

Violence will never defeat us



St Peter and Paul's Church, outside Nzara, south Sudan

people walking more than two miles barefoot in sackcloth and ashes and ended with a service appealing for God's protection.

While violent outbreaks have been reported across the south, at the time of writing much of the region remained peaceful, giving bishops cause for optimism.

Elections and a referendum on the political future of south Sudan are crucial for the long-term stability of the region.



ACN's support for Sisters and their ministry: Sr Eugenia with a leper in Nzara

Meanwhile, ACN has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the diocese of Tombura-Yambio through the civil war and continues to do so today.

Following the crisis in Ezo and Nzara, which took place in autumn 2009 barely a month after the ACN trip to the diocese, the charity provided emergency help for people traumatised by the violence, and those who lost homes and other property.

Long-term help in Tombura-Yambio includes key support for essential Church buildings and pastoral outreach in Mupo parish and much-needed repairs to the bishop's house and diocesan offices.

The Green Cathedral

"WELCOME to our visitors; welcome to our family of faith." The young girls in their bright yellow and white dresses, some holding garlands, sang and danced in perfect symmetry.

Behind them in a clearing in the forest was a large wooden structure covered with a tarpaulin. Crowds of people were crammed onto small benches and huddled on the dirt floor.

I thought: 'So this is the Green Cathedral.' In this town of Yambio, in south-west Sudan, war, disease and persecution had prevented plans for a cathedral made of stone from getting off the ground.

The Green Cathedral has been a focal point for ACN support. The charity has provided extra 'wings' extending the structure, a vehicle for pastoral outreach, a sound system and support and training for catechists.

ACN recently paid out help for a new tarpaulin for the roof. Sunday Mass attendance is as high as 5,000 in this structure, one of 42 outstations that make up the parish. Assistant parish priest Fr Jacinto said that the Catholic population had trebled in less than a decade.

He said: "The people here are very impressive. They are very poor – they have very little – but they are rich in spirit. They have a very strong faith. They realise that God has helped them through their traumas."



The Green Cathedral, Yambio

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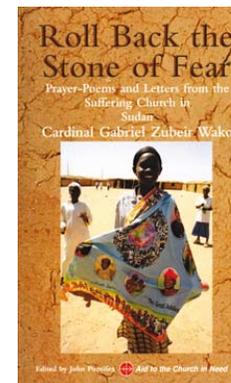


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Once again we are delighted to offer our book 'Roll Back the Stone of Fear' free of charge with any donation.

If you would like a copy for yourself or extra copies to pass onto family, friends or parish community please tick and fill in the box below.



Subtitled Prayer-Poems and Letters from the Suffering Church in Sudan, this exclusive ACN publication gives a precious glimpse of the faith and hope which have sustained a people amid some of the world's worst atrocities.

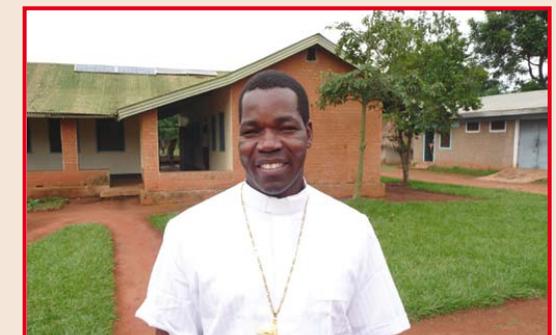
In heart-rending poems and letters of stoicism in the face of appalling acts of persecution, Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako, the Archbishop of Khartoum, demonstrates why his people call him 'Father Courage'. The book comes with evocative images from Sudan.

I would like ___FREE copy/ies of Roll Back the Stone of Fear

WHEN Africa's longest-running civil war finally came to an end in 2005, the people of south Sudan believed salvation had finally come.

But recent events have shown that the faithful continue to be at risk because of the faith they profess.

Walking through a forest outside Nzara, in south-west Sudan, villagers stumbled upon the remains of six people.



Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kassala

They had been nailed to pieces of wood fastened to the ground. Running to the bishop to report the atrocity, they likened it to a crucifixion scene.

But more violence was to come.

