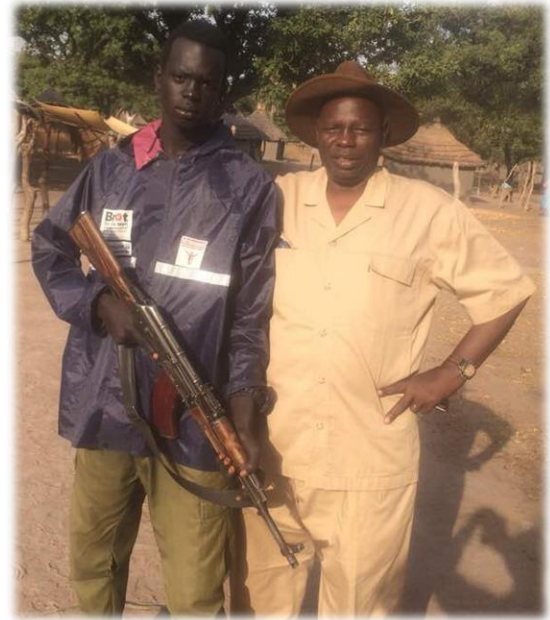




## South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP) 4th Quarter 2017 Summary Report

### Report Outline:

- I. Brief South Sudan Context Update*
- II. PCOSS Education Department Update*
- III. Teacher Training Update*
  - A. Yei Teacher Training College
  - B. Mobile Teacher Training
- IV. PEACEBUILDING Update*
- VI. Testimonies of Impact*
- VII. Challenges*
- VIII. Financial Update*
- IX. Mission Co-Worker Update*



**RECONCILE's E.D., Rev. Peter Tibi, meets with warring clans ready for peace.**

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

“Reverend, you came for peace, and you will go in peace,” the elders told Rev. Peter Tibi, Executive Director of RECONCILE International. They prayed for him and gave traditional blessings, then he left in an armored vehicle convoy.

Once they agreed to stop killing each other, four clans with a history of conflict over cattle raiding, water sharing, and revenge killings called on RECONCILE as their neutral mediator. So, the first week of December, Rev. Tibi traveled to this rural area in South Sudan and met with the clans to prepare them for their upcoming reconciliation conference. “They are ready for peace” stated Rev. Tibi, after meeting with the women’s group, youth and cattle camp leaders, as well as chiefs and commissioners, about 70 people altogether.

The initial community consultation, which included trust building activities, trauma healing and peacebuilding training, went well, but fighting broke out in a neighboring community, making the hour-long trip back to the airstrip life-threatening.

“My coming out was miraculous,” recounts Rev. Tibi. His vehicle made it safely through a village which had just been burned to the ground. The cars that followed his became targets of gunfire, and people lost their lives. Rev. Tibi explained that the people he was with wanted to join the fighting, “I told them not to open fire, because they would kill lots of women and children, and they listened.”

Soon after Rev. Tibi arrived safely back in Juba, the government declared a state of emergency in the community he left, and a forced disarmament followed. Now things are a bit more stable, and Rev. Tibi plans to return to facilitate the reconciliation conference in mid-February, hoping that RECONCILE can help unite the warring clans.

During the closing quarter of 2017, the blood of innocent men, women, and children continued soaking into South Sudanese soil, digging a deeper divide among people. While South Sudan’s national leaders agreed to a ceasefire in late December, the need for peacebuilding remains widespread. With the dry season at hand,

soldiers seeking to reclaim lost territory are not deterred by the agreement signed by their political leaders in neighboring Ethiopia.

Peacebuilding and education continue to need each other. “They were rescued from war. Now South Sudan’s child soldiers are going back” is the title of a November Washington Post article describing a former child soldier’s pursuit of education in a rural Pibor town. In 2015, Babacho Mama, participated in a large release of child soldiers. He and 1,774 other boys left fighting and returned to school. Yet there are many challenges which cause boys to return to fighting. In 2017, the UN estimates that more than 19,000 children have been recruited to join various armed forces in South Sudan. In Pibor, about 98% of children do not complete primary school, and Babacho’s school only holds classes for 30 minutes a day.

Through the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP), long-time PC(USA) partner, Across, was asked to train teachers in both Pochalla and Pibor, two hard-to-reach places in desperate need of improving the quality of classroom education. The training began in Pochalla in 2016, and in 2017, Across began setting up an office in Pibor to support teacher training and other education activities. Lord willing, the New Year will bring a better school for young Babacho and the many other children whose desire to learn is tied to their hope in a better future for their community.

Please continue to pray for the courageous men, women, and children who strive for something that seems to many impossible, yet they press on, believing in the unseen.

Let us pray for Rev. Tibi and Babacho, for our partners and mission co-workers, for the South Sudanese people, and for ourselves, the words of William Sloane Coffin:

May God give you the grace not to sell yourselves short as instruments of God's healing in the world.  
May God give you the grace to risk something big for something good.  
May God give you the grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love.



Joining forces for education.

