

TWINNAGE COMMITTEE

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Year End Figures: I am pleased to tell you that in the year just ended we were able to send a grand total of £833,790 to support the work of our brothers and sisters overseas.

A total of £215,690 was sent to our twins plus £101,954 for projects and £54,440 sent from the Disaster Fund.

Sudan Appeal: During 2008/9 we have contributed £213,020 towards the running of the SVP works in the Khartoum Archdiocese as well as El Obeid and Juba.

Because of the fall in the value of the pound this represented less than we had undertaken to provide in euros but the IRC felt that it was as much as we could raise at a sustainable level. Thanks to everybody's efforts, and in particular to a major fundraising effort in Shrewsbury CC which brought in a magnificent £78,000, our income did eventually exceed this figure.

For 2009/10 the Society is having to evaluate all projects and will inevitably have to close some of the baby feeding centres and possibly other projects. This is mainly because the French Government's support of almost 200,000 euros has come to an end but also because expenditure has exceeded income in 2008/9 resulting in The Friends of Sr. Emmanuelle having to utilise their reserves.

Last year the Society received a legacy of £75,000 for the Disaster Fund. In view of the healthy state of the fund (currently around £70,000) it was agreed by the IRC to allocate this money to the ongoing disaster which is Sudan.

With this bonus and the extra income from Shrewsbury we hope to be able to keep open some of the baby feeding centres which would otherwise close. Thank you to everyone for their efforts to support the Appeal – keep up the good work.

Tsunami Orphans: The largest chunk of the remainder, £110,000 was sent to support the children orphaned by the tsunami. This was the fifth payment but we will be very pleased to pass on any monies which come in for future years, the need is still there.

India: The Indian bishops' conference has paid tribute to the persecuted Christians of their country as "heroes of faith and patriotism." The 120 bishops have dedicated moments of prayer for the communities in many parts of India, especially in Orissa and Karnataka, that have faced persecution over recent months at the hands of Hindu extremists.

A report from John Dayal, president of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights, states that the Orissa situation is far from resolved, and thousands of Christians have not been able to return home. It says that the Orissa government "is still not able to ensure the safety and security of thousands of Christians who cannot still return to their village homes".

Please remember those suffering persecution for their faith in your conference prayers.

Disaster Fund: We have been able to send a donation of £10,000 from the Disaster Fund to support the CGI Appeal for the Italian earthquake victims. Details should be available on the new web site www.ssvpglobal.org

The real need for our support to continue:

India: Bishop Felix Machado of Nashik, Maharashtra interviewed in The Tablet said: "Throughout India quotas for government jobs and higher education have given Dalits privileges they never previously had. Christians cannot benefit from these changes because they are officially outside the caste system. So many Christians are turning to their cash strapped churches to make up for the benefits the state denies them."

Sudan:

Four years after the peace agreement, Sudanese Christian refugees are still waiting to return home as the government continues to push a Muslim agenda.

Bishop Daniel Adwok, auxiliary of Khartoum, said in an interview at the Aid to the Church in Need, that displaced Christians in North Sudan (the communities where most of the SVP work is carried out) need assistance, as the government's treatment of non-Muslims "remains unchanged." He stated that due to continuing conflicts "initiatives to move the refugees back to the south of the country have so far been sporadic."

Despite some "conciliatory gestures," the bishop reported that the government still promotes "the spread of Islam and the promotion of one religious and cultural identity." There has been little progress, he noted, since the 2005 peace agreement ended the 20-year civil war between the Khartoum government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement. "The government has always focused on the Islamisation process. I do not see any change on the part of the authorities."

He noted the lack of progress in efforts "to enable the displaced people to return to their original homelands in the south." For those attempting to return home, there are obstacles of continuing security problems and a lack of infrastructure, he said.

The bishop stated: "It is yet more insecurity that is deterring people from moving down to the south. There are ongoing conflicts involving forces linked to the rebel group and the government in Khartoum. "It gives a picture of a land where people can only exist if they have a gun."

Bishop Adwok said that some Khartoum Christians who tried to return home were forced to return north after finding "no opportunities for work and a lack of proper housing, roads and other communications."

He concluded, "We would have a sad future if we have no qualified individuals who have had a Christian education and hope to live in an Islamic society, making a positive contribution to the greater good."

With my Justice & Peace hat on: If, like me, fed up with politicians of all colours you feel inclined to stay at home on June 4th, please remember that the European elections are for multi-member constituencies and there are fringe parties out there whose views are not in accord with the Church's social teaching. They may get seats, and all the kudos and financial support that go with them, for as little as 7.5% of the vote in some areas, so please go out and VOTE FOR SOMEONE.