

TASK FORCE ON DIALOGUE WITH SOUTH SUDANESE ANGLICAN DIASPORA

Members

Mathews, The Rev. Ranjit, Chair	Connecticut, I	2024
Scarfe, The Rt. Rev. Alan, Vice-Chair	Iowa, VI	2024
Blanchard, Mr. Charles,	Colorado, VI	2024
Kraus, Ms. Jackie,	Chicago, V	2024
Paul, The Rev. Michael,	North Dakota, VI	2024
Van Koevering, The Rt. Rev. Mark.	Lexington, IV	2024

Changes in Membership

The Rt. Rev. Martin Field, who had served on the Task Force from its origins, resigned from the Task Force in May 2023. He was later replaced by The Rt. Rev. Mark Van Koevering.

Representation at General Convention

Various members of the Task Force expect to attend General Convention although plans are still being made and a definitive list is not available currently.

Mandate

The Task Force on Dialogue with the South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora was formed in compliance with Resolution D088 passed by the 79th General Convention in 2018. The text of the mandating resolution follows:

2018 - D088 – Dialogue with South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora

Resolved, hat the 79th General Convention call upon the Presiding Bishop to appoint a task force of two bishops, two clergy, and two laypersons to establish an official conversation for the purpose of developing a statement of understanding of the relationship with the South Sudanese American Anglican diaspora living in this country and The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That this task force report to the Executive Council at least once a year during the coming triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That this task force conclude its work and expire no later than adjournment sine die of the 80th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$15,000.00 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXTENSION OF THE TASK FORCE’S WORK:

The Task Force on Dialogue with the South Sudanese Diaspora (Task Force) was unable to complete its work prior to adjournment of the 80th General Convention, primarily due to the inability to gather as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, the following Resolution was passed at the 80th General Convention:

2022 -A004 – Continue Task Force on Dialogue with South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora:

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention extend the work of the Task Force on Dialogue with South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora for the coming triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force report to the Executive Council at least once each year during the coming triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force conclude its work and expire no later than adjournment sine die of the 81st General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$25,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Summary of Work

Virtual Meetings with South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora:

During the Spring of 2022, the Task Force, with the assistance of a steering committee created by the Task Force (Steering Committee) held a series of Zoom calls with various members of the SSAD. The purpose of the calls was to hear from members of the community, including those who likely would not be able to attend the planned in-person meeting scheduled for later in the year. This also gave the Task Force an opportunity to begin to understand the issues faced by the SSAD and be better prepared for in-person discussions later.

Involvement and Importance of Steering Committee

Throughout the entire tenure of the Task Force, we have been aided immensely by the work of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is composed of prominent South Sudanese clergy (The Rev. Thon Moses Choi, The Rev. John Agau Deng, and The Rev. Zachariah Char) and one Anglo Episcopal priest familiar with the South Sudanese community and co-sponsor of the original Task Force resolution, The Rev. Stan Runnels. Bishop Martin Fields was also on the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has been invaluable to the work of the Task Force and, indeed, has been significantly and substantively integral to the success of these endeavors.

In-Person Conference with SSAD Representatives:

The Task Force and the Steering Committee held a conference from October 1-3, 2022, in Kansas City, MO. There were 41 participants with 29 South Sudanese Diaspora congregation leaders, including 15 priests and 14 non-ordained persons. Participants came from dioceses representing 16 states.

Conference participants had wide-ranging conversations on various aspects relating to SSAD and their connection with The Episcopal Church generally. The primary areas of conversation revolved around:

- Theological Issues and Questions Concerning Ordination Possibilities;
- Physical Space for Worship and Community Building;
- Family Issues and Involvement of Children;
- Economic Issues and How to How Fund SSAD Clergy and Congregations;
- Understanding the Episcopal Church and How it Works; and
- Nurturing Diocesan Relationships

Bishop Alan Scarfe prepared a thorough report detailing the process and the findings from this conference. That report is included in Additional Information.

Development of a Strategic Plan:

Following the meeting in Kansas City and a review of the concerns expressed by the SSAD in attendance there, the Task Force prepared a Strategic Plan to begin to address those concerns. The plan outlines various tangible steps that should be taken including:

- Discuss with Diocesan Bishops the need to address the spiritual needs of the SSAD;
- Organize a gathering of Diocesan Bishops and South Sudanese leaders;

- Empower a South Sudanese steering committee;
- Explore way of securing funds to support SSAD theological education;
- Gather leaders of Episcopal seminaries to discuss theological issues of SSAD;
- Understand how TEC provides special assistance to minority groups; and
- Publish articles to highlight SSAD issues and related success stories.

