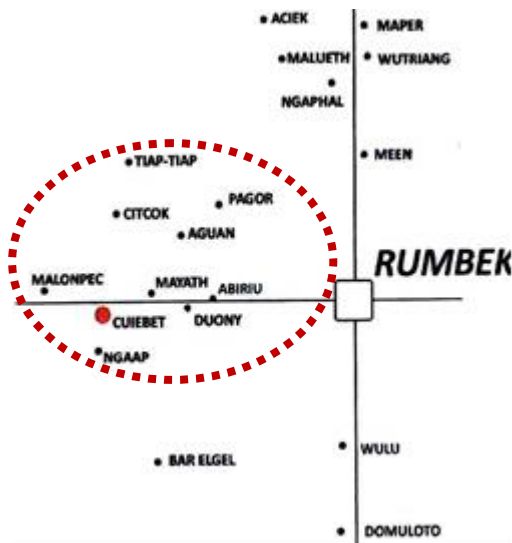


A Year of Change

2018 was a year of major change in the Diocese of Cueibet, reflecting wider changes in the life of the Episcopal Church in South Sudan.

Between 2011 and 2017, South Sudan moved from 10 to 32 states, the new ones being created largely along ethnic lines. Cueibet County, which was originally part of Lakes State with its capital of Rumbek, became a state in its own right with the name Gok State. It is one of the smallest states in South Sudan with a population of approximately 174,000. By far the majority of the people are Dinka, the major ethnic grouping in South Sudan, and of the Gok clan, hence the name of the new state. The state capital is Cueibet Town

Following these changes, the Episcopal Church began a similar process of creating new dioceses reflecting the civil boundaries and ethnic divisions. As a result, the Diocese of Cueibet is now smaller, matching the boundaries of the new Gok State. The original areas of Maper to the north east (mainly Dinka Agar clan) and Wulu to the south east (mainly Jur Bhel tribe) have both become separate dioceses lying in the new Western Lake State.



Original line map of Cueibet Diocese showing new diocesan area in red

Cueibet Diocese is now much more compact and manageable in terms of travel, straddling the single main east-west route through Gok State. The 33 mile / 2 hour journey along this unmade 'road' from the airstrip in Rumbek to the Diocesan Compound in Cueibet Town is the one that has been made by every visitor from Chalke Deanery. Because of the distances and transport difficulties, it has never been possible to visit Maper and Wulu although we have been able to provide limited support to the people of those areas. Each has one of our sponsored graduates from theological college, a trained

dressmaker from the Women's Empowerment Programme, 2 sewing machines and bicycles!

Peacemaking and Security

On 12 September 2018, South Sudan President Salva Kiir and former vice president and opposition leader Riek Machar signed what was meant to be the final peace agreement in the country's civil war, ending nearly five years of fighting. There are concerns both nationally and internationally about the fragility of this agreement. While the international community concentrates on influencing the political and military leaders, there is also a need for grass-roots peacebuilding, reconciliation and education.

The Christian churches have a more influential role in society than in western countries and are joining in peacebuilding with the United Nations Mission and organisations such as Christian Aid. In Cueibet Diocese, this 'hearts and minds' initiative began in November with the training of 'peace advocates' to work with the local population in their villages and with the youth in the cattle camps. Funds for the training, transport and other costs of some 50 clergy and lay volunteers came from the Anglican Peacemakers Fellowship. The Diocese also hosted a UN organised peace conference for members of the Gok State Youth Union in Cueibet Cathedral

Lying in a Dinka majority state, the Diocese of Cueibet is not affected by the political violence and devastation which has occurred in many parts of the country. However, there is sporadic inter-clan conflict, mainly due to the fact that the activity of the majority of Dinka is cattle herding. Cattle raids, other intercommunal violence and their associated revenge attacks force people from their homes, interrupting crop growing and creating food shortages. During the visit in March 2018, evidence of such conflict was seen at the village of Mayom which had been destroyed by inter-clan fighting with 42 killed and 23 homes destroyed. In June we were able to send £2,500 for emergency relief for food and rebuilding.



Mayom – burnt down tukul

2018 Visit

The visit by Archdeacon Alan Jeans and Geoff Taylor, 5-16 March, enabled us to hold the annual teaching conference for diocesan clergy while monitoring the progress on projects supported by Chalke Deanery. The conference was the biggest since our visits began in 2013 with 2 bishops and 60 male and female pastors attending on the main day.

The marathon of three days' teaching by Alan Jeans and Bishop Elijah was conducted in temperatures hitting 41°C with the addition of 2 days of torrential rain. Previously, visits have been made in November and we will definitely return to this pattern in 2019! The gathering of the clergy was a marvellous opportunity to hear their stories and gain an insight into the life of the Church and people in Cueibet. Their faith and hope for the future shone through the evident deprivation of their day to day existence. The three hour Eucharist at the end of our visit was a joyful celebration with singing and dancing and three collections for different causes. We have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in Cueibet.



15 students complete ALP

We have funded three brick built classrooms but two more are needed. The school is still relying upon 2 trained teachers and 10 volunteer assistants. Retention is a big challenge so we are continuing to assist with the payment of basic salaries.



Archdeacon feeling the heat before preaching!

Chalke Deanery Support in 2018

The main focus of our support in 2018 has been on Education. We have continued to fund the attendance of two theology students, Charles Chol and John Luke, at Kajo Keji College and it is planned that a further four students will begin studying in 2019. Meanwhile, in Cueibet itself, there has been a huge expansion of the church primary school.

In 2015, there were four classes with 200 pupils, taught under the shade of trees and during the April to September rainy season, in the Cathedral. There is now a full range of Primary Classes 1–8 with over 960 pupils taught in separate Morning and Afternoon sessions. The free lunch provided is the only meal of the day for the majority of the pupils. An Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) has started for older pupils who have come late to education and are considered to be better motivated. Teaching is from 14.00-17.00 and is condensed into 2 primary stages in 1 year. The second cohort of these students completed their course in December.



900 pencils from the Chalke Valley

The future for Cueibet Diocese

The alignment of diocesan and state borders and co-location of civil and diocesan administration in Cueibet Town has benefitted communities. Bishop Elijah has a good working relationship with state officials. Pastors are fully involved in the lives of their people with a better network of contacts than local government. A smaller diocese makes travelling easier although communication can be difficult. On Bishop Elijah's visits to remote parishes there is no internet contact and poor mobile access.

Planning and targeting of resources will be easier in the 'new' diocese. Preparations have begun for the visit of a group from the deanery in November 2019. Your prayers for peace and stability in our linked diocese and continuing support for our sponsored students and ongoing projects are much needed. Some of you will know of the death of Canon David Henley last December. David's vision as Rural Dean led to our deanery forming the Chalke-Cueibet Partnership in 2012. It is a privilege to be able to continue supporting the people of Cueibet.

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