

AFRECS E-Blast: May 6, 2015

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Supporting the Vine Grower

A Message from the Executive Director, Richard Parkins

Dear Friends,

We heard the familiar story of Jesus being the true vine in last Sunday's Gospel message. We heard of the pruning required if the vine is to continue to produce good fruit. I think that **there is a message here for us as we ponder our role as Christ's advocates for peace in South Sudan.**

I like to think of the perpetrators of violence in South Sudan as those withered branches that require pruning so that new fruit - the fruit of peace and reconciliation can take over.

Possibly our job is to help nurture those who would prune the vine and give new fruit a chance to emerge. Keeping this metaphor before us, we might think of those malnourished branches as those who have forgotten the message of God, the vine grower, commanding us to love one's neighbor as one's self and who instead cling to a form of tribalism that exalts animosity and violence rather than love and forgiveness.

Jesus as the true vine has made his message known through the churches of South Sudan. Some of the branches have withered and are producing fruit that is sour and bitter. They have lost their connection to the true vine and their perishable fruit is contaminating others. Pruning that fruit and allowing the vine and its strength and power to flourish and produce the fruit of healing and reconciliation is what is required if South Sudan is to find peace. But **we can help with that cultivation through our prayers and other forms of support that enable the churches and all those committed to peace to be nurtured and replenished.**

As the adversaries continue to hold millions of South Sudanese hostage by their intransigence and who are obviously not connected to the true vine and its message, we must help others to be nourished by that vine and to help its branches to spread and its fruit to increase in abundance so that the counter message of peace and reconciliation prevails. Our prayers and our support might be the fertilizer and water that help those in South Sudan who are eagerly sharing the fruit of love and healing. **These are the branches that must grow as those withering branches of hatred and animosity are replaced with those that produce the wholesome fruit of peace and healing. We can pray for our friends as they endeavor to produce a better harvest for their people.**

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

AFRECS is considering hosting a luncheon at this year's General Convention in Salt Lake City if there are enough persons coming to convention who would want to discuss the current situation in South Sudan and reflect together about the crisis there and the work of the church in responding to that crisis. Would those of you receiving this e mail message kindly let me know if you or anyone in your parish, diocese, or network is likely to be at Convention and likely invitees to a luncheon probably on July 1st or 2nd? Also, it would be appreciated if you could reach out to other folks who are likely to be at Convention and would be interested in South Sudan, **informing them of a possible luncheon.**

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

In a recent article reported in the [Associated Press](#), Secretary of State John Kerry condemned South Sudan's warring president and opposition leader as "disgraceful" Monday for squandering the promise of the world's youngest country and pledged \$5 million to create a court or another institution that might one day hold perpetrators of the nation's violence accountable.

However, in an article published in [Voice of America](#), South Sudanese Information Minister Michael Makuei said setting up such a court at this time will impede the ongoing, but elusive peace process.

"This is an unfortunate statement, especially at the time when we are in search for peace. The most appropriate situation would have been to work for peace first, bring peace and, after peace, then you make people accountable. Now it seems that the Secretary is putting the cart before the horse," he said.

In a recent [Sudan Tribune Commentary](#), Eric Reeves gives a thorough rebuttal of a documentary that aired on Al Jazeera America last month which was cited in the last AFRECS E-Blast. A brief excerpt of the rebuttal follows:

"Al Jazeera America is currently airing a two-part documentary that attempts to represent the character and causes of the catastrophe that has overtaken South Sudan following the explosive outbreak of violence in mid-December 2013 ("South Sudan: Country of Dreams"). It comprises a considerable number of interviews—of ordinary South Sudanese victims, a few of South Sudan's officials on both sides of the terrible ethnic divide that now splits the country and the former national army (but no interviews with senior government officials)—and a number of Sudan "experts." I, along with Ted Dagne and John Prendergast, are put on one side of the implicit narrative argument in this painfully unbalanced documentary; Alex de Waal, a long-time commentator and activist on Sudan represents the other side of this "argument."

