

**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2017 Summary Report**

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**I. Brief South Sudan Context Update:**

“Is there anything we can improve?” she asked.

“The food was great!” replied Michelle Lori, the associate for staff education and training in the PC(USA) national office.

“Thank you,” said the hotel manager with a big smile. Then she added, “and you can always come here for shelter, if there is an attack.”

Her words brought us out of the warm glow of a birthday dinner celebrated next to the beautiful Nile River, back into the chilling reality of the ever-present insecurity in Juba.

“Now there is fighting and no food and no water,” explained one of the women of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) who met us earlier that day for lunch. “The next time you come to visit us,” she continued, “it will be better, and then you can come visit us in our home towns.” The women fled their various hometowns due to the current conflict, and they now find themselves living in one of Juba’s camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The ethnically diverse group of church women were deeply encouraged to have a solidarity visit from the Presbyterian Mission Agency staff.

“You didn’t come here with your own agenda, you only came here to sit with us, and that makes you our sisters,” one member said to René Meyers, a PC(USA) Mission Engagement Advisor.

The PCOSS students, teachers, and PTA members were also grateful “to be remembered” and receive a visit. At one school, the PTA president, stated: “Education is a top priority for us.”

In the present context of overwhelming struggle, I was surprised to hear those words still rang true for this community elder. The head teacher made the same foundational statement, “education is our top priority,” and then went on to explain that the children did not have any water at school and many were not able to pay school fees.



Grateful to visit the PCOSS office in Juba, South Sudan (L to R) Jim McGill, Rene Myers, Rev. Nancy Smith-Mather, Rt. Rev. Peter Gai, Rev. John Yor, Michelle Lori, and Rev. Dr. Lori Kraus

“Many of our students are children of soldiers, and soldiers have not been paid in months,” said the head teacher. He and the other teachers are not currently being paid, yet they still volunteer to teach.

The PC(USA) group visited two schools that day, and neither had access to water. As God would have it, mission co-worker, Jim McGill, who is a water/sanitation specialist, was among the team. Jim’s trip would last 3 weeks, so that he could work to help bring water to some of the desperate schools. The presence, expertise, and commitment of Rev. Dr. Laurie Kraus, Director of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), was also much appreciated.

South Sudan has the largest refugee crisis in Africa, a man-made famine has been declared, and some say genocide is taking place... yet the PC(USA) delegation witnessed our partners working for peace both at the grassroots level, such as the multi-ethnic women’s group, as well as at the national level, through the office of PCOSS’ Moderator, Rt. Rev. Peter Gai. The visitors learned of relief efforts through the South Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SSEPC) and through the Presbyterian Relief and Disaster Assistance (PRDA). They worshipped with the 46 students at Nile Theological College, and prayed with the students, teachers, and PTAs at PCOSS schools. The team saw communities, churches, teachers, and students continuing to work towards development, so that “when peace comes” there will be something to build upon.

Mission co-workers supported by the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project hosted the group in Juba. In a conversation about the current crisis, mission co-worker Sharon Kandel said, “we would not be here if we did not feel called.” She went on to explain that our partners “are not as concerned about what we ‘do’, they are mostly grateful for our presence here with them during this time.”

Our mission co-workers, PC(USA) national office colleagues, and supporting churches feel called to stand with our sisters and brothers in South Sudan. Whether our accompaniment is through prayers, physical presence, sharing expertise in development or relief work, or financial support, it is truly an honor to travel this road together.



Leisa facilitating at a PCOSS Women Work Department's leadership course for all groups within the church.

**II. EDUCATION Update:**

- School Visits: The PCOSS Ed Department made mentoring visits to four schools this quarter.
- Publication of Newsletter: Published and distributed to our school communities in South Sudan as well as in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan. A hard copy was also sent to all individual and church supporters of the Education Facilitator (mission co-worker, Leisa Wagstaff).
- Mentoring Teachers: Nine of the ten Juba-based YTTC sponsored students attended a mentoring session.

The four Pochalla-based students engaged in a mobile teacher training program with Across.

- PCOSS Education Board Sub-Committee: In two half-day sessions, the Education Facilitator, Leisa Wagstaff, led a sub-committee in

their task of designing the educational structure of the department as well as guidelines for its operation and management of schools. Three female and two male members of the board were in attendance.

- Supplies to Schools: Textbooks sourced from Mission 21 funding were provided to five schools. One school was provided with a few basic supplies such as chalk, scissors, and pens. One school has received reading books to boost literacy skills and to encourage reading for leisure.



After strategizing with counterparts during the Parents Council and School Management Committee, a representative shares their plan of action to meet one of their school's challenges.

