

AFRECS E-Blast: June 24, 2015

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Prayers for Peace

Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

Dear Friends,

As the crisis in South Sudan persists and, in fact, worsens, one's sense of despair is likely to deepen. Eight negotiated accords between the warring parties have failed to produce a sustainable cease fire. As aptly put by one observer, the political leaders are not interested in peace - only power. With that mindset, prospects for peace struggle for a chance to take hold. Nevertheless, efforts by elements of civil society - namely the churches - continue, as well they must. Against this backdrop and endless fighting and the unmitigated suffering that goes with it, **we are called to pray earnestly** that the adversaries and those who support them will have a change of heart. **Yes, we continue to pray.**

Our prayers do matter even when the hoped for result seems remote if not unreachable. In fact, this may be the circumstance that makes our prayers all the more urgent. We pray because we continue to believe this: **That which seems impossible need not be, if hearts can be changed and God's power can break into a desperate situation.**

Many of us are receiving **frequent prayer requests from Sudanese friends** asking us to join them in a plea that their suffering be ended and peace restored. These requests reflect a variety of concerns encompassing petitions for relief from personal suffering related to displacement and loss resulting from the conflict, pleas that warring tribal factions will reconcile, or that leaders of faith communities be strengthened in their ability to lead their people to a place of safety and peace. What is key in all of these requests is a desire to have friends who care about them and who are also sharing their belief in a merciful God who will not abandon God's children. We pray with and for our friends and in so doing express friendship with them in their time of most desperate need. **It is prayer that connects us to those who gain a measure of hope when we embrace them in our prayers. Our prayers connect us to their suffering and send the vital message that they are not abandoned.**

It is difficult to imagine what the lives of thousands of South Sudanese might be like if they did not have prayer partners. As the conflict enters its eighteenth month with no clear sign that peace is imminent, we may ask whether our prayers matter. I consider that the efforts of the faith communities as evidenced in a recent trip to Rwanda by Episcopal Church leaders and a subsequent trip by members of the South Sudan Council of Churches to learn from the experience of faith groups in that nation where unspeakable genocide occurred, have been bolstered by our prayers. The tireless efforts of church leaders to minister to their people when

displacement and destruction surrounded them must surely have been sustained not only by their abundant faith but in knowing that in our compassion we were with them in prayer. **Having a cloud of witnesses surround you is no small matter when what confronts you is certain danger and profound sorrow. Our prayers affirm peace makers in their work. Our intercessory prayers are powerful acts of affirmation. Let them continue more fervently than ever.**

Our prayers have an evangelical dimension, particularly where we collectively lift up the plight of our Sudanese sisters and brothers. How many who worship with us and join in praying for peace in South Sudan begin to understand more fully what is happening in that part of the world. We enlarge the circle of partners and advocates as we invite them to pray with us that South Sudan emerges from its present pain into a peaceful and secure society.

In a recent article in [The Washington Post](#), commentator Michael Gerson noted...*"the resilience of South Sudan's people, through decades of war and struggle, is a wonder of history and an inspiration to the human family."* **The churches have immeasurably helped in nurturing that resilience.** It's important to recognize that along with the prayers and courage of South Sudan's faithful, we have added a measure of support as our petitions have complemented theirs. **It is a practice and tradition that must continue.**

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

AFRECS luncheon at General Convention on July 1st, beginning at 12:30 PM

Dear Friends,

If any of you are attending General Convention please know that you would be welcome to the **AFRECS luncheon on July 1st at the Salt Lake Marriott on West Temple (Downtown)**. If you are not attending General Convention, please be so kind as to reach out to those in your diocese who might be attending General Convention and alert them to the luncheon. **AFRECS and our Church Center colleagues are hosting the luncheon** as a means of bringing those concerned with current developments in South Sudan together in conversation. We plan to provide an **update on developments there** and also **share our work in supporting the peace efforts of the ECSSS**. The luncheon is on July 1st from 12:30 to 2:30. If you or others are able to join us, please RSVP to me (richardparkins1@gmail.com) or Ranjit Mathews (rmathews@episcopalchurch.org).

