

## News from the Diocese of Nzara

By Ray Gaebler

Bishop Samuel Peni has been busier than ever with a schedule that would exhaust a lesser person. Earlier this month he was in Kampala, Uganda, to get his children settled in school for the next term. Sentina has been living in Kampala with the children since the security situation in Nzara deteriorated last Fall. Sentina has returned to South Sudan only once to attend the funeral of her Uncle who died last month. Samuel's return to Nzara was by way of the capital, Juba, where on February 5 & 6 the JPRC (Joint Peace and Reconciliation Commission) organized a peace forum for 60 influential South Sudanese to discuss how they can help bring peace.

After the Peace Forum Samuel returned to Nzara for the annual Standing Committee meeting of the Diocese of Nzara. The Standing Committee meeting is the Nzara equivalent of our Diocesan Convention. You may recall that four delegates from Iowa participated in the 2015 Standing Committee. This year Bp. Peni felt compelled to withdraw invitations because the security situation has deteriorated significantly since last Summer. The closing of the Standing Committee was a four and a half hour worship service celebrating the ordination of new priests, deacons, and evangelists. Unfortunately this joyous celebration ended with security forces telling Samuel to leave Nzara within half an hour. In his haste to pack naturally he forgot some of the things he wished he has with him but he did get out of town and made it safely to Juba where he is trying to persuade authorities to stop the fighting.

Security continues to be a serious issue in Western Equatoria, Samuel's home state. His parents in Yambio, 14 miles east of Nzara, have been forced from their home and are living with many others in the bush with little or no access to food, clean water, or sanitation facilities. A local militia calling itself the "Arrow Boys" officially declared allegiance to the opposition and has taken control of Rangu Archdeanary, located only 10 miles northeast of Nzara.

There is a glimmer of hope from the government. As required by the "Compromise Peace Agreement" signed by all parties in August 2015, President Salva Kiir on February 12 finally appointed former Vice President Riek Machar to return to his post during the period of interim government as peace is established. There are many hurdles still ahead but most international parties agree that however flawed the CPA may be it is the best hope for the future of South Sudan.

The South Sudan Writers Team offers this prayer 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."*