## II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- PCOSS provided joint training in administration and supervision for 25 of its head teachers, Parent Council, School Management Committee and PCOSS/S Education Board members. They provided the first opportunity for them to share the challenges facing their schools. Each school’s representatives were guided in a time of strategic planning for 2018 and beyond.



**Children’s capacity building activity on choosing good friends.**

- Children’s capacity building training carried out for ten teachers from the PCOSS/S POC 3 school (POC = Protection of Civilians camp). A follow-up training will be held in early 2018 with implementation of an afterschool club for highly at-risk children.
- Pedagogic and administrative visits made to five PCOSS schools in Juba. During the visit, the department had an opportunity to see the student teachers enrolled in the YTTC program in action.
- *PCOSS/S Education News* quarterly newsletter published and distributed to South Sudanese education constituents and stakeholders. This issue highlighted children’s capacity development, explaining that: *“Evidence overwhelming supports that a child’s learning is not his/ her ability to recall the teacher word- for- word or pass*

*examinations but to integrate what he/she is learning into real life experiences.”*

- Water provided to a school comprised of internally displaced persons from the Pibor area now living in Juba. Pupils now have access to potable water during school hours which reduces the risk of water-borne diseases.
- Education Dept. visited a new school community to assess their progress and encourage their efforts.
- Through funding from Trinity Presbytery, South Carolina, the Education Director and a PCOSS/S presbytery moderator traveled to Bor and arranged for the reopening of a PCOSS/S school. The school closed in 2013 after the outbreak of violence in the area. When a significant number of the church members and school population returned, the community began working towards reopening the school which is now set to hold classes in 2018.

### III. Teacher Training Update

#### Yei Teacher Training College:

- PCOSS Scholarship Student Teachers are making use of their time away from studies at YTTC. They were observed teaching during the Education Department’s visits to schools.
- While YTTC opened a satellite campus in Juba for new students, the school has been slow to provide a solution to their stalled teacher training program in Yei. The reopening would allow for previously enrolled students to complete their certification. The PCOSS Ed Department asked YTTC to identify ways in which it can be of some assistance to the reopening of the program in Juba for our students who were already enrolled in their programs of study.



**PCOSS scholarship student teacher in action.**



- Even with the uncertainty surrounding completion of their coursework, there is still a high level of commitment from the YTTC student teachers to helping their home school communities.

Mobile Teacher Training:

- At the end of quarter, Across met with UNICEF who officially committed to a long-term partnership. UNICEF is interested in restarting secondary education in Pibor as well as supporting teacher training. Conversations started at the first of the year to discuss this collaborative effort of Across, PC(USA), PCOSS, and UNICEF, which was sparked by the vision of the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project. PCOSS leadership will guide the possible shifts in SSEPP planning as UNICEF joins the team, and we thank God for the addition of more resources and expertise to an area which is hungry for educational development.



Creating a “God loves me! I am special!” banner.

**IV. PEACEBUILDING Update**

- Trauma Healing and Play for Peace Camp held in a POC camp for 25 children. Five of their teachers were in attendance to share in the experience and to gain skills in trauma healing. (Planning, implementation, facilitation and additional funding raised for the event by PCOSS education dept.)
- RECONCILE International held a meeting with their board of governors in November. In that meeting, they called in a lawyer to help with the process of registering RECONCILE as an NGO with the Ugandan government. While the process is underway, the board decided to seek partnership with an NGO already registered in Uganda, so that they can begin implementing activities in the refugee camps in Uganda, which now hold over a million South Sudanese refugees. Rev. Tibi met with YWAM, an organization based in Arua, Uganda and actively providing trainings in the camps. The two organizations agreed to work together and plan to carry out an assessment in Bidi Bidi and Rhino refugee camps at the end of January. Their hope is to provide both “soft skills” such as trauma healing, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding training alongside “hard skills” such as agriculture or micro-finance (areas in which YWAM already has some expertise).

- While the plans for SSEPP activities for South Sudanese in Uganda are coming together, RECONCILE continues to work within South Sudan. Some of their activities include:
  - A Reconciliation Conference for PCOSS, SSPEC, and ECS church leaders
  - Peacebuilding training for Muslim and Christian women’s leaders in Juba
  - Training local government officials in Yei town on topics such as: the process for creating laws to govern their county, human rights, and children’s rights
  - Training NGOs on Conflict Sensitive (“Do No Harm”) programming which helps staff implement activities in a way that prevents conflict in communities
  - Peer Counselor training for South Sudanese Church leaders

## V. Testimonies of Impact

*Trauma Healing with School Children:* “We laughed, played, shed tears, journeyed through some painful remembrances and harsh present realities, and celebrated the promises that God has given to each of us. ‘God loves me! I am special!’ was the theme of our mini trauma-healing, peace-play, and rights and responsibilities training. The two-day gathering was part of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) Education Department’s activities for a small group of children who are already veterans of war; deprivation; and senseless losses of property, identity, and personhood... They, like thousands of other South Sudanese, live in one of the several overcrowded internally displaced persons (IDP) camps scattered throughout their country...

