those in the Charleston, SC, Mother Emmanuel AME church who, even as they mourned the loss of their beloved members, extended forgiveness to the one who committed this senseless act of violence. A few years ago, we witnessed forgiveness unconditionally offered by members of an Amish community who had the wrenching experience of seeing their children murdered.

Consider these horrendous examples of crimes that we can barely contemplate multiplied thousands of times over as we reflect upon what has happened in South Sudan these past two and a half years. What a momentous task faces those who take on the mantle of

peace makers. Let this Lenten season be a time when we not only pray for peace but lift up those whose task it will be to promote peace and create opportunities and conditions for peace making and reconciliation, May they have the courage, patience, wisdom and understanding to help the arms of forgiveness be extended and for those to whom these arms are extended, in turn embrace their enemies as friends. May all of this happen in the name of Christ who calls us to a life of forgiveness and renewal. Lent is a liturgical season during which special attention is given to the restoring of relationships. Surely that is what is most urgently needed if South Sudan is ever to function again as a stable, secure country where peace has a chance.

Faithfully.
Richard

Support Our Work

Dear Friends,

While there have been some encouraging signs that the conflict in South Sudan may be abating and that attempts at reconciliation may be taking hold, we still know that pockets of severe violence and upheaval exist. The suffering and anguish have not ended and the church is being challenged to care for its people and be a persistent voice for peace. AFRECS is trying to help sustain this voice and asks for your support in doing so.

We have no illusion that we can feed the starving thousands or resettle the multitudes that this conflict has produced. Major international organizations are better equipped to do that. What we can do is offer hope and comfort in those situations that are not generally within the purview of these larger bodies.

We are helping relieve the suffering and horrible insecurity facing at least seven displaced bishops and their families. We can give them enough security to allow these church leaders to minister to their often dispersed flocks. Without temporary shelter and support, they could not be a presence of any consequence in this war ravaged nation. Your gifts help us to keep the church engaged.

The church continues to train its clergy and recruit pastors. The Episcopal Church in Sudan and South Sudan is strapped for funds to support theological education, yet a vibrant church needs trained pastors. AFRECS has helped on this front and, more importantly, has supported special training in peace and reconciliation which speaks to a compelling task facing the church if peace is to take hold and be sustained.

AFRECS has been one of the agencies helping to underwrite peace and reconciliation work as the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission (JPRC) takes on the task of doing training in peace work in conflict areas of the nation. You can help us underwrite this important work which has already begun but needs to spread if a counter message to the one that has

dominated the nation these past couple of years is to be checked. We can build on some good training that has already occurred if we have the funds to underwrite the work of the JPRC.

An area that has allowed a message of peace and reconciliation to emerge has been sports projects in Kenya. There young people of various Sudanese tribes, displaced by the war, have come together in games that have led to friendship and understanding across tribal lines. The hope is that examples of reconciliation will be a helpful ingredient in making peace more achievable when these young folks return to South Sudan and can contribute to a culture of peace. AFRECS needs your donations to allow us to keep these peace initiatives going.

One area that is often neglected but which remains a concern of AFRECS are those in the Nuba Mountains who are residing in the Diocese of Kadugli in Sudan. These souls are still targeted by Sudan and struggle to keep going. AFRECS has helped through their bishop, Andudu Elnail, with the training of pastors who are needed to give solace and encouragement to a people who have tasted little else but violence and upheaval. Help us to be there for the bishop and his people.

Here at home, we are busy carrying stories of suffering and displacement to our government friends who have a critical role to play in changing the situation in South Sudan. Last fall we were able to escort four bishops of the ECSSS to government offices where they offered compelling testimony to what was happening in their country and what was needed to relieve the suffering of their people and make peace a reality. AFRECS has been able to deliver these first hand accounts to key government officials whose understanding of events in South Sudan is deepened by receiving on-site documentation of the reality on the ground. It costs to host these church leaders. Please help us to continue this important advocacy.

AFRECS has allowed The Episcopal Church to be a major player in the ecumenical network that has been so vital to keeping the welfare of the Sudanese people before our church and our government. Your support is vital to allowing us to play this role. Please be generous with your gifts. They mean a lot to us.

Donations can be made on line through our web site or by sending contributions to AFRECS, PO Box 12026, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304.

Faithfully,
Richard

News from the Diocese of Nzara

[Click here](#) to read news from the troubled Diocese of Nzara written by Ray Gaebler of the Diocese of Iowa. He coordinates the partnership link between the two dioceses. In closing, the following prayer, written by the South Sudan Writers Team, is offered for the Beatitude People of South Sudan:

"O God, Compassionate Creator, in the world you wish your children not to use swords but to turn in love toward one another in reconciliation. We pray that the Republic of South Sudan and throughout the world all people may move through hatred and mistrust and find a common ground in you. // Lord, hear our prayer and the prayers of your Beatitude People of South Sudan."

News from the Diocese of Lui

[Click here to see photos](#) and [read the heartwarming story](#) of a growing ECSSS church in a refugee camp in Uganda. Despite the difficulties and overwhelming odds, the small gathering of displaced people, who began to meet in a hut, built a church, evangelized more people, then expanded the building to accommodate them. In addition, a young Sunday School teacher received some unexpected help from far away friends. They were able to send her some much needed material for her students.

