

Greetings from South Sudan,

February 8, 2025

I hope this email finds you and your family well. I didn't realize how time has passed since my last newsletter.

I have always laughingly remarked that I don't READ the news, I LIVE the news. The situations of the world sometimes place me right in the place where the news is being created. Some have asked me if I have been affected by the recent US Government suspension of US AID throughout the world. Usually these things don't touch me, however, this time I can say unequivocally that I have been affected directly.

The boiled beans and maize meal lunch which the Secondary School offers to the teaching staff is provided by World Food Program. Much of that food is delivered by the US AID humanitarian assistance distributions. We do have a stock of USAID beans and maize meal still in the stores, but it is unclear how long this will last. For myself, I can afford to purchase other foods on the open market, however, our staff only earn about 200 USD per month and most of that is sent home to pay for their family expenses. Without the school lunch many of our staff will feel the pangs of hunger.

Similarly, the mission schools receive their food allowances through the same WFP distributions. If those monthly shipments are not delivered than the Parish would be unable to provide meals to the over 1,200 students in St. Mary Magdalen Parish schools. Three meals a day are currently provided to our 700 dormitory students. Without food assistance they would have to go home and the school might have to close.

This is not only true in this parish but in every school across the country. South Sudan is a food deficient country due to unusual flooding in the north and unusual dryness in the south (where I am). Without food aid arriving from USA, Canada and Europe, most of these schools would have to close.

Another direct impact was the brand new Skills Training Centre in the Parish which has just been completed. Fr. Blessed was right at the point of obtaining 15 sewing machines to teach youth a skill from which they could then earn a living. These machines were to be donated by an international agency which gets its funding from US AID. Since that aid was suspended, the machines cannot be purchased and the program is now in limbo.

I am sure there will be more domino effects and ramifications as time passes. Catholic Relief Services, one of the largest recipients of US AID funding, has simply closed all offices in South Sudan. Over a thousand people are out of work and have received no salary in 2025. More than a million beneficiaries are no longer receiving help. Education, Health, Agriculture, Peace, infrastructure, and many other programs are all stopped pending any further decisions by the US Government.

So our difficult situation in one of the poorest countries in the world has become even more challenging. I continue to be a presence amongst these poor Toposa people. I field questions every day why my government would do such a thing? There are no easy answers. We pray that the issues will be resolved soon. In the meantime, we go forward with our 2025 school year with hopes and aspirations for success.

God bless all of you and may you have a wonderful year. With prayers....G