Bishop’s Charge, November 2014

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This has been a wonderful and a terrible year. Many good things have happened in our churches, not only in Gambella, but in other parts of the Horn of Africa. At the same time this year will be remembered forever as the year of the South Sudan civil war. (We pray that we will not remember the year simply as the year the war started.) The reality of the war next door in our neighbouring country has meant that much of the work of the Anglican church in this area has been coloured by that conflict and much of our effort has been directed towards refugees.

I. Church Life

New Churches

We will speak of new churches in refugee camps later in this report. Outside of the camps, we have seen several new congregations started, especially among the Anuak people. In last year’s Assembly I reported that we were in conversation with people in Abobo about beginning an Anglican Church there. Since then the Bethlehem Anglican Church has not only started, but grown and they have planted three village churches in the area around Abobo. Members of that congregation are also in conversation with some in the Mezhenger zone about starting church planting work there. The Anuak congregation in Itang is also beginning to re-form after some time without regular Anuak-speaking worship there. We are also talking with people in Abol town on the main road to Itang about starting a congregation there. **Action point: work on the feasibility of developing churches in the Mezhenger zone.**

Sunday Schools

Approximately half of those who attend our churches are children. It is not enough for them simply to come to church and sit - they need to know Jesus and they need to be taught about Him at a level that is appropriate to their age. I, therefore, instructed the clergy to begin Sunday Schools in every church. As I have travelled around Gambella I have seen that many of the churches have taken this seriously and that children are being cared for spiritually much more than before. I would encourage every church represented here to take the spiritual life of our children as a top priority and I hope to hear good reports in the future about children coming to know and love Jesus. **Action point: we will try to provide training and resources for Sunday School teachers in the coming year.**

Catechesis

In my first year of ministry as bishop I baptized and confirmed a large number of people. However, I became uneasy because it seemed to me that many of those I was baptizing and confirming did not seem to be well prepared. The early church took preparation for baptism and confirmation very seriously. Sometimes this preparation would last for years before candidates were considered ready. I have, therefore, told the clergy that they must do a better job of training the lay readers to catechise and that I will only do confirmations when I have been assured that the people being confirmed have
throughly learned the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer, the 10 Commandments and the Creed. To date we have had one complete clergy training session on the Lord’s Prayer, led by the Bishop, and a complete training session on the Commandments led by the new Dean of our theological college, who we will meet in a few minutes. These have been well received by the clergy and I am assured that many of them are also teaching the lay readers so that the candidates can be prepared. A one week session on the Creed will take place in January, taught by the Rev Dr John Macdonald of Trinity School for Ministry in the USA and a team of theological students who will come with him.

Action point: In the coming year, we will continue to teach the clergy so that they may teach others, and we will attempt to provide catechetical material in vernacular languages.

Regional Deans
It is not good for the bishop to make decisions about local needs alone. In an effort to share decision-making responsibility and to build the capacity of the local leadership, the bishop has appointed five Regional Deans. Any requests for church funds must now be made to the Regional Dean who will bring requests to regular meetings of the Deans and the Bishop together. The scope of the Deans’ responsibilities will develop as we work together and consult with the Area Executive. I am grateful to each of the five priests who are willing to serve in this way:

The Rev Paul Pouk: Regional Dean of Pinyudu (Nuer and Jieng churches, assisting with Anuak churches)
The Rev. Darash Thatha: Regional Dean for Anuak churches (including Pinyudu, with advice from Dean Pouk)
The Rev Deng Mark Khor: Regional Dean for the Baro River (St Luke’s Gambella, Itang, Pilwal, Lare, Nininyang, Matar, Tiergol, and Nuer church in Opo)
The Rev David Onuk: Opo churches (assisting Dean Khor in giving advice concerning Nuer in Opo)
The Rev. Isaac Momma: Regional Dean for Assosa (Sherkole, Tongo, Ashura)

Action point: Develop policies on the work of the Deans.