Prayer request from the Bishop of Aweil

[Click here](#) to access the full text of Bishop Abraham Nhial's prayer request. In part he writes, "I am writing to express my deepest thanks to you all for your many years of prayers for the Nation of South Sudan, ...(which) have demonstrated your deep commitment to (the) people of South Sudan to have a (just) peace. Your prayers played a key role in our situation. I want you all now to pray for the formation of (the) Transitional Government of National Unity to be peaceful."

News from the Wau Diocese

[Click here](#) to see the latest Renewal Newsletter from the Diocese of Wau. An excerpt from this issue states:

"We really value your support and interest and hope that you will enjoy reading about the things going on in Wau Diocese in the last three months." It also shows a photo of Malong, a new graduate, with Bishop Moses and the following caption: "Malong works for Wau Diocese and is a highly educated person. The story of his education is a testament to direct fellowship and the good it can do. Read more in this copy of Renewal."

Sermon from St Matthew Cathedral in Renk

[Click here](#) to see the full text of a recent sermon, preached by AFRECS Board Member Philip Darrow. An excerpt follows:

"...I want to tell you, I am not here to preach to you as an American about South Sudan's peacemaking issue, but as a Christian brother about the whole world's peacemaking issue, a basic human challenge that is shared by Christians and others everywhere.

"There are many problems in making a lasting peace in South Sudan, but I want to make one thing very clear as I see it: they are not South Sudanese problems, but universal human problems. They are the same human problems as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria...in the conflicts between Israel and Palestine...North and South Korea...(E)ven the same problems as at the U.S. border with Mexico, and on the streets of my hometown of Chicago, where children are shooting each other almost every day in a battle over resources between rival groups. If this sounds familiar in any way, it is because we all share in the challenge of peacemaking.

"So what does Jesus have to say about this? ...Jesus was a master at cutting through all the ways in which people divide themselves, whether ethnic, political, religious, tribal or cultural....(Jesus) always saw the Children of God as one family, and showed us how to live according to this view, no matter who you are, where you came from, what you have done, or what has been done to you. And as is often true in the Gospel, the guidance on peace comes in the form of both a wonderful gift and a great challenge as to how to use that gift.

"...Love is the wonderful gift to us for peacemaking, but Jesus' audacious challenge to us is to put that gift to work in the world...by loving strangers...(and those) whom we call enemies.

"...(W)e all have to see that it starts with each of us. If we can all in some way use the power of the gift of love...and love those people until they are no longer either strangers or enemies, then eventually there will be peace on earth, and we will be the children of the one family God dreams of. That will be hard work, but, by the grace of God, we have already been given everything we need do it.

"Amen"

Open Letter from the Coalition of Advocates for South Sudan (CASS) in the Diaspora and in South Sudan to Jieng Council of Elders (JCE)

[Click here](#) to read this Open Letter from CASS to JCE entitled **The Unity of South Sudan is at Stake**. Released on 2/20/16, it begins: "(We are) conveying our grave concern regarding the current state of affairs in our beloved country of South Sudan."

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South Sudan

[Click here](#) to see full UNHCR report on recent fighting in Malakal. A brief excerpt follows:

UNHCR fears that up to 26,000 people may have been displaced by fighting that broke out on Wednesday (February 17) evening between ethnic Dinka and Shilluk at a site for internally displaced people in Malakal, South Sudan.

Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA) soldiers yesterday reportedly entered the protection of civilians (POC) site, which was hosting 48,000 internally displaced people (IDP). Humanitarian partners on the ground reported shooting, looting of properties and burning of houses. UNHCR staff said civilians fled carrying whatever they could and that vulnerable people were left unattended. Many families were separated in the rush to flee.

Also read this NPR article about the same attack, entitled: [U.N. Defends Its Role During South Sudan Attack That Killed 18 Civilians.](#)

The Independent, a UK news source, recently posted two editorials that give a grim view of the reality facing South Sudan.

-[World's youngest nation is still at risk.](#) South Sudan will be on life support and suicide watch for the foreseeable future.

-[The country on the verge of famine - where \\$6bn has gone missing.](#) Journalist James Cusick explains how the country is on the verge of going bust - but not everyone is suffering.

The Associated Press, on Friday 2/12/16 reported on its 'Big Story' webpage: [South Sudan president appoints rebel leader his deputy.](#)

Both Sudans

Read about the collaborative work of [Crisis Action in Sudan and South Sudan](#) from 2006 to the present. According to their recent monthly update, this organization's current initiatives in South Sudan are to: "... continue working with Oxfam in Juba to plan for the public and media launch of Robert Fogarty's photographs of South Sudanese peace-builders. In the aftermath of the AU Summit, we (at Crisis Action) will work with partners to further encourage the AU (African Union) to establish a hybrid court, and see how to use the latest report of the UN Panel

of Experts on South Sudan to ensure a decrease in arms flows to the country and better protection of civilians."

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.