

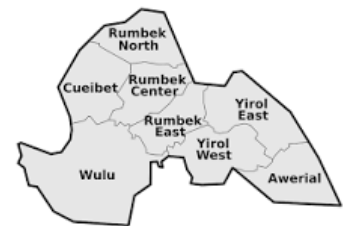
10 Years - Then and Now.....

When our Deanery Synod voted in 2012 to form a link with the Diocese of Cueibet, it was after having considered several South Sudan dioceses which had asked Salisbury for a link with one of our deaneries. Our Rural Dean, Canon David Henley, had already met Bishop Elijah of Cueibet when he had visited South Sudan. He felt that this was someone we could work with.

The other dioceses which had been suggested either lay near the borders of Kenya and Uganda or were adjacent to the capital, Juba. They were all easier to get to, communication was better and their economies were better developed. It was suggested that we should take what might be an easier option. But we thought that this would mean that dioceses like Cueibet in remote and underdeveloped areas would never receive support from anyone. So the decision was taken and the link was formed. The first visit was made in 2013.

Cueibet Diocese covers the County of Cueibet, one of 8 Counties in Lakes State with its capital of Rumbek, one of the major air-hubs in South Sudan.

It covers about 4,850 sq kilometres – bigger than Wiltshire - with an estimated population of 112,000. Everything in South Sudan is estimated. The majority are Dinka which in turn divide into a number of sub-clans.



Cattle herding and subsistence farming are the main means of livelihood for the people in the diocese. In addition to their economic value, cattle are linked to status and the price of a bride! The main crops grown are cereals such as maize and sorghum, and local vegetables such as kudra – their staple diet. Not surprisingly, both the cultivating and cooking are done by women. Families keep goats and chickens for their own use but meat is not a regular element in their subsistence diets.

The cattle are looked after by young men on cattle camps which move around depending upon the season, looking for the best grazing areas. Cattle are the main cause of community conflict involving inter-clan cattle raiding and revenge attacks, assisted by access to weapons which are available in some areas. The level of this violence has been dropping with the arrival of a new State Governor in 2022. The political and armed conflict of earlier years between supporters of South Sudan's President and Vice-President has reduced in the counties of Lakes States as part of the national Peace Agreement process. However, it continues at a higher level in some states.



The Episcopal Church of South Sudan is a major contributor to social cohesion and rebuilding. At a local level, Bishop Elijah and his clergy continue to promote peace and lay the foundations of healing and reconciliation in communities that have been in conflict with each other for many years. This initiative involves targeting and re-educating the youth in the diocese, mainly in the cattle camps.



Cueibet also experiences annual flooding. During the rainy season which can last from May to November, northern parts of the county are cut off from the rest of the county as the nearby Bahr Gel River overflows, Climate Change plays its part and in 2020, rains beginning in July brought flooding which led to massive crop failure and livestock death. This was repeated in 2021 with heavy storm damage to tukuls (mud huts) and the church primary school. It looks to become an annual

occurrence. One of the side effects of the changing weather patterns with long dry spells and lower crop yields is that, as cattle grazing areas reduce, the possibility of inter-communal clashes increases.

This is the nature of life in the diocese with which we are all linked. Given the challenges, one might be surprised at what has been achieved. As the Deanery Charity – The Chalke-Cueibet Partnership Trust - we are very grateful for your response.

Without going through the whole list of projects, the main support which Chalke Deanery has given to the people of Cueibet has been:

- Funding an Agricultural Programme to increase crop production
- Sponsoring Clergy Training at College
- 40 x special terrain bicycles for the pastors
- Building a diocesan Guesthouse for visitors
- Building 4 x Primary School Classrooms and supplying school furniture
- Emergency Relief for Internally Displaced Persons, homeless after flooding

As with the rest of the world, Covid had an adverse effect on the Chalke-Cueibet link. In Cueibet itself, the impact of Covid was lessened by its remote location. An outdoor lifestyle also helped. The major aid agencies provided low level medical support and Government restrictions were generally observed. However, access to food and all other supplies was severely restricted. Most commodities come from Uganda and Kenya travelling over weeks in huge trucks. Much of this was stopped to reduce the spread of Covid from these heavily populated areas. A lack of supplies meant that prices went up, followed by inflation. Our planned projects which had been costed before Covid, have doubled or trebled in price, but the need is still there.



So, a combination of events since the 2019 visit – Covid, Bishop Elijah and his wife, Rebecca, coming to us after the 2022 Lambeth Conference and the need to organise our own people meant that, until 2024 we have not been able to visit Cueibet.

All this time, we have used email and WhatsApp to keep in touch with Bishop Elijah, but it is not the same as a physical presence on the ground.

We also know that it is difficult to keep everyone in our Deanery interested if projects have stalled and we are only able to report on the basis of emails and conversations.

What has kept us going is knowing that people in Cueibet, many of whom possibly have a stronger faith than ours and have a completely different way of life, need our support and our prayers.

As a Deanery, we made a commitment over 10 years ago. Let us pray that we will be able to continue to honour that commitment over the next 10 years.

The Future



Giving thanks for
the Birth
of their Children
Sunday
4th February
2024