

AFRECS E-Blast: May 20, 2015

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Message from **AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins**

Dear Friends,

From various sources, we are constantly reminded that **much of what lies ahead for South Sudan depends on the work of the faith community**. This daunting realization prompts one to ask a series of questions about the readiness of the churches to assume tasks associated with bringing peace and stability to this war weary nation.

While the efforts at peace making have been many, recent reports from the UN and other authoritative sources speak of ongoing violence and an imminent food crisis. Protracted conflict, displacement and suffering adds to the burden confronting peace makers and **thus to the staggering work to be done by churches if they are to be major players in bringing about healing and reconciliation**.

1. Is the church prepared to take on the role of healer? The carnage of war and the ensuing suffering has left countless in terrible agony. The church has witnessed much of this suffering and has experienced it directly and intimately. What healing and recovery do church leaders need if they are to become the source of healing for those to whom they pastor? What steps are needed to produce sufficient emotional well being among pastors and church leaders to effectively embrace the pain of others? How can the church recover even as it presumes to be a source of recovery for others?

2, Are the churches able to unite in a shared mission of healing and reconciliation? The churches have not escaped the stain of tribalism and denominationalism. Can the work that lies ahead count on a faith community which is united as the legitimate purveyors of healing and reconciliation?

3. Can the churches manage the sheer logistical challenge of reaching all sectors and levels of society in such a way as to ensure that all South Sudanese participate in a national program of healing and reconciliation? Those who understand the history of peace making in other conflict ridden situations acknowledge that reconciliation works when all elements of society are included in the recovery process. Even though churches are to be found in the most remote parts of South Sudan, can the church manage the logistics of carrying out comprehensive peace work? If so, what resources are needed to make such outreach achievable?

4. Is the church as a key, if not the most important and pervasive, institution of civil society able to be a strong and prophetic voice for their people as South Sudan seeks a new political paradigm in which to operate? Those who are promoting the emergence of a recovered peaceful, democratic and stable South Sudan, put good governance and a new constitution which reflects the will of a diverse population as key priorities to be pursued when peace occurs. Should the church expect to be a mobilizer of the popular will that will get expressed as a new constitution is drafted and ratified and a new political and judicial system put in place? It stands to reason that if the church which can reach the most South Sudanese and claims the greatest legitimacy as the peoples' agent is to be a player, a new and difficult role will be added to the list of challenges to be faced.

5. Should the church take on the role of the peoples' advocate when the official pathway of policy makers neglects the openness and integrity which South Sudanese civil society leaders contend are essential ingredients of a new political structure? At a recent event, sponsored by the US Institute for Peace, one expert noted the closing of space for civil society spokespersons to operate in many countries such as South Sudan. It was noted that increasingly the government of South Sudan has implemented demands of the media and non-governmental organizations that are not substantially different from those of their former oppressor. This narrowing of space that would allow for critics to hold political leaders accountable is a serious problem if democracy is to take hold. How willing or how prepared are the churches to risk being the voice of dissent if undemocratic and dishonest practices become evident?

6 Can the church take steps to prevent a reoccurrence of the painful conflict of the past 18 months? For example, a friend and colleague recently commented that if youth were easily seduced into taking up arms and mutilating their neighbors, would not greater attention to programs for youth be something to seriously consider? Are there ways that core elements of our Christian faith - loving ones' neighbor as oneself and forgiving ones' enemy - can be more effectively taught, practiced and thus instilled? Are there practical ways that the church can match its exhortations with demonstration and example?

These are some of the tasks that the church may be asked to consider if the factors that have contributed to the current crisis are not to reassert themselves. Those within the church, both clergy and lay, are the best responders to these questions and may, in fact, add some of their own concerns. It does behoove partners, however, to be attentive to the needs of their South Sudanese friends in various faith communities as they decide how to be major players in helping to recover from the travesty that has afflicted their country. **Let us pray for our sisters and brothers whose lives as church leaders and apostles of Christ's love and compassion are tested in the coming months.**

Faithfully,
Richard

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

There will be a slight difference in our upcoming E-Blast publication schedule. The next issue will be coming to you in three weeks - on June 10th. This extra week will allow the editor to attend a program at Duke Divinity School's Summer Institute for Reconciliation. After that, the regular two week pattern will continue.

