

Bethlehem and Kajo Keji: Our Partnership

By Bill Lewellis

Communication Minister, Diocese of Bethlehem

Five years ago, Bishop Paul Marshall asked Charlie Barebo to help spearhead a capital campaign to develop a camp and conference center for the Diocese of Bethlehem. “A funny thing happened on the way,” said Barebo. “I woke up one morning in the Sudan.”

A global traveler as CEO of Otterbine Barebo, Inc., Barebo said it was no less than a “life-changing event that has deepened my faith and forever altered my outlook on this world.”

Parishes throughout the 14-county northeastern Pennsylvania diocese launched *New Hope* during the last two Sundays of September. By that time, more than half of the \$3.6 million goal had already been raised through advance gifts, said Barebo who chairs the New Hope capital campaign, but not for a camp and conference center.

“We have begun something unique,” said Bishop Marshall, “a capital campaign for others and an extra mile toward the Millennium Development Goals. Some 75% of the money raised will help the destitute in Sudan; 25% will provide grants to enable parishes in our diocese to expand projects and develop new initiatives to serve the needy in northeastern Pennsylvania. Our diocese, institutionally, will not benefit from this effort.”

“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,” said the bishop. “Through revolving micro-finance funds, enterprising individuals, largely women, will be able to make a new start in a war-torn country.”

Seeking a vision

Bethlehem has had a partnership relationship with the Diocese of Kajo Keji for the past seven years. Ten missionaries have been deeply affected by their visits with sisters and brothers in southern Sudan.

“Since 2000, I and others from our diocese have gone to Africa several times to seek a vision for Bethlehem among the suffering and those who care for them, in a place where the Holy Spirit can work,” said Bishop Marshall.

Archdeacon Howard Stringfellow was one of four, including Barebo, who woke up one morning in January 2007 in the Sudan.

“While I have known people in my native Tennessee and in rural South Carolina who had not either running water or electricity, I have never lived in those circumstances before this trip,” said Stringfellow. The people of Kajo Keji do not have those benefits or any that accompany them in first- and second-world countries, such as means of communication and transport.

“Telephone connection was available in only one location, and we saw a total of nine automobiles, one an abandoned tractor-trailer, in several days. The dirt roads have ravines, remainders and reminders of the rainy season and fifty years of civil war. Few are privileged to have motorcycles and bicycles whose speed often surpasses the three or eight miles an hour we were able to achieve in the “sport” utility vehicle provided by the people of the Diocese of Bethlehem for the Bishop of Kajo Keji to visit his people.”

Former archdeacon of Bethlehem Rick Cluett has been to Kajo Keji several times. "Their life has changed my life," he said. "Their faith has changed my faith."

Cluett says most of his life has been lived in a ghetto of comfort and privilege. "I have forayed from time to time into places and times of poverty – deep deprivation of wealth, opportunity, spirit – in urban and rural America, affecting people who are white-, black-, brown- and red-skinned. And I thought I knew how hard life could be. When I went to Southern Sudan, I discovered I had no idea. I thank God for them and for the opportunity to assist them in reclaiming their lives and their Church."

Mrs. Connie Fegley, a member of Christ Episcopal Church, Reading, and chair of the diocesan World Mission committee, visited with Kajo Keji refugees in Adjumani in northern Uganda in 2000.

She likened it to "a very hot and dusty Cursillo. I was physically uncomfortable, but my spirit was soaring in that spiritually alive place."

In July 2007, she and Cluett represented the Diocese of Bethlehem at the enthronement of Bishop Anthony Poggo, who along with a master's degree in biblical studies has an MBA degree from Oxford, as Bishop of Kajo Keji.

"The people are trying so hard under circumstances I fear would flatten me," she said. "I was struck time and again by how hopeful they are about the future and how lacking in bitterness and the desire for revenge they appear to be regarding all these many years of destruction of their homeland. They really only seem interested in getting on with things, rather than wallowing in the past."

