

ALUM VISITS SOUTH SUDAN WITH PITTSBURGH PRESBYTERY

The Rev. Susan Rothenberg '08 always expected that her first trip to Africa would be one to Malawi. "God, it seems, had other plans," she says. Susan has recently returned from a two-week trip to South Sudan—the first trip of the International Partnership of Pittsburgh Presbytery since the Presbytery signed an agreement with Blantyre Synod (Malawi) and the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SSPEC).



"On the trip we gleaned important information about the political situation in South Sudan and the challenges facing the Presbyterian Church there," says Susan, who serves as pastor of Emsworth UPC, Pittsburgh. "In Juba, the capital, we and leaders from the SSPEC met with political leaders of the very new South Sudanese government. We also worshiped and prayed with the broader membership of SSPEC churches, including pastors and elders who have been living in UN camps for displaced persons since civil war broke out in December 2013," she notes.

The Pittsburgh contingent also included PTS alums the Rev. Sharon Stewart '12 (Pittsburgh Presbytery member at-large) and the Rev. Ken White '76 (associate pastor at Southminster Church), as well as field education supervisor the Rev. Dave Carver (pastor at First UPC, Crafton Heights). Some in the group preached to thousands of displaced people in the UN camps, one to women in a local prison, and others in an open-air church and a variety of SSPEC churches in Juba. "For some of us, it was our first experience having our sermons translated from English into another language—in this case, Arabic," says Susan.



A highlight of the trip consisted in the small-group conversations they had with SSPEC leaders at the Resource Center for Civil Leadership (RECONCILE). Located in the town of Yei, RECONCILE is dedicated to giving church leaders the necessary tools to resolve differences, heal trauma caused by violence, and seek to establish peace among all people in the region. "To sit with my brothers and sisters in Christ, hear their often harrowing stories, share Scripture, and engage in deep prayer for peace was transformative. I will not soon forget their deep faith, extraordinary openness, and incredible courage," Susan recalls. "We are hopeful that our SSPEC partners will continue to utilize the resources of RECONCILE to train leaders who will help establish the peace of Christ in a war-torn and war-weary nation."

On one of their last evenings, the group shared time with seven PCUSA mission co-workers who were evacuated to Juba from locations throughout South Sudan during the outbreak of the current violence. "These incredible people are hoping to return to their respective ministries when the security situation stabilizes," says Susan.

"I would return to South Sudan in a heartbeat, particularly to spend more time at RECONCILE—a model for empowerment of people in countries being torn apart by war and injustice. Given the daily headlines, we need to stand with those who seek to bring healing and peace to a world that often appears to be coming apart at the seams."

For photos and a day-by-day description of the trip, see Dave Carver's blog at <https://castyournet.wordpress.com/> (search for "South Sudan").

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