

AFRECS E-Blast: July 14, 2016

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

**Messages from Executive Director, Richard Parkins:**

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**From Despair to Hope**

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Dear Friends,

As I write this in June, anticipating a visit to South Sudan, I reflect upon trying to understand the status of the peace process. I know that there will be some voices of despair that will emerge as I meet various friends in different sectors of society. Fortunately, I shall be with many who are risking much to bring about change, most significantly friends of the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission (JPRC) and the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). These folks are counting on a dividend of peace coming from the serious business of peace and reconciliation work.

Narratives of despair are a part of the religious landscape that we all know too well. I was reminded as I read an article by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his weekly reflection that Moses encountered some bumps or possibly caverns in the road as he attempted to lead the Jewish people to peace and safety. He expressed a sense of abandonment as he dealt with his unhappy flock and their hearkening back to the good old days in Egypt. But God was there and Moses overcame his sense of remorse and moved forward to lead his people onward.

As Christians, we know that Jesus experienced profound despair as he approached his death, speaking of being forsaken. We also know that resurrection was the next chapter in God's plan.

It is in the midst of suffering and despair that new beginnings can happen for those who step out in faith as agents of change. We have such persons in South Sudan, some of whom will be a part of my experience as a visitor to Juba. Being with faithful change agents at the JPRC and the SSCC as well as folks at the Bishop Gwynne College (BGC) will serve as a powerful reminder that hope remains a vital piece of life in South Sudan. And let us not forget that there are those who courageously continue to nurture students in schools in parts of South Sudan, even in places where war has intruded.

Some of us were fortunate enough to hear from Susan Mead who recently returned from a mission stint to Wau. She told us that a determined and creative bishop and his people are doing some pretty remarkable things to bring about positive change. Susan quite strongly advocated for putting forward these messages as an antidote to those more upsetting accounts of a stalled peace process and more conflict. This we must do, not neglecting the horrors that abound in South Sudan, but lifting up with great acclaim the faithfulness of God's people and their leaders who push forward in hope. Thanks be to God.

Faithfully,  
Richard

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## Reflections Upon Return

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Dear Friends,

There is much to reflect upon as I recount my eight days with friends in Juba. However, I am prompted to share one major thought as I digest the many experiences and emotions that the trip offered. At a Sunday service at All Saints Cathedral in Juba, we were privileged to hear a ***truth-to-power*** sermon from our dear friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Bilal. He spoke passionately about the sin of ***unforgiveness*** - the failure to forgive or to embrace forgiveness that halts all progress towards peace and reconciliation. It is the intransigence of revenge and retaliation that makes peace illusory.

I cannot begin to do justice to the remarkable way in which Joseph+ lifted up scripture as the basis for his persuasive message. Nor can I approximate the intense passion that surrounded his plea to the people and most especially the leaders of South Sudan. He pleaded that they acknowledge the evil done, their complicity in fostering much of the pain that has plagued South Sudan, and the consequent need to confess and forgive. My only wish is that this sermon might be disseminated throughout the country as a new round of violence attempts to nullify the fragile peace that was agreed to last August.

However, as we pray for peace more fervently than ever, let us pray that the Gospel message as given to us by Jesus will take hold with those who wage this war. It is a war extending the decades of suffering that the people of South Sudan have already endured. Also, let us pray that the peacemakers, many of whom we met on our recent trip to Juba, will continue to exhibit fortitude and courage. These are necessary in making forgiveness the irresistible force that is needed, if peace is to become real for our war-weary friends.

Faithfully,  
Richard

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**SAVE THE DATE** for the [2016 AFRECS CONFERENCE](#) October 21 - 23. Location: St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, 1020-24th St., West Des Moines, IA.

Under the theme of 'Building Bridges of Reconciliation' the conference will

- 1) Explore opportunities for the Sudanese diaspora to contribute to peacemaking in the Sudans and
- 2) Explore ways the friendship of North Americans can contribute to peacemaking in the Sudans.

Distinguished Guest Speakers and workshop leaders: (Tentative)

- 1) Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul; The Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan.
- 2) Bishop Samuel Enosa Peni; Diocese of Nzara, South Sudan and Chairperson of the Joint Peace and Reconciliation Commission of The Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan.
- 3) Congressman Jim Leach; Congressman from Iowa, 1977-2007, and Retired Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- 4) Dr. Dane Smith; Adjunct Professor, School of International Service, American University, Washington DC and Former Senior Advisor in the Office of the US Special Envoy for Darfur and Deputy Chief of Mission in Sudan as well as Ambassador to Guinea and Senegal.

5) The Rev. Canon Angela S. Ifill, Missioner, Black Ministries, The Episcopal Church (U.S.)

If you are interested in working on or contributing to this conference which is developing now, please contact Rich Jones, Chair of the Conference Planning Committee by replying to this email or by using our main contact email address: [info@afrecs.org](mailto:info@afrecs.org).

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

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Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor

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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](mailto: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.