The Rt. Rev. Martin Field presented the Strategic Plan to The House of Bishops meeting on March 12, 2023. The Strategic Plan is included in Additional Information.

Interim Bodies Meeting

The Task Force and the Steering Committee met in person from April 26-28 at the Maritime Center in Baltimore as part of the Interim Bodies Meeting. The group explored in detail what further steps were necessary to implement the Strategic Plan and the myriad of challenges that remained. As part of that exercise, The Rev. Canon Ronald C. Byrd, Jr. suggested that we utilize the Programming Evaluation Review Technique (PERT).

Statement of Understanding

During the interim Bodies meeting, members of the Task Force, the Steering Committee, and leadership of SSAD drafted a Statement of Understanding. That Statement of Understanding is set forth in italics below:

Statement of Understanding between The Episcopal Church and South Sudanese-American Episcopalians

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Episcopal Church acknowledges that the South Sudanese-American Episcopalians are our siblings in Christ, baptized and members of the One Body of Christ that is the Church, and are also a unique cultural group within United States' society. The South Sudanese-American Episcopalians and their worshipping congregations acknowledge The Episcopal Church as the historic expression of Anglicanism in the United States.

DESIRES

The South Sudanese-American Episcopalians desire full incorporation into The Episcopal Church, which will be exhibited as membership for individuals, full canonical standing for clergy, and admission into union with diocesan conventions for its worshipping communities, so that we may be the Body of Christ to one another.

The Episcopal Church desires to welcome the South Sudanese-American worshipping communities into The Episcopal Church by admission into union with diocesan conventions, and The Episcopal Church also desires to welcome South Sudanese-American clergy into standing and canonical residence in its dioceses, so that we may be the Body of Christ to one another.

COMMITMENTS

The South Sudanese-Americans, as they become members of The Episcopal Church individually or congregationally, will ascribe to and follow the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and of the dioceses in which they are severally located. When they have been canonically qualified, their congregations will seek to be admitted into union with their diocesan conventions and will support the common diocesan work by their prayers and by their time, talent, and treasure. When granted standing, ordination, or reception, South Sudanese-American clergy members will give assent to the disciplines laid upon all Episcopal Clergy.

The Episcopal Church, through the ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—particularly the ministry of the Canon for African Descent Ministries—will coordinate and work with leaders self-selected by the South Sudanese-Americans to establish and achieve mutually beneficial goals and actions that lead to the accomplishment of these expressed desires.

Establishment of a SSAD Leadership Steering Group to Work with Office of African Descent Ministries:

Perhaps the most important suggestion recommended by the Task Force and the Steering Committee was to transfer the responsibilities of the Task Force to a South Sudanese Leadership Steering Group (SSLSG). The SSLSG would continue the work of the Task Force in coordination with TEC's Office of African Descent Ministries. The Rev. Canon Ron Byrd has graciously begun the work. The SSGSG has been organized through the good work of The Rev. Stan Runnels who will play a role with the group going forward. The SSLSG is comprised of seven SSAD leaders, selected to lead these efforts by their peers. The Task Force envisions that it will continue to assist the SSLSG through the 81st General Convention, at which time its work will be largely complete.

Supplementary Materials

Kansas City Report

Introduction

At the General Convention in Austin in 2018, a resolution was passed to develop a comprehensive conversation between The Episcopal Church and the Church leaders of the South Sudanese Diaspora. A Task Force consisting of two Bishops (Alan Scarfe and Martin Field), two clergy (Ranjit Mathews and Michael Paul) and two lay deputies (Jackie Krause and Buck Blanchard) was established with a report back to General Convention expected in 2021. The Task Force set out to enlist congregational leaders, initially clergy and later expanded to include lay leaders, among the South Sudanese Anglican communities across the United States. This task revealed that we had no central directory of such communities across the Episcopal dioceses and proved that communication on such a scale was not easily available. The Task Force created a Steering Committee composed of prominent South Sudanese clergy (The Revd. Thon Moses Chol, The Revd. John Agau Deng, and The Revd. Zechariah Char) and one Anglo Episcopal priest familiar with the South Sudanese community and a co-sponsor of the resolution, The Revd. Stan Runnels. Bishop Martin Fields was also on the Steering Committee.

