

# **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND**



**SOUTHERN SUDAN**

**APRIL 2009**

# **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND**

## **DESTINATION: SOUTHERN SUDAN – Part I**

By Fr. Ronald P. Sajdak, Pastor of St. Martin de Porres/Director of ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa

The New Year 2009 was met with great excitement as the youth of the Diocese of Buffalo, through the “Pickle Jar Project” exceeded their goal of \$35,000 in order to build 1/3 of the Koiyom Medical Clinic in Southern Sudan. In Holy Week, Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, sixty young people from the Diocese of Buffalo, were participating in “Young Christians At Work;” a social justice “hands on” ministry week. I was invited to speak to the young people about the effective ways that ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa has been able to minister to African Refugees in Buffalo, etc. The week before, Fidele Diing Dhan, one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” living, working and going to school in Buffalo, approached me with the request that ROTA consider assisting him in establishing a medical clinic in his hometown of Koiyom, Southern Sudan. In scope and budget, the request was far greater than anything we had ever attempted before.

Since I was due to speak to the Diocesan Youth one week later I invited Fidele to come along and share his story and his ideas about building a clinic. Though we met late in the evening, the youth were riveted to the matters we shared. Fidele was able to share the incredible story of him and thousands of other “Lost Boys of Sudan.” The youth were genuinely supportive of Fidele and his idea to assist his people. Just how supportive they would turn out to be surprised us all.

Easter Tuesday, Fidele and I were summoned to the Catholic Center offices where many of the youth met us and with excitement exclaimed: “We’re going to build the medical clinic.” Even we at Reaching Out 2 Africa didn’t know the scope of how big an undertaking it was but it seemed too unrealistic to think that some teenagers could accomplish such a goal. We applauded them for their concern, love, and dedication. We refined their vision a bit and challenged them to build a portion of the clinic. They agreed upon a \$35,000 goal and the portion of the clinic would be dedicated in the memory of Fr. Gary Bagley and Sr. Karen Klimczak both who met untimely deaths; both giants in ministry in the Diocese.

Two years has passed and the teens met their goal. In fact they began their fundraising before we had even produced any promotional material that would help legitimize their fundraising appeals. The young church of Buffalo used their unbridled enthusiasm to accomplish great things. Their enthusiasm pushed us at ROTA to undertake a project that we had no idea we could complete.

Just this past Holy Week, after participating with “Young Christians at Work” again, this time for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the gathered youth were told of our team’s plan to depart for Sudan Easter Monday in order to meet with the Village chief and elders, break ground for the clinic, and return to share the experience. One youngster, who had been at the original Young Christians event two years prior requested that I wait and not leave until he returns. A few moments later he returns with a small plastic cup filled with Buffalo soil. “Take this and blend it with the soil of ground breaking.” What a neat idea I thought! This was only the beginning of the blessings the Holy Spirit had in mind.

It was Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009, six weeks before our departure for our first missionary trip to Sudan, that we were able to book our flights. Because “Lost Boy” Fidele Diing Dhan’s immediate family members were in Uganda, our flight plans included travel together to the city of Juba in Southern Sudan however after a period of business, Fidele would leave me and continue his journey to Kampala Uganda in order to spend additional time with his family. Finally our respective tickets were booked and set. The time allotted was thought to be enough to take care of our business together. We were facing a number of “unknowns” such as schedules of local flights to regions within the country etc.

After the monies were spent and tickets purchased with Ethiopian Airlines, I inquired about visa requirements for me as an American and non Sudanese resident. Our Travel Team agent referred me to the visa/passport agents that assisted us in the past. Consulting their website, as well as a variety of other travel visa websites, I grew aware of the fact that none of them listed Sudan as a country that they serviced. I tried calling and left messages to no avail.

Finally I visited the web page for the Embassy of the Republic of Sudan, located in Washington, DC. Looking at the guidelines and requirements for successfully attaining a travel visa became unsettling to me. In addition to the standard requirements including the \$151 US Dollar visa fee a few statements raised some red flags in my mind and became major concerns. One was that an applicant needed to plan early and needed at least eight weeks time to process one’s application for a visa. To date I had only six weeks. In addition to the filled out application, the fee, the photos, and valid US Passport, they also required an official letter of invitation and sponsorship from a Sudanese Hotel, government office, business or citizen. Communication with the Bishops of Sudan was very difficult. Where could I get such a sponsorship letter in time? The website also carried a warning that US Citizens who arrive without a proper visa may: be sent back to their home country at their expense, be sent to an additional country of Sudan’s choice, and/or detained. Failure to submit any papers required would result in the return of one’s passport and application immediately. I began to panic thinking that Fidele would be traveling alone and I just wasted very much money on a ticket that I may not be able to use.

I placed a quick call to Abuna, Fr. Philip Pitya, missionary coordinator priest from Sudan who had lived in the states for over twenty years. He too was preparing to return to Sudan not only to visit but to return to live out his remaining days. The cold of Connecticut was causing him many health difficulties. He answered my call while traveling in Florida, saying goodbye to a number of friends there. He inquired if I had any contact with the Southern Sudanese Consulate in Washington, DC. I knew of the Embassy in DC but what was the Southern Sudanese Consulate? He informed me that the southerners of Sudan had their own official offices in Washington and that I should contact them. They would be able to assist me. I looked up the information on the web. I

was even able to see an arial photo of the building on DuPont Circle. I thanked Fr. Philip for his advice and quickly made the call. The receptionist was very polite and indicated that in my situation I needed to talk to Consular-Madam Jehan Deng. Unfortunately she was not in and the fine receptionist took my information and left word for her.

