



# *A Christmas Story*

**FROM SOUTH SUDAN'S PASTORAL HEART**

**2025**



# Where Faith, Healing, and Hope Are Growing

Across South Sudan, in chapels tucked deep in forests, in quiet yards, simple halls, and in parish centers buzzing with life, small seeds of hope have been quietly taking root.

Throughout 2025, the Pastoral Program journeyed alongside communities in some of the most fragile regions of the country—forming leaders, renewing faith, healing wounds of trauma, and nurturing a spirit of peace in places where conflict and hardship have long shaped daily life.

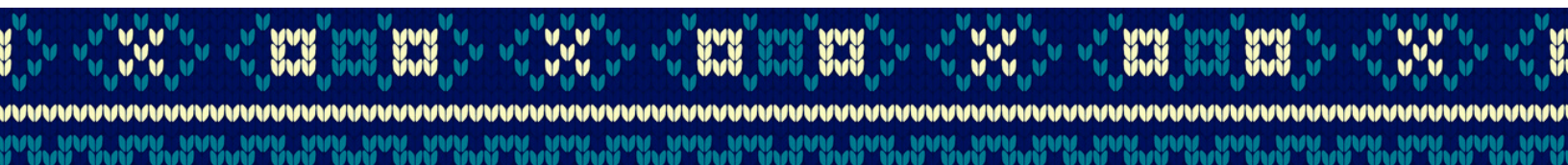
From catechists walking miles to receive training, to youth choosing peace through sports and leadership workshops, to women finding strength through empowerment programs, to priests rediscovering renewed zeal through retreats and spiritual accompaniment, this year revealed a simple but powerful truth: when people are accompanied with care, formation, and faith, whole communities begin to heal and grow.

## **Seeds of Formation Taking Root**

Across Magwi, Maban, Torit, Raja, Wau, Malakal, and Juba, the year 2025 saw a remarkable movement of lay formation. A total of 352 catechists received structured training—some in trauma healing, others in psycho-social-spiritual formation, liturgy, or Small Christian Community revitalization.

Their journeys were often difficult. Some walked for days to reach training centers. Others traveled through flooded roads or crossed insecure borders. Yet they came—carrying Bibles wrapped in plastic, notebooks tied with string, and an unshakeable desire to serve their communities.

These catechists are the heartbeat of pastoral life in South Sudan. In villages where priests may visit only once or twice a year, they keep the flame of faith alive teaching, praying with families, animating Small Christian Communities, and anchoring parish life. The 2025 formation programs strengthened pastoral presence in places where it is needed most.





# Where Faith, Healing, and Hope Are Growing



## Women Rising as Pillars of Stability and Peace

Across dioceses and deaneries, 915 women and girls participated in empowerment and leadership training, trauma healing, cookery and baking classes, agricultural training, and small business skills development workshops.

But what they gained was more than skills. Women rediscovered their voice. They formed parish groups that strengthened solidarity, savings culture, and community resilience. Many arrived carrying deep wounds—loss of family members, displacement, or years of instability. Workshops became safe spaces where healing began.

What they carried back home was precious: renewed stability, courage, and hope. Women continued to show that they are becoming the backbone of peace and community transformation in South Sudan.

## Youth Choosing Peace Over Violence



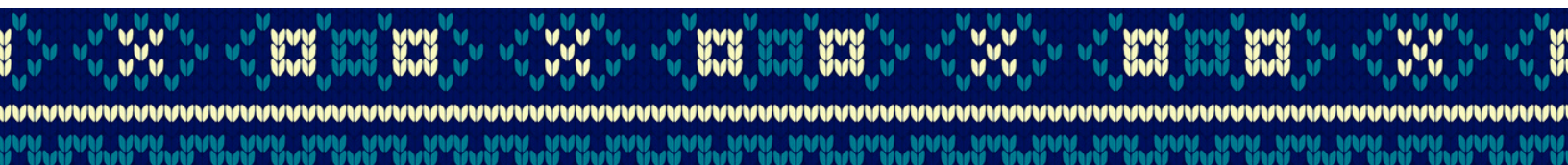
In a country where young people are often the most vulnerable to conflict, the Pastoral Program reached 2,563 youth through leadership trainings, lenten recollections, peace football tournaments, conferences, and workshops.

