

Serving in Sudan

JANUARY, 2005

Peace Agreement Ushers in New Era of Optimism

A peace agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the Government of Sudan (GOS) was signed recently, making peace and cooperation between the north and the south official. Many of you have asked what "peace" will mean to the people of South Sudan and Servant's Heart.

We continue to be committed to bring aid and development to the most remote area of south Sudan. We will continue to promote indigenous civil and church leadership and development.

Over the past few years, as Servant's Heart's presence has grown and communication in and out of the jungle has improved, the Government of Sudan has been less likely to attack because they know the attacks can be publicized. In their place, militias have been empowered to attack. Even so, in general, safety has improved and will probably stabilize further as accountability increases as a result of the peace agreement.

Personal safety in and out of our area is also likely to improve. Our greatest exposure has always been in the air, while flying in and out of "the bush". Access to this remote area will continue to be expensive, but safer. As a result, training programs will be more accessible to church leadership, teachers and community leaders.

As we have helped to identify the needs of this area and brought them to the attention of other organizations, we expect this area will be overrun with various groups all trying to "help", creating some chaos. We



The implementation agreement was signed in Naivasha, Kenya on December 31, 2004 by Sayed Al Khatib for the GOS (left) and Samson Kwaje for the SPLA (AP/Sayyid Azim)

are pro-actively coordinating with other organizations intending to provide resources, development and goods to the people of Eastern Upper Nile. (see article on our long-term plans on p. 3).

The biggest challenge for 2005 is that hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are expected to return, putting additional strain on the already fragile infrastructure. The United Nations is predicting 500,000 to 1,200,000 people will return in 2005! Forecasting where they will settle and the routes they will take to get there is a major concern. Please pray with us for wisdom as to where our scarce resources will provide the most good, as this is hard to anticipate.

Returnees will be better educated and have more resources than those who have remained, as well as have higher expectations.

In addition, some tribes have relocated in the past two decades, seeking safety. Returnees will need to locate their relatives and find a place to settle. They will need to survive until the next harvest in areas where there is already very little food. A preliminary report from the U.N. for 2004 has determined that the population in this area is already up to 24% insufficiently fed and the 2004 rainfalls were only 40—60% of normal.

Financially this means there is a sense of urgency to everything we are doing. The current infrastructure is already insufficient for the population. We are working to promote awareness of the needs of this remote area and partner with other organizations that can help address the needs.

As the area transitions to indigenous leadership framed by a fragile agreement between the north and the south, it means that the Sudanese people need our support more than ever.

The Church Grows Despite Setbacks

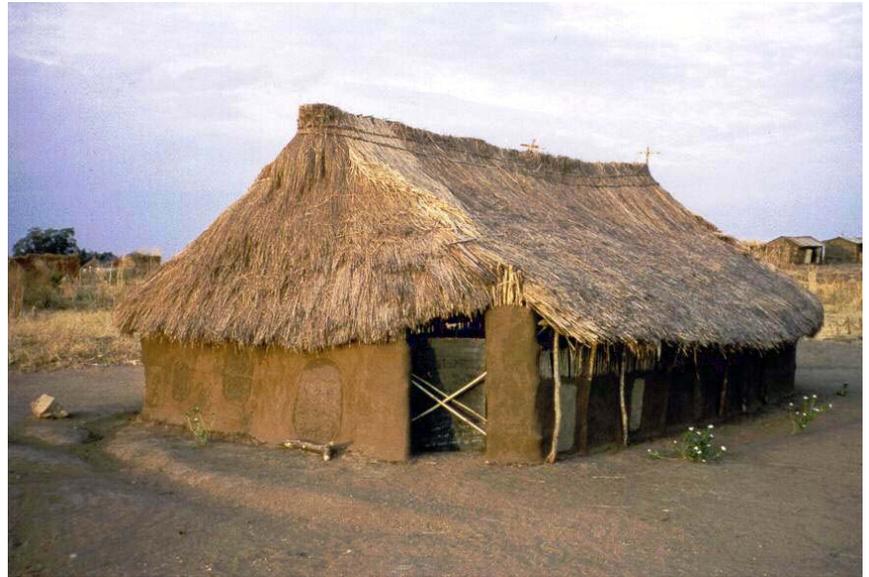
In 1998, Dennis Bennett visited a church in southern Sudan that had grown from six to 300 people in 18 months, but had only three Bibles between them. Dennis responded by bringing in hundreds of Bibles in response to their need.