The aim of the Task Force was to host a Conference for the conversation in time to report back to General Convention for next steps. With the arrival of the pandemic, scheduled Conferences were postponed at least twice, and finally made possible at the beginning of October (1-3, 2022) in Kansas City. By that time the postponed General Convention had been held. The Task Force made a written report of actions thus far for the Blue Book; and offered a new resolution for the continuation of the Task Force's work for the new biennial. During the postponements of the scheduled Conferences, the Task Force managed to hold regional zoom conversations with South Sudanese leaders, and a Day zoom Conference to begin our work, and to maintain momentum and interest among the South Sudanese. The Task Force was pleased to see that General Convention in Baltimore voted to continue the work through Resolution A004. The Task Force is also grateful to the Missioner of the African Descent Ministries, Ron Byrd, for his support throughout the process leading up to the Conference. We see his department as having a vital role in the ongoing relationship of The Episcopal Church with the South Sudanese Anglican Diaspora. The presence and contribution of the Officer for African Partnerships, Daniel Karanja, at the Conference was also greatly appreciated.

In the end there were forty-one participants within the Conference with twenty-nine South Sudanese Diaspora congregational leaders, including fifteen priests and fourteen non-ordained persons (as well as the three South Sudanese members of the Steering Committee and the one member of the Task Force). They came from dioceses representing Tennessee, Washington, Virginia, Iowa, Minnesota, Utah, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Kentucky, Arizona, New York, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota and Georgia.

An overview of the agenda at the Conference in Kansas City, October 1-3, 2022

The sessions were opened with video greetings from the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies, and with an explanation from the Task Force Chair, Ranjit Mathews, on how we had arrived at this place. Worship and prayer were vital parts of every session, led by South Sudanese members of the Steering Committee. Eucharist was celebrated at the start of the first full day of sessions, which was a Sunday. Conversations were held in small groups of six to eight people, facilitated by members of the Steering Committee who were South Sudanese except for one group. The Task Force members were placed as listeners and note-takers among the groups. Initial questions gave opportunity for participants to tell their faith stories, especially pertaining to their arrival in the United States and how their faith sustained them. They were specifically asked about attachment to the Anglican tradition. A second round of conversations centered around challenges and frustrations in being connected with The Episcopal Church. The Task Force held a plenary session to give feedback on what they had been hearing, and asked for further clarification, and for issues not yet heard. In turn each break out group offered their top three learnings so far. Throughout the agenda, from time to time, the South Sudanese held South Sudanese only sessions for their own assessment purposes on the Conversations.

In the evening of the first full day, we heard from The Episcopal Church Africa Partnership Officer and on behalf of the Missioner for African Descent Ministries, from the Director of AFRECES, Richard Jones, and from representatives of Seminaries working on alternative formation processes, Bishop Tengtenga from the School of Theology in Sewanee, and Bishop Fields representing the work of Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. The third round of conversations was held on the next morning, focusing on two or three most important objectives or needs to bring forward. These were shared at a final plenary session, in which the Task Force also explained avenues for the continuous work stemming from the Conference. Three areas were highlighted: report of the Conference will be presented in the Blue Book for the 2024 General Convention Blue Book; issues raised will form work objectives for the newly appointed Task Force from the 2022 Resolution; and cooperation will continue with the Office for African Descent Ministries.

Report on the Conversations

Before condensing the rich and honest conversations into their six essential themes, it must be stressed how important the Anglican tradition, and worshipping with fellow Anglicans/Episcopalians in Episcopal spaces was to every South Sudanese at the Conference. Testimony after testimony confirmed this. “It is one of the oldest churches in South Sudan and Sudan. It is what makes us who we are. Part of our foundation of faith is back home and always will be. We keep to Anglican tradition as our connection with back home “. “Our first Christianity is Episcopalianism, like our fathers and mothers”. “Most lost boys are again lost to other denominations and away from the Episcopal Church

in which they were baptized. This is painful”. “South Sudanese pay attention to theological background and tradition. They love the Anglican way”.

This embracing of the Anglican way is profound and significant when we look at the prevailing issues that arose in the conversation of the South Sudanese diaspora congregational leaders as to their relationship with The Episcopal Church. Those issues are presented in six areas.

