



May 2024

South Sudan Connections Lead to Peacebuilding, Reconciliation & Trauma Healing

Dear Friends,

This letter is #4 in a series of Dear Friends letters I'm writing for 2024, focusing on the word "connection." If you'd like to go back and read the first three letters in this series, please visit my RCA missionary page at rca.org/tenclay; scroll down to the *Resources* section on the right-hand side of the page, and click on the links for the three 2024 Dear Friends letters.

This letter is focused on another labor of love that has been several years in the making.

In January 2019, shortly after I returned to the U.S. from serving as a missionary in Italy and accepting this new role as Refugee Ministries Coordinator, I was given the opportunity to host a four-part series of FB live events entitled *Let's Talk: Refugee Care*. I invited Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather to join us as part of the panel for the fourth part of the series, but as I'm sure you can imagine, working with refugees in Africa is work that is filled with emergencies and technical difficulties, and they weren't able to join us.

This did, however, open the door to communication between the Smith-Mathers and I about their work and how we could partner together to share the love of Christ with South Sudanese refugees.

Then COVID hit and we all scrambled to figure out the best ways to care for refugees and displaced people amid a global pandemic.

But, by 2021, as we observed the 10th anniversary of the independence of South Sudan from Sudan and witnessed the ongoing conflict and displacement that affected millions of South Sudanese citizens, I knew it was time to get serious about using my role to shine a spotlight on the needs of South Sudanese refugees and the work of Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather and our RCA Global Mission partners of RECONCILE International.

This determination was solidified when, by the end of 2021, the United Nations [reported](#), "The South Sudan situation continued to be the largest refugee crisis in Africa, and one of the most underfunded, with the Regional Refugee Response Plan only 17% funded. Despite some progress, peace remained fragile, and humanitarian challenges, including acute food insecurity, persisted."

Would you like to receive these updates digitally? Please email Kelli at kgilmore@rca.org to be added to the email list. You will receive more timely updates from the missionary you support and help us be good stewards of our resources.

The people of South Sudan have faced over 50 years of violent conflict, death, displacement, gender-based violence, political instability, food insecurity, droughts, famines, floods, cholera, malaria, and beyond. Are we paying attention?

In early 2022, I met with Derrick Jones, supervisor of RCA mission in Africa, and proposed that we work together with the Smith-Mathers and RECONCILE International to identify a current unmet need for South Sudanese refugees and that we begin an awareness and fundraising campaign for World Refugee Day in June 2022.

And the RCA Global Mission South Sudan Refugee Care Project was born.



Our initial goal was to raise \$85,000 to train South Sudanese refugees living in Uganda to facilitate peace and reconciliation, social cohesion, and trauma care within South Sudanese refugee camps in Uganda in one year (June 2022-June 2023). We knew it was a big goal, especially as so many other humanitarian needs continued to pop up all over the world, but our message was clear: **God loves the people of South Sudan, and so does RCA Global Mission.**

We didn't meet our fundraising goal by June of 2023, so we decided to extend the project for another year. Kelli Gilmore, Coordinator for Global Mission Marketing and Communications, floated the idea of creating an experiential opportunity for individuals, small groups, congregations, etc. to gather for a meal and raise funds and awareness about what's happening in South Sudan, and the **A Meal for Peace** for South Sudan toolkit was created! We then invited participants to host **A Meal for Peace**, and to use some of the resources in the toolkit to guide their meal, hoping that this would get us closer to our \$85,000 fundraising goal and widen the circle of individuals and congregations interested in joining with RCA Global Mission and RECONCILE, Int. in caring for South Sudan and her people.



Derrick Jones and I also had the opportunity to reach out to Rev. Dwayne Jackson, who was General Synod President at the time, and who graciously agreed to allot 50% of the 2023 General Synod offering to the South Sudan Refugee Care Project!

We continued to gain traction and inched closer and closer to our \$85,000 goal.

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And...every time it seemed we were making substantial progress, another natural disaster or violent conflict occurred worldwide, and fundraising for the South Sudan project would come to an abrupt halt.

So where are we now? RCA Global Mission is currently \$7,000 short of our \$85,000 goal.

But, I'm not giving up! We still have just over a month until we close this fundraising project (projected deadline: June 1).

I hope we meet our financial goal.

At the same time, this project has always been about more than raising money. From the very beginning, this project has been about connection—connection with Derrick Jones, the Smith-Mathers, RECONCILE, Int., with the people of South Sudan, and with Christ.

I asked Derrick Jones to share a few words about why this project is important, and this is what he shared:

South Sudan became the world's newest nation on July 9, 2011. After decades of war with the largely Arabic Sudanese in the north, it was a time of great celebration and expectancy for the largely Black African and Christian Sudanese in the south. The RCA, its partners, and the world had high hopes for peace, reconciliation, and nation-building. Unfortunately, the impact of trauma, deep-seated rivalries, and conflicts in 2013 and 2016 gave rise to civil war in South Sudan.

With the slow implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict since 2018, the international community has grown weary, developed donor fatigue, shifted their focus elsewhere, or simply forgotten the South Sudanese.

JJ, your proposal to work with me, the Smith-Mathers, and RECONCILE International has let the South Sudanese refugees know they are not forgotten. RECONCILE International has been reinvigorated by the advocacy, prayer support, and needed financial resources to engage refugees and their host communities to empower them with the skills in trauma healing, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. With these skills, they will have what is needed to peacefully reintegrate back to their home areas in South Sudan with minimal communal conflicts. The Meal for Peace let them know there are churches and believers who still care about their overall well-being, what their daily lives are like, what a traditional meal is, etc. Partnership with your refugee care ministry has provided the Smith-Mathers and the RCA an expanded platform to share transformative peacebuilding stories of hope and resilience.

To those of you who have supported the South Sudan Refugee Care Project (financially, prayerfully, or by hosting **A Meal for Peace**):
Thank You!



If this story of connection piques your interest and you'd like to join us in providing compassionate, Christ-like care for the people of South Sudan, I'll leave you with three action steps:

1. **Pray.** Pray for peace in South Sudan (and Sudan). Pray for safety and healing for the citizens of South Sudan, especially those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and are living in refugee camps. Pray for healing of the land, and a cessation of drought, famine, and floods. Pray for Derrick Jones, the Smith-Mather Family, and RECONCILE International.

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2. **Give.** Can you help us raise the \$7,000 we need to reach our fundraising goal? Contact me at jjtenclay@rca.org if you'd like to make a donation or host a fundraising event BEFORE June 1, 2024. You can also give here: <https://www.rca.org/give/south-sudan-refugee-care-project/>
3. **Host a [Meal for Peace](#) for South Sudan.** Can you invite a group of people into your home, or organize a meal at your church and center the meal on South Sudan, the people, the culture, the food, and the hopes for peace and reconciliation? Even if you can't host an event before June 1, RCA Global Mission will continue our commitment to mission in South Sudan...a commitment that began 75 years ago and is still going strong!

Connecting in faith, hope, peace, and love,

JJ TenClay

missionary & refugee ministries coordinator

RCA Global Mission