Only one hour went by before I received a retuned call. After some pleasant conversation and disclosure of what ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa, is all about, the international projects we had accomplished and the trip to initiate the Koiyom Clinic, I made my concerns known. Ms. Deng listened intently and politely indicated that all visitors to Sudan need to be sponsored. I spoke to her about the communication difficulty I had encountered with the Sudanese Bishops. She assured me that there would be no problem. "Abuna," she said, "just send me all your completed paper work along with a letter of description about ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa. When I receive them we will issue a letter of invitation from the government of Southern Sudan and hand carry your application and documents to the Embassy." How do you spell relief? I thanked her for her kind intercession on my behalf and began to collect the important information needed to obtain my visa.

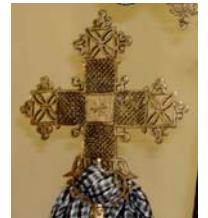
It took two days to collect all the important requirements for the visa including exchanging a "Federal Express" money order for a US Postal one; the specific one they suggested. I didn't want any sort of problem at all. All the documents were sent Federal Express on a Thursday afternoon due to arrive the next afternoon to the Washington address. The following Wednesday morning, only a few days later, my returned Federal Express package arrived. Opening the package I was prepared to see all my documents with a note that I forget something. After all they said it can take up to eight weeks to process one's application. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that all was in order and my passport held the precious visa I needed.

The following day, Fidele and I met with a team of Doctors, nurses, and concerned supporters who helped articulate what sorts of concerns about the clinic operation we needed to focus upon with our trip. When all departed Fidele and I reviewed all that occurred. I was showing him the visa when all of a sudden a business card falls out of the immunization record attached to the back of the document. The business card was from The Consul: Aban Pagan Othow, First Secretary for the Republic of Sudan who signed my visa. On the back of the business card was a posted note that read, "Rev. Fr. Ronald, I am related to Bishop Daniel Adwok Marco the auxiliary bishop of Khartoum." As soon as I shared this story with my good friend Fr. Philip his response was "Ron, he's a southerner working for the unified government. I told you you'd have no difficulties getting your visa did I not?" Praise the Lord, indeed I didn't. This was the first of many lessons that I had to learn concerning this trip. I needed to walk by faith and not by sight. The need to heed the words of God through the prophet Isaiah 55:8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD."

Preparations were underway. Immunizations, collecting of "over the counter" medicines, blankets for people, clothing for Fidele's family members, other Sudanese friends giving Fidele items to carry home to their loved ones all focused our attention of the remaining weeks of preparation. Finally Easter Sunday arrived. It was the day before the travel. Fidele was to

meet me at the St. James residence where he would spend the night due to our early departure time of 4:00AM to the airport. He finally arrived at midnight and we worked hard to repack many bags so as to fulfill various travel restrictions. The few hours of rest passed quickly and we were off to the airport. I was sure that we would have some difficulty with the amount of bags we had. However, that was not an issue for this commuter flight that would carry us to the international flight out of Washington, DC. There was some mix up regarding a paper ticket versus electronic ticket. However, it was all worked out and we squeezed ourselves into the tight seats for the fifty minute flight to Washington Dulles Airport. We were told that our bags would transfer automatically to the international flight and so they did; praise God. However, even with our personal back packs and one carry on case, the International Ethiopian Airline agents had weight travel restrictions and we needed to additionally check one of our bags and pay an additional fee. At that time it was less painful to just pay and get on the plane. Because Fidele was so very tall the agent called us over and re-arranged our seating so that we could be in the emergency exit rows that had more leg room. This was an added benefit that really worked out well except for the times that young children continually tripped over our extended legs as they cut through from aisle to aisle playing tag.

Though our travel was billed as a non-stop flight it did land in Rome, Italy for servicing and refueling. One hour was spent on the ground in the middle of their night. Unfortunately we were nowhere near a window to see at least the sights of the eternal city. I guess I'll have to catch Rome again sometime. Soon we were at the end of stage two of our trip: Addis Abba, Ethiopia. We had just a brief layover. Passing by some shops I couldn't help but notice some very fine silver Ethiopian Crosses that I had seen before. Bishop John Ricard from Florida, sent three such crosses made of gold, to Buffalo for the 10<sup>th</sup> Black Catholic Congress in the summer of 2007. Fidele encouraged me to wait until my return flight rather than carry them throughout. Indeed wise advise from he who would turn out to be a most protective son and travel companion.



We were just briefly up in the air on the way to Juba, Sudan when we were handed the immigration cards to fill out and before we could complete them we were making our approach into Juba. No carefully designed neighborhoods of homes here but miles of dirt roads, clusters of huts and a land dry from the scorching 98 degree heat. Walking off the plane we headed to the airline terminal. Confusion abounded within as we took care of our entrance visa requirements and waited for our luggage. No luggage vehicles with neatly following train car style attachments here just a farm tractor and a flatbed platform with wheels caring all our bags to the common meeting location. We hired a car and driver majorly because he was the only one with a luggage cart. We loaded it up and proceeded to the customs officer. Fidele spoke to him telling him that all these bags belonged to Abuna, Fr. Ron from United States. The officer looked at Fidele, looked at me, looked at the bags and marked them checked without opening a one of them. Soon we were off in the private SUV on route to the Archbishop Paolino Lukudu Loro's residence where I needed to check in and pay my respects to one of my hosts.

# THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND

## DESTINATION: SOUTHERN SUDAN – Part II

By Fr. Ronald P. Sajdak, Pastor of St. Martin de Porres/Director of ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa

Many people think that I stay at the church so long that I should just move my bed into Tulu; our storage/shipping container that is located in our back parking lot. Little did I know that I soon would have an experience of what that would be like.

Fidele and I, upon arriving in Juba, Sudan, made our way to the Archbishop's residence which wasn't too far away from the airport. Our hired car remained in waiting as we greeted his grace, Paolino Lukudu Loro. He welcomed us and sat for some conversation. He had one available room in his dwelling which he offered us. Because Fidele and I were to travel again in a few days after some rest, we opted to just secure some rooms and a neighboring hotel, down the street from the Archbishop's residence.

