Reflections on a Mission Trip  By Howard Stringfellow

Four missioners from the Diocese of Bethlehem returned late Sunday (January 14) from a ten-day and 15,000-mile journey to our sisters and brothers in the Diocese of Kajo Keji. Randall Fegley, Jo Trepagnier, Charles Barebo, and I made the trip without Randall’s wife, Connie, who learned, while traveling to Kennedy Airport to fly to Africa, that her father was dying. She was able to change course and to be with him and to be recognized by him during his last hours.

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. 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 only in 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 their Bishop to visit his people.

Though I noticed it first, the economic and infrastructural situation, however, fails to be the chief characteristic of the people. That honor belongs to their deep and yet (in every positive way) superficial faith in Jesus Christ. Every meeting begins with earnest spontaneous prayer, and every small speech and word of welcome begins with “Praise the Lord!” They mean it: they have been saved by Jesus Christ from so many things other than merely existential ones. They have been saved from war and the remnants of war, brief incursions and hostilities from their enemies, and landmines which are still being decommissioned by the United Nations. Every day’s activities conclude with a Scriptural reflection which invariably sews a credible connection between God’s revelation and the dusty duties each person cannot but undertake to survive.

The people of Kajo-Keji proudly identify themselves as your and our brothers and sisters, united as one family, as Canon Henry Leju said in greeting us, “by the sacred blood of Jesus Christ.” He and others could find, if they wished, so many things to distinguish us. Instead, he chose the thing that unites us for time and for eternity.

The Venerable Howard Stringfellow serves as archdeacon for the Diocese of Bethlehem.

Reflections on a Mission Trip  By Jo Trepagnier

In the five full days that the diocesan mission team spent in Kajo Keji, Sudan we were treated with kindness and generosity from our African brothers and sisters and we felt your prayers for safety and mission. We visited six schools, an orphanage, a displacement camp, the site of the proposed center of the diocese (which will house the cathedral, the Bible College, the bishop’s house, an agricultural center and a primary and secondary school). We met with local officials and clergy, teachers, representatives of the Mother’s Union and heard them talk about their priorities and dreams.

We are all still reviewing our notes, sorting our pictures and each of us is reconsidering what were the main learnings from this trip. For today, one short week after my return I want to share the following:

I now know and respect the Kajo Keji diocesan Episcopal Churchwomen and the Ngorongoro Charitable Foundation (archdeacon and more clearly understand their leadership, and their vision of the future of the Sudan and their incredible challenges.

Now as we begin our 3rd year of peace, the people of Sudan continue to return to Kajo Keji, mostly from exile in Uganda. They are returning to their families land but the education system is still so weak (schools with holes, teachers with no pay or certificate) and day to day life so difficult that many of our church leaders keep their families in Uganda.

The Bible College, which was exiled to Uganda, will return to the Sudan this spring or summer. The new building they will move into, totally sponsored by the Diocese of Bethlehem, has walls, windows and a floor. No roof, electricity or place for students and teachers to live.

The roads have not been graded or paved in years and with the bombings and the rainy season, are almost impossible to move around. We had access to Bishop Manassah Dawidi’s car and a fearless driver, but during our week we saw no more than a dozen cars. 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 two 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.

A new Bishop will be elected within the next month. The leadership is strong now and they have great hopes for the future. The new Bishop will offer. Bishop Manassah is living in Kajo Keji and is still active until a new bishop is ordained.

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.

Most of you may know by now that our team dropped from five to four when Connie Fegley responded to a dire family emergency and was not able to travel with us. The team included: The Venerable Howard Stringfellow, Charlie Barebo (Capital Campaign Chair and member of St. Anne’s, Trexlertown), Dr. Randall Fegley, education coordinator for the World Mission committee and member of Christ Church, Reading, and Jo Trepagnier, office manager for Mediator, Allentown, and member of Nativity Cathedral, Bethlehem.

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 of the day a strong breeze cools things off.

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Dioecesan ECW raised $20,000 for Kajo Keji ministries

Since October 2004, members of our diocesan Episcopal Churchwomen have raised some $20,000 through their sale of crafts made by the Mothers’ Union of the Diocese of Kajo Keji in southern Sudan. That includes a recent transfer of $5,706, according to the diocesan World Mission committee. All proceeds, not simply the profit, are used for the diocesan World Mission committee.

We encourage parishes to schedule a craft show. Fellowship gatherings after services or forums, parish women’s meetings: all are great places to present showings.

