

AFRECS E-Blast: January 6, 2016

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Message from Executive Director, Richard Parkins

The Darkness That Cannot Overcome

Dear Friends,

We are emerging from the Christmas season where messages of hope and light were constantly ringing in our ears, even as we were confronted by so much news of war, suffering, and fear. Those of us following developments in Sudan and South Sudan struggled especially hard to see reasons for hope; neither were we blinded by the light of peace. Yet, there were some glimmers worth lifting up and some occasions for hope. Because we are Christians, we are obliged to notice these and to take heart when we find them.

Possibly, the original Christmas narrative might help us to garner hope as we survey developments in the Sudans. After all, it was the light that appeared on a peaceful night that announced the birth of Christ even though much of the world over two thousand years ago was not tranquil. God's intervention was bright enough to attract wise men from the East and shepherds from nearby fields who could not resist the light that shone that night. They each made their journeys expecting to find something different and wonderful. The fact that they lived in a troubled world did not deter them from moving out beyond their familiar surroundings and trusting that the venture was worth it. God's call trumped fear and emboldened those who were alert to God's message.

Possibly, as we take a close look at what is happening in South Sudan and Sudan, we can see some parallels to those Biblical times. New priests are being ordained to respond to the needs of the church even if the setting for this holy act is in a camp for displaced people. ([Click here to see full report on UNMISS ordinations from Bishop John Gattek of Bentiu Diocese in Unity State.](#)) Peace and reconciliation workshops have taken place in Bor county where conflict once left countless displaced and suffering incredible loss. Schools in some places expand to meet the quest of young persons and their families for an education, recognizing that a future without an education is grim. Pastors reach out to their flocks in the most challenging of circumstances and bishops made their pastoral visits this Christmas season facing formidable obstacles. These are all manifestations of hope. They are occasions when light breaks through the darkness and hope is restored.

Christ's birth did not end misery and restore hope to all the world. But it did usher in new possibilities for peace and reconciliation where conflict and fear had dominated. It is this understanding and this perspective that guides our friends in both Sudans who are purveyors of light and hope. As their friends, we can help them carry this light as one way of worshiping the Christ child.

Faithfully, on the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Richard

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Both Sudans

[Sudan Tribune:](#) Juba to mediate between Khartoum and Sudanese rebels.

South Sudan & Diaspora

The **Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC)** met recently in Juba. Lead by Chairperson Festus G. Mogae (former President of the Republic of Botswana), JMEC issued the three items linked here:

- [Opening Statement](#)
- [Press Release](#)
- [Implementation Calendar](#)

The following excerpts are taken from the Opening Statement:

"To the people of South Sudan, in this season of hope, forgiveness and renewal, it is my sincere hope that this Christmas, 2015, is the last celebrated in a context of conflict. The greatest gift that could be presented to the people of South Sudan by its leaders is the gift of peace and the promise of reconciliation and healing." (page 4)

..."I intend to move forward with all of these steps [listed above], so that by the end of the year (2015), I can positively report to the IGAD* Heads of State and Government, the AU** Peace and Security Council and the UN*** Security Council the status of implementation of the Agreement and ask them, where necessary, for the action required of them to further support the peace process." (page 8)

* Intergovernmental Authority on Development// **African Union// ***United Nations.

[Huffington Post](#): "A Christmas Parable for Diplomats" by Rebecca Tinsley follows up on the 12/10/15 hearing of the US Senate Committee of Foreign Affairs and views the current conflict through the lens of history and the question of 'lessons learned'. The first paragraph follows:

"As the world's youngest nation, South Sudan, marks two years of bloodshed, the only light of hope comes from its resilient and patient citizens, and its churches. The international community must assist them; and at the same time our diplomats must draw lessons from South Sudan's descent into horror if a path forward is to be found, and if we are to stop repeating our mistakes."

[South Sudan Council of Churches \(SCC\)](#): Christmas Message of Hope. An excerpt follows:

"We call upon all who carry arms to lay them down for Christmas - and not to take them up again afterwards. The plan for fighting has ended; now is the time for talking. Let us move from a culture of violence to a culture of peace....(T)here are many peaceful avenues available to us. We call upon the parties to talk seriously, and to put aside their own political, military and tribal agendas for the interest of our ordinary citizens."

[Sudan Tribune](#): South Sudanese president calls on churches to disseminate peace messages.

[Voice of America](#): 2016 to Be Year of Peace, South Sudan Rebel Leader Says.

[Sudan Tribune](#): South Sudan's Lou-Nuer refugees reconcile after dispute in Kakuma camp.

[Sudan Tribune](#): Jonglei's new governor says security, roads and unity are priorities.

[Newsweek](#): How to Heal the Wounds of South Sudan's Civil War.

[allAfrica](#): 'Unprecedented' Malaria Outbreak in South Sudan.

Sudan & Region

Sudan acts against Iran:

[BBC News](#): Saudi Arabia's allies Bahrain, Sudan and UAE act against Iran.

[Al Arabaiya News](#): Sudan follows Saudi, expels Iranian ambassador.

[Voice of America](#): Sudan Opposition Leader Accepts Talks With Government.

[Sudan Tribune](#): Sudanese army carries out fresh air attack in Blue Nile: SPLM - N

Darfur:

[allAfrica](#): Darfur - Lull in Jebel Marra Fighting

[Radio Dabanga](#): Settlers prevent displaced from returning to Darfur's Jebel Marra

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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.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.