The price was a bit expensive but it did include all three meals each day, laundry service, etc. We registered for two single rooms. We were very surprised when we walked to the back courtyard to see rolls of what were repainted shipping containers stacked one on top of another and organized into courtyard roles all made into single rooms. I recall my first night thinking, "I don't believe that I'm paying so much to live in Tulu. Compared to some of the up and coming attractions in accommodations, this hotel truly lived up to its name, Paradise Hotel, after all each unit had its' own "western style" bathroom attached. At one of our lunch times we had the opportunity to meet Sudan's Foreign Minister, Mr. Deng Aloor. I was carrying a letter from one of our Sudanese parishioners to Mr. Aloor's brother and so it was convenient to meet him and request he carry the letter for us.

During our two days of rest and recuperation in Juba we united with Fidele's uncle, Deng Gau. This man could not have been more than a year or two older than Fidele himself. He worked for the government in Juba but his wife and family were at their homestead in Aweil many miles north. He assisted us in exchanging some US Dollars for Sudanese Pounds and purchasing a mobile phone so we could have contact with the States. He also took us to the burial ground of the historic head of the SPLA, Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army, Mr. John Garang. We also visited an international bank to begin our inquiry about wiring funds etc. After our business was completed we left. I made my way back downstairs where Fidele's uncle was waiting but Fidele was not with me. We waited and waited and finally I retraced my steps trying to look for the "Lost Boy." He remained outside the bank and indicated to me that he was waiting for one of the young bank staff to complete his business so that he may talk to him. He soon emerged and after a few words they began to hug as they both realized that they were together in the refugee camp in Kenya. No sooner than this reunion began another young fellow, looking for the same bank with the address written on



a paper in his hand looked at both Fidele and his friend and recognized them both as well. Tears, hugs, and stories of survival filled the glorious time of this blessed reunion. This was only the beginning of such blessed reunions for our son Fidele.

Fidele however, was not the only one who experienced surprises on this trip. Our second evening at the hotel Fr. Phillip Pitya surprised me bring for a visit another priest Fr. David Tombe. He knew I admired for David's courage and witness to faith. He was the one tortured and imprisoned in northern Sudan when His Holiness, John Paul II's official plane made an unscheduled stop to the airport in Khartoum. The pope demanded that the president release his priest or he wouldn't leave the runway. After a joyful reunion these two took me to a dinner reception that the Archbishop was attending for the opening of a Catholic University in Juba. Along with my friends we were seated at a table with Comboni Missionaries, Jesuits, and a variety of other lay missionaries. They all inquired what group of missionaries did I belong to. Being put on the spot I admitted that I belonged to no particular group but was just a "Parish Priest" in the United States in ministry to the largest African American Congregation in our Diocese and ministering to Africans in America through ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa. Near the end of the dinner, the head of the university spoke of their Italian Founder, Fr. Louis Monza, founder of "La Nostra Famiglia" or the "Our Family Movement;" a man I knew nothing of. This holy person's cause was being considered for sainthood. The university's president spoke of how this man was an ordinary parish priest in Italy who loved his people, was obedient to his bishop and yet God worked through him to do great things in far away Africa. This testimony along with personal and public words of welcome on behalf of the archbishop helped me feel at home and confirmed why I was in the motherland after all.

The two days at Paradise passed quickly and soon we prepared to board one of the safest 56 seat internal aircraft company planes called Feeder Air, which would take us to the city of Wau. It was a rather quick and safe flight however something rather unusual happened as we landed. Looking out the window I didn't see houses and streets but miles of arid land, bushes and huts dotting the landscape. As we touched down on the airstrip at Wau and cloud of dust surrounded the plane. I instantly knew that we had landed upon a dirt runway. When the plane came to a complete stop it did a U-Turn and proceeded back down the runway. Apparently we overshot both the runway as well as the access road that would take us closer to the terminal building. We again waited for our luggage and then looked for a vehicle to carry us to our next location.



Fidele warned me, “Abuna, I think we’ll have to take a rickshaw to Bishop Majak’s office.” A “rick what?” I asked. He pointed to these three wheel carts that I only recently have seen on James Bond movies when the agent was in India. Fidele negotiated with the driver



as to the amount of money he would charge to carry us to the Kaneesa, or Cathedral Church. Once there we met the Vicar General of Wau and found out that Bishop Deng Majak was away, visiting one of the outlining areas of the Diocese and was not due back for two weeks. I began to feel discouraged thinking that I would not be able to see my friend. Bishop Majak was also a fundamental player in our project. His help and assistance was a necessity in order to accomplish our goals. The village of Koiyom after all was in his Diocese. We met a few other folks as we made our way back to the rickshaw and inquired about hiring a car that would take us on the two and a half hour journey north to the town of Aweil. After paying half the price for the transportation, so the driver could purchase the fuel he needed, we were off.

There is a new road being constructed which will link many of these larger cities together. At this stage though the built up road was just surfaced with compressed, ridged heavy laden dirt. Our hired car appeared to have very little comfort; no shock absorbers or working springs for that matter. Because of this condition our hired car traveled very slowly otherwise we would have been thrown out of the vehicle due to the vibrations of the road surface. Our two and a half hour trip turned into five hours before we finally made it to Aweil, our destination. Again we searched out the parish church first and soon met Fr. Angelo, parish priest of St. George Parish in Aweil. He welcomed us and showed us one guest room he had available at the time. All the priest’s rooms were single rooms off a covered porch walkway. Across the courtyard were the pit toilets that the priests would use. The room was dark and the ceiling very high. A fan was in the room though the electricity was intermittent at best. Fidele looked at the conditions and said: “Abuna, I’ll sleep here; I’ll find somewhere else for you.” Fr. Angelo took us both to the Southern Sudan Hotel just a few blocks from the Church where I secured a room. I encouraged Fidele to stay at the hotel as well but he was concerned because of the cost and preferred to stay at the priest’s home.

