

Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS)
Malakal, Upper Nile State, South Sudan
Africa
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Dear Partners in Mission,

I had heard so much about the infamous mud of Malakal that upon the purchase of a pair of almost knee-high rain boots, my mantra became, "Have boots, ready to travel!" More down-to-earth thinking set in as I pondered further upon what the rainy season entailed for my new area of service: a proliferation of malaria-carrying mosquitoes, limited passable roads, cave-ins of thatched roofs and mud walls, and much higher costs for everything not grown, harvested, gifted or manufactured from nearby resources. The other season, dry, will bring forth dust, shortage of foodstuffs, illnesses and heat. How does one pack for such a journey so many miles, cultures and languages away? How does one make the clothes, medicines, work and household-related items, and a few favorite spices fit? After many attempts at sorting, eliminating and repacking, I knew that I had the essentials – those brand new rain boots, a passport with a South Sudan visa, malaria prophylaxes and my favorite Bible in the trunk. In my heart I would carry a respect for others, an openness to follow wherever God leads me, and the knowledge that there are innumerable Presbyterian partners undergirding me in prayer. Perhaps now, I was more ready to travel.

Now in my longed-for Malakal, located in the Upper Nile State of the Republic of South Sudan close to the Sudan border, I am with mixed emotions about my packing choices. Maybe I should have brought more of one thing and less of the other; but I find comfort in knowing that the essentials are with me.

It is the tail end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry period. Although I may not be using those boots now, I see remnants of the rains. Three weeks post any deluges, the roads are rutted with mini craters, evidence of the struggle by four-wheels drives and tractors to become freed from the mud (smaller vehicles remain bogged down until the tracks are dried out), crossroads filled with sludge, and donkeys straining to pull their carts laden with barrels of Nile River water for sale.

No matter the season, I am enjoying meeting people, hearing the cacophony of many tongues, witnessing the faith of the Presbyterian community here, seeing the women set up their tea and coffee stands in a corner of shade every few meters, and telling time by the starting of generators by small business owners and the pounding of the metal workers' hammers against the anvil at the break of dawn. Even the baying of the donkeys and barking of dogs throughout the night are not so bad.

I am encouraged by the hope of people whose lives have been disrupted by years of war, poverty, loss, broken promises and displacement. A richness still exists in their ability to

make things work and to live despite the climate of extreme weather patterns and political insecurities, the insufficiency of basic necessities and scarcity always at their doorstep. There is much hope that the enthusiasm that propelled these groupings of people into a new nation will carry them through these difficult periods of adjustments.

"One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world."

Malala Yousafzi

I am humbled again and again as I am welcomed to be part of the community although I hail from a place that may not have always or wholeheartedly advocated on their behalf.

Education of all, the South Sudanese remind me, is paramount to their country's success as a nation and growth as a people and they are thankful to the PC(USA) members for their commitment to providing quality education for 200,001 children by 2020.** As partners in this challenge, your continued prayers, encouragement, advocacy and financial support are greatly needed. Teachers and head teachers attending a recent in-service training program on the challenges of education within the country repeated again and again the need for quality education with a special emphasis on the education of the girl child. Emerging from the various small group discussions was the rallying cry, "Educate a girl; educate a nation."

The PCOSS administers approximately 20 schools, three of which are secondary schools. I say approximately because the correct statistics cannot be determined because of poor communication channels, distances between schools and the church's headquarters and disruptions caused by war and inter-ethnic conflict. Three primary schools in Pibor in Jonglei State, for example, have disbanded because of inter-ethnic conflict in the area. A few other schools are hidden in the "bush" to protect the teachers and learners. One estimate is that there are approximately 13,000 pupils and students in PCOSS schools. However, with refugees returning to their homeland and other nationalities arriving to begin a new life here, the educational ministry of PCOSS envisions the need for an increase of trained teachers and equipped infrastructure to meet the desire of 14,050 additional school age children wanting and needing to be educated in its schools by 2018. What a challenge for the PCOSS and an invitation for the PC(USA)'s involvement!

...Attending school is not a privilege, but a right that enables individuals to take advantage of other rights – to speak, to organize, to earn a living, to safeguard family health, and to contribute to society...education is what separates mere existence from the ability to live a full life, rich in dignity and understanding." Ambassador Samantha Powers, US Permanent Representative to the UN

THANK YOU for accepting this invitation!

In Ministry Together,
Leisa TonieAnn Wagstaff
PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker (South Sudan)

*Internet access is limited.

** To learn more about the “quality education for 200,001 children by 2020 program”
visit www.pcusa.org/poverty or www.presbyterianmission.org.