Special events
Over the last year several special spiritual events have been held in the Gambella churches. St Luke’s was host to an ecumenical gathering of Nuer believers recently and a large group of Anuak believers met in Abobo earlier this month. Church dedications have been held in Lare, Sherkole, Opo and Akule 1. Several churches are still waiting to receive a visit so that their church may be dedicated and named. Each of these events gives an opportunity to give thanks to God for all his goodness to us, and a chance for us to be renewed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Action point: We encourage churches to plan and host more events which encourage the spiritual life of the people and evangelistic events which will introduce new people to God’s love in Christ. (The Jesus Film is now available in our office in several languages for any who would like to show it.)
Samaritan’s fund
In last year’s Bishop’s Charge I stated that I wished to start a fund for emergencies. At that time we did not know just how many emergencies we would have, especially due to the new refugees. Money’s received for this new fund have been used in several ways: to help with emergency medical care, for transportation of some refugees who have come to us for help to safer locations, for the building of churches in refugee camps, for the supply of basic necessities of life for some staying on our church compounds. Medically, we have sent several clergy and staff for eye glasses and for cataract surgery and two small children with terrible heart problems (ventricular septal defect) have been screened and are awaiting to be taken for surgery in Addis when a visiting surgical team comes. Action point: The bishop will continue to appeal for funds from our international partners to meet emergency needs when they arise.

Financing clergy salaries from the churches
One of the goals I announced when I became bishop was that the church in this Episcopal Area should become self-supporting financially. This is a long-term goal. One step towards self-support was taken last year when this Assembly voted (in response to a directive from the Synod in Egypt) that each Mission Centre should supply 10% of the salary of their pastor. To date, very few Mission Centres have done this. We will have another motion to raise this amount to 15%. Action point: I appeal to each Mission Centre to provide the office with at least 6,000 Birr by the end of 2014 to support the work of the clergy.

Bible translation
One of the great accomplishments of this year has been the work of Opo Bible translation. Our priest, David Onuk, together with another Opo, James Bol, and aided by the Rev Isaac Pur worked hard and finished translating the Gospel of Mark just before Easter this year. The whole Gospel was read to great excitement at Easter services. The team is continuing to work - both editing Mark and now translating Luke. Action point: In the coming months we hope to print an edited copy of Mark’s Gospel for every Opo who can read or who is learning to read.

Bibles, Hymn books and liturgies
Although Anuak Bibles are readily available, it is still very difficult to find Nuer Bibles. The 250 Nuer Bibles bought in Juba were sold very quickly. Nuer hymn books exist, but the rights to buy them are not available to everyone. We are working to try to buy copies for our Anglican churches. The Nuer and Anuak liturgical booklets have been reprinted and are available at this Assembly for a small cost. More translation of liturgical and hymn resources are needed. Action point: We will continue to encourage the Bible Society of Ethiopia to order a printing of Nuer Bibles. We will try our best to obtain Nuer hymn books soon. I intend to appoint some people to translate more liturgical resources in the coming year and to find funds to have more things printed in Anuak, Nuer, Opo and Mabaan.

New Buildings
Some partner churches in the USA have generously donated funds to build new churches this year so that our congregations will not always need to meet under trees. Some new funds will be coming soon for ongoing work. New churches have been built, renovated or improved in the following places this year:

- Lare Mission Centre - St Paul’s Anglican Church (improvements to compound); St Martha’s Anglican Church, Kuacthiang; Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Waken; Kuerrok Anglican Church.
- Pilwal Mission Centre - Malou Anglican Church; Thorow Anglican Church; Wathgai Anglican Church
- Itang Mission Centre - St Mary’s Anglican Church (improvements to compound); Ngode Anglican Church; Mal Kwoth Anglican Church, Akule 1; St Simon of Cyrene Anglican Church, Akule 2
- St Barnabas’ Mission Centre - Abol Kir; St Thomas’ Bonga; St Patrick’s Anglican Church, Ilea; Bethlehem Anglican Church, Abobo; Dumbang Anglican Church (plastic sheets); Thenye Anglican Church (plastic sheets)
- Itang Anuak congregation - (only mudding left to do)
- Grace Anglican Church, Pinyudu town (expanded); Promised Land Anglican Church, Pinyudu (plastic sheets - camp)
- St Luke’s Anglican Church, Gambella (expanded)
- Matar Mission Centre - Gade Anglican Church;
- Nininyang Mission Centre - Leitchour Anglican Church (camp)
- Pinyudu (Jesus Light Anglican) Mission Centre - Jesus Light of the World Anglican Church (improvements to the compound); Good Shepherd Anglican Church [Jieng] (renovated)
- Pinyudu (Bethlehem Anglican) Mission Centre - Setcot Anglican Church
- New Pinyudu (Jerusalem Anglican) Church Mission Centre - Jerusalem Anglican Church; Christ our Healer Anglican Church; Redeemer Anglican Church
- St John’s Anglican Church Mission Centre, Dimma - St John’s (rebuilt); Holy Family Anglican Church (camp); Anglican Church of the Cross, Marcus; Anglican Church of the Resurrection, Gedu (in process)
- Sherkole Mission Centre - St John the Baptist Anglican Church [Mabaan and Jum-Jum people] (rebuilt), Christ the King Anglican Church [Jieng], Ashura refugee camp
- Opo Mission Centre - Prince of Peace Anglican Church (rebuilt); Lulbar (Nuer); Akule 3 [Opo] just plastic sheets at this point

Action point: The bishop will meet on a regular basis with the Regional Deans to decide on how any available funds for church building should be used.

II. Refugee Ministry
Several crises have occurred in the Gambella region of Ethiopia over the last two years, the largest being the influx of refugees from South Sudan. A number of international organizations have helped us to meet a variety needs during this past year, Australian Board of Mission, Anglican Aid (Sydney), ARDF-Australia, ARDF-USA, Church Mission Society-Ireland, Society of Anglican Missionaries and Senders-USA, Mennonite Central Committee-Egypt.
Tiergol
Our priest in Tiergol when the fighting began in South Sudan, Michael Anyar, could not return to Tiergol because, being a Dinka, it was too dangerous for him there. It soon became evident that it was also difficult for him and his family to stay in Gambella town. They were relocated to Addis where Michael is studying at Mekene Yesus seminary.

Matar
Early in January 2014 many refugees came to Matar. Before the refugee camp was organized in Leitchour many stayed on church compounds there. Our priest in Matar, John Gach, who was also the head of the Nuer Council of Churches in the area, helped to meet the needs of people staying in the churches and in the homes of Christians there.

Dimma
A new camp opened in the Dimma area in January 2014. Although most of the new camps have had mostly Nuer refugees, this camp has some Nuer, but also many Anuak, Dinak and Murle people. The UNHCR had opened a new refugee camp in Dimma and I visited the newly founded church in the camp in late January. Interestingly the four ethnic groups made it clear at that time that they wanted to worship together. They wanted to send a message to the people of South Sudan that they don’t have to fight, that they can live together. So they chose to worship together, to sing and pray in different languages, but do it as one body. They also wanted help - they had food and shelter thanks to the UN, but they needed clothes, Bibles and help building a place for this multi-ethnic church to gather. We were able to buy them some clothes in Dimma, and were later able to send many more donated by St Matthew’s Church in Addis which were distributed by our Anuak priest Wilson Okello. Michael Anyar also went to Dimma for a period and helped in the construction of the church, named Holy Family Anglican Church. We understand that most of the Murle people have now formed a church of another denomination in the camp and we wish them well and pray that we will continue to have good relationships.

Leitchour
This camp near Nininyang town opened with 3,000 were brought there from Matar at the beginning in February 2014 - the camp now has more than 45,000. We supplied a number of non-food items to refugees there, mostly cooking materials, and we have helped them to build a simple church with the help of the priest from Nininyang, Peter Kuel. There seem to be Anglican churches developing in all three parts of the camp now, although it is unclear what the future of this camp will be because of extensive flooding.

Nininyang town
In the early part of this year many Anglican families were displaced. The Anglican church helped them to build new homes.

Abol
A horrible incident did occurred in the Abol area early in 2014. One Anuak village was raided, children were kidnapped and some adults killed. The survivors fled across the river to Abol Kir. The Anglican church provided help and support to those displaced and have built a new church in the town.