My first morning in Aweil, Fr. Angelo picked me up for morning Mass which I concelebrated with Fr. Angelo, his associate priest Fr. Natalie, and an older priest, Fr. Anthony. After Mass we sat under the porch and spoke together. Just then Fidele came out of his room looking really bad. He couldn’t sleep all night due to the mosquitoes. Just then I recalled that I didn’t see any mosquito net within the room. Needless to say that was the last night Fidele wished to spend there as well. We were welcomed to sit for some tea in the morning and we sat at what appeared to be a plastic table cloth covered dining room table. Red ants scurried across the table’s surface as we poured hot tea from a thermos container. I was just about ready to take a sip when a young man came out with tea bags. I looked at Fidele and told him, “The thermos already contains tea, showing him the brown water in my

cup.” “That’s only the water Fidele pointed out.” With that information I suddenly lost any desire for tea that morning.

That day we visited Fidele’s uncle Deng’s family homestead in Aweil. Deng’s wife showed us a new dwelling that Fidele’s uncle just constructed and Fidele declared that he’ll continue his stay with these family members rather than to continue to impose upon the hospitality of the priests. I thought that was a very wise move. Fidele’s aunt made lunch for us. We were escorted into the new dwelling where a table had been set up with chairs for us. The rice, as well as the aceita, a Sudanese corn flour product, was sweetened with cow milk which made them very appealing. Fidele’s aunt as well as other female relatives as well as their children ate separately in the courtyard while we, as is the custom, sat alone in the house.



Aweil, though so very simple, was quite beautiful. Dirt roads crisscrossed forming gathering spaces for people and merchants. Homesteads were built and sectioned off by woven fences of tall grass. Just a brief walk from the hotel, on the way to St. George Church



was an open air market. There you could purchase anything that you needed for you day. We did spend some time walking around and purchasing some gifts for Fidele’s mom and family members when he would finally be reunited with them later in Uganda.

While at the hotel in Aweil members of the Koiyom Clinic Committee traveled to meet with us and discuss just how we would be received within the village of Koiyom which was an additional two hours ride north of Aweil. I was very happy to meet Dut Deng Gabriel the head of the committee and Charles Malon, the committee’s finance officer. We made our plans to visit the village of Koiyom in just a few days on Sunday April 19<sup>th</sup> just after the morning Masses at St. George. Fr. Angelo offered to drive us after his 8am Mass in one of the adjoining mission outstations.

When Sunday came with backpack in hand I walked to St. George Church. Arriving at the church I concelebrated 8:00AM Mass with Fr. Anthony who took time to speak about why Fidele and I were visiting their church that day. The 8am Mass ended at 10am. Because we were to leave at 11AM with



Fr. Angelo, Fr. Natalie invited us to speak at the beginning of the already late 10AM Mass. I’m happy to say I had nothing to do with the lateness of the Mass. At the 10AM Mass both Fidele and I had the opportunity to speak and explain

why we had traveled to Sudan and were going to Koiyom. Unfortunately Fr. Angelo was greatly detained. It was already about 1:00PM and we were two hours late for our two hour journey to the village. “What if Fr. Angelo gets here too late?” I inquired. Fidele said that we’d just have to go to the village the next day. I just couldn’t disappoint the people in that way and so we hired yet another car, this one with shock absorbers, which took us safely to Koiyom.

# THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND

## DESTINATION: SOUTHERN SUDAN – Part III

By Fr. Ronald P. Sajdak, Pastor of St. Martin de Porres/Director of ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa

Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup> found Fidele and I waiting anxiously for Abuna, Fr. Angelo to return to Aweil from one of the outpost parish communities where he celebrated an 8:00AM Mass. We had already attended the 8:00AM Mass at the Church of St. George and both of us had the opportunity to speak to the congregation at the 10:00AM Mass. It was now near 1:00PM and I suggested to Fidele that we hire a car and proceed on our way. I didn't want to disappoint the people of



the village of Koiyom who were expecting us. Thus we hired a car for the journey that would take us an additional two and a half hours. Occasionally we left the newly being formed roadway to travel on more smoothly crafted local roads. The aridity and dry

conditions of living in this part of the world was overwhelming. We traveled through a number of small villages; huts that were clustered together. I was able to see some open air markets of people buying and selling goods, a group of elders with the whole village gathered under the shade of a large tree holding civil court, and everywhere countless children creatively engaged in playtime activities with their friends. Life is so incredibly simple out here with one's main focus being survival, food, shelter, and family.

We finally arrived at the village of Koiyom and I saw scores of women in beautiful dresses and wraps approach our vehicle. Ecstatic shouting and singing could be heard as they surrounded our vehicle opening the doors and escorting us out. Fidele, the first born and eldest of his family began to rub the



tears from his eyes as his sisters met, kissed and welcomed him back home. Brightly colored sashes of material were draped over us in celebration. Soon we were led to the group of elders who welcomed us to Koiyom and with a

number of young men holding to the ground a young calf I was instructed that I was to jump over the animal. With a running start I leaped across the animal while Fidele and his long legs just stepped across the beast. This calf was to be slaughtered for the feast that would follow.

After some dialogue with leaders of the clinic committee, whom we had met in Aweil a few days before, we were led to the site for the clinic. I called for some water and a few branches of leaves which they prepared for me. We began a time of prayer, blessing of the water, and profession of faith. With that accomplished I began to dip the leafed branches into the water and bless the people at which they began to clap their hands and laugh. Fidele leaned over to me and told me that the people have never seen a man of God do such a thing. The spear master and his tribal medicine men always use such

rituals and so the spearman and his colleagues felt affirmed while the people experienced the joy of baptismal renewal and blessing.



