84. Companions on the Journey

*Solidarity with South Sudan* (SSS) is a deliberately chosen name. After a recent visit to South Sudan, SSS Board member, Brother Jorge Gallardo, who has been involved in the project from the beginning, wrote:

> Just after the signing of the CPA, the Bishops Conference of Southern Sudan appealed to the leaders of Religious Institutes in Rome for help. The Union of male Superiors General (USG) and its female counterpart, the UISG, together, responded by taking the courageous decision of creating a new model of mission for religious life. Different Religious Congregations would commit financial aid and/or personnel in order to provide teacher education, health training and support programs to assist the South Sudanese people in their quest for peace, unity and reconciliation. The project was given the name of Solidarity with South Sudan (SSS). There is a clear stress on the preposition “with”, underlying the commitment of its members to accompany the people of South Sudan, empowering and supporting them as they rebuild their lives, their communities, and their societal structures.

When Sr Ninet in Malakal, one of the pioneers of SSS who arrived here in 2008, attended a recent meeting in Malakal, the Minister of Education described SSS as ‘best partner’ because of ‘the continuity and consistency’ SSS brings to its work, offering experienced teachers who stay on with the people rather than doing short tours of duty. SSS brings a further ‘S’, stability, to its work in South Sudan. One South Sudan government official remarked that SSS is the only organisation in all of South Sudan who will be taking teachers into the final year of the in-service curriculum in 2012. Various persons have remarked that they have noticed our SSS personnel have stayed through times of civil disturbance and not fled the country. We have come to be recognised as companions on the journey, not just foreign drop-ins delivering a service.

The Sudan Catholic Bishops have been meeting, during the past ten days, at the Catholic Health Training Institute in Wau. This facility, belonging to the Bishops, has been redeveloped by SSS and is administered and staffed by SSS, a special gift for the benefit of all the people of South Sudan. Sr Kathrine O’Flynn FCJ, Board chairperson of SSS, along with Sr Pat Murray IBVM, the Executive Director of SSS, travelled from Rome, and attended part of the Bishops’ meeting while Fr Callistus Joseph CMF our SSS Director of Projects and Fr Manny Ginete CM, a new member of our pastoral team, were also present for most of the meeting. Nurse training has continued during this time.

Meanwhile at Malakal and Yambio, in our teacher training facilities, 84 teachers, or intending teachers, have been receiving intensive English tuition. The extraordinary stability and strength – maybe we could be called ‘Solidarity bringing Stability and Strength’ – generated by the combined efforts of male and female religious assisted by some lay partners, justifies our claim to be a key companion organisation on the journey of the people of South Sudan to build a strong, Christian country.

SSS has nineteen religious Sisters, two priests, three Brothers, one lay man and a lay woman living and working in South Sudan in teacher training, nurse and mid-wife training, pastoral initiatives and agricultural projects. Brother Jorge summarises our diversity in these terms:
In South Sudan itself there are 26 missionaries: religious and lay volunteers, male and female, from 14 different countries and belonging to 18 different religious congregations living together in 5 mixed communities.

SSS is achieving remarkable unity in diversity: the focus is on what unites not what divides. Uncertainty and doubt have been replaced by stability and strength. I believe this ‘new model for mission’ is indeed generating new marrow in old bones.

- Br Bill