

Educating Teachers in South Sudan

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It is a good problem to have. We need more dormitories and more staff accommodation in Yambio where there are now four, full-time classes of pre-service teacher training in action. There are two semesters per year and the programme extends over two years – thus, for four semesters. At the beginning of each semester there is a new intake. Initially, we projected four streams to be our maximum enrolment but with the indefinite closure of our Malakal campus – a consequence of the senseless civil strife in South Sudan - we are planning on expanding our Yambio campus to six streams. There are many young men and women keen for higher education.

Unfortunately, I cannot say they are all avidly keen to be teachers. Yes, the two classes undertaking practice teaching in the schools at present are very enthusiastic but the reality is that South Sudan teachers are very poorly paid (less than US\$100 per month on average). So we know that many graduates will seek other jobs that are better paying. In one respect, that can be discouraging but the fact that we have prepared them well for whatever they undertake is very encouraging. The student teachers are very grateful for the opportunity they are receiving. In years to come, no doubt, teaching will be better remunerated and a higher percentage of people will be educated. At present, it is still less than 50 per cent of children in South Sudan that receive the opportunity to go to school at all.

An unfortunate, graphic statistic for South Sudan is that a fifteen year-old girl has more chance of dying in child birth than of completing her secondary education. Some new good schools, such as Loreto in Rumbek, are changing that. Last year, the Loreto girls gained the top results of all the secondary schools in South Sudan. *Solidarity* makes a special effort at affirmative action and offers teacher training to each class of Loreto graduates. There is a great need in South Sudan for more educated women. At our Teacher Training College in Yambio, we endeavour to encourage as many girls as possible to train to be teachers. Currently, however, we have 25 female students in a student population totaling 91. Too few girls have the secondary qualifications to begin teacher training.

Our academic staff in Yambio are very diverse in nationality and background. Sr. Margaret Scott, RNDM from New Zealand is the Principal while her Deputy is Sr. Margaret, Sheehan FCJ from Ireland. Br Methodius from Ghana is a member of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. There are two Comboni Missionary Sisters: Sr. Sandra Amado from Brazil and Sr. Carmita Cabrera from Ecuador. Trish Palmer is a lay woman from Australia while Sr. Pat is a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, USA. Brother Joseph Alak is a De La Salle Christian Brother who was born in Juba, South Sudan, but joined the Brothers in Egypt. All of these men and women, from different traditions, live happily together in one religious community. The Irish Christian Brothers also have a community in Yambio and Brother Odongo from Kenya also works in the College training teachers. It is a healthy mix of vision and skills.

So it is that we varied persons stand together in solidarity to encourage the young men and women in the College, from diverse tribes, to live together in peace and mutual respect. The obvious happiness of the students and their good relationships is evidence that this is working well. Clear expectations are set for the students and we have found that very quickly they take a real pride in who they are and what they are achieving. We have been blessed with financial assistance from many donors in establishing the College and delivering programmes with our current major partner being *Caritas Austria*. *Caritas Austria* also sponsors our agriculture programme at Riimenze, about 30 km from Yambio. That farming project provides significant quantities of food for the Yambio College. Our goal is long-term sustainability for the good of the people of South Sudan.