We then blessed the site for the building of the clinic and I called for a shovel for groundbreaking. Well a farming hoe was provided. The ground was so very hard that ground breaking became ground scraping. I, then the village chief, a neighboring chief, Fidele, and Dut Deng Gabriel, the head of the

Clinic Committee all took turns. Finally we all armed the tool in order to show our dedication to work together to make this clinic a reality. Showing the gathered crowd a small bag of soil I began to explain how the youth of the Church in Buffalo have stood behind and walked with Fidele to make this project possible.

Just a week prior to our journey, after presiding over a service of reconciliation during Holy Week with "Young Christians at Work" the gathered youth prayed over me for a safe journey to Africa. One of them, Michael Powell, a youth who had been with us throughout the two years of support that the "pickle jar project" had provided requested I not leave until he returns. He returned with a plastic cup filled with dirt that he requested we mix with the ground breaking soil of Koiyom. Explaining this to the gathered crowd, I mixed the earth of our two communities together. Fidele then leaned over to me and inquired, "Aren't you going to bring some of the Koiyom soil back to Buffalo?" I looked at him with a surprised look on my face, while thinking "What a great idea" and we made it so.

We were then led to a prepared place of honor within the village. The village members gathered around us in an



organized fashion: women and young children, the chief and elders sitting in a place of honor, all the men of the village, and finally all the wide eyed children, listening to every word. It was again a very hot sunny day with

temperatures near 98 degrees. At this site the speeches began. The chief, village elders, Fidele and finally I was asked to speak. When this was complete

we began a ceremony of gift exchange. We had brought with us a number of gifts. A special made shirt for the Village Chief with his name, the ROTA name & emblem, St. Martin de Porres Parish name and his title, "Area Chief." We also had a "Diocese of Buffalo" shirt that we shared



with the guest chief of the neighboring area. I spoke of the life of St. Martin de Porres and shared our large St. Martin emblem medals with the chief's brother, the medical assistant in the village, the head catechist, and the chairperson of the clinic committee.

A few days prior to this visit, while in Aweil, meeting with Dut Deng Gabriel, Charles Malone, the chief's brother and others I inquired from them where I may shop to obtain a gift cane. An elder friend of mine from Chicago, when hearing that I was to travel to Sudan, in addition to assuring me of her prayer for my journey requested that I bring her back a walking stick or cane from Sudan. All the men from the Koiyom delegation smiled at me and said, "Abuna, you have no need to shop for the Lord has already heard your prayers." I didn't quite understand their comment and thought I misunderstood something in the translation of language back and forth.

However, it was now time for us to receive gifts from the village. The Spearman, along with a delegation of others came forward caring a variety of gifts: two gourd bowls, one of which I already used to hold the blessed water, a sifting basket/plate, and three walking sticks. They proclaimed that one was for me, one for Fidele and the third a gift for someone I choose. Looking at the smiling faces of the men I had met just a day or two prior in Aweil, I knew that God already had taken care of my needs before I could even ask. During the time



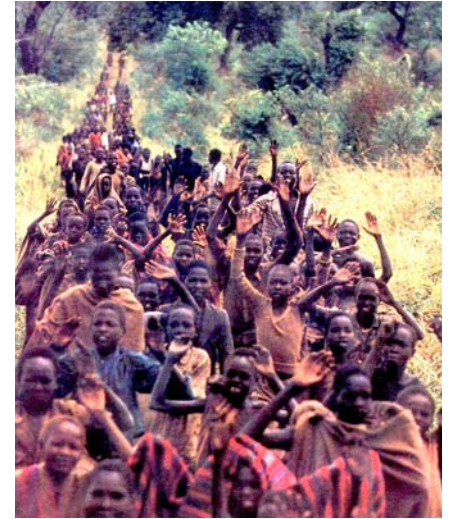
this gift exchange was taking place, I didn't notice but a small cloud came and rested over the village. The light changed, the sun wasn't quite as warm, and then we experienced a brief shower of rain. All the women began to shout and sing alleluias, people began to clap and sing. I leaned over and asked Fidele what was happening? He told me, "Abuna, when the gods approve of any negotiations between people and tribes, it always rains.



Though the smaller children scurried to get under the shelter of the covered area, I joined the chief as we raised our canes in celebration of God's blessing our unity of purpose for the people. I shared God's blessing at the beginning of the ceremony and God, Himself blessed us at the end.



The beautiful rain shower lasted but a few moments and signaled the end of our celebration. Soon Fidele and I made a short journey to his family's homestead in the village. This was where he was born. This was his home where years ago, when he was just nine years old, he had to leave along with thousands of other boys and flee for safety. This is where he began a four year journey of survival and became known as one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan." His incredible journey would take him to a refugee camp in Pinyadu, Ethiopia and then Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. This was his home that he longed to see and in 2006, after graduating from UB, becoming an American citizen, selling his car and all his belongings, and nineteen years since he left home, he returned again for the first time. Our visit was his third visit to his family since that perilous journey. Now I can understand the passion that fuels his selflessness. Instead of just making a life for himself, he is thinking of all the members of his village he has left behind. He's aware that his blessings here in America are not



only his to keep, but his to share and share not only with his family but with his whole village as well.

We stayed at his family's homestead until sunset at which we boarded our hired car, gifts in hand, and began our journey south, back to Aweil. The next day in Aweil, the village chief and members of the Koiyom committee met us for a full morning of talks and discussions. They wished us a safe journey and much success in our continued efforts to make the Koiyom Clinic a reality that will help the people of their village for years to come.



# THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND

## DESTINATION: SOUTHERN SUDAN – Part IV

By Fr. Ronald P. Sajdak, Pastor of St. Martin de Porres/Director of ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa

After the ground breaking, speeches and gift giving were completed, Fidele and I spent a little bit of time at his homestead. This was where he was born. This was where some of his immediate family still lives. Last year he moved his mom and fourteen members of his family south into Kampala, Uganda where his younger sisters and brothers could attend school.