Today, Servant's Heart works with churches in many villages, providing Bibles, Christian literature and pastoral training in partnership with other organizations to help them get back on their feet.

In the wake of persecution in the mid-80s, many church leaders were killed by the Government of Sudan or its militias. Those Christians who survived were not prepared to lead the church and many people hid in the jungle out of fear they'd be killed.

Even recently, Muslims have brought in truckloads of food, medicine and clothing trying to tempt needy people to convert to Islam.

Over the past 20 years, pastors and lay leaders have come forward in many villages throughout the area.



New church built in Daga Post, EUN with local materials.

From Southern Blue Nile to Eastern Upper Nile, Christian leadership is still stretched thin, but developing. Most pastors oversee more than 10 churches, traveling from village to village, like "circuit riders" did in the U.S in the 1800s.

Not long ago, Pastor John was

overseeing 24 Nuer churches in EUN. He was beaten late one night and almost died. Soon after, he and his wife left with their young child so he could recover and attend Bible college in Kenya. He intends to return to this area when he completes his studies.

When Dennis and Diane Bennett first visited Daga Post in 2001, there was no organized church and many people had been in hiding for years. By 2003, Christmas services had attendance over 800, many coming to church for the first time. Today, regular attendance is around 300 people each Sunday. In this church, people worship jointly from five tribes, singing and praying in their own language.

Each village has no more than one Christian church, where they translate the service and Bible readings into various languages, depending on who's in attendance. Churches are focused on preaching the gospel. Denominational distinctions disappeared under persecution. Deaconesses tend to the sick and the many orphans and widows.

Please pray with us for the continued development of the church.



A children's choir dressed in choir robes in preparation for Sunday church services under a tree.

Servant's Heart's Five-Year Regional Plan

As peace has turned from a dream to a reality, many relief and humanitarian organizations are planning to expand their work in Sudan in 2005 due to the increased safety and continued needs all over Sudan. Servant's Heart continues to be ambassadors for this region as the only outside Christian organization established in Eastern Upper Nile (EUN).

We plan to continue to provide goods, services and training by providing staff, ground expertise and facilities in partnership with other organizations to care for the people of EUN. As a result of our unique knowledge of the area, Servant's Heart has developed an aggressive and bold development plan targeting 15 villages across the area.

The plan targets the primary population centers to provide basic services within a day's walk of most of the population, currently estimated at 200,000. Our goal is to serve the tribes of this area equitably. We expect some transience of the population as the result of peace, since returnees will need to find their tribal homes, which may not be where they were previously. Other families move to seek water, food and other resources just to survive.

The paradigm we've developed in Daga Post and Wudeir over the past few years seems to be working. The combination of communication improvement, physical aid, schooling, midwifery and church support work together. We are hoping to replicate this model to provide similar resources in 13 more villages. Through this we believe we can impact the region.

In late 2003, Servant's Heart became able to communicate routinely from Sudan to our office in Nairobi by radio with no air time charges. Today, several villages check in with our office daily and report in, including any unusual activity. This has re-

duced our travel expense and increased our communication with several key villages. They can let us know any time that there is a problem.

This has worked so well that we are now in the process of installing more radios and will soon circle the 15 villages with a "Security Envelope" of radios. This will increase security and provide a means of communication between villages and with the outside world that they have never experienced.

As a direct result of the peace, Servant's Heart safely gains access to more remote areas. Some of these villages are difficult to access even in peaceful times – there are no roads and no airstrips in most of the area. Missionaries were not active in this area that we know of, so little is known by the "outside world". The terrain is rolling hills, where the valleys flood up to five months per year. Expanding into these areas will be a challenge without roads and with lots of unknowns.

In the past two years, Servant's Heart has been able to build two wells in EUN that provide clean water to thousands of people in and around these villages today. We plan to install ten more wells in 2005. With the help of a volunteer and minimal equipment, we have saved time and money targeting areas where clean water is within 30' of the surface and is easily accessed. Please pray for the successful installation of these wells to make clean water more available.

Schooling continues to be an important part of our work. School is still in session in Daga Post and Wudeir. Our hope is to have a school in each of these 15 villages, whether it is sponsored by Servant's Heart or other organization.

