

Diocese of Bethlehem launches ‘unique’ capital campaign

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“What we are going to do is unique,” said Bishop Paul Marshall of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, “a capital campaign for somebody else. We intend to raise significant funds in order to give them away.”

Marshall spoke of *New Hope for Sudan and the Needy in Pennsylvania*, a five-year, \$3.6 million capital campaign launched last Sunday in churches throughout the 14-county diocese.

Some 75% of funds received (\$2.7 million) will aid the Episcopal Diocese of Kajo Keji in southern Sudan; 25% (\$900,000) will seed new outreach ministries of the diocese’s 66 parishes to benefit “the poor among us,” visible and invisible, in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Last Sunday’s launch focused on Kajo Keji County, 7000 miles away in southernmost Sudan on the northern Ugandan border, roughly one-third the geographical size of the 14 northeastern Pennsylvania counties of the Diocese of Bethlehem.

Next Sunday, parishioners will hear about the distribution of funds for the benefit of “the poor among us.”

“I was describing my enthusiasm for and commitment to the *New Hope* campaign recently and someone said to me, ‘Well, of course, that’s your job,’” Marshall wrote recently to Diocese of Bethlehem parishioners.

“The fact is, it isn’t my job, but it is my passion. My transformation in this matter has required the re-ordering of personal and professional priorities. My financial commitment to the project means, among other things, that I will need to postpone my planned retirement date by two years and that we will have altered our standard of living. That is how seriously we take this effort at our house.”

Marshall’s passion was sparked in 2000 when he visited Africa for the first time.

"I have always known, intellectually," he said upon returning, "of the disparity between what we Americans take for granted and how most of the world actually lives. Seeing it produced a jumble of thoughts and feelings. I was grateful, embarrassed, a little sick, but mostly convinced that it is not possible for a Christian to see this much suffering and not lower his own standard of living in order to help brothers and sisters. I came back with the determination never again to let myself be gulled by our culture into feeling deprived."

In 2005, the bishop and his wife, Diana, spent an intensive five days with sisters and brothers in Kajo Keji.

“Diana and I baked in a bus for 14 hours in the Ugandan sun,” he told delegates of the October 2006 diocesan convention. “Finally, you just give up wiping your face. As we became increasingly caked with red dirt and the overcrowded bus grew hotter and hotter, I found myself baking in a holy and creative sense: I knew God wanted my attention.”

Marshall abandoned “some of my bricks-and-mortar dreams for our own diocese, particularly regarding a conference center, in order to see what God would have us do for others.”

“A question has intrigued me,” he continued. “Could we dare to have a capital fund drive where we didn't get the money?”

A few months later, four missionaries from the Diocese of Bethlehem began to explore that question in the Sudan.

They immersed themselves in the life of Kajo Keji, visiting six schools, an orphanage, a displacement camp, the site of the proposed center of the diocese which will house the cathedral, the theological college, the bishop's house, an agricultural center and a primary and secondary school. They met with local officials and clergy, teachers, representatives of the Mothers' Union and heard them talk about their priorities and dreams.

They were Howard Stringfellow, archdeacon of the Diocese of Bethlehem, Jo Trepagnier, member of the diocesan World Mission committee and the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, Randall Fegley, professor of political science at Penn State, expert in African studies, member of Christ Church, Reading, and member of the diocesan World Mission committee, and Charlie Barebo, a global traveler as CEO of Otterbine Barebo, Inc.

Five years ago, Marshall had asked Barebo to help spearhead a capital campaign to develop a camp and conference center for the Episcopal diocese.

“A funny thing happened on the way,” said Barebo. “I woke up one morning in the Sudan, a life-changing event that has deepened my faith and forever altered my outlook on this world.”

A few months later, he accepted the bishop's invitation to lead the *New Hope* capital campaign.

“When we accept Jesus' discipline of looking beyond ourselves, we change,” Marshall said. “When each of us sees ourselves as having a part in Christ's mission in life, much around us changes. The family in our diocese has affected its neighbors unforgettably. In the last six years, our relatively tiny diocese has given over \$800,000 to relief for Africa, for tsunami victims and for hurricane relief. And that is just the money we know about because it flowed through us to Episcopal Relief and Development. Certainly there has been more.”

During the late summer of 2004, in response to Marshall's emergency call to local congregations, the Diocese of Bethlehem quickly raised \$80,000 to have food delivered by trucks to some 157,000 starving refugees. “What the Diocese of Bethlehem has done,” wrote a correspondent in Sudan at that time, “will enter the history books of Kajo Keji. Their actions have given our people hope that they are not alone.”

Funds from the *New Hope* campaign for Kajo Keji have been designated as follows, in line with priorities and requests developed by the leadership there:

\$1.1 million to build and support a theological college in Kajo Keji that will feature a seminary and a teachers' college as well as teach business and vocational skills.

\$1.1 million to build five and support eight primary schools and one secondary school in Kajo Keji, touching the lives of more than 2,000 young Sudanese each year.

\$250,000 to fund a micro-finance program to help kick start a failed economy in Kajo Keji. Micro-finance programs make small loans to families and have resulted in success stories around the globe in developing countries.

\$250,000 to help hire an administrator in Kajo Keji to audit and insure financial propriety.

Additionally, \$900,000 has been designated to seed social ministry projects in parishes, starting with a homeless shelter in Scranton.

The Diocesan Trustees will publish a grant procedure and distribute it to the Diocese of Kajo Keji and the parishes of the Diocese of Bethlehem.

The campaign will extend over a five-year period. Commitments may be fulfilled on a weekly, monthly or annual schedule, or paid in full at any time.