

# PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS TO ENABLE THE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION NEEDED TO LIVE IN PEACE

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His Eminency Peter cardinal Turkson, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; His Grace Marcel Utambi, the archbishop of Kisangani; His Excellency bishop Paolo Lo Guidice; Superior Generals, and you all my brothers and sisters in Christ present here, I give you the immense greetings of your brothers and sisters in South Sudan.

Allow me to first give you the sincere apologies of my bishop, the Rt. Rev. Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala who was invited to come and take part in this conference, but he could not get the visa in time, and he delegated me to fill in for him. Please kindly accept his apologies.

“And who is my neighbour?”, this question posed by an expert of the law to Jesus continues to confront us as the church in South Sudan. The question painfully confronts us when we see massive death, suffering and misery orchestrated by human beings against their fellow human beings on the basis of ethnicity or political affiliation. The suffering and misery in South Sudan is manmade. On the one hand, as church leaders there are times when we feel discouraged or even frustrated. We ask ourselves, how have we not done it? where have we not done it well? Or have we laboured in vain?—especially when the architects and the perpetrators of division and violence are members of our Christian communities or have passed through our own Catholic schools. Nonetheless, on the other hand, we take it as a challenge to even work harder, to lower our nets into the deep waters for a catch. We still believe that at the heart of the conflicts and bloodshed in South Sudan is the lack of or the wrong answer given to the question “and who is my neighbour?” and we have a responsibility to contribute to the formation of the correct intuition and answer to the question.

We are aware that the aim of pastoral activities, as gleaned from church documents, is the transformation of the person and society into a new life according to the pattern of Christ. Although we believe that the transformation of hearts is the work of God, we nonetheless as human agents, collaborating in this work, have our part to contribute.

It is in this light that we have 5 pastoral considerations for the healing and reconciliation that is needed to live in peace in South Sudan.

1. Admittedly, we have active and vibrant Christian communities in our parishes which we need to consolidate and deepen in Faith, hope and Charity in the following ways:
  - Firstly, we have to be attentive and responsive to the needs of different groups and members of our communities so that everyone feels welcomed, at peace and at home. Once our communities are bound together, there will be no room for divisive policies to infiltrate and to sow seeds of division, hatred and violence.
  - Secondly, we have to continue to be purposeful and focused: our activities, even when they are social in nature, are not to be like those of other organisations and agencies. They are distinct because they lead to an encounter with Christ who invites us to a life of relationship with him and one another.
  - Thirdly, we must constantly look at ourselves as a missionary church, and that this mission is given to all the baptised. Our Christians must be encouraged to reach out to one another, to the lapsed and to the unbaptised. Once we are all fully involved in the missionary mandate, we shall disseminate the much needed Christian values not only through our offices of justice, peace and reconciliation but through a movement of diverse groups who will leaven the society with the values of unity, justice, peace, reconciliation. However, the challenges before us are: do we have the capacity, as the church in South Sudan, in terms of trained personnel and resources to carry out this mandate? To send people out into missions and sustain them?
2. Broaden our pastoral contacts and platforms to include government and civil institutions—this involves setting up catholic chaplaincy in the army, in the parliament, in the universities and colleges, in schools, in hospitals, in business organisations, etc. Most of our parish communities comprise of simple ordinary folks who live in peace and harmony. In most cases the conflicts that erupt have their sources from elements in the

politics of the country, or in the military, or among those involved in tribal or ethnic leadership wrangles. As church we need to have more engagements with these people at their various levels of preoccupations, their developments and their needs. Setting up these pastoral contacts and platforms will require adequate training of the pastoral agents – both the ordained and laity.

3. Integral pastoral vision—the thrust of all pastoral program ought to be the liberation of the human persons so that they may have life to the full. There is to be no dichotomy between the pastoral and the social programs. Our social projects are vehicles of evangelisation. Through our social activities (education, health, livelihood services), we have and we can empower more people so that they can become instruments of honesty, dignity, peace, unity. Our schools particularly are not only to be centres of knowledge but they must above all, be places where new attitude and culture of peace, unity, the concern for the common good are cultivated.
4. Formation of youth movement for justice and peace—South Sudan has a young population; more than 50% are young people who are predominantly uneducated, have no skill, no jobs and no income. They are full of energy, have dreams, aspirations and searching for ways how to better their lives. Regrettably, the huge population of uneducated and unemployed young people has become a strategic reservoir of the politicians from which they tap into their armed militia groups to advance their selfish agenda. We need to have more pastoral programs targeting the young people to unite and forge them into a movement of justice, peace and reconciliation in the society.
5. We recommit ourselves to being present—the situation of South Sudan calls on us to be present with the people in their different social locations and circumstances. It is only in this way that we can effectively form the consciences of the people and build up a God-fearing society. We have to continue to walk together with the people with our feet in the mud as they strive to make sense of their faith in their difficulties.
6. By being present, we have already been able to be at the centre of the search for justice, peace and reconciliation. We have been courageous in our prophetic call. We have reached out to aggrieved groups and communities, we have dared to trek into the wild bushes of South Sudan to establish contact with armed groups, and we have bridged tensions between individuals and communities. Notably, Bishop Paride Taban has done it in Easter Equatoria, and bishop Eduardo Hiiboro has done and continues to do it in Western Equatoria. We have mitigated conflicts by our peace initiatives. We have empowered people through our social projects. We have touched people's lives in incredible ways. We take it as divine call incumbent on us to continue on this path until we shall reach a reconciled and peaceful South Sudan. The weight of these challenging tasks assails daily us and presses us down, but not to the point of being overwhelmed. We are strong because we constantly feel strengthened by the Lord and of course by your prayers. We never run out of the air of confidence and comfort because we are surrounded by such a great multitude of good-willed people as friends and collaborators in the call and mission of Christ.
7. We remain stronger in faith and hope in the Lord that it is possible to achieve a reconciled, just and peaceful South Sudan; that the waters of baptism will be thicker than the blood that runs through our veins; that the common good will be placed above personal, tribal and ethnic interest; and that the right and adequate answer to the question “and who is my neighbour or my brother” will be given by every human person in South Sudan.