

For the observance of Marc Nikkel's life and work in the Sudan,  
Sept. 6, 2020

Today, on the 20th anniversary of his death, we celebrate the life and work of the Rev. Dr. Marc Nikkel among the people of the Sudans. Through his poignant observations about his students and acquaintances there, he brought us to know the people, and especially the Dinkas, of southern Sudan.

While teaching theology there in the 1980s, the second civil war between the Muslim north and Christian/animist south was becoming inevitable. Yet, even in the midst of the mounting unrest, Nikkel sensed the deep spirituality of these people. He wrote in one letter to his support groups back home "while there is no question that some refraction of the Christ is to be met in every human community, every society, every culture, it seemed as if these 'small incarnations' were an almost daily occurrence during my years in Sudan."

Marc Nikkel had to leave his beloved Sudan during the peak war period of 1987 to 1993. However, first in Kenya, then at the University of Edinburgh where he pursued a doctorate, he maintained his contact with Sudanese communities. For his thesis he researched and described the growth of Dinka Christianity with special reference to music and song. This teacher had learned the Dinka language and was able to translate many of these songs. One immediately popular piece written in 1992 by the Dinka theologian, Mary Aluel Ngongdit Garang, displays the resilience of the Sudanese Christian in the face of civil war:

Let us give thanks to the Lord  
in the day of devastation;  
and in the day of contentment.  
Jesus has bound the world round  
with the pure light of the word of his father.  
When we beseech the Lord  
and unite our hearts and have hope,  
then the "jok" has no power.  
God has not forgotten us.

Evil is departing and holiness is advancing,  
these are the things that shake the earth.

Do not look back: we are the people  
who have received the life of Christ....  
Do what you are able to do  
according to the gift which  
has been given to you.

Although he was from California, Marc Nikkel was a priest of our diocese, being ordained a deacon in Grace Memorial Church, Lynchburg. Later in 2003, a dozen “Lost Boys” from across Sudan settled in Roanoke. When we learned that they had known Marc, we invited them to a lenten supper that year. The Sudanese and South Sudanese of Roanoke have become a part of our parish community. We have remained connected—sharing worship, sewing crafts, attending diocesan events and receiving distinguished visitor’s from the two Sudans. Last year at this time, the Archbishop of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan participated in the inaugural conference of the South Sudanese Diaspora Network for Reconciliation and Peace hosted here at Grace Church.

In honor of the work of Rev. Marc Nikkel, and because of the connection he encouraged between us and the Sudanese people, our parish is concluding a fundraiser to assist three young South Sudanese to continue their education next year in Kenya. Thanks to the virtual yard sale, individual donations, and a gift from our Diocese, we have collected \$3,292.75 as of August 31. We are less than \$300 from our goal of \$3,500! Please, help us finish up by the end of this week!

You can write a check to Grace Episcopal Church with “South Sudanese students” in the memo line or make an on-line donation by selecting “Alta Fowler - Sudan Outreach” from the drop-down menu on the church website at <https://www.graceepiscopalexington.org/give/>.

Whatever you can give is much appreciated! Thank you!

——MJ Mayerchak for the Sudan Mission

Group