The schools we have started continue to teach over 1,000 kids daily. Across Sudan, girls usually don't

typically attend school for very long because girls, even from a young age, are expected to help with the other children, harvest grain, make food, and fetch the family's water. We have started teaching classes in the evening so that more girls can attend and it's working!

While there are humanitarian organizations that care deeply about the people of south Sudan, there are few that are prepared to work with the spiritual development of the indigenous church. We hope to expand the work Servant's Heart and partners have been doing into more villages in this region and encourage indigenous

Our Regional Plan

- ▶ Targets 15 villages for relief & development
- ▶ Creates a Security Envelope around the region
- ▶ Provides Physical Assistance such as food, clean water, farming tools and clothing, as needed
- ▶ Educates children and adults in each village
- ▶ Supports church development through pastor training, Bibles and literature

church development.

We don't know how many or if there are churches in some of these villages because they have not had contact with the outside world. We understand they speak the same languages and are part of the tribes from the other areas where we are working. We look forward to working with the people in these villages and learning about how God has been with them during the difficult times.

Please pray with us that our efforts will be welcome and helpful to the people of the most remote villages of south Sudan.



Mission Statement

As a responsible Christian organization, Servant's Heart seeks to honor God by serving the Christian church in restricted-access regions of the world with the goal of self-sufficiency. Servant's Heart addresses the community's immediate relief and developmental needs of spiritual growth, educational programs, public health and primary medical care, and agricultural and economic infrastructure.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you and watch over you.

Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the Lord's unfailing love

surrounds the man who trusts in him."

Psalm 32: 8,10 (NIV)

We're on the Web!
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All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Dear Friends:

It is exciting to be able to write to you about peace in Sudan! We are hopeful that the peace will be real and just to all the people of Sudan. I recently visited with our African management team in November, working on our plans for this dry season, strategic-planning for the coming five years, and meeting with other organizations we are looking to partner with in the field. It was exciting to talk to plan to provide training and services without the same security concerns we have had in the past. We pray this is a long-term condition.

I am proud of our African team, running our office in Nairobi, Kenya and our ground operations in Sudan. For over a year, the three of us have worked as a team though we had never met. Servant's Heart has been blessed with two dedicated men that love God and work hard to care for the people in Sudan. It was great to work face-to-face with them. Working closely together is more important now as our role will expand to new villages and we will have new challenges.

Gideon Sawe is our office manager. He is Kenyan and runs the financial, procurement and logistics operations between Kenya and Sudan. With minimal assistance, he has handled the goods needed to run the operations in Sudan. As we go to press, Gideon and his wife are expecting their first child.

Deng Leek is Sudanese and our hard-working Country Manager. He oversees the operations in Sudan, helping us coordinate with other organizations and seeing that everyone is doing their jobs and being treated fairly. All of the people working in the field report to him. This is a big job and he works long hours under tough circumstances. He is often in the bush for months at a time, which is tough on his family. His family has relocated to be closer to him when he is not in Sudan. When he is in Kenya, he talks to the villages daily by radio.

We thank the Lord for the strength and wisdom he has given to these two men. Please keep them in your prayers.

May God richly bless you! *Dennis and Diane Bennett*

Bible Translations Needed

Most of us take for granted that we have the Bible in our language. In this area of Sudan, several tribes had the New Testament translated into their language by missionaries in the 1940s and 50s. Other tribes are still waiting.

Christians who don't have the scripture in their language have to learn another language to understand the Bible. Most churches conduct services in two or more languages so everyone can worship.

People without translations learn another tribal language, but it's not their "heart language". Two tribes in our area have Christians and no translation in their languages. These include the Buldit and the Berta (or Funj) tribes.

The Koma have three books of the New Testament translated by a missionary in the late 1950s, but the New Testament was never completed. Local evangelists are now reaching out to the Koma tribe, hoping to bring enough believers to

the Lord to start a church among the Koma, but there are no New Testaments to give them and only one elderly man can read. Since literacy is rare in this area, few people read any language.

We have consulted with other organizations with expertise in Bible translation and they are willing to partner with us to train project managers and help with the translation process, but this is only part of the challenge. At their suggestion, we have focused on literacy in our schools. By teaching in English, we are able to encourage children from all tribes to read and write and lay the groundwork for future Bible translation.

The pastors of EUN hope to start a translation center where the Koma translation can be completed and other translations can be started. This will require a great deal of infrastructure and development, including power to run computers. Please pray with us for this effort in this era of peace.