

## **A reason to unite**

### **Amid division, Bethlehem Episcopalians are joining to help Sudanese diocese.**

By Michael Duck  
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*[If you receive The Morning Call, the story begins on the front local page, with a very good photo of Bishop Paul and Bishop Anthony interacting as well as a shaded "How to Help" box. This is the story without the photo. The photo will be published on the cover of the November issue of Diocesan Life. –Bill]*

#### **HOW TO HELP**

***The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem hopes to raise \$3.6 million to help poor people in southern Sudan and eastern Pennsylvania. To donate, contact the diocese at 610-691-5655 ext. 222.***

Most people don't even have shoes in Bishop Anthony Poggo's Anglican diocese in southern Sudan. His people in the Diocese of Kajo Keji struggle with hunger, malaria and the aftermath of a half-century of war.

And these same people are saving Episcopal Bishop Paul V. Marshall of Bethlehem, along with his 16,000-member diocese here in Pennsylvania.

"I don't know where our diocese would be without Kajo Keji... We have been changed and mobilized by that connection," Marshall said Friday to Poggo and representatives from the Diocese of Bethlehem's 66 churches.

The group gathered Friday and Saturday in south Bethlehem's Cathedral Church of the Nativity for the diocese's 136th annual convention.

While other parts of the Episcopal Church have fractured over questions about ministering to homosexuals, Marshall's mission to help Poggo's diocese has unified the Diocese of Bethlehem, which includes 14 counties in eastern and northeast Pennsylvania.

Instead of focusing on controversies or on pricey construction projects, Marshall's diocese has come together to raise more than \$2 million in pledges in just a few months to help its sister diocese of Kajo Keji.

Marshall also has led by example, saying experiences in Sudan inspired him to delay his retirement, downgrade his car, and live more simply so his family could pledge \$53,000 to the campaign.

"What you are doing is giving us hope," Poggo told the hundreds of delegates Friday. "Thank you very much for your sacrifices to your brothers and sisters, [bringing] hope to a people who have known nothing but war, poverty and disease."

Poggo and Marshall's dioceses are both part of the Anglican Communion, a confederation of churches that grew out of the Church of England.

Other African bishops in the worldwide group have denounced the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion's American branch, for consecrating an openly gay bishop in 2003. Some African bishops have allied themselves with breakaway conservative American parishes that agree the Bible forbids homosexual relationships.

On Sept. 25, Episcopal bishops responded to an ultimatum from Anglican leaders by saying the church wouldn't consecrate more gay bishops or bless any same-sex unions. Marshall, who supports a larger role for gays in the church, didn't vote for the statement.

But those tensions don't affect the friendship between Poggo and Marshall, who acknowledge the conflict in the world church but see other issues as more pressing.

"When a person is dying because of lack of food," Poggo said, the American branch's stance on homosexuality "is not really a concern."

Marshall and his wife, Diana, first visited Kajo Keji in 2005, when a peace agreement halted the decades of civil wars that followed the country's independence in 1956. The fighting pitted Arab Muslims from the north of Sudan against blacks from the south, including many Christians.

"We had the privilege of being with refugees [from Kajo Keji] on the day the peace treaty was signed," Marshall said, "and that is a celebration I shall not ever forget."

About the same time, other ethnic conflicts ignited in western Sudan's Darfur region, leaving 200,000 people dead in four years. And while international attention has focused on Darfur, north-south tensions flared again last week when southern leaders accused the northern-led government of breaking the 2005 peace deal.

Scars from the half-century of north-south fighting still remain in southern Sudan, said Charlie Barebo of Upper Milford Township, who visited Kajo Keji early this year as the head of the Diocese of Bethlehem's fundraising campaign.

"It just starts when you look at the people," Barebo said. There are countless women and orphans, but "you don't see any men from the age of 15 to 60," he said, because they've either died in the fighting or have left to find work in Uganda, which borders Sudan to the south.

Land mines are buried near farm fields. The only water is from hand-pumped wells miles away. That water might be contaminated, but there's not enough firewood to boil all drinking water, said Poggo, who became bishop in July.

"To us, when we pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' we mean it!" Poggo said during

his sermon at the Bethlehem convention's worship service Saturday. "You cannot preach to a person who is dying and does not have food."

But Poggo's people somehow found enough to share with their visitors from Pennsylvania.

"Religion became so much more real for us when we encountered people who were on the brink of annihilation, and they were still full of faith and joy," Marshall said.

### ***Finding room to give***

After returning to Bethlehem, Bishop Marshall said, he decided to sacrifice "some of my brick-and-mortar dreams" for his diocese and instead conceived a capital campaign for Kajo Keji. Donors have already pledged \$2.2 million toward the five-year, \$3.6 million campaign, which launched publicly in September.

None of the money will go to the diocese, which has an annual budget of about \$1.7 million, said the Rev. Bill Lewellis, a spokesman. One-fourth of the funds raised will go to charities in Pennsylvania, starting with a homeless shelter in Scranton.

The rest will go to Kajo Keji, primarily to build a college and several schools, the diocese said. The money will also fund a "micro-finance" program, providing small loans so that residents may start their own businesses.

While the bishop rethought his priorities for the diocese, the Marshalls decided to make changes at home, too. They traded in their Saab for a Subaru. They chose to live in a smaller house than they could afford on the bishop's annual salary and housing allowance, which total \$122,530.

For the next five years, Marshall pledged to donate all royalties from the seven books he's written, and also put off his retirement by two years so he and his wife could donate more.

Others in the diocese have taken similarly dramatic steps. Barebo, a member of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Lower Macungie Township and the chief executive officer of a fountain company in Upper Milford, pledged to donate half the money he had saved to send his son and daughter to college.

"It's the right thing -- it's what Christ wants us to do," Barebo said.

That message resonated with youth leaders in the diocese, who pledged to raise \$7,000 for the campaign.

"We have enough money, so it's like we always have an opportunity to give. Because most of us have excess," said 15-year-old Katie Kolepp, who attends Cathedral Church of the Nativity and lives in Hanover Township, Northampton County. She pledged to donate her \$20-a-week allowance -- which means a lot fewer new clothes, she said.

Bishop Marshall believes that kind of attitude can transform the Diocese of Bethlehem the same way it has transformed him.

"Our work to do this is a chance to transcend [our differences]," he said, "and experience a kind of unity of purpose and identity that changes us."

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