

The Changing Face of Mission

Emer Kerrigan works with Irish Jesuits International.

Irish missionaries, both religious and lay, are renowned across the globe for their dedication to serving those on the margins. They have helped shape the overseas aid sector as we now know it and have encouraged the Irish government to continue to commit to overseas development aid.

The impact of US funding cuts to foreign aid in 2025 has had a global ripple effect: many charities having to cut staff, pare down programmes and entirely close projects in some of the most needy locations in the world.

The role of the missionaries has become more critical than ever. Missionaries are respected among local communities for staying when funds dry up and conflict escalates. With the aging profile of Irish missionaries, a new generation of missionaries are taking their place – missionaries born in Africa, Asia and South America being called to mission in locations where people have major challenges in accessing schools, vocational training and basic health services.

In South Sudan, the lowest ranking country in the globe on the UN Human Development Index, cuts in the aid sector are being tragically felt. Yet the appetite among Irish missionary congregations to continue support to South Sudan is as strong as ever. This year, we launched the Forum for Irish Missionaries in South Sudan (FIMSS),

a collective of 18 missionary congregations based in Ireland working in 70 projects across South Sudan. The aim is to collaborate, work together, share resources so that we can continue to work in places where other charities can't – given the complexity of the community dynamics – or won't – because of tight security protocols.

We have eight Kenyan, Tanzanian and Ugandan Jesuits missioned in South Sudan, working alongside local sister congregations including the Irish Loreto Sisters and over 100 lay personnel across the 13 projects. They face added challenges to what our Irish missionaries would have faced. They don't have direct access to international support, media or donors. They are more likely to be targeted during times of insecurity. Kenyan Jesuit Fr Victor Luke Odhimabo SJ was killed eight years ago, when on mission at Mazzolari Teacher Training College in Cueilbet, South Sudan.

I remember my time as a lay missionary over twenty years ago when I was placed with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in South Sudan. Just my presence as an expatriate gave extra security to the camp of 33,000 people, much like a 'human shield'. That international visibility would be called upon if the camp was to be attacked by rebels, given the access I had to international media, embassies and



international offices. This is a luxury our African missionaries don't have – that platform to access or call upon European media, to advocate when there are serious violations to human rights.

For this reason, our role in Ireland is even more important. Irish organisations like us are continuing to back our brothers and sisters as they put themselves through considerable personal sacrifice. Our accompaniment of our counterparts is strong, in terms of monitoring, mentoring and support. Our mission is as strong as ever, crossing cultures, in the spirit of collaboration to serve those furthest behind.

To learn more about IJI's work in South Sudan, visit: www.iji.ie or call to donate: (01) 8366509

Jesuits in South Sudan

The Sudan war has displaced millions as families flee the bombardment and violence of civil war in neighbouring countries.

In South Sudan the JRS receives refugees at Renk on Sudan's southern border and provides aid and psycho-social support.

In addition to humanitarian aid, projects focus on education and skills trainings for marginalised communities in Maban, Juba and Yambio.

Our work in South Sudan also includes projects coordinated by the Jesuit community and Jesuit development office of South Sudan, focused on formal and vocational trainings, teacher training and climate resilient agriculture trainings to tackle food insecurity.

Childrens Pages

Spot 10 differences, follow the maze and colour in the picture!