The football fields became unlikely sanctuaries of reconciliation—spaces where tribal lines dissolved, and unity was rebuilt through play. Leadership training and workshops helped youth process trauma, discover identity, and learn conflict-resolution skills. Conference gatherings brought together young leaders from parishes across the country, offering a vision of a future rooted in hope, not violence. Many walked away believing—perhaps for the first time—that their story could be bigger than conflict.

## Healing Wounds the Eye Cannot See



Trauma healing gatherings in El Obeid, Wau and Juba brought together clergy, religious, displaced and refugee communities. These workshops—reaching dozens of participants across the year—provided space for participants to speak their pain, reconnect with hope, and rebuild trust.



# Where Faith, Healing, and Hope Are Growing

Healing became the doorway to renewed faith, emotional resilience, and meaningful ministry. Again and again, 2025 reminded us that formation cannot take root in wounded hearts—healing must come first.



## Accompanying Priests and Religious

Priests and religious serving across vast and challenging territories received spiritual renewal through annual retreats—50 priests in Juba and Rumbek, and additional clergy and religious in Malakal. These days of silence, prayer, and reflection restored pastoral zeal and strengthened unity. A renewed priest becomes a renewed parish. A revived parish becomes a revived community.



## Nurturing Creation and Future Generations

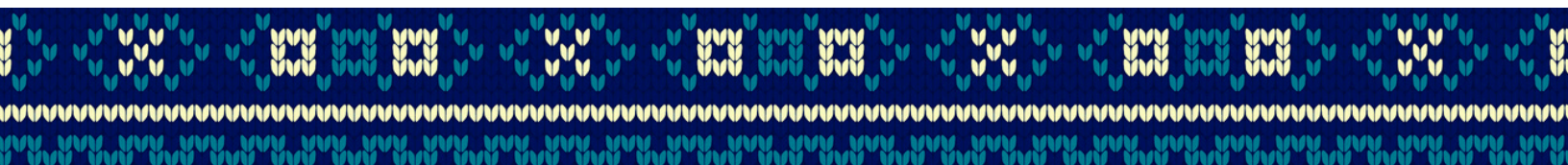
Children preparing for Confirmation—192 of them in Holy Rosary Parish alone—participated in faith formation and spiritual preparation. Students at Kit and Martin de Porres School celebrated Laudato Si' Week through eco-awareness workshops, and 75 youth deepened their commitment to ecological justice at the Ecumenical Youth Workshop. Tree planting, clean-up days, and learning sessions taught children that caring for creation is part of caring for their faith.



## Where the Work Meets the Hardest Places

Every milestone we celebrate comes from a landscape shaped by profound challenges. Many diocesan pastoral offices are still emerging, with limited capacity and few resources. Some chapels remain cut off for months due to flooding or insecurity. Priests often minister alone, traveling vast distances to reach their communities, with some only reaching communities once a year.

Communities grapple with conflict trauma, language barriers, and limited literacy, while widespread poverty affects transport to trainings and participation in parish life. Yet these challenges are also what refine this mission—reminding us that every step forward is sacred, hard-won, and deeply meaningful.





# What 2025 Has Taught Us: Wisdom from the Road

The year revealed transformative truths about pastoral life in South Sudan:



- Lay leaders—catechists, women, youth, and Small Catholic Community leaders—are sustaining the Church in places priests cannot regularly reach.
- **Healing must precede formation.** Wounded communities cannot receive or share the Gospel fully until their hearts are restored.

- Small Christian communities quietly anchor peace and evangelization, especially in conflict-affected villages.
- Women are becoming the stabilizers of parishes and households, transforming communities from within.
- Youth naturally become peace ambassadors when given leadership, structure, and belonging.