Parents Council/School Management Committee:

- Parent Council and School Management Committee members representing five schools currently open in Juba received training in good governance and strategic planning. By the end of the training, each school's representatives had drawn up three work plans to address three challenges they identified at the beginning of the training. The participants included head teachers, parents, education department staff, and two YTTC student teachers. Almost a third of the participants were women.
- Networking with other organizations: Met with Sea-Partners to examine the possibility of common areas of ministry in Boma. Also, met with Mission 21 at their request to discuss their future educational work with PCOSS.
- Community Mobilization: One community's chief, parents, church elders, and teachers met to discuss opening a school. They discussed the PCOSS department's expectations of the community's support, community challenges, the day-to-day operations of the school and long-range planning. Thirty-five people attended.
- Construction and Maintenance: The education facilitator helped leverage additional funds for the PCOSS Ed Department to complete a two-classroom block for a newly-established school in a resettlement location. Plastering and painting were carried out in one school that recently re-opened, and construction of one classroom was started for a host community school. (SSEPP collaborated with Mission 21 in securing funding for all three activities).



Students enjoying two new classrooms.

### III. Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC) Update

- The college is currently closed, with the following plan: *“It seems prudent that we continue to watch the situation with the plan of re-opening in Yei. July remains our target for now, all other factors constant. Once we re-open, we have resolved to conduct catch up sessions and complete the school calendar in the shortest time possible.”* – Sarah Amulo, Partner Relations Manager YTTC
- Of the fourteen teachers enrolled in training at YTTC, thirteen are engaged as teachers in their home schools. For many, they are considered as the most qualified and are assigned to teach the higher classes. Four students have been given additional training by ACROSS to serve as TOT (Trainers of Trainers) in early childhood education for the public and lay private schools in their community. Four students are female. One student is not reachable and has not been in contact with his classmates or the Education Department.

### IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

Despite the challenges facing this organization, RECONCILE continues to make a difference. **RECONCILE has led countless initiatives to promote peace in the region. Among their efforts have been the facilitation of trainings for the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and South Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church Leaders as well as forums for Christian/ Muslim Relations. In the former, Reconcile guided PCOSS and SPECC Leadership as well as leaders from Internally Displaced Camps and surrounding host communities.** The focus of the trainings was to address the tensions between IDPs and their host communities. In addition, the trainings aimed to improve relationships between grassroots population and the Church Leadership. The interfaith initiatives brought together predominantly women **Christian and Muslims leaders who were focused on** promoting peace and healing in their families. One leader remarked, “Our mothering instinct, to nurture and protect human life, saw us calling for no more deaths. While we were one with our leaders in the struggle for our destiny, we also cajoled them not to lead South Sudan in the way of destruction. We said, “We do not carry guns like you men in the jungle, but we are the ones who cry over our dead. The pain we feel for our land is like the pain we feel when we give birth. But we have no more tears left! Please find another way to restore our dignity and to save our society!”

RECONCILE has worked directly with South Sudan’s top leadership as well as those effected by the ongoing war. During the last few weeks, PC(USA) Mission co-workers Reverends Shelvis & Nancy Smith-Mather traveled with the RECONCILE Executive Director and a Reformed Church of America leadership delegation to

Bidi Bidi and Rhino Refugee camps for a solidarity visit. While there, they met with former members of RECONCILE’s staff and RPI alumni to find out about the challenges facing them in the refugee camps. RECONCILE’s Board of Governors is currently meeting to discuss how to best engage RECONCILE with in the refugee camps of Northern Uganda where many South Sudanese have fled.

### V. Testimonies of Impact

- The PCOSS Education Director, Rev.Nyang, is focusing on improving teaching and community mobilization instead of focusing on construction
- The YTTC-sponsored students, representing many ethnic groups, keep in contact to inquire of each other’s well-being, share ideas, and anxieties, and just to laugh. Seeing them interact gives hope that the country can



Leisa Wagstaff visits two YTTC scholarship recipients at the school where they currently teach.

move beyond tribal affiliation differences to “unity in diversity”.

*“If you need help with something at YTTC, you can ask any of the students, it doesn’t matter what tribe they are from.” – PCOSS Student-Teacher Rachel*

- Rev. Alice, an RPI graduate, currently lives in Rhino Refugee camp in northern Uganda. She serves a church in the camp, and after their joy-filled Palm Sunday service, she and the church elders detailed some of the struggles their newly formed community faces. Rev. Alice explained that there are different levels of trauma in the community. “Some people fled their homes in South Sudan due to the fear of violence, while others actually witnessed atrocities,” she said. One elder described the trauma of the community as a “sickness in the brain” and stated the “disease” needs to be treated. He went on to share that many youth in the camp are engaging in destructive behaviors both towards themselves, such as drug abuse, and towards others. These behaviors can also be a sign of trauma. “I am really using the skills I learned at RPI in the area of trauma,” explained Rev. Alice, “I do not have my trauma healing books (they remain in South Sudan), but I am teaching lots of people about the effects of trauma and trying to help them heal.”