The film itself is often poorly or confusingly edited, even for someone who knows a fair bit about what occurred in South Sudan before and after December 15, 2013, when violence exploded, precipitating a brutal civil war that immediately took on a vicious ethnic character. It will be more confusing for those who do not know the history of South Sudan. The documentary is marred by key omissions, an imbalanced representation of the two "sides" in the conflict, and tendentious characterizations of Dagne, Prendergast, and myself. At one

point we are described as giving our “devotion to the new rebel army in the South.” But the “new rebel army” came into being with the notable uprising in Bor (Jonglei State) in 1983, long before any of us began our work on bringing a just peace to all of Sudan. And it was to this just peace that we were “devoted,” not the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) (the “Movement” part of the title is almost always omitted by de Waal and the documentary, even as it is a clear sign of a nascent political vision)."

This commentary can also be found in an expanded format with photos by following this link to [Eric Reeves' website](#).

A recent [statement by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan](#), Toby Lanzer, explained the reason for the withdrawal of aid workers from Pagak. In part, it reads: "Over the past days conditions for aid agencies in Pagak, Upper Nile state, have deteriorated. Aid workers there have been harassed and threatened and their freedom of movement has been impeded. The organisations are no longer able to conduct their work on behalf of populations in need in an impartial, neutral and safe manner. As a consequence, aid workers have left Pagak until such a time when the conditions for them to be present there, on behalf of civilians in need, are re-established."

[USAID commits \\$16 million](#) in further aid to the people of South Sudan. A brief excerpt from the press release follows:

"In addition to the new assistance, the U.S. Government directly helps South Sudanese people withstand the catastrophic effects of conflict and build foundations for a peaceful future through long-term assistance in health, education, agriculture, livelihoods and other critical areas. International assistance can alleviate suffering but will not resolve the crisis. For the sake of the people of South Sudan, we urge South Sudan's leaders to make the compromises needed to reach peace."

Both South Sudan and Sudan

[Sudan Tribune](#) reports "The United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki Moon said the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has apprehended someone claiming to be a Sudanese intelligence officer after a deadly attack last month. Ban said in his latest report to the UN Security Council that peacekeepers in Abyei responded on March 2 to an attack on the village of Marial Achak by 100 armed individuals from the Misseriya tribe, pointing that three people were killed in the attack, four children abducted and 24 houses destroyed.

"UNISFA responded swiftly to the incident and was able to intercept the armed men fleeing north from Marial Achak," his report said. According to Reuters, the report pointed that after an exchange of fire, UNISFA troops captured eight of the armed assailants, who had five AK-47 rifles, over 400 rounds of ammunition, three motorcycles, and a Motorola radio set.

“Among the eight detainees were one logistics officer from a local militia group, Tora Bora, and one individual who identified himself as a Sudan Armed Forces intelligence officer,” the report said.

A full account of the contested Abyei region can be found on [Eric Reeves website](#). Entitled "**Khartoum’s Military Seizure of Abyei—A grim fourth anniversary looms,**" it begins:

"The Abyei region of what was formerly a united Sudan was promised a self-determination referendum in the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement of January 2005, signed by the Khartoum regime and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The CPA comprised several “protocols,” issue-specific agreements that made the CPA a true guide to peace, if all parties abided by these protocols. The Abyei Protocol, however, was never really accepted by Khartoum and this led eventually to its military annexation of the region in late May 2011—after several months of military preparations that had been regularly reported publicly by the Satellite Sentinel Project and myself.

Abyei continues to fester as Khartoum moves ever-more aggressively to complete annexation of the region, rich in pasturage (if only modest in its oil reserves). ..."

Sudan

"UN asks for Sudanese mediation in convincing Libya's factions to sign a peace deal," as reported recently in [Sudan Tribune](#).

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

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE. LEARN.

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.
