

AFRECS E-Blast: July 31, 2014

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

Celebrating Independence in July: Who We Are

As we celebrated American Independence on July 4th, we celebrated that important holiday as Americans. That's what we call ourselves. It's also how we intentionally or unintentionally embrace certain values such as fairness, inclusiveness, and freedom. When we challenge our nation to do better, we invariably invoke those values and norms which we describe as American. Even though we do not have exclusive claim on these values, they invariably enter our public discourse as essential ingredients of our culture.

Likewise, when we counter those actions which we deem unacceptable, we frequently describe these actions as un-American. In short, how we define ourselves says a lot about who we are and what we believe. Of course, when we call ourselves Christian, the same assumptions pertain. While Christians may differ among themselves on theology and practice, we cannot as a community of faithful believers stray too far from a common belief system before risking the citation of being unchristian.

All of this hopefully sheds some light on the peace making and reconciliation that faces South Sudan, if the nation is to emerge from the vicious civil conflict of the past eight months. If folks see themselves primarily as Dinka or Nuer, their primary identify will no doubt govern their behavior. While one either in the US or in South Sudan is likely to shed one's more parochial identity (Texan or Dinka), when one fixates on a narrower or more parochial membership, a barrier is created when there is a larger community such as a nation which needs one's primary allegiance, This allegiance is essential if the larger community is to survive and flourish. Narrower identities can be useful and comforting; but if not transcended to embrace a broader spectrum of humanity, they are hazardous to peace and harmony. For example, when Dinka or Nuer embrace being Sudanese as what matters most in how they describe themselves, prospects for a peaceful South Sudan becomes more likely.

From what we have learned from those engaged in the discipline of peacemaking and reconciliation, it is only when one's Christian identity and eventually one's Sudanese identity dominates the thinking of South Sudanese that initial steps in peacemaking and reconciliation can occur. Friends who have been part of peacemaking exercises invariably invoke the Christian narrative, including stories of forgiveness, beginning a move toward a greater understanding of reconciliation as key to faithful Christian practice. If one embraces the Gospel message as key to being a Christian and if being a Christian is what matters most to an individual, then possibly a different mindset can emerge. If one judges one's worth in terms of Christian values, then the

conflict that now occurs in South Sudan becomes unacceptable. The embrace of Christian identity and all that that includes allows one to shed the animosities that inhibit reconciliation. In fact, shedding these animosities is an imperative.

Obviously, getting to that point is the challenge. Most experts see this as a process that can be difficult and lengthy, largely because forgiveness is difficult when the actions against one are so egregious as to be indelibly imprinted on one's consciousness. A perceived need for revenge is not easily erased, but the unfolding of the Gospel message with opportunities to practice forgiveness can inspire new forms of behavior. Hopefully, it will be the ability of rival tribes in South Sudan to acknowledge a fundamental allegiance to the Gospel and the messages of Christ that will cause competing tribal groups to see allegiance to an identity that glorifies conflict as wrong. The objective is to allow a new sense of being South Sudanese to take hold. All of this is mentioned as we assess and embrace the long road to peace and recovery that lies ahead for South Sudan. Our prayers are that rival Christian groups can commit to a Christian identity that makes them true peacemakers.

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

Editor's note:

On this last day of July, we say farewell to the month of celebrating Independence Days. Whether we are in the US or South Sudan, above all we pray for justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness.

The month of August signals a time of rest from the AFRECS E-Blasts, for all of us involved in producing them and likewise for you, the faithful reader. The date of our next scheduled posting is Wednesday, September 10th. By then, we pray that we may see real, even if modest, improvement in the circumstances in South Sudan. Hopefully, we will see a growing peace that is "relevant not only to conflict but also to other domains of social life of particular concern for Africa, namely: governance, state-building, and economic development."

The above quotation comes from a published paper by Ethiopian peace negotiator, Hizkias Assefa, entitled, 'Peace And Reconciliation As A Paradigm.' I'm grateful to have joined his class, 'The Philosophy and Praxis of Forgiveness and Reconciliation' at Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice & Peacebuilding in the Summer Peacebuilding Institute. A great deal was shared and learned by all participants, a class of 22 derived from a student body total of 90 people representing 23 countries. Now we face the challenge of continuing to learn and sharing what we have absorbed whatever our circumstance and location in the world.

As we humans pass through phases of development from Childhood (Dependence), to Adolescence (Independence), and then Adulthood (Interdependence), we can see that peacemaking values have relevance to a vast array of social relationships, from those between two people all the way to global institutional relationships. The process of reconciliation, however, has an even wider scope, encompassing the four dimensions of Spiritual (God), Personal/Psychological (Self), Social (Neighbors), and Ecological (Nature). [For a much fuller explanation, see Dr. Assefa's work cited above.]

On a personal note, I have found the practice of these concepts of justice, peacemaking, forgiveness and reconciliation to be a life-long challenge. May each one of us experience God's peace that passes all understanding, then pass it on to others - as difficult as that may be at times. I believe that ultimately, this process is only possible by the grace of God.

See you in September.
Thoughtfully & prayerfully,
The Editor

Here is a brief and provocative [video](#) about the work that has been done and continues in South Sudan, by Episcopal Relief & Development, the Anglican Alliance, and SUDRA - the humanitarian arm of ECSSS - the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan.

[Look here for the link](#) to the Press Release about House Resolution #689 which was introduced on Tuesday (7/29/14) by a Bipartisan Group of House Members. Led by the Bipartisan Caucus on Sudan and South Sudan, the resolution supports efforts to end the conflict in South Sudan and encourages greater engagement to alleviate the humanitarian crisis there. It also praises efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a group of eight nations in the region committed to promoting peaceful regional development, to mediate the conflict. You may also [click here](#) to see the text of the resolution.

See the latest USAID fact sheets on the South Sudan Crisis ([Fact Sheet #5](#) and [Fact Sheet #50](#)), where the security situation remains volatile and on the Sudan Complex Emergency ([USG Assistance to Sudan](#) and [USG Assistance to South Sudan](#)) where insecurity continues to cause displacement in all five areas of Sudan's Darfur region. The statistics - in the thousands, hundreds of thousands, and millions are beyond the reach of imagination regarding both the numbers of people displaced and the amount of humanitarian assistance applied in both of these countries.

Finally, a recent 'The Niles weekly wrap-up' focuses on the "Food Crisis: Some 3.5 million South Sudanese, or one in three people, face an acute lack of food, the UN says. A widespread famine is looming..." The following articles are included:

-[Western Equatorial State](#): farming feeds the people and could provide for other states.

-[A farmer's tale](#) of working hard to grow crops in Sudan.

-[Food prices soar](#) in Juba where residents flee or struggle.

-'Agriculture has to be number one' [a video report](#), investigating the causes behind the close down of the Gumbo Vegetable Farm in Juba.

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

Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor

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.

PRAY FOR PEACE AND DEEP HEALING OF THE CONFLICTS AND RIVALRIES IN SOUTH SUDAN.

PARTNER, URGE, GIVE

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

* 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.

* Pay attention to the evolving events and be prepared to advocate for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

* Give to provide relief for internally displaced persons and others whose resources are compromised by the fighting and instability. One hundred percent of [donations to AFRECS](#) go to ECSS&S entities that can provide direct help to the people most in need.