- Collaboration across dioceses and congregations multiplies impact, making pastoral outreach sustainable.
- Accompanied priests renew entire communities.
- And above all: South Sudanese communities are profoundly resilient—able to rebuild, heal, and lead when given the opportunity.

# A Christmas Hope

As Christmas approaches, the pastoral mission continues—in chapels and classrooms, under shade trees and in parish halls. It continues in the footsteps of catechists, the determination of women, the energy of youth, and the faithful dedication of priests and religious. This is the Christmas story unfolding across South Sudan—a story of faith that endures, hope that grows, and communities that rise again. And in every step of that story, **your support makes the light shine a little brighter.**







## TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

# *Anthony Pitia Joseph*

I was not born blind. I lost my sight when I was around four or five years old. Two of my brothers and I are visually impaired. Growing up, I heard many hurtful words from people who thought that disability meant I had no value.

When I was young, my father took us to Khartoum seeking treatment. The doctors said there was nothing they could do. When we returned to Juba, we were brought to the school for the blind. There, I learned Braille, how to move with a white cane, how to care for myself, and many other skills. Without this center, many people with disabilities would not have had the chance to be educated or employed.

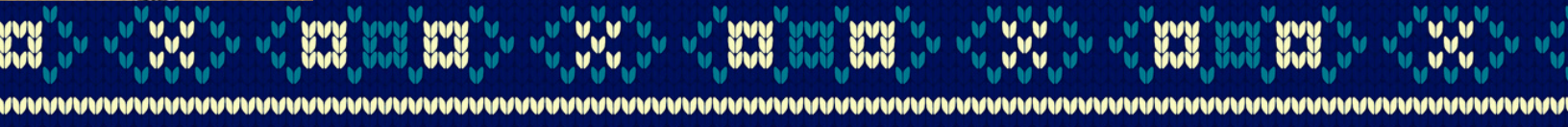
After rehabilitation, I joined a mainstream primary school. It was difficult. Other children mocked me and accused me of pretending. Still, I worked hard and performed well. I later completed secondary school and graduated from the University of Juba with a degree in Communications and Public Relations. I proved that disability is not inability.

Before receiving trauma healing training from Solidarity with South Sudan, many of us lived with deep frustration. People often treated me like a beggar or spoke about superstitions surrounding blindness. Some students became blind later in life and struggled greatly. Some even thought about ending their lives.

The trauma healing training helped us understand our experiences and deal with frustration. I learned to take one day at a time and to see that blindness is not the end of life. As a teacher now, this training helps me support my students with patience and understanding when they feel discouraged.

I hope the training continues, because it has helped us heal and live with dignity.

Anthony Pitia Joseph





## BENEFICIARY TESTIMONIAL

# Mary Mindraa Jino Gama

I work as an Information Secretary in the Youth Office of the Archdiocese of Juba. I help pass information between parishes, support youth activities, and represent the office when needed. Through this work, I see how important the church is in the lives of young people.

I grew up during the war. In 1992, my family and I fled from Juba to Khartoum. I still remember seeing people running in fear. We returned to Juba in 2012, and again war broke out in 2013 and 2016. Many people who had fled to Sudan for safety were forced to flee again when war reached there too. I have lived most of my life surrounded by conflict.

During the war, the church was always the place people ran to. When there was shooting, families gathered there. In the church, we found hope, safety, and our faith was renewed.

The youth are the pillar of the church in South Sudan. Through the Youth Office, young people gather for leadership training, spiritual reflection, peacebuilding discussions, and trauma healing sessions. These activities help us understand our role in the church and in our country. They also help us feel valued and not alone, especially after experiencing war, poverty, and economic hardship.

Through what I learned in the church, I became more aware of others' needs. This led me to start a small organization with friends to support women in prison. We teach skills like baking, soap making, and beadwork, and we provide psychosocial support. Even if women cannot return to school, they leave with skills and encouragement.

The church helped shape who I am today. It continues to be a place where people heal, grow, and learn to help others.

Mary Mindraa Jino Gama