In Ezo, not far from Nzara, guerrillas stormed Our Lady Queen of Peace Church during a Novena prayer, desecrating the host, the altar and the building before abducting 17 people mostly in their teens and twenties.

One of the captives was later tied to a tree and killed.

Telling ACN what happened, Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kassala of Tombura-Yambio, said: "It was hard to take in the fact that we were exposed to such a risk. The attackers clearly wanted to harm the people because they knew they were at prayer."

Amid reports that the dissident Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was to blame, Bishop Eduardo appealed to the government to step up security.

Refusing to give in to despair, the bishop organised three days of prayer. It climaxed with 20,000

Fr Joseph's story

"DURING my first year as a priest, I was arrested on Christmas Eve. They wanted to ensure I couldn't say Mass. The same thing happened the following Easter."



Magwi parish priest Fr Joseph Otto

Such were the experiences of Fr Joseph Otto in Islam-dominated northern Sudan.

But when I met him in the strongly Christian south, things weren't a lot better.

Based in the town of Magwi in Torit diocese, Fr Joseph, now 41, ministers to a people who

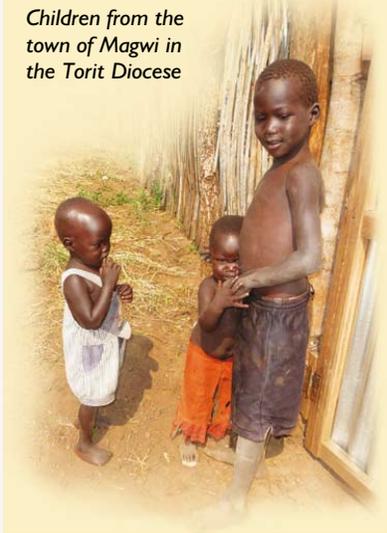
have no running water – just a series of bore holes. There are no tarred roads. Schooling and healthcare are very limited.

To begin with, Fr Joseph lived in a mud 'tukel' hut but now he has a better home and last year parishioners erected a vast barn-like chapel complete with a large cross on top.

It is only a beginning for a priest whose parish measures 80 miles by 140. There are 42 chapels in the parish.

Roads are beginning to be repaired and now thanks to better transport he can move around more.

He said that in Magwi alone baptisms will soon hit 1,000 a year.



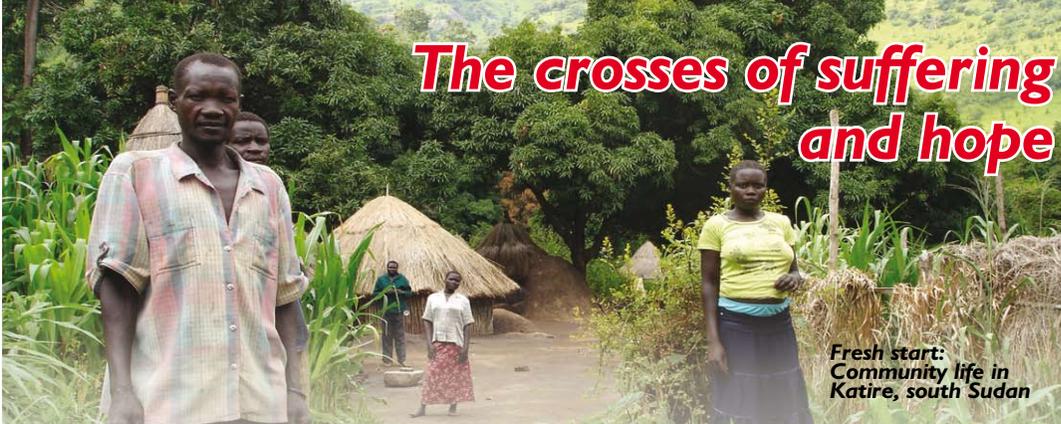
Children from the town of Magwi in the Torit Diocese

"This is a time of real hope," he said. "At last there are no more guns, no more fighting. We can start afresh. There is so much we can do."

ACN is prioritising help for clergy including Mass offerings and transport for priests and Sisters in remote and poverty-stricken areas.

Another key area of help is support for seminarians both in the north and the south of the country.