- 1) **Theological Issues:** As stated, the diaspora want to be Episcopalian because they need to stay connected to God, and this is the tradition in which they were brought to faith. They do not want to change their Episcopal roots. Worshiping in a Lutheran or Disciples or Pentecostal space feels foreign to them. They wonder if US Episcopalians truly understand them to be Episcopalians too. One woman commented that she is ordained to be a local priest, but she wants to be sure that her son, if he should be so called, will have the same chance to fulfil that call as anyone else.

For the South Sudanese, call to ministry, including ordained ministry, comes before formation. Several of their leaders practiced ministry in the camps, or in communities gathered along the way to the United States. A few were ordained in South Sudan and have trouble having their credentials approved by The Episcopal Church or, as in one case, even by the Lutheran authorities in whose church his community has found worship space. This is frustrating. They recognize that South Sudanese Bishops complicate matters by calling individuals home for ordination and sending them back to minister as priests or deacons to their diaspora congregation. It was noted that there needs to be clear conversation between diocesan bishops and South Sudanese bishops on this matter. It is a discussion, however, that needs to be carried out in a spirit of common mission and pastoral care for the diaspora, and not simply concern ecclesiastical boundaries.

It was obvious that there was much confusion and ignorance about how The Episcopal Church system works regarding discernment for ordination and for deployment of the ordained. For ordained South Sudanese the only posts that seem open, and for which those in process are being trained, seems to be non-stipendiary or bi-vocational positions. Many Church leaders are holding down two or three jobs to sustain their families, and pastoral services suffer from lack of time and energy.

It was expressed that the discernment and deployment process need to acknowledge the differences in language and culture between Western raised people and those from South Sudan (We have heard of this issue also among Indigenous people in the United States). There was a definite unanimity in the desire of the South Sudanese Anglican clergy to have full acceptance and unquestioned Holy Orders in The Episcopal Church. They are very concerned about working with and getting through TEC’s diocesan program of discernment for Holy Orders. This is coupled with their concern about making their way through the educational requirement expected of those preparing for TEC ordination. It was asked that The Episcopal Church, in particular the House of

Bishops, and local dioceses consider alternative processes for ordination preparation for the near term to allow South Sudanese Diaspora to thrive and grow. They found education too rigorous for some and asked for a hybrid model. They expect some recognition of the education they have already received in South Sudan. All of this is stated in the light of a concern about acquiring enough priests to serve the growing number of South Sudanese churches and their growing families.

- 2) **Physical space:** To find a way to house South Sudanese Diaspora communities in Episcopal congregations seems a first order of business. That as Anglican siblings, they have spent years trying to find places to worship when almost every community they are in has TEC resources that should be offered to them for use seems a colossal failure of imagination and hospitality on local Dioceses and congregations. The House of Bishops needs to talk about this issue and find ways to encourage local leadership to be more welcoming. “We have a witness of staying the faith course through difficult times. We ask – are we children of God? Are we part of the worldwide Anglican communion? Are we not part of Christ? We have been suffering since 1954 and lost 2.5 million people. We have not found help as believers from other Christians, and yet it has not pushed us to lose faith”. “If General Convention passes resolutions – why don’t we (TEC) pay attention and live up to it? How can people be turned away?”

Unfortunately, this has been many groups experience. Sometimes hospitality depends upon the whim of the Rector and can become precarious at times of transition. It follows that the congregations need official recognition and clear membership in the life of the local diocese. They need to know their bishop and to have their bishop pay attention to them. They count on their “Father/Mother in God” to be the instrument of unity between their congregation and the diocese.

In addition, mention was made of the possibility of using old churches, no longer in use, for South Sudanese congregations; and for seeking optimum times on Sunday morning for worship. Often, they are given late afternoons. South Sudanese enjoy the church as a place of social interaction. It is important to them. As is their own style of worship which involves much singing. As one Bishop once said, “The Hymnal is your Bible”. They have very much grown in faith through the words of hymns and by singing.