There is no functional school in the Village of Koiyom as yet. Soon it was after 7PM, the sun had just set and we were driving south again toward Aweil; to return to our familiar surroundings. Fidele's family thought we'd be spending the night in the village and so prepared a beautiful hut with two beds which had some very beautifully embroidered sheets upon them. However, Fidele determined that such a stay would be too difficult for me. There was nowhere to purchase bottled clean water, no mosquito nets, no toilet or bathing facilities. The ride home seemed to progress quicker than the ride to the village. The only event that slowed our progress were the multiple animal crossings that occurred along the way.

The next morning in Aweil, the Chief, and committee members made the journey to Aweil to join us for a business meeting. We met under the large tree in the courtyard and discussed all the business matters dealing with the building of the clinic. The chief and committee agreed to dedicate and name a certain section of the clinic in honor of Sr. Karen Klimczak, SSJ and Fr. Gary Bagley as the youth of the Diocese of Buffalo had requested. We discussed the wiring of funds, persons responsible and accountable to us in America, digital progress reports, etc. After lunch time Fidele and I left by public, mini bus, to travel back to Wau where we were told, two seats had been reserved for us on a Feeder airline flight back to Juba. The public mini bus was another new experience. Though we started off having a bit of room in the vehicle, the bus stopped to pick up two SPLA soldiers, AK47s in hand. In order to accommodate the two new passengers, we needed to place all our luggage on the top of the vehicle. Before I gave up my backpack I secured my passport and mini video tape No. 2, the ground breaking, from my bag to carry on my person. With the condition of the roads, as well as the driving skills of the operator, I didn't trust much that the bags would stay on the roof. One soldier leaned his gun against the back of my seat. He talked nonstop and all through the trip I was distracted thinking that maybe on the next bump the rifle would discharge and I'd lose my head. However my fears were unfounded. In fact when we arrived at Wau, we found out that Fidele knew the youngster. Though



much younger, he too was at the refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya when Fidele was there. Yet another reunion with joy!

Hiring a rickshaw, we immediately traveled to Bishop Majak's offices hoping to speak to someone there and get electronic contact information for future business matters. We hadn't arrived until evening and the offices were closed. A guest priest who noticed us in the compound, came out to meet us and offered to take us to the home of the Vicar General so that we might get the desired information. We agreed. In conversation with him, Fidele was surprised to find out that Abuna Paul was from his area, his family lived very close to Koiyom. Soon we arrived and Fr. Paul and I left the truck. Just before we were to knock on the metal door of the fence, a German Comboni priest turned the corner and met us. He was the director of development for the Diocese of Wau. He gave me his card and assured me that any communication I need to give to the bishop he would forward for me. We rejoiced in this added blessing. He just happened to have been on an evening walk when we encountered him. Blessings indeed! Returning to Fr. Paul's truck, he took us to a hotel to spend the night. It was a rough night. The hotel had all the appearances of the comforts of home but nothing worked correctly. The air conditioner didn't condition the air, the bed was a box spring, the bathroom fixtures didn't work; and all this for \$200 a night? Needless to say we were glad we intended to be in Wau only the one night.

At sunrise we were at the Wau airport; sitting on some stones in the dusty lot before the terminal buildings. After more people arrived we heard from the locals that the Feeder Airline Company airplanes didn't fly on Tuesday but Thursday. We waited until some airport officials arrived to confirm the information. Not wanting to remain in Wau, I inquired if there were other flights going to Juba that day. Even the officers said yes but did not recommend them to us for safety sake. Leaving the airport we caught another rickshaw and traveled to another hotel that was recommended to us. The staff members at the hotel were busy and so we waited at an umbrella covered table. I had my Rehobth DE Beach baseball hat on and Fidele took out his AM/FM/Shortwave radio to listen to BBC news so we could find out what was happening elsewhere in the country. Just then an Africa named Malmoud approached us and asked if we worked for an organization called: Persecution Project Foundation? He showed us his hat which was identical to mine but with a different logo. Fidele's radio looked just like the two way radios they used. He thought we worked for the same foundation. In our conversation we found out that he works locally for a number of international NGOs: non-government organizations. Many wire funds through him to accomplish their work in the country. We spoke of our business objective, the building of the clinic in Koiyom. In our conversation I had mentioned that we'd have to provide fresh drinking water for the people in the village. Immediately he called over a colleague from Kirkistan. Soon we were speaking to Mohammed Anour who with his dad runs a well drilling business. We were amazed at the blessing of this



contact. He and his father drill clean water drinking wells throughout Aweil and in the villages north of there as well. He even put in a well for Bishop Deng Majak. What a blessing to have been at that right place at the right time to have met him.

Just then the hotel manager came to the table and offered us two beds in a tent for an astronomical amount of money. Our new friend recommended that we not lodge there but look at a hotel operated by Eritreans who are located near his business location. Soon we found ourselves and our belongings in his truck off to this new location. We stopped at his business where his father met us and offered us some kindness and hospitality. We walked over to the hotel, nightclub and looked at the facility. The rooms were simple and clean. The facility had a restaurant where we could purchase our meals. The price was very reasonable; cheaper than anywhere else we had ever stayed. Fidele warned me not to get too excited until I see the facilities.



Indeed the one sink and mirror was in the parking lot, the two shower stalls just on the other side of the mirrored wall and the two pit toilets beyond that were a site to see. No one would take any reading material and stay in these facilities. When you're in there you just want to get out. No wonder I never heard anyone fight over being in the bathroom too long. Having agreed, our two additional days were spent at the Sun Rise Hotel. The owners and staff couldn't have been better. The food was great. In regard to the pit toilets, I told Fidele: "You're really trying to make me into an African aren't you?" When we passed by our new friend's business in order to catch a rickshaw, Mohammed's father would offer to drive us where we needed to go. We were able to get into town to pick up some supplies: bottled water, shower shoes, toilet paper etc.