With all good wishes,

Richard Parkins
AFRECS Executive Director

Mark your calendars

In October, we will gather in the Washington D.C. area for our annual conference. This year we will pay particular attention to the establishment and maintenance of partnerships as well as providing up to date information about the ongoing crisis in the South. **Please mark your calendars for Friday and Saturday, October 23 and 24, 2015.**

More details will follow.

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South Sudan

[This New York Times](#) article by Marc Santora gives a snapshot of the current situation and a thorough review of the history of the conflict in South Sudan which began more than 18 months ago. The title speaks the difficult truth: "As South Sudan Crisis Worsens, 'There Is No More Country'." Reported from Malakal, South Sudan, on 6/22/15 the lead sentence describes this sad truth with this telling fact: "In places where the fighting is fiercest, no one is even attempting to count the dead." The subtitle: "In the world's newest nation, the fighting, atrocities and hunger have increased, with no end in sight to the warring leaders' power struggle," sheds light on the background of this comprehensive article.

Yet, even amidst unspeakable violence in South Sudan, a basketball tournament is taking place in Juba this week for the youth of the new nation. Honoring Manute Bol, NBA player and legend, on the fifth anniversary of his death, the 'Peacebuilders Tournament' includes youth from every tribe and from locations all across the country. One of the organizers, Achuei Chol, is the wife of Nicola Bol, brother of the late Manute. She told [Voice of America](#) that organizers and participants hope the tournament will help bring peace to South Sudan. "I thought about it because Manute Bol was a peacemaker and because of the situation in South Sudan, I thought this is the time to use Manute's legacy to unite us together," she said.

The United States announced more than \$133 million [in additional humanitarian assistance](#) on June 16, 2015, in response to a surge in conflict and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian conditions in South Sudan over the last two months. The announcement was made in Geneva, Switzerland, by a U.S. delegation led by U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Donald E. Booth and including Deputy Assistant Secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Catherine Wiesner and USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Director Jeremy Konyndyk, at an international conference on the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan and its impact on the region.

[Here](#) is an article from the Sudan Tribune on GoSS' response to an NGO letter calling for additional sanctions and an arms embargo.

In [this press release](#), the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF) has revised upward an earlier estimate of the number of children massacred in South Sudan last month, saying the number could be "as many as 129."

Humanitarians are [delivering "emergency survival kits"](#) in southern Unity state in South Sudan in a bid to keep alive tens of thousands of people who fled the government's May offensive but do not have permanent access to relief.

Both South Sudan and Sudan

To follow up on the situation reported by the [Sudan Tribune](#) and included in the June 10th eblast, two South Sudanese Pastors still face the death penalty in Khartoum. [BBC News](#) correspondent and Sudan Specialist, Tom Copnall, posted this article recently: "Are Christians in Sudan facing persecution?" It gives a deeper look into this issue.

Sudan

[Voice of America](#) reported recently that according to a legal expert, South Africa was obligated to arrest Sudan President Al-Bashir when he visited that country for a meeting of the African Union recently. Instead, the government of South Africa provided transportation while the courts considered issuing an arrest warrant. The question hinges on whether a sitting president

can be prosecuted. "Critics say that means impunity for Africa leaders, many of whom stay in power for decades."

Regional and Continental News

The [Sudan Tribune](#) reports that US President, Barack Obama, will travel to Ethiopia next month, making him the first sitting American leader to visit this East African nation. According to White House press secretary, Josh Earnest, the president will discuss ways to “accelerate economic growth, strengthen democratic institutions, and improve security” in the African continent. This visit “will build on the success of the August 2014 US-Africa Leaders Summit by strengthening ties with our African partners and highlighting America’s longstanding commitment to investing in Africa,” Earnest said on Friday.

Also President Obama will visit Kenya and participate in the 2015 global Entrepreneurship summit, an annual conference that aims to connect entrepreneurs with various organizations, governments and business leaders. The Sudan Tribune adds that Kenya is the native country of Obama's father. Moreover, "Ethiopia is a key ally of the US in the war against terrorism and has played (a) crucial role in the war against (the) al Qaida allied Somalia militant group, al-Shabab," reports the Sudan Tribune.

This trip to Africa "is said to be the president’s last trip to the African continent. Since (he) assumed power in 2008 as (the) first black president of the United States, Obama has visited five African countries, namely Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, Senegal and Tanzania," according to this prominent East African newspaper.

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

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.
