

Op-Ed – The Morning Call

October 19, 2007

[Novel campaign reaches to starving in Sudan](#)

By Bill Lewellis

Three summers ago, about 160,000 expatriate Sudanese had come back across the southern Sudan border from resettlement camps in northern Uganda when Kajo-Keji County in southernmost Sudan was experiencing a drought. It created a desperate situation.

"We must act now to prevent people in Kajo-Keji from starving to death," Bishop Paul Marshall of the Diocese of Bethlehem wrote on diocesan Internet lists. Local churches of the 14-county Episcopal diocese in eastern and northeastern Pennsylvania responded immediately, with \$80,000 to have food delivered.

Trucks loaded with staples traveled from Kampala, Uganda, over rutted roads in the Kajo-Keji area. The first shipments of food reached Kajo-Keji in time to prevent mass starvation.

"What the Diocese of Bethlehem has done," wrote a correspondent in Sudan in 2004, "Will enter the history books of Kajo-Keji."

Since 2001, the Diocese of Bethlehem has sent more than \$400,000 to Kajo-Keji to provide, in addition to life-saving relief, scholarships, agricultural tools and oxen, and to support primary education and the Mothers' Union ministry with orphans and widows as well as their vocational education projects such as sewing classes that include dress making and embroidery.

This did not happen in a vacuum. Relationships began to develop when Bishop Marshall returned from his first trip to Africa.

"I have always known, intellectually," he said at that time, "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."

Ten missionaries from the diocese have traveled to Africa to meet sisters and brothers on their Kajo-Keji homeland and in resettlement camps in northern Uganda. Some have made the journey several times. All have been deeply affected by their visits.

The bishop and his wife spent five days there in 2005. "Diana and I baked in a bus for 14 hours," he said. "I knew God wanted my attention. I decided to sacrifice some of my brick-and-mortar dreams. One question intrigued me. Could we dare to have a capital

fund drive where we didn't get the money?"

Marshall had previously asked a parishioner to help lead a capital campaign to develop a diocesan camp and conference center. "A funny thing happened on the way," said Charlie Barebo, CEO of a lake and pond water quality management firm in Upper Milford Township. "I woke up one morning in Sudan. It was a life-changing event that has deepened my faith and altered my outlook on this world."

Barebo was one of four who immersed themselves in the life of Kajo-Keji in January. They met with local officials and clergy, teachers, representatives of the Mothers' Union and heard them talk about their priorities and dreams. Within a few months, the diocese launched New Hope, "something unique," Marshall said, "a capital campaign for others."

The goal was set at \$3.6 million: 75 percent to help the destitute in Sudan, 25 percent to enable parishes to expand projects and develop new initiatives to serve "the poor among us."

After a few months of advance gifts solicitation, the "campaign for others" went public in September. More than \$2.3 million has been raised. Marshall has led by example, saying experiences in Sudan inspired him to delay his retirement and live more simply so his family could pledge \$53,000 to the campaign.

"We are responding to the request of the Diocese of Kajo Keji for assistance in building the educational and organizational centers that will allow them to provide for their own future," he said. "Through revolving micro-finance funds, enterprising individuals, largely women, will be able to make a new start in a war-torn country."

Youth leaders in the diocese have pledged to raise \$7,000. Fifteen-year-old Katie Kolepp of the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, will donate her \$20 weekly allowance, which means a lot fewer new clothes, she said.

To donate, contact Charlie Barebo at 610-965-6018 ext 210.

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