During the training, each participant was asked to think of a very painful experience or memory. The instructions were clearly understood, but choosing was difficult. There had been so much terror, and the bad recollections far outweighed the more pleasant ones. All their vivid responses related to the war as they talked freely of killed relatives, running through the “tall grasses,” homes being torched “by those with guns,” anger, lack of good education, and “maybe no future.”



**Children complete the activity using their laps as desks.**

*Trauma Healing with Pastors:* “The teaching of trauma healing is really more important to me, it helped me. What is more important is how to help those who are grieved, because one-third of our people are grieved. It is most helpful for we South Sudanese, because we have



**The view of the camp from the classroom window.**

Their only hope and prayer is that the war will stop and there can be a “life outside [of camp] where the UN tanks don’t sit, the other tribes don’t hate us so much, hunger and killings are not there,” and they can dream in vivid colors instead of only black and white through veils of uncertainty. To be so young and tender, they know too intimately the emotions of anger, sadness, and disappointment. [As a result of the workshop] as their journey continues, they are prayerfully taking along with them the skills they have learned, moments of being free from worry, and affirmations of being loved by God and, thus, so very special.”

– Leisa Wagstaff



*lost all our properties, some have lost their dear ones, some have left their children, some have been separated with their families, and in this one [course], the word which says, 'God is in love with us', although you have fallen in those conditions, God is the love of everyone, whether you are in a good situation, whether you are in a bad situation... really God has power to help the grieved, to assist the grieved, and console the grieved, and indeed I was consoled.*

*Last time, I shed tears, when that topic of forgiving was discussed, because I have lost two of my sisters, I have eight children which my sisters left me, their husbands were lost during the war, both of them. And they have left me those children. Up to now I am struggling to look for their food, to look for their education, to give them clothes, but still, with that idea [of forgiving], with that verses, I still take courage ...*

*Even though the enemy, which sends us out of our country, if they were to be around us we are eager to call forgiveness, so that we will be one. So that God will work his miracle powers to reunite us again, to join us again, so that we are able to build a new country, to build a new nation, out of the lessons you have given to us, out of the knowledge you have given to us. We need to forgive our enemies. We need to understand ourselves, so that we are able to reform and bring a new country, out of desperate conditions. We know that God will work his miraculous powers. – Rev. Felix Sebit Francis*



**Pastor Felix Sebit Francis.**



**Revs. Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather facilitated a Trauma Healing course for South Sudanese pastors displaced in Uganda.**

## **VI. Challenges**

- RECONCILE’s board of governors decided that, while Yei became more stable in the last two months of 2017, there needs to be a longer period and wider reach of stability before RECONCILE is comfortable hosting leaders from around the country and taking on the responsibility of their safety during a 3-month RECONCILE Peace Institute (RPI). The hope and plan at this time is for RPI to resume in 2019, Lord willing.

- Family and community financial, physical, and emotional concerns stemming from the conflict often pulls the attention and energy of the South Sudanese leadership from work-related issues and tasks needing attention. This slows down the implementation of activities.



**Finding strength to go on after fire destroys property in Juba.**

### **VII. Financial Update**

We are grateful that \$45,717 reached our partners this quarter to facilitate the implementation of various SSEPP activities. At least 15 individuals, presbyteries, and churches gave to the project this quarter, and that does not include the many who separately support the sending and support for Leisa Wagstaff, the Kandels, and the Smith-Mather family.

We celebrate the generous gift of \$50,000 made by Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, and total gifts of \$214,743 in 2017. We are so thankful for each and every gift!

Please continue to share the story of this project with presbyteries, congregations, and individuals interested in supporting peace, education development, and South Sudan. Thank you!

### **VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:**

**Sharon and Lynn Kandel Update:** "Education is so important - we keep hearing this from so many people living in different places. Lynn and I are doing well here in Juba and try to keep ourselves up to date on what all is going on with the SSEPP. Leisa keeps us busy making sure funds are on hand for the many different things Rev. Stephen and she are doing. Despite many challenges for the teachers, they continue to come for training and workshops and are eager to learn more. Please keep praying for these teachers as they teach in hard conditions with little in the way of supplies."



### **Leisa Wagstaff's Update:**

*Leisa is scheduled for IA from July to mid-September 2018 and looks forward to sharing the ministry of the SSEPP with each of you.*



**Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather Update:**

The fourth quarter came with many exciting events for our family: Nicole turned 1-year-old, Jordan turned 5, and Nancy also had a birthday ;-). We enjoyed celebrating with our neighbors and also the children’s preschool, which is a small school of 22 students from 7 different countries (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Eritrea, Congo, UK, and the US). Perhaps our favorite event was hosting a closing dinner for a group of pastors displaced from Yei who came to Arua temporarily to complete their theological studies. Shelvis taught two of their final courses. After finishing exams, most returned to refugee camps to celebrate Christmas with their families, but not before filling our house with songs of worship and prayers calling on the Prince of Peace. What a blessing for our home.



South Sudanese pastors and church leaders pray before entering the Smith-Mather’s home in Uganda.

