

Diocesan News

Refugee gives back to those in his homeland

By Lisa Bourne
Mirror Staff

After fleeing his home in Sudan 20 years ago and settling in Des Moines, St. Ambrose Cathedral parishioner Garang Kiir Nagour recently went back to his homeland to assist those who are returning after years of strife.

He encourages people to help a hand in helping by contributing to an effort to build a homeless shelter in Sudan for returning refugees.

The people Nagour wants to help are returning to the village of Awiel in south Sudan from the north and west of the Sudan, including the city of Khartoum, the Darfur region and the Kordefan area.

Refugees are gathering at St. Joseph Parish in Awiel seeking food, shelter and health services. Nagour will be helping to build

a homeless shelter at St. Joseph.

Reflecting on his homeland, Nagour said he was born in Awiel in 1966.

"Before war, beautiful. It's nice," Nagour said of his village.

One of 24 children from the four wives of his father, Nagour was one of only two boys from his village, he and a big brother, who were chosen to go to school.

"It's not easy for kids, especially for kids," he said.

Nagour was taught by the Comboni missionary priests and sisters.

The Institute of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus was founded by Bishop Daniel Comboni (1831-1881). Bishop Comboni was canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

Sister Pat has been with Nagour since picking him up at



Above: St. Joseph parishioners in the south Sudan village of Awiel. People returning to the area after years of civil war need help.
Photo submitted by Sr. Pat Scherer
Right: Garang Nagour returned recently to his village to help build a homeless shelter.
Photo by Lisa Bourne

the Des Moines airport when he first arrived here.

He made Des Moines his home. Nagour has done steel work in Des Moines and worked in environmental services for Mercy Medical Center since settling here.

"I be happy in Iowa so much," he said.

Nagour has been a U.S. citizen for two years.

He went back to his village in Sudan last May to visit for the first time since he left.

While there, Nagour saw one of the Comboni sisters he knew from his childhood. Eighty-four-year-old Sister Sodonía was overjoyed that Nagour was free and still alive, said Sister Pat.

Sister Sodonía invited Nagour to return to help with the building of the homeless shelter on the grounds of St. Joseph Parish in Awiel. She suggested he try to raise funds for the shelter while he was back in America.

"After coming back to the states and thinking and praying about this invitation, Garang came to me to share in the discernment of what he should do," said Sister Pat. "In no time, we both had concluded that God had invited him to give back some his life to his poor brothers and sisters in the Sudan."

"I feel people need help," Nagour said.

Because people are coming back, everything is zero," he said. "No building."

The land for the homeless shelter has been purchased. However, money is needed to buy bricks, stones and other building materials. There will also be a need for furniture, bedding, kitchen appliances and various other supplies.

Along with being a preventative homeless shelter, it will serve those who are sick with malaria, dysentery or hepatitis, so medicine and medical equipment will be needed as well.

All donations will be processed through the Comboni Mission Office in Cincinnati, Ohio before being sent to Bishop Rudolf Majak in the Diocese of Wau, Sudan. The Comboni Mission Office will also issue a tax credit for contributions.

Father Louis Gaspanini is the provincial for the Comboni Fathers in the province of the United States. His office serves a vehicle for transmitting funds for mission work.

He said he was happy to support the St. Joseph homeless shelter project for Awiel.

Father Gaspanini said he thinks it's great that Nagour is going back to his home to serve people in need.

Father Gaspanini said what Nagour is doing is an example of the local church having



Garang Kiir Nagour

Help the refugees

Checks in support of the project to build a facility for Sudanese refugees returning to their town should be made out to "Comboni Missionaries" with a reference in the memo space to "Homeless Shelter, Awiel, south Sudan."

Donations should be mailed to:

Sister Pat Scherer,
St. Ambrose Cathedral,
607 High St.,
Des Moines, IA 50309.

Sister Pat will forward the checks to the Comboni missionaries monthly.

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Hear more

Sister Pat Scherer, pastoral minister for the Sudanese Catholic Community at St. Ambrose Cathedral, is available to talk to church groups, schools, parish councils, etc. to provide more information on Garang Nagour's homeless shelter project. Call her at 515-288-7411 or write to her at St. Ambrose Cathedral, 607 High St., Des Moines, IA, 50309.