The next morning we made our way back to Bishop Majak's offices. We knew he wouldn't have returned yet but we wished to speak to a Comboni brother named Papo, whom we learned was the Diocesan Financial Officer. While waiting to speak to him we were greeted by a Comboni sister named Maria. Sharing our ideas with Br. Papo, he recommended that we speak to Sr. Maria who is one of a group of sisters who were restarting a program in Wau called HTI: Heath Training Institute. He called Sr. Maria in and soon we were able to make an appointment with her for later that day. She would be able to explain to us the hopes for the new nursing program.



Bro. Papo took us in his vehicle to view the campus. He told us of how successful the institute was before and even during the time of the civil war between the north and the south. However, in 1986 all the foreigners were expelled from Sudan and so the school was closed, pillaged, and left abandoned. Now an international group of sisters have returned to reopen this medical school.

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Later that afternoon, Fidele and I returned to the HTI, Health Training Institute site. We were greeted by a number of small children who were playing amidst the abandoned buildings. We walked through the buildings and the site and could just imagine the fine work that this beautiful facility provided in its time. Soon we were at the gate of the sister's compound and Sr. Maria met us and welcomed us into their residence. The residence housed a number of sisters from around the whole world. We met one "teaching sister of Notre Dame from Brooklyn as well. All are



dedicated to reopen the Health Training Institute. To begin the first class, three candidates will be accepted from each of the nine Diocese within Sudan. The tuition including room and board would be \$2,500 US dollars a year. After a four year program, graduates would function as nurse practitioners. They would be able to operate their own clinics, diagnose, prescribe medicine, fill prescriptions, and do minor surgeries. Our eyes lit up. Immediately we requested if someone from Koiyom in the Diocese of Wau could be accepted. Sr. Maria said it would be up to Bishop Majak.

Our two day delay was far from being a waste of time. Instead, God utilized our time to meet some incredible people who we needed to know for the future hopes of success of the mission in Koiyom. On Thursday of that week we made it back to the airport where indeed the Feeder Airline did arrive and we were able to return to Juba where we had begun our journey within Sudan. Fidele's uncle Deng again met us and transported us to another hotel where we'd spend a last evening together before Fidele would leave and join his immediate family members relocated in Kampala, Uganda.



Before Fidele was to leave I needed him and his uncle to assist me in a legal matter. Upon arrival my passport was stamped with a directive, "Registration within three days." Deng told me that I needed to register with the Department of the Interior. Working for the government himself, he dedicated the day to assist me. We arrived at the government offices and moving ahead of all the lines he insisted that the officers take care of Abuna, Fr. Ron. They asked me if I had a completed application form? What application form I inquired? I filled one out and then came question number two: "Do you have an additional passport size photo?" Not having one we left the office and walked to a courtyard that had a number of business tents set up each with their own generators for electricity. We took the photos and paid the fee. Returning the officer inquired who was my sponsor; a Sudanese citizen who will testify that I am who I am and are in Sudan for the stated purposes? Deng agreed to do so. Again we were off to photo copy pages from my passport and Deng's official identity documents. Returning with the mission accomplished we paid the filing fee. Before we could accomplish the remaining steps, lunch time was declared and all the office personnel stood up and left. Returning a few hours later we completed the registration process. Now I was assured and felt more secure that I'd be able to leave the country having abided by all their laws.

# THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND

## DESTINATION: SOUTHERN SUDAN – Part V

By Fr. Ronald P. Sajdak, Pastor of St. Martin de Porres/Director of ROTA: Reaching Out 2 Africa

Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup> was a day of mixed emotions. For the first few days of our travel Fidele appeared anxious to get our business done so that he may rejoin members of his immediate family waiting for him in Kampala, Uganda. Even in telephone conversations with them they were wondering what was taking Fidele so long in enjoining them. “Did he not love them anymore?” I thank and praise God for opening doors before us both in the days we were together. Now was time to part ways and say farewell. It was difficult for us both. In a short amount of time we witnessed so many miracles. Neither one of us wanted it to end; yet Fidele’s family anxiously awaited him. We spent the morning and some of the afternoon together that last day. His uncle Deng drove us to the Archbishop’s residence where we said our goodbyes. I was to remain with the Archbishop until my flight back to Buffalo and Fidele was off to the airport to continue his visit.

Fidele was my security blanket in Sudan. I was feeling just a bit insecure being left alone in a foreign country for what I thought was just four days of rest. I was real foolish to think that God was done with the blessings of this adventure.

The four days spent with Archbishop Paolino Lakudu Loro were filled with time for prayer, relaxation, and yes, new experiences again. The accommodations were more than adequate. I felt like I was at a “Holiday Inn” of Juba. Mosquito net bed, ceiling fan, desk, my own bathroom with working plumbing and even a commode.



The next day, Saturday, we celebrated the Feast Day of St. Mark the Evangelist. The Archbishop preached about the commissioning of the disciples to go and preach the Gospel to every creature. He likened it to my visit to Sudan and even my stay with them at his home. While at dinner later that night I shared with Bishop Loro the story of the young man from Buffalo that wouldn’t let me leave until he returned with a plastic cup full of dirt. “Take this” he said, “and mix it with the dirt of the groundbreaking.” What a beautiful symbolic gesture why didn’t I think of that? I shared how I explained this to the people of Koiyom and how we mixed the soils together. It was Fidele who gently reminded me that I had to take some soil from Koiyom back to Buffalo as well.

After dinner the Archbishop took me back to his private chapel where we celebrated Mass and prayer each day. Going behind the altar he lifted the altar cloth to reveal jars and bottles filled with dirt. “These bottles contain dirt from areas of my diocese where during the twenty three year war, I could no longer travel” he said. “My priests in these villages were killed.

