

S Sudan Brochure 2022

Background

In 1996, Assistant Rector Hentzi Elek, a former relief worker in Sudan, introduced St. Francis to ministry in southern Sudan. Our first outreach project was the collection of money to buy goats for Sudanese women widowed by the long civil war. In 1997, Father Hentzi introduced St. Francis to an Episcopal priest from the Diocese of Ezo in southwest Sudan who was studying at the Virginia Seminary. The Rev. Bako's stories of his life in Sudan, his faith, and the needs of Sudanese Christians inspired St. Francis to make Sudan a vital part of our prayers and outreach ministry.

Our Covenant with the Diocese of Ezo

In 1998, St. Francis signed a formal covenant with the Diocese of Ezo. The covenant outlined obligations of prayer and support between St. Francis and the Ezo Diocese.

Establishing the St. Francis Basic School in Juba

In 1999, St. Francis raised money to start a school in Juba in southern Sudan for the Ezo families who had fled the fighting in Ezo to the relative safety of Juba. The "St. Francis Basic School," as it came to be called, began with 63 students taught by four volunteers.

The First Mission Trip to Juba

In 2008, St. Francis sent two parishioners, Charlie Jackson and Janet Gralley, to visit the St. Francis Basic School in Juba. They were warmly welcomed and spent almost two weeks in Sudan, most of it at the school, which had grown considerably by then. Some of their most vivid impressions were of the sheer poverty of the area, coupled with the great optimism and faith of the people.

A New Country Emerges

Civil war and unrest have plagued Sudan since 1955. Northern Sudan, the site of the capital of Khartoum, was (and is) a Muslim country, while the south of Sudan had always been home to tribes who were more likely to be Christians. A peace agreement was reached in 2005 and, in 2011, South Sudan became an independent country, with Juba as the new capital.

Impact on the School

The establishment of Juba as a world capital had a number of consequences for the St. Francis Basic School in Juba. The many years of warfare and strife took their toll on the school's relationship with its home diocese of Ezo, and the school no longer maintained a relationship with Ezo.

2013 Mission Trip to South Sudan

In 2013, our Rector, the Rev. Penny Bridges, accompanied by parishioners Stephanie Kendall and Virginia Carlson, visited South Sudan. They were able to spend time in Juba visiting the St. Francis Basic School, but they also learned of conflict around the school and its growing pains in the burgeoning city of Juba.

Mother Penny, Stephanie, and Virginia also made the difficult trip to the Diocese of Ezo and were able to establish a relationship with Bishop John Zawo. In a country of extreme poverty, the people of Ezo Diocese were (and are) some of the poorest. Their lack of resources, their isolation, lack of reliable transportation, and years of brutal attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army made life especially stressful and dangerous. However, it was gratifying to have reestablished contact with Ezo and its church.

2018 Visit from the Bishop of Ezo

After contact was reestablished with Ezo through the 2013 mission trip, several years of emails followed. In March 2018, after much fundraising by St. Francis parishioners, the Bishop of Ezo flew to Washington, DC, and spent 19 days visiting St. Francis. His visit coincided with the 20th anniversary of the original covenant between the Ezo Diocese and St. Francis. A new covenant was signed during that visit and now hangs in the narthex.

The Newest Bishop of Ezo

In 2021, Bishop John Zawo retired, and a new Bishop was elected, the Rt. Rev. Isaac Ephraim J. Bangisa. Bishop Isaac has brought a depth of organizational experience from his work with World Vision and World Relief in South Sudan. After his enthronement in Ezo, he held a strategic planning session with local government and church leaders to develop a five-year plan to help the Diocese move forward. In 2022, Bishop Isaac attended the Lambeth Conference in England. Bishop Isaac has a long vision for improving circumstances not only in Ezo, but for all the people of South Sudan.

Soon after Bishop Isaac was enthroned, St. Francis was able to transfer funds raised at the 2020 Gala to repair a well on the Ezo Diocesan compound and to dig a much-needed new well at a local elementary school. Supplying fresh water in this area not only prevents many diseases but also frees girls up to attend school (because they are not burdened with fetching water all day).

Where Are We Today?

No one would deny that the situation in South Sudan today is extremely complex. Despite the fact that the south was able to establish its own country, conflict erupted in December 2013 amid a power struggle between the president and his deputy. This conflict has continued, made more complex by widespread government corruption, violence, and displacement of more than a million citizens. Likewise, the relationship of St. Francis Great Falls remains complex with our brothers and sisters in South Sudan.

- 1. We continue to carry out our covenant with the Diocese of Ezo.** In 2018, St. Francis formed an Ezo Committee to follow up with support through fundraising, grant money, spreading the word about the Ezo Diocese to other U.S. churches, and keeping the relationship alive at St. Francis. We regularly correspond with Bishop Isaac and hope to further that relationship as the Bishop works on his strategic plan for Ezo.
- 2. We have lost contact with the St. Francis Basic School in Juba.** While we corresponded for many years with an officer of the school and continued to send money to support the school, that relationship has not continued since the pandemic. It's unclear if the school still exists as a church school, and it's been very difficult to get information about the school.

The Future

We are committed to carrying out the promises we made in the covenant signed in 2018 with the Diocese of Ezo. We hope to deepen our relationships with the people of South Sudan, and we will continue to explore the situation with the St. Francis Basic School in Juba. We will support Bishop Isaac in his plans for Ezo and its people through fundraising and linking the Bishop to other potential sources of support.

Learn More

Would you like to be involved?

- Everyone is welcome to the St. Francis Outreach meetings. Contact Ginger Roll (rollginger@icloud.com) for more information.
- Learn more about the involvement of American churches with South Sudan through the American Friends of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan at www.afrecs.org.
- Keep up with the Ezo Diocese on its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2449764135160421>



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