## VI. Challenges

- More than 1.5 million citizens have fled the country since this civil war began and more than 1.8 million people have been displaced internally. Most recently, the United Nation’s has deemed South Sudan as a famine state as millions are in danger of starvation. Some argue South Sudan’s violence constitutes genocide.
- Yei has experienced the terror of war in ways many would not imagine. Military forces have captured territories, looted property, harassed citizens, and fiercely divided communities. Yei has been the epicenter of violence for months and several partners have withdrawn funding support of RECONCILE. Some are unwilling or unable to provide funding for efforts in refugee camps. In addition, many RECONCILE staff are afraid of returning to South Sudan because of the targeted ethnic killing against Equatorians. Currently, RECONCILE is underfunded and understaffed in the nation’s most critical hour.
- Due to the situation in Yei, the teacher training college has not reopened.
- A visit to one of the schools located in the POC (Protection of Citizens) camp near Juba was aborted due

to insecurity near the camp. The PCOSS Ed Department entourage was stopped by a group of youth who denied them entry into the camp area while demanding money as well as the vehicle in which they were travelling.

- Inflation continues to climb making it impossible for many to purchase food.
- Many families cannot pay school fees, consequently many teachers are unpaid.

## VII. Financial Update

Generous churches and individuals gave \$13,472 in support of the SSEPP during the first quarter, and pledges totaling \$85,000 are already set for the year. In addition, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis committed to a 38% match for each new gift. We give God thanks for the



The “office” and “staff room” of an SSEPP-supported school.

continued commitment of churches, presbyteries and individuals who are partnering financially with our South Sudanese sisters and brothers during this difficult time. **Thank you!**

### VIII. Mission Co-Workers

**Update:** *The Mission co-worker Multiplier Effect*

The multifaceted nature of the SSEPP gives it strength. Not only are partners supported with funds to implement programs, the partner's programs are enhanced by the skills of accompanying mission co-workers. Mission co-workers not only offer their expertise, they also act as bridges connecting PC(USA) congregations with the work of our partners, connecting partners to other resources,



South Sudan PC (USA) Mission co-workers.

and connecting PC(USA) global partners to each other. One example of global partner collaboration was when the PCOSS recruited teachers, who then attended Yei Teacher Training College, which equipped those teachers to then assist Across in their mobile teacher training in a rural community.

Mission co-workers act as a bridge when they host individuals who desire to see the work of global partners up close. Such a visit took place recently, when Sharon and Lynn Kandel and Leisa Wagstaff hosted staff from the PC(USA) national office in Louisville, KY during a visit to Juba. These colleagues are better equipped to “tell the story” of our South Sudanese partners and raise awareness and supporting funds after they witness programs in their context.

Hosting a group, however, is a big task, and Leisa, Sharon, and Lynn along with our global partners, responded with incredible hospitality and care. On a day when the rain poured, they helped the guests navigate the Juba airport, which is currently located under tents. Lynn registered the group with the police, exchanged their dollars into pounds, arranged taxis and receipts, and even made delicious coffee cake for breakfast. Sharon set up and facilitated meetings to introduce visitors to several global partners including: PCOSS, Across, NTC, PRDA, and SSPEC. Leisa prepared the group with heartfelt stories of students' lives and descriptions of schools, and then took them to meet the students, teachers, and PTA members whom she and the PCOSS Ed Dept. work so hard to serve and support. Thank you!

Shortly after arriving in their new home, Arua, Uganda, Shelvis and Nancy had the privilege of hosting the Director for World Mission, José Luis Casal, and Africa Area Coordinator, Rev. Debbie Braaksma, for the Reformed Church in America (RCA). They facilitated their accommodations, arranged meals, and accompanied

the guests to the refugee camps. The visit gave a deeper understanding of the current situation for the refugees and also the ministry of RECONCILE International.

While our mission co-workers contribute directly to the SSEPP, they also build bridges that strengthen our global partners, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and local PC(USA) churches, and these connections have a multiplying effect. For that miracle and opportunity, we give God the glory. Amen.



Palm Sunday Celebration at church in Rhino Refugee camp pastored by an RPI alumni, Rev. Alice