2000

The first mission trip

Bethlehem's relationship on the ground with sisters and brothers in Africa began in February 2000 when Bishop Marshall visited the small country of Swaziland in southern Africa, spending time with Dr. Ned and Emily Wallace and Dan and Maggie Land (all, at the time, from Trinity, Bethlehem)

"To seek the face of Christ among the suffering and those who care for them," he spent time at "a 135-bed mission hospital that is overloaded daily by at least 65 patients and Hospice at Home in surrounding villages where requests for assistance double every six months."

Earlier, he had named Dr. Wallace medical missionary for the Diocese of Bethlehem, with a focus on AIDS-related activities. Wallace had spent four months a year, since 1991, coordinating a medical education, work and service program in a mission hospital in Swaziland,

At that time, HIV/AIDS affected at least a third of the pregnant women in Swaziland, and the estimate was that Africa would be looking at 40 million orphans left by AIDS in the next five years.

He preached and celebrated in the Swaziland Cathedral and met with clergy, vestry members, Bishop Zulu, key lay leaders, medical care workers, intellectuals and lay missionaries.

"I have always known, intellectually," Bishop Marshall said at the 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."

A month after Marshall's return, Fegley went to Adjumani and Kampala in Uganda to meet with Bishop Manasseh Dawidi, the exiled bishop of Kajo Keji and to visit with uprooted Christians from southern Sudan, nearly 150,000 refugees, in northern Uganda refugee resettlement camps.

"It is my hope," Marshall said then, "that the World Mission committee, which revived so wonderfully last year, will bring to our June [2000] convention a plan for us to serve Christ's neediest people and to deepen our contacts with Christians around the world. Our deeper attachment to brothers and sisters in the Third World can only mean good things. I'd like to see the day when people from our diocese go to Third World countries to do various kinds of ministry."

Trinity Church, Bethlehem, soon developed a relationship with the Cathedral Church in the Diocese of Swaziland.

Delegates at the 2000 Convention adopted unanimously a recommendation to "establish a companion relationship between the Diocese of Bethlehem and the Diocese of Kajo-Keji in the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, whose leaders and many parishioners are now in exile in Uganda." The formal partnership was signed in 2001 by both bishops.

Bishop Manasseh's visit

"I came here to share with the people the plight of the Sudanese," Bishop Manasseh said in an interview with *The Morning Call*, late in 2000.

"God will bring peace through your prayer, through your letters to your government and through your conversations with officials of your government when you tell them what is in your heart" he said at *Share the Bread* in Wilkes-Barre, a 2000 diocesan celebration and proclamation of the gospel. "They can take action to bring the war to an end and to bring peace to the Sudan."

He spoke of the chaos that befell his Kajo Keji diocese as Arab Muslims from the north waged war against animists and a Christian minority in the south, where there are oil fields.

"Families eat one meal a day," he said. "People are dying. Land in the camps is not conducive to planting. But God is great. God gives man a mind to search for food and will help him find the food."

On April 2, 2001, Marshall and ten others traveled from Diocesan House to Washington, D.C., in a van, to meet with key senators and representatives and members of the State Department to make the case for alleviating the suffering of the Sudanese people.

2001

A Kajo Keji Hoedown in Uganda

"People are hungry," Bishop Manasseh wrote later in 2001 about the Kajo Keji refugees from southern Sudan living in settlement camps in northern Uganda. "Drought has been there for a year. People are suffering. Rains have just started. When I was there, there was hardly anything to eat. People hardly complain about hunger because their belief is that nobody will listen."

The World Mission committee of the Diocese of Bethlehem, in consultation with Bishop Marshall, appealed to churches in the diocese. Churches responded with gifts of more than \$19,000.

“After meeting several times among themselves and with the United Nations Refugee Agency in Adjumani,” Fegley said, “Bishop Manasseh and some of his church folk decided to purchase hoes with \$8,500 of the funds received.”

