

Pray for Churches in South Sudan

Songs of praise echoed through the village of Dwani, South Sudan, as hundreds of believers marched in a grand procession around their newly rebuilt church on dedication day.

Some people carried small, **wooden crosses**. Others played handmade drums and instruments. Colorful swirls of orange, red, blue and green radiated from the women's flowing headscarves and dresses as they circled the building, thanking God for their new sanctuary.

Pastor Anthony Powgo stepped up to the double doors of the church and raised his hand to quiet the crowd.

"With joy and thanksgiving we have met here today to consecrate and dedicate this building to God, and for the glory of His Name," he said. "Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we consecrate this building to Almighty God."

The church in Dwani is just one of 478 churches that have been built by **Samaritan's Purse** to help replace sanctuaries that were bombed or burned to the ground during Sudan's bloody civil war.

The war erupted in 1983 when the Islamic dominated government in Khartoum imposed Sharia law on the nation. Millions of Christians and non-Muslim tribal groups in southern Sudan refused to submit, sparking an armed rebellion.

Attacks against Christians intensified under President Omar-al-Bashir. His hardened troops swept southward, burning churches, shooting worshippers while they prayed, and executing pastors in front of their congregations.

More than 2 million people were killed before a cease-fire was

brokered through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The agreement paved the way for the emergence of the independent nation of South Sudan on July 9, 2011.

When Samaritan's Purse launched its Church Rebuilding Project in 2005, village congregations were eager to join in. Men and women formed work crews to help prepare the land. They collected sand and crushed rocks by hand to help make concrete mix, and they worked along side Samaritan's Purse construction teams to set every handmade brick in place.

Built upon the ashes of war, the new **churches** became symbols of hope for the future in communities across South Sudan. They also became hubs for community activities.

Working with local **pastors**, Samaritan's Purse also helped establish 10,600 Bible study groups and distribute 260,000 Bibles, translated into six tribal languages. Many people who received the Bibles had never owned one before. Thousands of illiterate people who joined the Bible study groups began learning to read, using the Bible as a guide.

"Now that people have Bibles there is a big turnout every Sunday," said Martin Sebit, a church leader in the village of Tomoret. "Now the people have their personal Bibles so they can read for themselves."

As churches grew, leaders placed a renewed emphasis on ministering to children, giving them a firm foundation in Biblical truths as a guiding light for the future.

A youth leader named Moses was excited about the growing number of young people who were coming to Dwani Church.

"The number of worshippers increased from 80 to 250 every Sunday," Moses said. "Youth alone make up more than half of those coming. Children now have their own service. Sunday school now threatens to reach 150 every Sunday, and this poses new challenges for training Sunday school teachers. The number

of converts is also climbing. The challenge we face now is training up leaders and following up on converts to build them up spiritually and morally.”

At a church dedication in the Nuba Mountains, a 13-year-old boy named Israel shared his excitement. “The church makes me happy,” he said, glancing at the new sanctuary with its bright yellow walls and red trim. “I hope to bring my own children to this place to learn about Jesus some day.”

On a sunny September morning, Israel and his friend, Joseph, walked to the altar of the new sanctuary to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. “The Holy Spirit moved my heart,” Joseph said, “I said that the Lord provided this new church for us, and I knew I wanted to trust Jesus.”

While Christians in South Sudan had been celebrating a new era of peace (until recent days), believers in the northern state of Sudan are facing renewed persecution. President Bashir has launched attacks on non-Muslim and non-Arab populations that inhabit disputed border regions between the two newly separated nations.

Some of the most violent confrontations have been in the Nuba Mountains, a region where Samaritan’s Purse has built 168 churches and a Bible college.

Bashir’s renewed wave of terror in the Nuba Mountains has included the aerial bombing of Heiban Bible College and the bombing or burning of four churches. More than 70,000 people have been driven into South Sudan and may never be able to return. Surrounded by hostile troops, more than 300,000 people in the Nuba Mountains face possible starvation.

Believers in churches across South Sudan are praying for peace in the Nuba Mountains. Franklin Graham, the CEO and president of both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan’s Purse, encourages believers from around the world to pray.

"We at Samaritan's Purse condemn the repeated attacks on the innocent people who are being terrorized in the Nuba Mountains," he said. "Please pray for the safety of believers, and that God would intervene."

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