- 3) **Family issues:** As an immigrant/refugee community the South Sudanese Diaspora struggles mightily with family issues. This was raised throughout the conversations. They are aware that often their large children population puts a strain on the relationships with local congregations in sharing space. They asked for help in teaching their children a more disciplined approach to being at church. The South Sudanese diaspora wants their children to grow in the Anglican faith. They see this as a bulwark against loss of purpose and unruliness. Parents are often at a disadvantage, with both parents working, and with their children drinking in western culture faster than

themselves. They don't want them to lose their native languages. Sunday School is a vital program for them, especially training for Sunday School teachers, which often would be a priority in their dioceses back home. They do not see resources as readily available, or within their financial capacity. They seek lessons in civic ways to be able to survive and flourish in the United States. There is an intense desire to transmit the faith to their children and their next generation. Godly Play was mentioned as something they would like to get access to more broadly. In some cases, children outnumber adults in the congregation, but they do not have financial or programming resources. They want their children to be welcomed in Episcopal Churches, not seen as a nuisance. The non-stipendiary status of the clergy means that they cannot undertake additional programming for the children. Resources for the development of women in leadership was also mentioned. And South Sudanese men were challenged by the women to consider that it might not always be them who need time from the children to assume leadership roles. It was noted that there were examples of distress through PTSD, and marriage breakdowns are happening impacting the family system. This raised the question of access to mental health resources as something The Episcopal Church could assist.

“How do we help our children learn the faith at the family level until becoming believers in their own right. The process is no longer there as we had it back home. Children and parents get distracted. Kids get sidetracked and don't follow their parents.” “Ministry to children and young people is weak. We need trained teachers among the South Sudanese. Resources are not so readily available, and programs are deemed boring. There is a need for financial resources for Church programs, including summer camp fees or scholarships for example.

- 4) **Economic Issues:** Scholarships for children and especially young adults to get education at Episcopal Schools or colleges was another primary focus. Clergy also are highly desirous of financial support from diocesan and general church wide structures and believe such support would allow them to invest more time in their pastoral duties and less in earning a living. Using the old English term, they need a “living” because they see so much ministry going undone because they must work a secular job. They called for a financial reprioritization in dioceses to enable assistance with scholarships for young adults to attend theological school, or to help them train in vocational schools even if it was to return to work in South Sudan. There was an interest in having discretionary funds for work in their communities. In general, they challenged the local churches to work with the South Sudanese in providing guidance and resources on how to plug into US agencies and opportunity centers that are there to “help you live”. They seek brothers and sisters who live alongside them and help them integrate into the system.
- 5) **Understanding The Episcopal Church and how it works:** We heard often that the South Sudanese Diaspora do not fully understand The Episcopal Church system. Clearly the House of Bishops and The Episcopal Church leadership must create mechanisms for them to better understand The Episcopal Church polity and administration both at the local/diocesan level as well as the church-

wide level. The South Sudanese Diaspora want to collaborate as partners but are frustrated by our systems. There was a wondering as to whether they should be organized along the lines of the Liberian Episcopal Church USA. Mostly, however, the South Sudanese Diaspora as Anglicans want to know how to become integrated into The Episcopal Church on every level. The United States still feels a strange culture even after two decades, and their sense of belonging in The Episcopal Church can assist in overcoming this.

They asked if there was a newsletter that came out of the Office for African Descent Ministries to which they could contribute, and that perhaps their stories, particularly their successes could be featured more in ENS. One question raised was that “at the top, the dioceses have their own autonomy and so there is no national uniformity. Nothing nationally creates greater uniformity”. How do we dig deeper to think through these two systems?

- 6) **Nurturing Diocesan Relationships:** Much of what we heard hinges on the nurturing of good diocesan relationships, especially Bishop to South Sudanese Diaspora congregations and their clergy leadership. It requires a better awareness and level of engagement by local bishops. The General Convention office and other offices of The Episcopal Church may need to create process and procedures for assisting local bishops in matters regarding refugee communities that share a faith base with us. The House of Bishops needs to establish a shared protocol and methods for better engaging the South Sudanese Diaspora nationwide. This may begin with a healthy, affirmative interest in the South Sudanese community and a strong message that “you belong here”. Priests need to be treated as priests in their diocesan authorities and not simply as “local South Sudanese clergy”. Encouraging their involvement in Annual Convention or other faith formation programs or developing South Sudanese liaison committees to meet with the bishop.