They purchased 4,320 hoes for 8,064 Sudanese refugee families.

A package from Uganda arrived at Diocesan House in January 2002. It told an incredible story. “The package included the most thorough documentation I’ve ever seen,” said Fegley.

Jack Moulton, a member of the diocesan World Mission committee who has been to Kajo Keji several times, is a trained professional farm manager who had worked for some 40 years with nonprofit agricultural organizations in many developing countries. “When the refugees got to Uganda, they were located in areas where the soil is quite marginal,” he said. “Receiving hoes, to them, would be like our farmers getting a tractor from someone. The hoes give them dignity and hope as providers for their families. The cost of a hoe would be a year’s salary for some.”

2002

The second mission trip

Four Diocese of Bethlehem representatives visited Kajo Keji in late July and early August 2002. The team was selected with specific goals in mind.

Dr. Randall Fegley, who had lived and taught in the Sudan several years ago and now teaches about Sudan and Africa at Penn State, went as the team’s education expert. Jack Moulton, who recently retired from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and is an agriculture specialist with African experience, went to look carefully at agricultural issues in Kajo Keji. The Rev. Elizabeth Moulton and Archdeacon Rick Cluett spent time with Bishop Manasseh and the clergy and people in local congregations, looking specifically at needs of the Diocese of Kajo Keji.

“Before our trip we had requested meetings with specific people, some by name, others by position or title,” said Cluett. “We met everyone we wanted to meet. We saw as much as possible of life in the refugee camps of Uganda and the communities in Kajo Keji as could be put into our days.”

“One day we heard a loud explosion, a few hundred yards away,” Cluett said. “A farmer struck a landmine with his hoe. There was nothing left of him. Realities of life in Kajo Keji came clear in a new way.”

Soon after the team’s return, the World Mission committee listed specific projects that might be undertaken by parishes, youth groups, ECW groups, prayer groups, individuals, clergy, diocesan leaders and the committee itself.

Jack Moulton returned to Kajo Keji in May 2003 to assist in redevelopment on a parish level by teaching, training the trainer and helping to develop agricultural cooperatives. “I came back to Kajo Keji to retrieve my heart that I left there last year. However, my heart is still there and I will have to go back again and retrieve it. I left Kajo Keji last year with moist eyes after seeing and witnessing the devastation and despair, but this time my eyes were moist with joy for all that has

happened within the last eight months. My work in agricultural development and community development is only beginning.”

2004

Acting to save off starvation

By July of 2004, some 160,000 expatriate Sudanese had come back across the southern Sudan border from resettlement camps when Kajo Keji was experiencing a drought. It created a desperate situation.

“We must act now to prevent people in Kajo Keji from starving to death,” Bishop Marshall wrote on diocesan internet lists. Local churches responded immediately to make “a miracle in August,” raising some \$80,000 to have food delivered.

Trucks loaded with staples came 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,” Bishop Marshall wrote later in his pastoral letter of thanks, “and the funds we provided will continue to feed the refugees for the immediate future.”

“Even if you don’t see it on the national news,” the bishop said later, “it really happened. This summer we learned again that when followers of Jesus work together, great good comes of it. Working together to meet a crisis and with very little time to act, our tiny diocese in Pennsylvania staved off mass starvation on the other side of the globe.”

“What the Diocese of Bethlehem has done,” wrote a correspondent in Sudan at that time, “will enter the history books of Kajo Keji. Your actions have given our people hope that they are not alone.”

“When word of this disaster reached me, I knew you would respond,” the bishop said in his 2004 address to Diocesan Convention, “but I was not prepared for the depth of generosity and compassion you have shown. I do not yet have the words to tell you the depth of my emotions at what the people of this diocese have done to fend off death in that suffering corner of Africa.

“Some parishes have deficits this year, one has had a devastating flood, but no parish represented in this room today turned a deaf ear to the cries from Africa. This outpouring has been what I will cherish about the year 2004 above anything else.”