For further information or scheduling, contact the Mothers’ Union is the ECW counterpart in many parts of the Anglican Communion.

The artistic renderings have been shown at diocesan conventions, parish forums and fall and holiday craft shows. They include finely woven baskets of millet, palm leaves and split bamboo (all renewable sources, ecologically speaking) and small carved pieces.

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March 3, St. Stephen’s, Wilkes-Barre

8:15 Registration & Hospitality
9:15 Opening Prayer/Welcome
9:45 Session I Workshops (to 11:15)
11:15 Luncheon
12:30 Church
1:15 Session II Workshops
2:45 Commissioning/Departure
Flyers and registration forms are available online at www.diobeth.typepad.com/diobeth_newsp

Afternoon Workshops
Planning Holy Week and Easter
Planning and Preaching
[Led by Bishop Paul]

Treasurers
Focus on Cash Receipts, Cash Disbursements, Internal Controls, and Audits. Review the Balance Sheet and Revenue and Expense statements. A question and answer session will follow the presentation. [Led by R. Bruce Reiner and Richard Goyer]

AWE...
Kids!!!
In this workshop, you will learn about the resources of AWE: Children’s Ministries, including: advocacy resources and how to Walk a Mile in their Shoes campaign; worship and speakers for adult forums; education; parish consultations; curriculum; Bishop’s Day for Kids, and our Teacher Formation Events. Learn about DiobethKids.org: aweSome News, our quarterly newsletter filled with help for educators; and our Faith Formation in the Home Packets focusing on life-long faith formation. [Led by The Rev. Debra Kissingar and members of the AWE Executive Committee]

Daylight Saving Time
Begins a lot earlier than usual this year, March 11, and ends later, Nov. 4.

ECW Annual Meeting
The diocesan Episcopal Churchwomen invite all to their annual spring meeting at Kirby House, Mountaintop, May 9. Bishop Paul will lead the program, Women of the Word. A fete of $12 includes registration, refreshments, lunch and program. Registration deadline: April 22. No registrations accepted after that date. Submit names of each person attending. Checks payable to Distinctive Publishers. Contact: Kirby House, 1839 Usher Road, Allentown, PA. Phone: 610-688-6602.

Quiet Day in Whitehall
Bishop Donald J. Parsons, visiting professor of New Testament at Nashotah House, will lead a Lenten Quiet Day, March 17, at St. Stephen’s, Whitehall. The day will begin with Holy Eucharist at 9:30. Bishop Parsons will give a brief address, after which participants go to a quiet place to spend time alone in prayer and reflection. A quiet lunch at noon is provided. Bishop Parsons will participate again at 12:30 and at 2:00. He will be available throughout the day to receive confession from anyone who chooses to do so. The day ends with Evening Prayer at about 2:45. The Lenten Quiet Day is open to anyone in the diocesan community. Register at the church office by March 1 (305) 377-9090). The cost of this day is $10, which supports this event at Nashotah House.

Sayre church visits mosque
Preceded by visits from Drs. Muhammad Wattoo and Ibrahim Ahmed, members of the Diocesan Evangelism Commission, led by the Rev. Father Lentz, were invited in January to observe and/or participate in evening prayers held by the Islamic congregation of the Sayre Mosque. Dr. Wattoo explained Islamic beliefs and their prayers. At sunset, Dr. Amhed, Imam for the congregation, led the gathering by chanting in Arabic the evening prayers. Father Lentz then offered a dialogue on the similarities between Christianity and Islam. Some 60 people not of the Islamic faith were in attendance. The discussion was that Islamic beliefs and our perceptions of our Muslim neighbors are different than what is presented in the media today. After prayers and dialogue, break and refreshments were served, a hot meal at the nearby Nagy Restaurant. [Terris House, of the Church of the Redeemer]

Regional Evangelism Workshops
[From Father Andy Gerns, chair, diocesan Evangelism Commission] The dates for the 2007 Regional Evangelism Workshops are April 21 and 28, May 5 and 12, and Saturdays, 9:30 to 2:00. Places TBA, in north, central and southern parts of the diocese. All workshops will include lunch and noonday prayers. Registration will take place through the Bishop’s office or online at www.diobeth.org. All congregations that took part in the first round are asked to send their teams of at least two people to the second round of training to share the two projects they worked on since the first workshop. If your congregation did not take part in the first round, it is not too late. The first round is not a prerequisite for the next round. Our goal is to have every congregation in the diocese take part in a regional evangelism workshop and do practical projects in evangelism all over northeast Pennsylvania. We are also interested in having congregations learn from each other’s experience no matter how simple or complex their particular program might be.