AFRECS hosting luncheon at General Convention on July 1st at 12:30 PM

This is to remind all who might be attending the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Salt Lake City this summer that AFRECS will host **a luncheon on July 1st at 12:30 PM** for those interested in South Sudan and the current crisis as it impacts on our work with our sisters and brothers there. **Please share this information** with any in your parish or diocese who might be attending General Convention, especially those who are mission minded with a concern for South Sudan and the church there. Please have interested parties contact me at info@afreecs.org so that we can have a sense of how many we can plan to attend the luncheon. Thanks.

Faithfully,
Richard

Encore Entry Announcing the Fall Conference:

A Letter from AFRECS President, Bishop David Jones

May 5, 2015

Dear Friends,

This year, we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the founding of the American Friends of the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan. These ten years have seen great rejoicing and profound sadness. We have seen the end of civil war, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the joy of independence in the South and now the sadness of conflict and the threat of mass starvation.

Our primary purpose is the ministry of prayer. We pray for peace and the peacemakers. We pray for the bishops and their dioceses and congregations. We pray for the Archbishop and the Province and those who serve the wider church. Our prayers are personal since so many of us have established friendships both on visits to Sudan and South Sudan and through receiving visitors in our homes. We pray for the church and our friends.

Our prayers lead us to action. One important ministry at home is advocacy – telling the story to people who care. At the present moment, we are supporting the training of peacemakers – preparing for the difficult and painful process of reconciliation. We believe that God’s grace will prevail. We pray. Your gifts to AFRECS are translated into action.

In October, we will gather in the Washington D.C. area for our annual conference. This year we will pay particular attention to the establishment and maintenance of partnerships as well as providing up to date information about the ongoing crisis in the South. **Please mark your calendars for Friday and Saturday, October 23 and 24, 2015.**

More details will follow.

Faithfully,
+ David
David Colin Jones
President of AFRECS

If you have received this eblast in a forwarded message, you may [sign up here](#) to subscribe. Then you will receive them from AFRECS on a regular bi-weekly schedule. (See the end of this eblast to change your subscription information or options.)

South Sudan

[The Conversation](#) recently published an article entitled, "As refugee crisis deepens, the world is losing patience with South Sudan" which gives thoughtful observations by Jonathan Fisher. Located at the University of Birmingham. the author is a lecturer in International Development. Brief excerpts follow.

"South Sudan has now been at war since 2013, with no end in sight. And while the two sides focus on defeating each other, the humanitarian situation on the ground is only deteriorating."..."(M)any African states also appear to share their Western counterparts' frustration (at) an endless conflict driven by the political and economic greed of a selfish elite."

The article continues, "Ethiopian prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn has labelled the war "senseless" and has accused both sides of abdicating "the most sacred duty leaders have to their people: to deliver peace, prosperity and stability" – shockingly candid language by the standards of African diplomacy."

The article closes with this observation, "This... (is) both the tragedy and promise of the South Sudan conflict: when the old architectures of conflict resolution fail, it seems no-one has a clue

what to do next."

"South Sudan rebels say capture oil refinery, tell firms to leave," headlines this news story by Denis Dumo that [Reuters](#) recently carried from Juba and was then circulated by Yahoo News. It focuses on the capture of a refinery near a major oilfield in Upper Nile State where fighting has flared up recently.

[Voice of America](#) reports that the "UN Condemns Fighting in South Sudan".

"In a statement late Sunday, the council said a government military offensive in Unity State caused large-scale violence that has forced 100,000 people from their homes and halted aid delivery to civilians in the area.

"The council also blamed the rebels for launching an attack on the town of Malakal in Upper Nile state.

"A bloc of East African nations that has been trying to mediate the conflict between President Salva Kiir's government and rebels backing former Vice President Riek Machar said it was "deeply frustrated" by the rebel violence in Malakal. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development urged both sides to follow through on their agreement and find a peaceful end to the crisis."

Sudan

The [Sudan Tribune](#) reports that Sudan's Supreme Court approves general elections results. "Sudan's High Court approved results of the presidential and parliamentary elections held last April dismissing 122 out of 126 challenges submitted by political parties and presidential candidates."

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.afreecs.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@afreecs.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.