2005

The visit of Bishop and Mrs. Diana Marshall

In January 2005, Bishop Paul and Diana Marshall spent an intensive five days with sisters and brothers in Kajo Keji.

They addressed 17 gatherings. The bishop preached at least three times each day, observing the local minimum of 45 minutes, and was invited to ordain 34 African deacons and three priests for the war-torn diocese on the Feast of the Epiphany. As he concluded the priesthood ordination formula for Joyce Doru, the large outdoor congregation broke into sustained applause and singing.

They laid foundation stones for the new Theological College building (on the site of the destroyed one) and for the Mothers’ Union Training Center.

The primary purpose of the visit, Bishop Marshall said, was “to respond to what was said in the invitation: how much it would mean to the people of Kajo Keji just to know that we know they are there.”

Diana Marshall, upon laying the foundation stone of the Women’s Training Center, observed that the church in the U. S. is grateful to have heard the wisdom of African men for some time, but that the African witness will be fully present in Anglicanism when women’s wisdom is celebrated and revered by all. “It is time to hear the voices of African women.”

The Training Center will provide young women with education and skills to build a life for themselves with a new independence and to take their places in local governments and economies. Diocesan programs already provide training in sewing and tailoring, also equipping women for their eventual roles in government and public administration – roles not previously available in the Islamic regime. The site will eventually include a nursery school and health center.

Mrs. Marshall’s world is “much larger or much smaller now, depending on how I look at it. The people of Kajo Keji are very real to me and I feel connected to them as brothers and sisters. They have made my world larger. But Africa is no longer so far away as it once seemed. I am very aware of being a part of the entire world, not an isolated portion, and that means being a part of a community that is worldwide, with all that being a part of a community entails.

“I was not prepared for many aspects of this journey,” she said. “The first was the immediate connection I felt to the Kuku people and the warmth and genuineness of their love for us.

“I was not prepared to be accompanied by armed guards, to see only shells of bombed out structures and temporary mud tukuls replacing more permanent homes that have been destroyed repeatedly, to see the ruins of two cathedrals, to see children wearing rags along with smiles that covered their entire faces. Nor was I prepared, in the midst of such deprivation to witness the most joyful worship I have ever encountered, or to see 34 deacons and three priests (one a woman) ordained by an American bishop from Bethlehem.”

At the site of the Dr. Katherine L. Moulton Memorial Secondary School, arising next to the bombed-out shells of former school buildings, Diana Marshall spoke of attending Katherine Moulton’s funeral, and what a heavy day that was for everyone, adding that the erection of this school in Katherine’s memory was an important part of the healing of the Moulton family’s grief.

“A broiling bus ride,” Bishop Marshall said, “remains the major moment of conviction in my life: in the heat, dirt, and physical danger of that journey I knew we are called to work selflessly with these fellow members of Christ.”

Bishop Manasseh wrote later: “Your visit brought to us untold joy. It was during your visit that peace was signed in Sudan. You were the very important and unforgettable guests who came and worked together with us. My sister was among those you ordained.

“It was probably the first time for you to sleep in an African hut (tukul). It was good that you came and witnessed the effects of war upon us in the Sudan. You have been hearing and reading from the papers which was not enough, but you have now witnessed the horrors of war which is painful to take (or even to take photos) as the views appear in ones eyes.”

A few months after returning home, the bishop and his wife made six presentations about their visit at locations around the Diocese of Bethlehem.

Fabrics and fibers strengthen relationships

As part of the expanding relationship between the two dioceses, the executive board of Bethlehem's Episcopal Church Women (ECW) established a venture to support their counterpart, the Mother's Union in Kajo Keji: selling crafts made by Sudanese artisans. With a small advance for shipping costs, the ECW launched its commitment to the Mother's Union. Eight oversized boxes arrived at Diocesan House just in time for the October 2004 Diocesan Convention.

