



SOLIDARITY with South Sudan

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LIFE-LESSONS LEARNED

by Sr. Cathy Arata, SSND

In November 2005 the Sudan Conference of Catholic Bishops invited the organizations of the male and female religious (USG & USG)to send a delegation to South Sudan to assess the needs of the country. Sr. Cathy Arata, SSND was part of this delegation, and she was one of the very first to start the work of Solidarity with South Sudan in the country. Sr. Cathy is still in South Sudan, working as hard as ever.



Solidarity with South Sudan is an inspirational venture which has captured the imagination of many religious. It began in Rome in November 2005 when the Sudan Conference of Catholic Bishops invited the UISG and the USG to send religious to Sudan to accompany and be in solidarity with the Sudanese people as they rebuild their country and church after 21 years of civil war. It was born with the interest, collaboration, and imagination of many religious.

At that time I was living in Rome and serving as the International Coordinator of the School Sisters of Notre Dame justice, peace and integrity of creation network. I was a member of the delegation that the UISG and the USG sent to South Sudan in March 2006 to do an assessment of the needs. Training of teachers and nurses, pastoral concerns and agriculture became our priorities.



In February 2008, the first members began arriving in South Sudan. Today in South Sudan there are 33 members from 20 religious congregations and from 19 nationalities. I was one of the first members and have been asked to write some “lessons learned” from my experience with Solidarity with South Sudan. Here are a few:

1. I learned that if it is of God it will happen! It is important always to be alert, conscious and open to what God might be up to and what “new” thing God is doing. Often we miss it because we are too busy doing the “old thing.” Sometimes God uses our imagination to create the “new thing.” Solidarity with South Sudan is a “new thing,” a new paradigm for religious life. The Spirit of God looks for new venues from which to act!
2. I learned that the days of religious congregations doing their “own thing” are over; we cannot do alone what we used to be able to do. Collaboration on a big scale has to be part of the new evangelization. Bringing

charisms of religious congregations together creates a new charism, a charism for our time: solidarity. Solidarity evokes the gifts of one another intermingles them and creates the impossible.

3. We learn to take risks and to trust one another when personnel and money are shared for the sake of the common good. Among the many talents we have seen in action these past five years have been builders, construction foremen, fund raisers, teachers, nurses, agriculture experts, accountants, administrators, pastoral workers, community organizers, logisticians, and hospitality givers. These ingredients of skills and talents have enabled us to celebrate the gifts and talents of each other and to live the gospel in a most gratuitous manner.



4. I learned that living community life within one's own congregation or with members of another congregation is enriching, challenging and humbling. The challenge is to bring the best out of each other and to be forgiving when we don't. Being sensitive to the diversity of cultures, without judging what is right and wrong, takes patience, humility and charity.

5. I am learning that peace does not just happen through politics and diplomacy. It is fragile and must be worked for, imagined and prayed for. Peace building is an art as well as a vocation. Peace-building should be 'a vow' of contemporary religious congregations; keeping it we commit ourselves to the transformation of the world through the transformation of persons. Imagine our world today if we did take a vow to build peace.



6. I have learned that being a guest in another country helps one to realize that we are brothers and sisters of one human family and that God was there before any of us arrived.
7. I learned, once again that evil is real. Someone once said, "The battle between good and evil is always raging and the battleground is the human heart." We cannot deny the presence of evil in our world especially the evil of violence and war and the evil of hunger and starvation. Having

companions with whom you can think out loud, ask questions of God, doubt without being judged, is a blessing when one is surrounded by and/or confronted with evil.



8. I have learned that celibate men and women can live together, pray together, complement each other, challenge one another and walk the journey to God together as did the disciples to Emmaus.