The crosses of suffering and hope



Fresh start: Community life in Katire, south Sudan

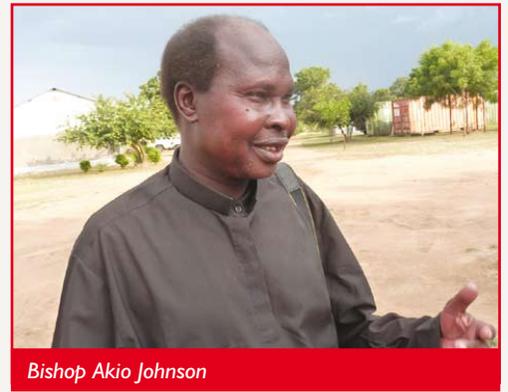
ALTHOUGH a return to widespread violence has remained an ever-present threat, the end of the civil war in south Sudan has given the Church an opportunity to start afresh after decades of suffering.

Bishops across the region have called on ACN to do whatever is possible to help heal the scars of trauma and loss and give the Church new hope.

During ACN's first-ever trip to Torit, one of the dioceses worst affected by violence, the vicar general, Fr Okello said: "The bishop has no cathedral, no offices and very few churches. He doesn't even have a house of his own to live in. Everywhere is damaged and destroyed."

Bishop Akio Johnson of Torit explained: "My most urgent priority is the spiritual renewal of the people."

Mgr Akio, who has repeatedly escaped death and is known as 'the bishop with nine lives', added: "There is a very close bond between the Church and the people. It is because we stayed with the people through the worst of the atrocities."



Bishop Akio Johnson

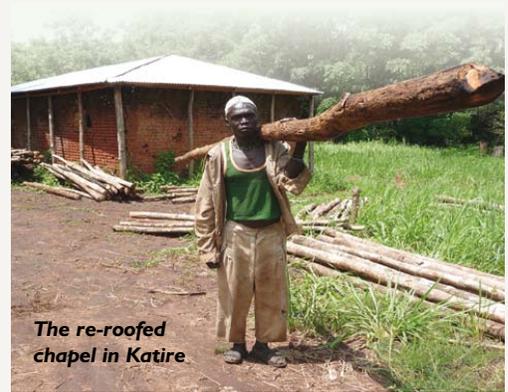
With the recent end to the violence in Torit, Bishop Akio achieved a breakthrough when he was finally able to make a visit to the distant town of Katire, close to the Ugandan border.

Katire was cut off from the outside world for 16 years as war ravaged the region, decimating everything in sight, including all roads and bridges.

Now communications have reopened. A priest regularly visits. Agricultural and vocational courses, building work and catechetical programmes are all finally getting under way. The chapel has a new roof – after waiting almost a decade.

Bishop Akio said: "I constantly tell the people that they're not alone, that ACN is helping us, praying for us. What ACN gave – especially during the war years – really helped us. "Please don't abandon us now that we have new reason for hope."

ACN has promised support for the Church in Torit – in particular Mass offerings for priests ministering in the most remote parishes.



The re-roofed chapel in Katire

Out of the Ashes of Persecution

THIS is make-or-break time for the people of Sudan.

Despite continuing political uncertainty and extreme poverty, Christians cling to the hope that new shoots can spring up out of the ashes of persecution.

Under siege from aerial bombardment, massacres and random acts of violence, the Church's survival through recent times is little short of miraculous.

But not only has the Church in Sudan survived, it has grown.

Back in 1960, there were less than one million faithful. Now research suggests there are more than four million.

This report looks at the people behind the statistics – bishops, priests, Sisters and lay people whom we met during an ACN fact-finding and project assessment trip right across Sudan.

Again and again, Catholic leaders thanked ACN for its help over the years.

Now, amid times of change, the bishops are once again turning to ACN for help.

The requests include help for Christian schools, Catholic radio projects, ACN Child's Bibles, Mass offerings for poor priests, new churches and training for seminarians, Sisters and lay people.

The Church in Sudan knows it can count on your prayers and support. As one bishop from south Sudan put it: "You at ACN never abandoned us – even in our darkest hour."

"We still have huge challenges. But because we have faith, we have confidence to go forward."



Children at the Green Cathedral in Yambio, south-west Sudan. You have provided a new tarpaulin roof to protect against the heat of the African sun.



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