

# South Sudan



The country of South Sudan is located in east-central Africa. It is a land-locked country, meaning it has no direct access to the ocean. In square miles, South Sudan is slightly smaller and has slightly less than half the population of Texas. South Sudan is a new country, having gained its independence from The Sudan on Saturday July 9, 2011, after six years of civil war. The estimated population is about 8 million people; The war made a proper census impossible.



Cattle herders in South Sudan

The current capital city of South Sudan is Juba; there are plans to move the capital in the future. The official language of South Sudan is English – meaning it is taught in schools - but there are over 60 different tribal languages spoken in the country. Most people who live in South Sudan are subsistence farmers: they depend on their own crops for food.

Many South Sudanese follow an Animist, or traditional African religion. Estimates vary widely on the number of Catholics in the country – the most common number is used is about 2.5 million, from the World Christian Encyclopedia. The Comboni Fathers are known to have first brought the Catholic faith to the area.

Because of the war, millions of South Sudanese were forced to flee their home and either left the country or were internally displaced, in both cases becoming refugees. Over two million people have fled South Sudan for another country. It is estimated that over 1.2 million of them have ended up in resettlement camps in neighboring Uganda. According to the UN Refugee Agency, 63% of the refugees are children.

It is in this corner of northern Uganda that the refugees have found welcome and peace. Because of a law enacted soon after that independence of Uganda called the Control of Alien Refugees Act, people who are forced to seek a new life in Uganda are welcomed and even given land to farm so that they may feed themselves, become productive citizens, and contribute to the local economy. Refugee children attend local schools—when they are available.

## MCA in South Sudan

Those who stay in South Sudan have very difficult lives. The infrastructure has yet to be repaired after the war - roads are poor condition and there is a severe lack of health care. Not only were hospitals destroyed in the violence but also many health care professionals either fled or were killed. Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world.

Receiving a proper education is also very difficult due to the lack of facilities, trained teachers, and materials. Less than a third of the population is literate. This rate is even lower for girls who are encouraged to drop out of school young, marry, and have children early.

A few summers ago, our office was visited by a young priest determined to change some of these problems in his home Archdiocese of Juba. Father Peter Loro Bambu told us how grateful he was to those who were willing to sacrifice to help to rebuild his war-torn country a half a world away. Father Peter said, "Our people are desperate. They have lost everything, and are unable to help themselves. Many, particularly the most vulnerable children, women and the elderly, are dying daily from starvation and curable diseases.

We in the Church are the hope of our people. Our clergy, religious, catechists and lay leaders are fighting against all odds to keep the flames of faith burning in our country. While burying the dead; supporting the survivors; sheltering the displaced; healing the wounded and broken-hearted; feeding the orphans, displaced children, and elderly; we continue to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ vigorously to build the Church and consolidate faith in our country.



*We need your help to continue to keep hope alive* among our traumatized people. I am therefore appealing to you our brothers and sisters in faith to support us to be able to survive on our own. Thank you in advance for standing in solidarity with us in

our time of need. May our Risen Savior Jesus Christ bless you with the fullness of grace, peace, and health."

Sadly, Father Peter would not live to fulfill his dream to see his people survive on their own. After returning home, he fell ill with malaria which damaged his liver. Because Father was unable to get immediate medical attention, by the time he was sent out of the country for care, first to Kenya, then to India for a liver transplant, he was weak and very ill. The transplant never took and he went home to God soon thereafter.

But the spread of the Gospel continues in Juba. At Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, children gather outside an abandoned thread factory, using old spools as seats while they learn their catechism.



The factory itself has become a makeshift church—too many landmines make the regular chapel unsafe for use.



At last report, Missionary Childhood members worldwide sent \$490,000.00 to the Archdiocese of Juba to help rebuild the Church and its services there. Of those funds, \$7,000 went to Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish for faith formation programs. Amazingly, MCA members in South Sudan were able to sacrifice \$408.00 so that other children in the world may come to know the love of Jesus, too.

**Missionary Childhood Association**

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