Jubilate
Hymnody for Lent and Easter 2007 (Ash Wednesday, Feb. 21, to Easter 7C, May 20), published by the Diocese of Bethlehem for our diocesan community and for free distribution to the world, may be downloaded at www.diobeth.org. Jubilate is a service of our liturgy and music commission specifically designed for congregational singing.

Walk a Mile in their Shoes
This Practical Guide for Bishops and Congregations by the Rev. Eric Snyder is the first new guide for bishops in more than 25 years and the first book of its kind aimed at helping congregations prepare for a bishop’s visit.

“This short book has a dual purpose and is aimed at two audiences,” according to Church Publishing.

“Through practical instruction and guidance, it equips bishops to minister effectively as the chief pastor in the diocese, while helping clergy and congregations reduce the eternal anxiety around the words, The bishop is coming.

“Realizing that ceremonial custom varies among different diocesan congregations, the author lays out some normative principles that should be followed in all liturgies at which the bishop presides or is present. His clear, engaging, and often humorous style will put the reader at ease when dealing with ceremonial material.”


Visit www.churchpublishing.org and search for “Marshall.” Bishop Paul is the author of several CPI titles, including Prayer Book Parallels; One Catholic and Apostolic: Samuel Seabury and the Early Episcopal Church; and Same-Sex Unions: Stories and Rites.

Vestry
An introduction for new wardens and vestry members—or a refresher for experienced vestry members—to the roles, responsibilities, and practices of parish leadership. We will look at canons, models, strategies, and resources to assist the elected leaders of parishes. [Led by Bishop Paul and Association for Ministry and Strengthening the Church]

Ministry of the Lay Eucharistic Visitor
“I was hungry and you fed me.” The Ministry of the Lay Eucharistic Visitor extends the celebration of Holy Communion to those who are unable to attend the gathering of the faithful: the home-bound, those in hospital and nursing homes. Biblical, historic background as well as resources and practical consider- ations on how to minister. [Led by Rev. Sally Pellett]

Jean Snyder from us
The Lord wept. And so does Jean. Deep is the grief in the passing of Jean Allen on February 2, the day Jean died. “She is with the Lord she loved and served,” Rick Cluett said: “Each of us is one way or another related to Jean’s Ave, her care, her health issues. This short course leads to lic- ensing by the Bishop. [Led by The Rev. Edward K. Erb]

Show Me the Money: Planned Giving and the St. Matthew Society
An informal workshop for lively discussion about developing significant funds for min- istry in your parish. Learn about the St. Mat- thew Society, which honors and thanks all those who have included their parish in their estate plans. Discover how a former tax collector became a saint, what planned giving is all about, and how it can help even the smallest parish! Members of the St. Matthew Society Steering Committee will offer practical tools for launching and prop- elling the Society in your parish so that funds for future ministry can take root and grow. You needn’t reinvent the wheel. All are most welcome! [Led by Char Horst & Steering Committee Members]

Jean Snyder, R.I.P.
“Jean was one of the best,” wrote Scott Allen on February 2, the day Jean died. “She was always there on many fronts — as a spiri- tual companion, a social justice advocate and indomitable friend. She was always offer- ing something in the realm of the spiritual as well as the psychological level. And she was not shy about sharing her opinions! A mother in the best sense of the word, she raised her own children and then grandchildren in the region of one. She is with the Lord she loved and served and will be waiting for the rest of us with a wonderful smile, twinkling (and somewhat mischievous) eyes, and with arms outstretched for one of her big hugs.”

In his sermon at the Funeral Eucharist, Rick Cluett said: “Each of us is one way or other related to Jean’s Ave, her care, her wisdom, her hospital, her fierce devotion to, and passion for, God’s justice and the poor in this world, her deep searching and encompassing spirituality, her life of nurturing, serving, helping, guiding, supporting, mothering and befriending. “Jean Didion wrote about her own grief that it “turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.” It is a place where we must live for a time. It won’t be rushed, it won’t be bound by our sense of time, it won’t be done in three days. As deep is the gratitude for her life, so deep is our grief in the passing of Jean Snyder from us The Lord wept. And so do we. There is no other way”.

Jean and Eric (The Rev. Eric Snyder) were married for 54 years. Jean’s obituary and Rev. Eric’s sermons may be downloaded at our diocesan blog.