Hold My Heart

Two Spanish visitors and I, guided by Sr Dorothy from New Zealand, Director of our Catholic Health Training Institute in Wau, recently visited the wards of the Wau Teaching Hospital as well as the St Daniel Comboni Catholic Hospital where our registered nurse students are on clinical placement. I had visited these facilities before. I found it simply wonderful to observe the dramatic improvement in the buildings but especially, also, the greater confidence of the staff, and nurse trainees, that is now evident. Standards of care have risen dramatically with great benefit to the people of South Sudan. I drove the two Spanish visitors from Yambio to Wau and later to Aweil to catch a plane back to Juba. It was a stimulating occasion discussing our SSS goals and achievements with these two inquisitive guests, Claretian priest, Fr Javier Ojeda, and De La Salle Christian Brother, Br Javier Sanchez. These two men have worked energetically behind the scenes for Solidarity with South Sudan (Solidarity) to generate the funds necessary to develop and sustain our work. ‘No money, no mission’ was one of the very practical epithets uttered by our former Superior General, Brother John Johnson. It was their first opportunity to see what they have helped bring about. Working in the hospitals as trainee nurses were the students to whom I had taught English last year as part of a Foundation programme in preparation for the formal registered nurse training. What a joy to see the assertive ‘presence’ they have developed and the

Brother Bill Firman, FSC is Director of Education for Solidarity with South Sudan. On a regular basis Br Bill writes a reflection expressing his experiences living and working with the people of South Sudan.
belief and pride in what they are now doing! For me personally, their warm greetings were very reaffirming. For our Spanish visitors, it was extremely gratifying that their seemingly endless toil over fundraising applications has borne such fruit. In the great freedom seeking movements of the sixties, they used to sing: ‘All we are saying, is give peace a chance’. What I hear the young people of South Sudan saying today, now that there is peace, is: ‘All we are saying is give us a chance.’ Give us a chance to help our people with better health care, better education and better attitude. Trauma in this country runs deep - in prisons, homes, schools, hospitals, wherever the people are. Our Solidarity pastoral team has already delivered a Capacitar workshop on trauma healing in the Wau prison. I often recall asking a Wau class about their families. Only 12 out of 32 still had fathers living. The mothers of 26 of this class were still living but in most of their families some siblings had died. The guns of war were directly responsible for the death of many people but, indirectly, many more died from starvation, poor health care and harsh living conditions.

Here people do not ask for much. They are grateful for the gift of life and celebrate it daily with family and friends. I find myself moved by young people who approach me, not for their own advantage, but with questions such as ‘Can you assist my sister, my brother, my friend?’ Can you help the baby in the Wau Hospital, cradled in his mothers arms, a child with hideously swollen lips who has the highly contagious disease of anthrax? I listened to a doctor say he could not place this child in a ward with other patients and put all of them at risk. The hospital says it cannot afford an extra nurse to care for this child in an isolation ward. Such is the dilemma, and sometimes the despair, of South Sudan.

The words of the Liam Lawton hymn, The Pieta, take on extra meaning:  

Who will come and share my sorrow  
Hold my heart 'till wake tomorrow  
Is there time that I could borrow  
Oh oh oh oh the silence and the sorrow.

Here in South Sudan we are bringing professional care into the silence and the sorrow. Our Health Training Institute is healing and holding hearts to a waking tomorrow.

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