La Salle Rumbek builds new futures in South Sudan

South Sudan is the world's youngest country. It came into being in 2011, following decades of war for independence from Sudan. But just a few years later, the country was plunged into a civil war, marked by deep divisions between groups vying for power.

In the wake of the war, the wounds and tensions remain, affecting the opportunities for education, holistic development and a dignified life for the younger generations.

From conflict to hope

Against this backdrop, in 2018 La Salle founded a secondary school in Rumbek, in the centre of the country, "with the aim of providing quality education to young men, as there was already a school catering for girls", explains Brother Jhonmar Sánchez Rodríguez, from Venezuela. "The school opened following a period of the social conflict the country, bringing hope to South Sudan," he adds.

Brother Jhonmar combines his vocation as a teacher – of Mathematics – with pastoral ministry and the administration of this significant educational project, which he leads alongside two other Brothers of the Christian Schools: Brother Brinesh Rayen, from India, and Brother Adega Emmanuel, from Nigeria.

In the early days, whilst the school was being built, "the Brothers and teachers held lessons under a tree in Loreto — about five kilometres away — for the first 23 students who were admitted to begin their education at the school", recalls Brother Jhonmar. Later, "in 2019, we moved to its current location".

Fraternity amidst diversity

The school operates as a boarding school and accommodates more than 275 young men aged between 15 and 23, from different parts of South Sudan and from diverse ethnic groups, clans, cultures and languages. "Here they complete the four years of secondary education, and on completion they receive a certificate approved by the Ministry of Education."

Despite this diversity, the community dynamics of this Lasallian school promote

fraternity and inclusion. “The school provides many things that are not part of the reality of the country. It is not just education; it is also care, protection, safety and support. Here we all live together as equals, but outside the confines of the institution, unfortunately, the situation is very different.”

A day at La Salle Rumbek

What is school life like? “Our day-to-day life is shaped by the formal educational environment,” explains Brother Jhonmar. Classes begin at 6.00 am and run until 3.30 pm. Afterwards, the young people carry out community service, such as cleaning and tidying the school, although there is also time for sport and personal study.

“We have daily prayer sessions, in the morning and in the late afternoon, as well as Sunday Mass and on special feast days,” continues the Venezuelan De La Salle Brother. “The school also runs agricultural projects, which form part of the young people’s educational programme. This involves preparing the soil, sowing seeds and harvesting crops.” Similarly, extracurricular educational opportunities are provided through various societies, including *the Boy Scouts*, environmental groups, arts societies, the choir and the Lasallian youth group, amongst others.

The first fruits

“Everything the school offers brings about changes in the young people,” says Brother Jhonmar. “The school has established itself as one of the best institutions in the country. Our former pupils are more aware of their role in the development of their communities, and of South Sudan, of course.” Indeed, “many of them go on to further education; others are employed as teachers in primary schools… Their education and discipline are evident when they leave school, as when faced with the realities of life they tend to be more respectful and responsible, and apply what they have experienced and learnt to their own lives”.

The De La Salle Brothers value the positive impact that La Salle Rumbek is having on society and on building new futures in South Sudan, although “all this is a process that takes time, especially when it comes to bringing about change”.

Hence the importance of continuing to invest in the lives and education of young South Sudanese people: “We must commit to personal development and the needs of others, without focusing on differences and recognising one another as equals,” concludes Brother Jhonmar.

We invite you to find out more about this story:

La Salle Rumbek is part of the 1LaSalle solidarity projects.

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