

UPDATE Leisa Wagstaff

Hello and happy Easter.

I continually thank you for your concern for the people of South Sudan and my ministry with them.

It is indeed good to be here although oftentimes it is traumatic as I hear the stories of what has transpired in Malakal as well as in other places in South Sudan. At the same time, it is strengthening as I hear the triumphs of those who have survived against so much but continue to have hope and to share love.

I am currently in Juba awaiting return to Malakal. However, it seems that a return may not come for many, many months or even a year or more. As you may be aware, the headquarters of the PCOSS was located in Malakal and gave refuge to thousands of people of all tribal groups and denominations for months. Those seeking shelter there were finally forced to flee for their lives. Everything within the Church's sanctuaries, offices, housing and infrastructure was looted. Some buildings were damaged or completely destroyed. The PCOSS membership is scattered: many remain in the UNMISS compounds; some are still hiding in the "bush" while others are seeking protection in neighboring countries. Many, many members were slaughtered, including at least five of our pastors.

At present there is only one PCOSS school "in operation". This, however, may be a great opportunity – time wise - for our untrained teachers to engage in study. We are assessing the situation to see where our pupils, students, teachers and administrators are and the country's general state of affairs for education. We cannot afford another generation of young people to lose out on education. Prior to this conflict, the statistics in education were already bleak.

Although I do not have a set job description as an outcome of these troubling times, I try to stay engaged with the PCOSS community and am often with the PCOSS leaders and Christians five or six times a week, assisting in whatever capacity needed and working closely with the General Secretary. In addition to helping facilitate strategic planning I also do a lot of trauma healing. Though I am the type of person who loves to be doing all of the time, I am learning the true meaning and power of a ministry of presence. Know that the PCOSS leaders have expressed their sincere thanks for my being here and your faithful support, despite the situation. It is indeed a long, hard journey for us and we need you.

My language study in Arabic has finally resumed after the delay in finding a good teacher. She and I are bonding beyond the lessons as we share our Christian faith, experiences and cultures. As I grapple with this undertaking it is a good reminder of how different age groups learn, the special needs of the older learner and the impact of culture on education. It also reminds me how much I need the prayers of all in order to continue this journey.

God's richest blessings.
In Ministry Together,

Leisa Wagstaff
PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker