

Archiepiscopal Visit to the Diocese of Twic East

Thursday 21 – Monday 25 April 2011



“This Easter must bring a change to every heart”

Overview of the trip

On Maundy Thursday, 21 March 2011, The Most Rev. Dr. Daniel Deng Bul Yak Archbishop of the Province of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, along with a provincial delegation travelled to the Diocese of Twic East, in Jonglei State, approximately 170 miles from Juba, on two missions. The first was to observe the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in services on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. However, the second was a mission concerning conflict resolution and reconciliation within the community. Over two days, the committee for the community of Twic East held a conference to address the problems of Twic East including the violence between members of the so-called Anglican Church of the Sudan from the Ayal and Dachuek clans that resulted in the deaths of 21 people. Clarification to the committee on the breakaway groups from the ECS was another item on the agenda. The call for communal reconciliation and clarification aptly coincided with a time that Christians around the world traditionally remember Christ's triumph over death and their reconciliation to Christ through his death on the cross. It was thus very significant that Archbishop Daniel and his episcopal delegation were able to stay in Twic East during this period.



Archbishop Daniel addressing the participants of the Twic East community conference

After a six-hour journey from Juba, the delegation made up of Archbishop Daniel, Rt. Rev. Joseph Garang, Bishop of Renk Diocese, Rt. Rev. Micah Laila, Bishop of Terekeka, Rt. Rev. Paul Yugusuk, Assistant Bishop of Lomega Area, Diocese of Torit and support staff, arrived in Maar, the see of the diocese of Twic East. Bishop Ezekiel Diing, Bishop of Twic East, senior clergy and other members of his diocese stood along the side of the road waiting to greet their guests. Immediately, Archbishop Daniel and those who had accompanied



L-R: A local chief, Archbishop Daniel, Bishop Ezekiel, Bishop Paul

him were taken to one of the church compounds and welcomed with many songs. Once they were seated, Bishop Paul was nominated by Archbishop Daniel to give the sermon for Maundy Thursday. Although he literally had only a few minutes to prepare, he gave a very animated and entertaining talk on the importance of obeying instructions. The high point of the sermon came when he drew from the inside pocket of his jacket, a small orange plastic horn and blew at the walls of a nearby tukul (mud hut). Whilst this image brought much laughter from the crowd, it was solely to demonstrate that the walls of Jericho fell because the Israelites obeyed the instructions God had given them, not because the trumpets they were blowing obtained any special powers. Therefore, as they were approaching Eastertide, it would be particularly important to obey God's instructions and live in peace so that the



Bishop Paul blowing his trumpet

risen Lord would bless the people of Twic East. The congregation were so impressed and encouraged by Bishop Paul's short sermon that they insisted he preach again agreeing that after rest that evening he would return to them the following day. The remaining hours of the day were spent resting and preparing for the movements, meetings and sermons that would take place the next day, Good Friday.

Good Friday

The episcopal group set off from the church compound in Maar, heading north to greet the Christians in parishes along the way to Wanglei, 8 miles away from Maar, and where they would be spending the night. The first stop was at Paliau, the hometown of Bishop Joseph Garang. The bishops received greetings by the roadside and marched to shelter under a tree next to Paliau parish. Bishop Joseph addressed the crowd in an emotional sermon in which he described his joy at being back in his hometown after more than 20 years away. He added that today was a special day when Christians would be commemorating Christ's death. He instructed the congregation to pray with full hearts this Easter for a spirit of peace and forgiveness. As is very common in Sudanese culture, Bishop Joseph illustrated his main points with a short folktale. The story went something like this...



The Mothers Union and drummer boy people of Paliau parish

Once there was a Rat. Rat was always coming into the kitchen troubling Mother and trying to eat the household food. One day, Mother lost her patience and told Father,

“The next time you see Rat I want you to kill him. He keeps trespassing on the kitchen and eating our food.” Father agreed and set a trap. Rat overheard Mother’s instructions to Father and confronted her.

“What is your problem?” Rat asked Mother, “Why do you want to kill me?”

“You are my problem,” Mother replied. “You keep eating our food and disturbing me while I am cooking. A trap has been set for you which will soon spell your end.” With that, Rat ran straight to Ox to tell him what Mother and Father had planned.

“This is not my problem, Rat,” Ox replied. “I cannot help you.” In desperation Rat ran to Hen to explain the situation but he got the same answer from Hen.

“Please don’t refuse to help me,” Rat said. “It may seem that this is not your problem but it soon will be, mark my words!” Despite all the efforts to convince Hen and all the begging and pleading he did, Hen would not listen. The next day, Rat was hungry and went searching for food in the kitchen. Spotting a little morsel on the ground he ran towards it. Snap! The trap snapped shut and Rat was killed. Hearing the snap, Father got up to investigate the trap. He was not the only one who heard the trap snap shut, Snake heard it too. With Rat being his favourite creature of all to eat, he quickly went over to the trap to eat Rat. As Snake was about to tuck in, Father came up behind him. Hearing the footsteps and feeling very threatened, Snake turned around and bit Father then slithered away in panic. As the hours passed, the

venom took its toll on Father and he grew weaker and weaker. Mother called the local witch doctor and asked him what she should do.

The witch doctor said, “We must perform a sacrifice. Bring me Hen so I can slaughter her. Hopefully, this will please the gods and they will be favourable on our appeal for clemency.” So, Mother brought Hen and she was slaughtered in the sacrifice. Unfortunately the sacrifice had no effect whatsoever and in a matter of minutes Father died. The whole community was very saddened by the news and slaughtered Ox on the day of the funeral to atone for the sins of Father.

It seemed that Rat was telling the truth, then. His problem soon became the problem of his friends because they refused to listen to him and help him in his time of need.”

So, Bishop Joseph explained, the small problem of one person or a few people that is not resolved properly can come to everyone therefore it was very important for people in the diocese of Twic East to make an effort to respect and understand one another.

Bishop Micah was welcomed to add a few of his own words. He explained to the congregation that the problems of Twic East had brought the bishops before them from their respective dioceses to Twic East that Easter when they should have been celebrating Easter in their dioceses. “All our hearts long for peace in this land and although this problem lies in the centre of Twic East, it is clear from our presence that it is affecting all of us.”

Archbishop Daniel was the last bishop to speak. He stated that the church was not the community but the believers of Christ Jesus, therefore the church was not for one individual or one clan to own or claim; it was for all.

In appreciation of their visit, the head chief for the area rose and thanked the bishops for coming. He added that what he had heard that day concerned what is important in their lives and that they would no longer lean on the words of elders. He also thanked them for coming as no one from the government had come to see them since the tragedy a few weeks before. A visit from so many church leaders was a sign of their concern and empathy.



Bishop Joseph addressing the congregation at Paliau

Goodbyes were said and the bishops moved ahead to Wanglei, the birthplace of Archbishop Daniel, the Late Dr John Garang, First Vice President of the Republic of the Sudan, his wife Mama Rebecca Nyandeng, and Rt. Rev. Hilary Garang, Bishop of Malakal whom they met there with his delegation later that day. The Christians of Malakal had been so concerned about the church conflict in Twic East that they were keen to



Mama Rebecca Nyandeng welcoming the bishops to her farm in Wanglei

accompany the Bishop. The delegation was very diverse in nature. Ernest, a Shilluk Catholic accompanied Bishop Hilary. Mama Victoria, a member of the Mothers' Union was also part of the group. The final guest was an elderly man referred to simply as Yaba, the first Sudanese priest in Malakal who taught both Bishop Hilary and Archbishop Daniel in their youth. Archbishop Daniel praised Bishop Hilary for bringing such a delegation with him and thanked them all heartily for making the effort to traverse a difficult road over many hours in their effort to reach Twic East. Archbishop Daniel added that Holy Communion would be taken on Easter Sunday, therefore those who had gathered and were intending to take Holy Communion should work on forgiving those who may have grieved them. The sermon was again given by Bishop Joseph and followed the same themes as his message in Paliau although to the Dinka Ayual in Wanglei who had been caught up in the fighting, he added that forgiveness of sin was important to spiritual life and that it was important



Bishop Hilary upon arrival in Wanglei

not to act out revenge attacks in this time of mourning. He also commented on the lack of development in Twic East. "Who would believe that there is not a single concrete building in Wanglei, the birthplace of John Garang?" Advising that the community would find their strength in unity, he said, "Let's go ahead and develop this place."