There was no one to care for my people.” “I secured dirt from their villages and pray over them each and every day at Mass in our chapel. I am thus reminded of the sacrifices of my

priests and my people and join them to the sacrifice of the Altar; to Jesus the Lamb of sacrifice.” All of a sudden the Buffalo youngster’s gesture was filled with a dignity that I didn’t quite understand at the start. Again, I witnessed yet another sign, another affirmation during this pilgrimage.

While in Juba I got to visit with priests that I had welcomed to Buffalo at various times. My good friend Fr. Philip, the missionary coordinator of the Sudan who was stationed for over twenty years in Connecticut relocated to the Sudan the previous month. I couldn’t believe my eyes in seeing Fr. David Tombe again. David was tortured and imprisoned in Khartoum during the war and it took an unscheduled visit of Pope John Paul II’s plane and an ultimatum to the president of Sudan to free him. The reunion with these two men along with others made the days pass swiftly. Finally my host offered various options concerning my travel on Sunday. I opted to remain and travel with him to All Saints church in Rejaf. Youth from various tribes of the Diocese were meeting for a full week. When I heard of this I thought of our Diocesan program “Young Christians at Work.” The topic for this weeklong meeting and conference though was: “Youth Eradicate Tribalism and Nepotism through the Gospel.” This was some serious thought and reflection, I thought.

While on the way to the Church the Archbishop informed me that usually the president of Southern Sudan and vice president of the unified country attended Sunday Mass at the Cathedral. Apparently he found out about the youth conference and that the Archbishop would be joining them for Mass and so his Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit invited himself.

Bishop Loro prepared me for the gun laden soldiers of the SPLA: Sudanese People’s Liberation Army, who would escort the President. When our vehicle arrived at Rejaf, again the

young women met us along the road and surrounded our vehicle. Crying out, shouting and singing they escorted us to where the Archbishop and I would disembark. Once out of the vehicle, they dressed their Archbishop in a flower lei and after being greeted and welcomed by the parish priest we walked through parallel lines of joyfully singing youngsters. It was so very beautiful to see the love these youth had for their bishop. With the Diocesan Youth Day Cross the Archbishop blessed all the youth gathered together. After enjoying the energy of the songs of praise we



made our way again to the head of the line in order to welcome the president when he arrived. No sooner had we done this when through the courtyard gate came rushing through jeeps full of Kaki Colored camouflage young soldiers laden with AK47s. After them the tinted windowed SUVs; the one in the middle decorated with the flag of Sudan. After the Al Jazeera cameramen were in place along with the government's photographers, Commander Salva Kiir Mayardit emerged from his vehicle. A very tall stately man with a black cowboy hat and walking stick; he made his way to greet his grace, the Archbishop. He too was presented a flowered lei in welcome. The Archbishop began to introduce the priests who



were leading the conference and all of a sudden I heard my name mentioned. I made my way to the president. I did get to speak briefly to him and greet him on behalf of all his brothers and sisters of the Diaspora from Sudan especially in Buffalo, New York. Just after my moments with

him I realized that I was so surprised and nervous during the meeting that I failed to give anyone my camera to take a photo. The president was greeted by the singing youth as well and made his way into All Saints Church for the Mass.

At Mass, the pastor emeritus of All Saints Parish was on the Archbishop's left and me at his right as we concelebrated Mass with many of Bishop Loro's priests and people. During the Mass the Archbishop as well as the President of Southern Sudan received a report from the Conference Youth Leaders. The report from this gathering included their resolutions on a variety of topics: The Principles of Democratic Elections, Gender Education, Tribalism and Nepotism, The role of the youth in the church and civil society, Education for Life, and Spirituality. In his comments the President assured the youth that he would see to it that these resolutions would be read over the government radio waves to share the fruit of their labor.

After Mass we enjoyed some local food for lunch. Following that we gathered for a many hour program that would include each group of young people performing tribal dances, songs, speeches etc. It was very enjoyable and entertaining.



At the conclusion of these festivities the World Youth Day



Cross was presented and entrusted to another tribe of youth who was to keep it safe, retain it in their churches until this group could meet again. The group of young people received the cross with joy and processed throughout the compound

with it. Finally at one point the Archbishop called me up to share a few words. I spoke about how impressed I was regarding the serious topics that the Diocesan Youth choose to deal with and study throughout their week. I spoke of our new president in the United States and how President Obama is not afraid of engaging in dialogue with those who disagree with him; in fact he welcomes it enthusiastically. For only in honest, factual dialogue with others can opposing parties come to some common ground of understanding or at least respect for each other's differences.

Returning to the Bishop's residence the following day was one of rest and preparation for my departure back to the United States. The evening brought with it an unexpected blessing. Bishop Rudolf Deng Majak, Bishop of Wau, was not in his Diocesan Offices when Fidele and I traveled though his city. Bishop Majak is chairperson of the Sudanese Conference of Bishops and called a meeting in Juba for the Tuesday that I was leaving. At the time of the evening dinner we ascertained that he should have arrived that evening into Juba in preparation for the meetings that would follow on Tuesday.



While we were still speaking about the matter, who walked into the dining room but Bishop Majak. He heard that Fidele and I were looking for him and he was hoping that he would get to see me before I'd fly out back to Buffalo. We had many fine hours of discussion that evening. He returned in the morning for

Breakfast and was joined by good friend, his classmate, Fr. Philip Pitya. The time we had spent together confirmed some important pieces of business. Bishop Majak agreed to accept a suitable candidate from the Village of Koiyom for the Health Training Institute if ROTA would sponsor him or her. He also agreed to assist our local committee with the wiring of funds through him to the Village of Koiyom for the project. With these matters taken care of my mission appeared to be accomplished and I could return with a spirit of joy at what God had wrought!