Marlene Hartshorne, ECW president, Catherine Jeffery, vice president, Margot Bradbury, treasurer, and Laura Chegwiddden, mission coordinator, scurried to take inventory of the items for sale. Gloriously colorful, embroidered garments of batik and tie-dyed fabrics and skillfully created baskets and trays of papyrus, palm leaves, split bamboo and banana rope were among the wonderful crafts. Additional boxes revealed beaded purses and jewelry, carved cattle bone necklaces and glass beads woven into delicate bowls.

The artistic renderings have been shown at diocesan conventions, parish forums and fall and holiday craft shows. All proceeds – not simply the profit – support 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. More than \$20,000 was raised in this way over the next three years. Hefty postal costs were offset by additional contributions.

2006

God wanted my attention

“When we accept Jesus' discipline of looking beyond ourselves, we change,” Bishop Marshall said in his address to the October 2006 Diocesan Convention. “When each of us sees ourselves as having a part in Christ's mission in life, much around us changes. The family in Bethlehem diocese has affected its neighbors unforgettably. In the last five 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. No one can doubt that the love of God lives among us, and I thank you on behalf of the many who have no other way to address you. ...

“Diana and I baked in a bus for 14 hours in the Ugandan sun last year. 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.*

“Genesis says humans began our existence as kind of mud pies, and the red dust of the earth baking into my pores helped me have the beginnings of a new insight: Here were sisters and brothers with almost nothing to their names trying to build a life and a country – how could I go on as usual with my life?

“As I told you last year, in addition to altering how I live personally, I have had to abandon 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. The question that intrigued me was, *Could we dare to have a capital fund drive where we didn't get the money?*

Within just a few months of that convention, four missionaries from the Diocese of Bethlehem woke up one morning in the Sudan.

The missionaries of 2007

In January of this year, four missionaries from our Diocese spent five full days in meetings with representatives of the Diocese of Kajo Keji and its various ministries.

They were Archdeacon Stringfellow, Charlie Barebo, Jo Trepagnier, member of the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, and the diocesan World Mission committee, and 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.

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.

"I now know and respect the Kajo Keji diocesan staff and archdeacons and more clearly understand their leadership, and their vision of the future of the Sudan and their incredible challenges," said Trepagnier

"The roads have not been graded or paved in years. Most people walk, a few have bicycles and a very few have motorcycles.

"No electricity or running water means that much of every day is spent getting water at the nearest well, (could be a mile away) and gathering your food for the day. No refrigerators mean no milk products, no leftovers. No money means no shopping. Our main diet was starch and eggs and our hosts offered our team valuable meat.

"There is no clear secular life. They talk about, sing about, dance about God and Jesus in all parts of their day. Almost every family we met talked about some type of mental illness in their family. Suicide, depression is common place. Sons that had been kidnapped. Girls that could not function. They are hopeful and hopeless at the same time.

"The women of Kajo Keji have official and unofficial roles that show great leadership. Projects like teaching women to sew, and cook and make soap are active. Some of the headmasters are women and the head of the orphanages is a woman and there is one woman on the Diocesan staff.

"January in Southern Sudan is hot and dry but every day, particularly in the middle of the day a strong breeze cools things off. As we sat under these majestic mango trees for our community meetings, that breeze reminded me of the power of the Holy Spirit and the mystery of our lives and the hope for the future for our brothers and sisters."

Dr. Fegley spoke of seeing "a people in dire need of help, but not waiting to be helped. Much has already been accomplished. Currently under civil rather than military administration, the area has seen repaired roofs, teacher-training seminars and the instatement of a new curriculum. To finish their education, many cross the border and sit for final examinations in Moyo, Uganda.

“Education was everywhere: from humble mud huts where tiny children enthusiastically recite their lessons to diocesan headquarters where two women were training a dozen others to make soap from shea butter oil and caustic soda.

“We visited five primary schools. From our 2006 donations, each school had been given a bicycle, incentives (pay) for their teachers, textbooks and stationary. Training seminars were provided for PTAs and school management committees (school boards). This is the first time that teachers have received any salaries in eight years.