Archbishop Daniel's home in Wanglei, constructed where his childhood home used to stand. He welcomed the bishops and support staff to stay in and around it

Holy Saturday and the Twic East Community Conference

The conference was formally entitled the Twic East Conference on Peaceful Coexistence and Development. After a fairly lengthy delay caused by disagreement over where and when the meeting should be held, the participants settled under a tree to begin. As the meeting was to be held over two days and began on the Saturday, the topic of the church conflict was scheduled for discussion that day.

'Peaceful coexistence' and 'development' are words that are often immediately interpreted as NGO jargon, words in the same category as 'capacity building' and 'tribalism', words that are often used but seldom analysed and understood. The difference in a



Participants at the community conference

meeting of this kind was that it was the very people who had been affected that were addressing their own peaceful coexistence and development. This quality made for a very engaging debate. Moreover, there was great significance placed on resolutions.

The church crisis in Twic East is made up of many parts. There has been disagreement over the name-change of the area diocese from Kongor to Twic East, a change that occurred when the diocese was officially formed. Additionally, the nomination and election of Rt Rev Ezekiel Diing as the Bishop of Twic East caused disagreement. The



The bishops together at the conference

third issue is the breakaway of a number of pastors from the ECS who later formed a branch of Reformed ECS or the Anglican Church of the Sudan as they are also known - a church headed by the disgraced former Bishop of Rumbek and former Lakes State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gabriel Roric. The most serious of the community's complains concerned the conflict over a piece of land between Dinka Ayual and Dinka Dachuek members of Reformed ECS which resulted in the deaths of 21 people in Wanglei. Therefore, the topics of discussion that day were naturally reconciliation between the Ayual and Dachuek communities and clarification on the breakaway groups from the ECS. After lengthy discussions and heated debate over six hours without breaks for food, refreshments or exercise, the community resolved two things; firstly, that a sub-committee should be formed to speak to the Dachuek community and persuade them to attend a meeting with the Ayual. Secondly, that Bishop Peter Bol Arok is to report back to the ECS as soon as possible or otherwise form a completely new church with a new name on their own land. Thirdly, that the rebel pastors did not have grounds to challenge the ECS or the authority of Bishop Ezekiel Diing and should make efforts to reconcile and unite. Whilst the situation that is the 'church in Twic East' remains complex and troubled, the forum was certainly a step towards settlement of the issues.

Easter Sunday

Over 1500 gathered to celebrate Easter Sunday in Wanglei parish. There was singing and worship, dancing and beating of drums; although the people of Wanglei had much to be sad about with the recent fighting and deaths in their area, the morning was spent in reverence and praise of Jesus Christ and his mighty resurrection. Of course, there were still some things to be said about the meeting that had begun the day before. The head chief for the area stood to affirm his



Singers and drummers in Wanglei church on Easter Sunday

support for Bishop Ezekiel and asked the people to pray for the pastors. Mama Rebecca Nyandeng, who had attended the meeting and who had come to the church that morning added her thoughts. “I was very unhappy with the way some of the pastors spoke to the Archbishop yesterday,” she said. “We must respect ourselves and respect each other.” On the topic of development she said, “I have come home, I have come to develop my area. As a contribution to development, I will donate a microphone to the church,” a comment that, unsurprisingly, generated much applause and ululating. The chairman for Twic East Community spoke next saying,



Mama Rebecca Nyandeng addressing the congregation

“We must forgive each other and forget the past. I accept Bishop Ezekiel as my bishop in this area. The argument is over.” He also expressed his gratitude to the chairman of the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Bishop Micah, for his efforts in coming.

After all the visitors to Twic East had been reintroduced, Bishop Micah began his sermon. “This trip will make it my fourth time to visit you all here,” he began. In his sermon, he explained the importance of purifying ones heart and mind, particularly at that time and in that place. “The spirit that God left with us after his resurrection and ascension is within each of us. Therefore, this Eastertide, we must consecrate ourselves to Christ!” He raised the point about how peaceful Twic East had been during the referendum despite the large level of illiteracy in the area and implored



The bishops giving the final blessing

the people to awaken this spirit of peace once again for the sake of their development. Turning to the pastors, Bishop Micah exclaimed, “You pastors are sometimes devils to people. You are uneducated but you have to ask the spirit to educate you.” To the chiefs he said, “You chiefs don’t know your own people. This is why you cannot discipline

them after they have fought.” The general accusation that he

levelled at community leaders, both lay and clerical was that they were often the catalyst if not the very cause of the problems in the community and with the celebration of Christ’s resurrection, this would have to change.

