



SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH SUDAN

<http://www.solidarityssudan.org/>

(Good Afternoon I would like to thank the UISG in the name of all who form Solidarity with South Sudan for inviting us to this assembly, to this panel and to share the photo exhibit of the project)

First of all, let me remind you that the project of Solidarity with South Sudan came to life from the UISG and USG out of the 2004 religious life congress, answering to the call of the Sudan Bishop's conference.

It is, therefore, a project of the UISG in collaboration with USG. It is a result of the inspiration of the Spirit who called consecrated life to move forward by responding in a new way to the cries of the people. In fact, it is a living example of weaving global Solidarity for life. Since the beginning till now more than 260 religious congregations have been involved in different ways: with personnel on the ground, by serving in the governing board, with funds, with expertise and prayer... Is this not an amazing miracle?

Pope Francis is calling Religious Life to break the limits of our institutes and charisms to work together in the frontiers of our world. Solidarity has been trying to live this call since 2006. Is it not a prophetic sign for all of us?

In these new difficult moments of distress and suffering for the people of South Sudan, our communities have chosen to remain by their side, witnessing the power of God's Love over hatred and division. The diversity of our communities formed by religious, men and women of different congregations, origins, ages and cultures is by itself the best way we have of witnessing and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, in a country torn by tribalism and power struggles. For our students and the people around us, our living together is a confirmation that peace within diversity is possible.

Despite the challenge of working in a difficult environment, the quality of the service and the results obtained are remarkable: 3000 teachers have been formed in Malakal and Yambio, around 250 nurses and midwives have been trained in Wau, pastoral workshops and formation of pastoral agents have reached all the dioceses of the country, community and sustainable agriculture is being developed in all our training centres and especially at a 50 ha

farm in Riimenze. A single congregation would have never been able to make such achievement; it has only been possible thanks to the collaborative actions of so many congregations involved. We can all be grateful for it.

This inter-congregational way of living and working together to respond to today's needs seems to be marking a direction for the future of consecrated life. We already see it in other projects like Fratelli, Migranti, the itinerant teams of Amazonia and others.

Solidarity with South Sudan, during this 8 years of existence, has developed systems and structures of governance, administration and communication, such as the governing board, and legal entities, website, and newsletters, all which could serve for other projects under the same paradigm of collaborative action among congregations.

Recently in the US, a partner entity, Friends in Solidarity, has been created to support the activity with the generous involvement of the LCWR. The learning experiences of religious men and women living together with laity is a very valuable resource that proves that inter-congregational communities, gathered around a common mission, are possible.

To better explain what we learn from the experience, I borrow the words of Sr. Cathy Arata, one of the pioneers of the project:

"We 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!

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

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 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.

We 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."

Looking at the future, and having done a 5 year Strategic Plan, we foresee that Solidarity will need to be present in South Sudan at least 10-15 more years. The Strategic Plan is aiming towards a progressive transition of the projects to the local church. Meanwhile the renewal of personnel and the support of the congregations are very important. Without you it won't

be possible. We express our deep gratitude to all the congregations who have sent personnel to participate in any way in this collaborative project, and most sincerely to all the individual religious who have accepted the call to minister with Solidarity.

At this Assembly I take the opportunity to appeal once more upon your generosity for personnel: the process of a search for a new executive director and a fundraising director will be initiated soon, (the detailed information for this two positions will be sent through UISG and USG). In South Sudan we currently have needs in every area: An Assistant Director of Finance and fundraising, Nurse and midwifery tutors, or Clinical supervisors, a trained nurse to assist in Riimenze , Tutors for primary teacher training, a religious committed to pastoral ministry in the area of Justice and Peace, semi-retired religious happy to be support persons in community, and someone to oversee hospitality in Juba and Riimenze communities.

Also the bishops have asked us to help them in acquiring a teacher of philosophy for the major seminary in Juba.

(Handouts with the specific needs and more details are on the Solidarity Table in the corridor)

We also invite you to engage anew with financial support. During these past years many congregations have fulfilled 3 and 5 year commitments, for which we are extremely grateful. We offer now the possibility of renewing these commitments or beginning if you have not done so in the past.

Based on an unbreakable trust in God, let us continue to weave together Global Solidarity in our world.

Thank you.