“The motivation of individuals and the human resources available as a whole far exceeded our expectations. We saw a people who have much to fear but who welcomed their strange looking visitors with smiles and both hands waving. They are a people with great spirit, great hearts and a great thirst for learning. As our brothers and sisters in Christ, they deserve our best efforts.”

The new Bishop of Kajo Keji

Anthony Poggo was consecrated Bishop of Kajo Keji on April 22, 2007. “We all rejoice at your election as Bishop of Kajo-Keji and give thanks that God is providing our sisters and brothers with a strong and loving leader. We believe that God will work mightily through you to equip the saints for every good work ... It would be a great blessing to me if you and I were able to build a direct relationship so that we may effectively lead our people in joint ministry.”

Born 1964 in Kajo Keji, Bishop Anthony Dansasuk Poggo was ordained a priest in 1996. He has worked with ACROSS, a Christian aid and relief organization in Sudan, Kenya and Uganda, in several capacities, including coordinator, communication and publishing director, and, most recently, executive director. He has a bachelor’s degree in public administration and management, a master’s degree in biblical studies, and an MBA. He is fluent in spoken and written English and Bari, fair in spoken Arabic and Kishwahili, and has a working knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek. He is married to Jane Basa Namurye. They have three children: Grace, Faith and Joy.

Bethlehem and Kajo Keji meet in London

During the first days of July, outside of London, Bishop Marshall and Archdeacon Stringfellow met for prayer, conversation and fellowship with Bishop Poggo and the Rev. Emmanuel Murye, diocesan secretary of Kajo Keji. For two days they were joined by *New Hope* chair Charlie Barebo.

“One message we all returned with,” Bishop Marshall said, “is that Bishop Anthony, Father Emmanuel and we are clear on objectives, methodology, and the always important issues of transparency and accountability.”

Joint Pastoral Letter

“As Southern Sudan recovers from a half-century of state-sponsored terrorism,” the bishops wrote in a joint pastoral letter published in September, “we pray earnestly that the Khartoum government may truly respect the dignity and freedom of all of its citizens.

“In our conversations we reaffirmed our partnership in the gospel and our partnership as sister dioceses. We are grateful for the extent to which the faith and joy of each diocese has been strengthened by our relationship over the last seven years. We pledge to continue to pray for each other and to stay in contact on every possible level. The exchange of visits will continue ...

“We reviewed the goals of the *New Hope* Project of the Diocese of Bethlehem, and went over the accountability provisions of the plan in detail ...

“In a time when the question of relationships between member churches of the Anglican Communion is acute, we are aware that our partnership in word and sacrament, in ministry and mission, and our shared experience of the love of God in Jesus Christ *is* the essence of Communion among churches.

“We each value our cultural and theological traditions while rejoicing in the gifts God has given in the traditions of our partners. It is our prayer that our relationship will continue to deepen and that in working together we will increasingly be formed into Christ.”

The back story

“Hello out there, this is Connie Fegley from Christ Church in Reading.” That was the beginning, in April 1998, of the back story of our partnership with Kajo Keji. It was her first post to “Bethlehem of Pa,” the interactive Internet list of the Diocese of Bethlehem. It concerned the *Hear the Cry! Standing in Solidarity with the Suffering Church* conference that she and her husband, Randall, attended a few days before.

In response to her relentless advocacy for the suffering church of Sudan, Bishop Marshall reconvened our diocesan World Mission committee. Margaret Larom, the Episcopal Church’s World Mission Interpretation and Networks officer, was a guest at the committee’s March 1999 meeting. The committee held a hearing at the June 1999 Diocesan Convention, arranged for Michael Kiju Paul, a Sudanese Anglican priest, to speak at the hearing, and then to make a whirlwind tour through congregations, telling Spirit-filled and compelling stories of “how God is working in my life and in the Sudan.”