Voices of Sisters
Ministry
Social Justice



The Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa are in the Wau Diocese in South Sudan, supporting the diocese to promote good health, quality education and social interventions to promote and develop the lives of the poor and marginalized. (Provided photo)



by Anne Wandia

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I am a Kenyan citizen, and a member of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa. In 2010, through our congregational leader, we were invited for mission by the late Bishop Rudolf Deng Majak, who supported the Wau Diocese in South Sudan. The bishop gave us a house to stay in, within the cathedral premises; there are now three congregations there — the Comboni Sisters, the Nazareth Sisters (a local congregation), and our community.

Other offices housed there include the Pastoral Center/PALICA (the pastoral, liturgical and catechetical department for pastoral services), Caritas for Development, Justice and Peace, the Health and Education Department, the Curial Office for Land and Legal Affairs, and the voice of Hope Radio (operated by the Sudanese bishops' conference).

Currently we are under the office of the diocesan administrator. In the Wau Diocese of 16 parishes, there are 13 congregations of religious men and women serving in various apostolates — some in Wau town, others in parishes in the rural areas.

South Sudan got its independence in 2011. Two years later, the young nation started experiencing a political crisis of civil war between different units of the army, led by powerful leaders like the vice president, who left his office to lead the opposition, and who with others defected from the government, despite various peace agreement deals.

"Fretit" was a name given to six tribes from Wau because of their occupations as farmers and fruit eaters. This was the main group of rebels from Wau; they went to the bush to fight for justice in 2016, and fought with government soldiers for four years. The government soldiers were responsible for the displacement of the Wau people, who had to run for their lives and seek safety and security on church premises and in a U.N. protection site camp.

Four parishes from around the Wau Diocese were home for displaced families for four years; the cathedral hosted 18,000 households! Many people lost their lives; their property and businesses were looted, destroyed and burnt to ashes. The

International Organization for Migration came to rescue the displaced families by providing shelter in the camp. The families had lost everything and fled to the camps with nothing.

The Wau Diocese is in the process of developing a child protection policy through the support of the Franciscan Sisters and other partners. This is necessary because many girls are married at the young age of 14 years; they are seen as a source of wealth through their dowries. They end up dropping out of school when they become young mothers, their health is put at high risk, and they are denied their rights. So the implementation of a child protection policy will help to safeguard children's rights and help them pursue their goals through raising awareness here in Wau.

Partners like UNICEF support children by providing scholastic material to help them remain in school, and provide for the special needs of girls. The Sudan Relief Fund also helps them through a feeding program, and provides uniforms and school supplies for the poor and needy children.

Currently we are partnering with the Hold the Child agency, which has created awareness of children's rights and safety; they are funded by UNICEF. Others like Oxfam support them with hygiene and sanitation, and Women for Africa Foundation gives talks to girls and boys in schools. Many boys had dropped out of schools and joined the rebels in the bush to fight for justice.

Presently, I am studying with the Loyola Institute of Ministry out of Loyola University New Orleans in the United States, which supports Catholic sisters in partnership with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. This has helped us to gain the knowledge we need to become instruments of reaching out through God's grace and love. Particularly helpful has been its context of Scripture reflection and praxis; inspired by faith, this has helped us to inform our consciences and identify our potential.

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Also, inspired by Catholic social teachings and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, I have been able to see how I can integrate my personal gifts and understand my cultural context. Guided by our congregational charisms and personal transformation, we sisters are developing a practical partnership that brings impact to our ministry as a sign of incarnation, and brings the reign of God here on Earth.

Networking with others, and with the help of God, we are becoming co-creators with God to bring his reign here on earth: We consider that this is our call — to give life to all.

Shalom!

[Anne Wandia of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa is a Kenyan citizen ministering in the Wau Diocese of South Sudan. A teacher by profession, she is also credentialed in grant writing and child protection. Presently she is working in teacher development, empowering teachers, learners and parents.]