We return to the issue of financial resources as part of this relationship. How can we help at diocesan level to subsidize clergy for their ministry, and ease their dependence on having to hold multiple jobs? Can the Diocese focus on the training of young South Sudanese – the next generation – who are interested in the priesthood, and create financially sustainable or supported resourcing? Clearly engaging and moving forward toward meeting concerns and priorities that came to light in the conversations hinges on the willingness and availability of TEC bishops and the diocesan structures to connect with them and the South Sudanese Diaspora and their congregations. The conversations indicated that there a very mixed result on this across The Episcopal Church. “The fact that The Episcopal Church has begun to think of inclusion of South Sudanese and their challenges is the beginning to a solution. Let us not leave the conversation and regret not approaching to resolution”, was the concluding remark of one participant.

Some Final threads

The participants from the South Sudanese Diaspora were clear that there remained the question of their relationships with Dioceses back home, and especially how this affected TEC Diocesan Bishops. We were asked to reckon how this impacts their life and relations here and how it effects the ability to support themselves. The question was raised: how do we smooth out these issues to promote growth and better relationships? It is not realistic to expect the Diaspora not to care for their people back home; and in fact they would like to become strong communities so as to support better their people in South Sudan. All of this is seen as a fruit of a solid integration within The Episcopal Church. Likewise, they are a mission-minded people, and see their lives as witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. As one person said “The Church is dying everywhere in the world. We need to raise up new generations of faith. The South Sudanese have this issue” They are co-laborers in the field where Jesus says it is white for harvest.

Finally, we learned of one surprising project that has been undertaken by a young man from Atlanta for several years. Every October and November, he translates the Old Testament readings for the upcoming year’s lectionary into Dinka. He develops one hundred and fifty pages of translation. He combines these with the New Testament passages which are already translated elsewhere and sends out the readings for the upcoming year to as many Dinka congregations he can find. He aims each year to do this by Christ the King Sunday. He has sought for quite some time a software that might help him upload his translation and have them more readily at hand for people. This seems like a low hanging fruit for The Episcopal Church to come alongside and assist.

We also learned of an elder priest, ordained in South Sudan and at one time an Archdeacon over territories that have since become dioceses. He trained many of those who later became bishops and has baptized many of the lost boys. It was clear as he entered the Conference room, there was respect and honor for him among the participants. Almost to a person. He had come to the United States and settled, could not find a home among Episcopalians and served in a South Sudanese congregation in a Lutheran church where his priesthood was not recognized by the Lutherans. He knows little English and did not know the local Bishop. Another low hanging fruit was to connect him with that Bishop before the Conference ended, as we were able to do.

It was an incredible honor to be listeners as Task Force members to a people of faith who trusted us with their stories, their lives of struggle and faith, and even the difficulties which they continue to face. This is a proud people, a deeply devoted people, a people who are Anglican, a living example of that Episcopal expression of the Jesus Movement. They may not share our position on LGBTQ issues and were open to admit that; they may compare their love of the Anglican way as they notice TEC interests in battling US racism, identity inclusion, economic structures, materialism and consumerism; and maybe express a difference in that emphasis, but they present themselves as our brothers and sisters in Christ and they want their children to be able to do the same. This is the body of Christ at work.

Task Forth on South Sudanese Diaspora – Strategic Plan

At the General Convention in 2018, a resolution was passed to develop a comprehensive conversation between The Episcopal Church and the Church leaders of the South Sudanese Diaspora (“SSD”). A Task Force was established with a report back to General Convention expected in 2021. The aim of the Task Force was to host a Conference to listen to the concerns and suggestions of South Sudanese congregational leaders. Due to the pandemic, the Conference was postponed at least twice but finally took place in Kansas City October 1-3, 2022.

A full report of the findings coming out of the Conference is attached. Those findings identified areas of concerns and how The Episcopal Church might respond to the needs of the South Sudanese Diaspora. Please refer to the attached report for a comprehensive discussion of those issues.

At General Convention 2022, a resolution was passed extending the work of the Task Force during the upcoming biennial. Below is an outline of the Strategic Plan recommended by the Task Force to make tangible steps during this biennial to affirmatively address the needs and concerns of the South Sudanese Diaspora.

The Committee is asking for \$50,000 for meeting needs, specifically for item two.

