

AFRECS E-Blast: May 7, 2014

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

A WAY FORWARD

As we continue our Eastertide observance, we are reminded in our readings of the post Resurrection experiences of those who followed Jesus. Most notable is the journey of two who were making their way back to Emmaus, contemplating the news of Christ's appearance among a few close friends.

Likewise, as a part of our faith journeys, many of us have connected with our Sudanese sisters and brothers by sharing spiritual journeys. Like the two going to Emmaus, we are not always certain of what is right before us. Hopefully, we have come to recognize Christ more fully in our lives as we break bread with our friends in South Sudan. This was my experience last week as I shared a few days with Joseph Garang Atem, the bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Renk.

As a part of our advocacy work, AFRECS was privileged to host Bishop Joseph, giving him a platform to talk about what is happening in Renk to colleagues in the government and to church friends. The larger conflict in South Sudan continues to inflict untold suffering on the innocent people of South Sudan. As Bishop Joseph pleaded with our various contacts to pursue peace and reconciliation more robustly, he tried to convey the anguish and pain of his people. At that moment, I realized that his presence among us was itself a sign of hope.

The message of the journey to Emmaus is that the two companions who finally recognized Jesus returned to Jerusalem to join other followers in bold recognition of the risen Christ in their lives. Death was not the final answer. Neither is death the final answer for many church leaders in South Sudan.

Like many of the bishops in South Sudan, Bishop Joseph has not succumbed to despair even though he has had reason to do so. In addition, we have learned of other bishops who continue to reach out, even though some of their people have now relocated in Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The bishops do not abandon their pastoral duties, even when their flock is displaced and distraught. This witness is a part of our resurrection experiences. We incorporate them into our journeys as we garner funds for their support.

Here are some examples of the efforts that give us hope:

-We are hoping to fund peace initiatives in at least two centers of theology in South Sudan.

-We are collecting funds pledged to equip those bishops who are severely challenged by this crisis. They must deal with their personal displacement and maintain the church as a source of support for the thousands who have been scattered elsewhere. Their courage and faithfulness are expressions of hope in the face of horrendous developments including the prospect of widespread starvation.

-We know of efforts being made to start peace and reconciliation training in the Kakuma refugee camp in hopes that it will bring conflicted tribal groups together effectively to embrace a culture of peace.

-We have learned of schools in parts of the country that are relatively calm, continuing to educate young people in spite of the pervasive insecurity they experience.

-We are encouraged further by the generous support that many extend to buttress their partner churches and dioceses in South Sudan.

-All of the above and more will be affirmed as we respond to a call by our Presiding Bishop for a church-wide Day of Prayer for Peace in South Sudan on May 18th. The Office of the Presiding Bishop and various staff persons in her office are preparing materials to support this observance. Please check [The Episcopal Church website](#) for more information including support materials for this observance later this week.

-Gratefully, we hear of a surge of diplomatic attention to the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan as the spotlight is now directed to the prospect of a catastrophic food crisis if the current level of food insecurity continues.

-We pray that the overtures to leaders of both factions in the conflict will be received favorably have the desired result: commitment to ceasing the warfare that threatens the very existence of South Sudan.

-We pray that they might have an encounter with the Risen Christ that causes them to turn away from the path of destruction & suffering and towards the path of hope & peace.

In closing, let us pray that more hearts will be touched as peace makers do what they can. Let us pray that more hearts will embrace the message of peace and reconciliation during this Easter season.

Faithfully,  
Richard Parkins

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Recently, the [Episcopal News Service](#) published "Global network aims to raise awareness, 'stop genocide in South Sudan'". The article written by Pat McCaughan cites many of the advocacy efforts that are referred to elsewhere in this newsletter.

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[The Christian Century](#) published a feature article written by Ross Kane, an AFRECS Board Member. Now a priest at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, the author was a volunteer missionary in East Africa from 2002 to 2005 with the New Sudan Council of Churches.

The article begins: "Only two years ago South Sudan was celebrating its independence from the repressive Sudan regime. After 20 years of civil war, a beleaguered yet hopeful people had overcome internal tensions to establish a new state. Churches helped usher in a new era of South Sudan state politics, encouraging participation in the independence referendum and educating South Sudanese on the particulars of voting."

As a whole, the article gives comprehensive coverage of the history of the current crisis and the response of the Church in South Sudan.

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On Saturday, May 3rd, under the title of "In South Sudan, 'everything they are doing, they are doing with tears'" the [National Catholic Reporter](#) published an article written by journalist, Chris Herlinger, about the sad situation on-the-ground in South Sudan.

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On Monday, May 5th, the New York Times published an article entitled "South Sudan [Fighting Rages as Kerry Appeals to Rebel Leader](#)". Then the NYT followed with the article, "[U.S. Imposes First Sanctions](#) in South Sudan Conflict" on Tuesday, May 6th. The first article carries the by-line of Isma'il Kushkush and Michael R. Gordon; the second carries the by-line of Michael R. Gordon.

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Recently, in its weekly review, The [Sudd Institute](#) published a Policy Brief: "The Replacement of Army Chief and Its Implications." It was written by Abraham Awolich, a founding member of the institute, an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy-relevant research in order to "improve analytical capacity in South Sudan."

The final paragraph reads, in part: "What is of great concern for the people of South Sudan is whether such changes will bring a speedy end to this crisis." After drawing a negative conclusion to the previous statement, the author continues: "The best way to end the crisis is through a complete cessation of hostilities, sincere dialogue and reconciliation. Both parties should commit to the peace process in Addis and speedily cease military confrontation and destruction of property and lives."

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Facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the document: [Recommitment on Humanitarian Matters in the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement](#) was signed by the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and the SPLM/A (In opposition) on May 5th in Addis Ababa. It can be found on the AFRECS website Links page. (Click on the document title above. It will be the first entry under the first section: 'Information on Current Crisis and Humanitarian Response'.)

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[Reports from UNHCR](#) detailing the plight of refugees caused by the on-going fighting in South Sudan can be accessed on the AFRECS website Links page. (Click on the highlighted text above and look at the top of the first section: 'Information on Current Crisis and Humanitarian Response'. The reports will be entries #2, 3, &4.)

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On Friday, May 2nd, the [Human Security Baseline Assessment](#) published an analysis of the SPLM-in-Opposition, which includes the background and the development of the political and military leadership that has coalesced around Riek Machar. With substantial detail, the report highlights the various distinct components, objectives, and activities of the SPLM-IO through April 1st.

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Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.  
Ellen J. Hanckel  
Editor

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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](mailto: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.

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