Immediately after the sermon, Bishop Ezekiel rose and shook hands with all the clergy and all the chiefs as a symbol of his reconciliation with anyone whom he might have made peace with. Gestures such as these undoubtedly have much weight in the long run.

Next, Holy Communion was distributed with over 700 people partaking. Each of the bishops made a communion station to allow for an easier



Bishop Paul praying for the young men and their cars

process. Throughout, the youth and the Mothers' Union sang with gusto praising God. After Holy Communion, the final benediction was given and the congregation processed out of the church to two cars opposite the entrance. It had been requested at the beginning of the service that the bishops pray over the two vehicles stationed outside the church. The owner was a young man who had suffered many calamities trying to build his automobile dealership. The first car he purchased knocked down a pedestrian breaking his legs, the second killed a goat, the key to the third car he bought was lost and not found and the fourth car overturned with 13 people inside but only injuring one, he himself. Bishop Paul bound the young man and his business partners with his stole and prayed for them together with the priests. With this, the crowd dispersed and youth began to dance bringing a joyous conclusion to the end of the day and the trip.

Conclusion: Journeys

The journeys for both the Juba delegation and Bishop Hilary's team from Malakal were very smooth coming to Twic East. The journey for Archbishop Daniel was also trouble-free on the way back. However, the same cannot be said for Bishop Hilary and his team as they attempted to reach Malakal.

Here is an account of his arduous journey:

"Our journey began after our return from the Twic East Community Conference. I had gone to represent His Grace which reassured many people as they thought the church would not return for the second day of the conference because of the discussion concerning the conflict within the church. The Church agenda continued until 3:00 pm when I was given the chance to speak on behalf of His Grace. At 4pm, we began our journey to Malakal. As it is many miles from Wanglei to Malakal, we slept in Duk Monykuer, and the following morning proceeded to Ayod and to Canal. The security of the SPLA gave us the OK to move ahead but soon afterwards we were told by SPLA soldiers that we need to join their convoy because Gabriel Tang's soldiers had run into the forest around Canal area. They said that if we continued alone and if they managed to stop our car, they could easily hijack it and use it for attacking or escaping. With that surprising news, we did as we were told and followed their convoy for the whole day driving at a low speed.

When we arrived in the middle of Canal we fell into an ambush of Gabriel Tang's troops with the SPLA surrounding his force ready to fight. At the same time there were negotiations going on behind the scenes between Gabriel and the SPLA or GOSS, and as we went further we met SPLA troops on the other side waiting to fight. They advised us to follow their convoy which went through without any fight.

When we entered Canal, we found the situation to be very tense. All the armoured vehicles were ready to move into the battle line. We picked up one of the wounded soldiers of Gabriel Tang and took him to Canal. Our vehicle was the only option for him because all the SPLA cars were full with soldiers who surrendered to SPLA. However, when we wanted to hand him over to the security personnel, they reacted violently and wanted to kill him saying, "Why do you help him, he is an Arab, he deserves to die!"

After a short while, we heard news that Gabriel Tang had surrendered to the SPLA. Everybody felt relieved and happy because the cause of the problem and fighting had been dealt with and Tang had been caught alive.

Eventually, we reached the River Sobat. The batch of cars that were going to cross the river had gone to Malakal for safety, so I had to leave our car at Canal and go to the other side of the river in a canoe with the team to go to Malakal. We discovered only one commercial car and another car, the car of one of the Governor of Upper Nile's advisers. This driver gave us a lift to Malakal and so eventually we arrived safely that same day but with a lot of pressure and trauma to all who saw all those events. We thank God for our safe arrival.

A big relief to us was that the vehicle we left by the Sobat was left intact. The vehicle had actually been offered to us by "PAX Christi" who recognised the importance of the trip and kindly facilitated our travel to Twic East County, so we are extremely grateful to them for this act of kindness to us."

Bishop Hilary Garang

The Episcopal Church of the Sudan would like to thank Catholic Relief Services and Pax Christi Sudan for their contributions to this very important mission of peace. We are confident that the conference and the teachings the bishops were able to conduct in their time there will serve as the start of a peaceful and stable atmosphere in Twic East.