- 1. Discuss With Diocesan Bishops the need to address the spiritual needs of the South Sudanese diaspora.**
 - a. Start with a few Bishops, perhaps six dioceses with large SSD populations
 - b. Steering Committee and Task Force pick best dioceses (and bishops) to start
 - c. Circulate Bp. Scarfe’s conference summary to these bishops (also all conference participants)
 - d. Try to pick dioceses from which some conference attendees came
 - e. Get help from the office of Africa descent ministry and share information through that hub
 - f. Arrange meetings with Bishops and staff and several SSDs, just so Bishops listen
 - g. Arrange for South Sudanese to be speakers at Diocesan Conventions and HOB.
 - h. Have SSD congregations tell success stories at Diocesan Conventions
 - i. Have SSD communities in various dioceses set up tables with materials, etc.
 - j. Have SSD community sing a hymn as part of worship at Diocesan Convention
 - k. Get an SSD member if front of HOB somehow

2. Organize a gathering of Diocesan Bishops and South Sudanese leaders in dioceses with large South Sudanese Diaspora populations.

- a. This step would come after #1 above
- b. Have an in-person gathering, maybe with a few more bishops and SSDs, but still small
- c. Funding from Task Force budget plus some from Office of African Descent, if possible
- d. Identify specific steps that dioceses and SSD communities will take together
- e. Report out from that meeting to Diocesan conventions and HOB

3. Empower South Sudanese steering committee (October 2022 conference) w/ Rev. Stan Runnels as consultant

Primary Objectives:

a. Explore physical Space:

- i. Maybe select a few properties to try to convert to South Sudanese churches.
- ii. Find a few properties that have been, or could be, turned over to SSD congregations
- iii. Tell their stories in diocesan newsletters and ENS
- iv. Show that there can be success stories – solicit brief summaries of these successes
- v. Also tell stories of SSD congregations sharing space successfully, perhaps with Diocesan support

b. Develop specialized formation training for members of the SSD (including children).

- i. This could involve staff members from TEC, formation leaders at the Diocesan level and organizations like FORMA. Solicit descriptions of Iona model working with potential deacons and clergy (e.g., North Dakota, Upper Michigan, Seminary of Southwest)
- ii. Offer classes locally so folks can still work to earn a living
- iii. Invite bishops (including retired ones) who have implemented these programs to be part of the discussion group (e.g., Bp. Michael Smith?)
- iv. Specifically target SSD communities/congregations for focused formation assistance
- v. Find funding to introduce (or enhance) Godly Play at several congregations across several dioceses; start with a few as models

- c. **Develop a comprehensive list of South Sudanese congregations worshipping as Episcopalians or otherwise in the Anglican Tradition.** (with office of Africa descent Ministries)
 - i. Start with Steering Committee list
 - ii. Add list from AFRECs, GEMN, EPN and TEC
 - iii. Vet with newly appointed “International Mission Advocates” in each diocese
 - iv. Appoint a point person or persons to be sure that we develop a comprehensive list
4. **Explore ways of securing funds at the TEC or diocesan level to support theological education.**
 - a. Don’t have to educate everyone right now – so consider pilot programs.
 - b. Perhaps take the dioceses with the most interest and have them identify one or two candidates each (question of affordability)
 - c. Are seminaries able to give scholarships?
 - d. Solicit descriptions of dioceses who have funded, at any level, education for members of the SSD community (e.g., funding to help lay leaders advance, stipends for clergy)
5. **Call for a gathering of leaders of the various Episcopal Seminaries to discuss theological issues concerning South Sudanese Diaspora. Who? When? How to get them interested in this effort?**
 - a. Arrange a Zoom call with seminary representatives and select SSDs
 - b. Small group to start
 - c. Have seminaries briefly describe creative education models they have previously developed and circulate widely
 - d. Better understand Iona model, who has used it and what works or not
6. **Better understand how TEC provides special assistance to the Latino, Native American, Black and other minority groups (with office of Africa Descent Ministries)**
 - a. Is there a way to replicate those efforts?
 - b. Some dioceses have part-time ministers for the Latino community, for example; Could we find one or two dioceses to experiment with that for their SSD congregations?

- c. Continue to remember that SSD's came from Episcopal background; other minorities perhaps less so
 - d. Solicit descriptions of dioceses/individuals who have successfully advanced these programs
- 7. Start a focused effort to publish articles highlighting these issues – and related success stories – in Diocesan newsletters and ENS.**
- a. Goal of two stories in ENS in 2023 and a story in every (with a sizable SSD community) diocesan newsletter, sometime during 2023, describing the South Sudanese community there and its efforts, goals, and successes.