**Kule (or Akule) camps**
The largest new refugee camp opened near Itang town in a place the UN are calling Kule and the locals call Akule. There are now three separate camps with a population of approximately 100,000. To date most of our work here has been in helping organize and build two churches in the camps. Two Nuer priests and a Nuer lay reader from the South Sudan diocese of Malakal are now living in that camp and the local deacon, Peter Tot, from our church in Itang, is helping them with organizing the church there. They recently had a visit from Bishop John Gattek, Assistant Bishop of Malakal, and Archdeacon Peter Gatbel of Australia to encourage them.

**Opo**
A special situation associated with the Akule camp (Akule 3 in particular) is a group of refugees from the Opo people. There are approximately 5,000 Opo people in the world, most from Ethiopia, but some from South Sudan. In April Opo villages in South Sudan were burned and the people fled to Ethiopia. They were welcomed and helped by churches in Opo. They have now been given shelter and rations by the UN.

**Previously existing camps**
Because the two churches in the Sherkole camp in Assosa region (St John the Baptist, which is primarily Mabaan and Christ the King, which is mostly Jieng [Dinka]) have had a large number of newcomers and because their church structures were inadequate to start with, we have had to rebuild both of those structures. Our Mabaan priest, Isaac Momma and our Jieng deacon, Gabriel Guot, have facilitated this work. Also in the Assosa region, we have tried to facilitate work in Tongo as much as possible and the Rev Isaac Momma has facilitated new pastoral work in Ashura refugee camp.

In Pinyudu (where we have a priest Paul Pouk and a lay pastor Stephen Monye) and New Pinyudu (priest, Michael Lual) camps we have built four new church buildings in recent months (there are eight Jieng and Nuer churches in these camps). The building for Good Shepherd Anglican Church (a Jieng congregation) has been renovated. We are now in the process of helping establish an Anuak congregation in the camp, with the help of the people from Grace Anglican Church from Pinyudu town.

**Action points:**
1. As well as pastoral leadership for leading worship and teaching the people, a major need is healing from the trauma of war. Many of our Gambella families have lost loved ones. All of our new refugees have been traumatized in many ways. We will seek to find resources to help people to experience God’s healing after these terrible events.
2. Related to this, of course, is the need for reconciliation between ethnic groups. We will continue to pray for peace in South Sudan and to encourage the Christians to be peace makers.

III. St Frumentius’ Anglican Theological College
It is with great joy that we welcomed the Rev Dr Johann Vanderbijl and his wife Louise to Episcopal Area of the Horn of Africa and to Gambella recently. Johann has already been teaching the clergy - and the staff in our morning devotions - and he is busy preparing courses and lectures. Although we will have some courses in the coming months, the official opening of the College for theological courses will be September 2015. Prior to that, intensive English courses will be held in June and August. A ceremonial opening will probably take place after theological classes have begun - probably October 2015.

As you can tell, building of the facilities for the College are underway - the next step is the chapel, then a security wall, and housing for faculty and students. All this construction will probably take another 3-4 years

**Action points:** Meet the government regulations for a ministry training college, establish a budget, raise funds for scholarships and salaries of staff, and develop an oversight committee for the College. Recruit part time and full time faculty. Recruit students. Continue building the facilities.

IV. Clergy and Lay Reader training
For the last two and a half years I have been meeting with the clergy approximately once a month for training. In the last few months we have added a number of lay readers, especially some who are good candidates for ordained ministry. These have been fruitful times of learning. With the coming of St Frumentius’ College, we will need to re-evaluate how we do training for clergy and lay pastors. It is probable that much of what we have been doing in monthly training will now need to be integrated into the work of the college. Certainly we do not wish to neglect the training of those already engaged in church ministry even as we also begin to train those not yet ordained.

It is now time to have what used to be called a ‘Selection Weekend.’ We will change the name to ‘Discernment Weekend’ because WE are not doing the selecting - God is - our job is to discern who God might be calling to ordained ministry in His church.

**Action points:**
1. Work with the Dean of St Frumentius’, with the Regional Deans and others to develop the best possible training for clergy as well as ordination candidates.
2. Work with the Dean of St Frumentius’, and the Executive Committee to hold a ‘Discernment Weekend’ at the earliest possible date.
V. Mother’s Union
The Mothers’ Union may be the most important institution of our church. It is hard to say enough about how wonderful these women are and about how hard they work to build up the life of the church and life of our families. They need our constant support.

The MU literacy programme has continued and has spread to new centres in the past year. In addition to the many ways in which it is beneficial to learn to read, it is important that we highlight that if a person can read, they can read the Bible for themselves. The Bible is the source of our life in Christ and the more people in our churches who can read and understand the Bible, the stronger will our churches be. We are grateful to MU in the UK for continuing to support this programme and to the Rev Darash Thatha, the Rev Isaac Pur and Ato Ojullu Obilla Ojaho for coordinating and facilitating the programme.

Mama Wendy’s programme of training women leaders for the church has been exciting. Women from all of our Mission Centre have been receiving teaching on prayer the Bible and practical skills. The training they receive is being brought back to many villages and peoples’ lives are being helped in many ways.

Action points: Continue to support and encourage the women of our churches.

VI. Libraries
The library at St Matthew’s in Addis has been providing a resource to the community near Arat Kilo for many years now. The library in the GAC has seen more regular users recently. In an effort to increase our outreach, some books, bookshelves and other resources have recently been moved to St Luke’s in New Lands, so that students at that end of town will be able to access these valuable resources more easily.

Action point: Provide more on the job training for Ato Dugassa, the librarian, and continue to develop the St Luke’s branch.

VII. Sports
The Gambella Sports authority recently recognized the good work being done at the GAC, especially by Ato Obang. Many children use our facilities every day. We are always looking for more resources from donors to help with this programme. We received a wonderful gift this past year - the Arsenal Football Club in London, England sent us Arsenal jerseys! The children were excited by this support. Recently most of our regular players watched the Jesus Film in Anuak one evening.

Action point: Continue to develop the Sports programme as a ministry to the children and their families.

VIII. Bookkeeper
We are grateful that there has not been a large turnover in staff recently. We did lose Mintamir Mulugeta a few months ago and have been very happy to welcome Ato Nhial Gatkwoth to the staff. Nhial has a degree in Accounting from Mekelle (where he was also a member of our Anglican congregation). He is learning the job well and we pray that he will remain for many years.
IX. Addis ministry
St Matthew’s is the Mother church of the Horn of Africa. We are grateful for the ministry of the Rev Roger Kay and the St Matthew’s congregation. They pray regularly for Gambella, they have supplied clothes for refugees, they reach out to the community through the library and the Breakfast Club and they the support those from outside of Addis (like the Bishop) when they travel through.

X. Student ministry
Our church in Mekelle continues to thrive. The Bishop was able to visit once this year and plans a February visit again this year. There is a real possibility of developing English-language ministry in other towns which have a significant student population.
Action point: The Bishop and Roger Kay to visit the Mekelle Anglican Church and other places where English churches may be possible.

XI. Somali ministry in Addis
The Bishop has been able to speak at two conferences for Somali believers and has visited the Saris ministry run by Ato Daniel Kabede. We look forward to developing ministry with Somali believers as God leads.
Action point: Continue to pray for the right openings to share the good news with Somalis and to encourage Somali ministry.

XII. Other countries in the Horn of Africa
The Bishop has recently visited two countries in the Horn of Africa outside of Ethiopia. Although our conversations are only beginning, it is a real possibility that we may be able to rebuild an Anglican church in one of those countries in the near future.

XIII. Synod in Egypt
The next Synod of our Diocese will be in Cairo from May 4-7, 2015.
Action point: Elect….to attend Diocesan Synod.

XIV. Bishop’s travels and visitors.
In addition to travel within the Episcopal Area of the Horn of Africa, the Bishop has been able to visit partners in Australia, Canada and the USA in this past year. These are not vacations, but involve the hard work of explaining what God is doing in the Horn of Africa and raising funds to do the work that God has called us all to do here.

In addition to going out, many visitors have come to see what God is doing here. We expect that these visits will continue and will bear fruit in people praying for the Church in the Horn and supporting our work of sharing the good news.

Action point: Visit Canada and the USA in May and June 2015; welcome visitors to Gambella.