

## **Juba Diocesan Model Secondary School – the story so far**

*By Colonel (Retired) Charlie Thackway MBE, Chair of Friends of JDMSS*

Juba Diocesan Model Secondary School (JDMSS) was founded in Juba in 2005, shortly after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, by my predecessor, Commander Richard Dean RN. Essentially founded from scratch, it was started in response to a request from the Archbishop of Sudan at the time, The Most Reverend Joseph Marona, for a church secondary school to be built in Juba, where the church was already running 10 primary schools.



An Episcopal Church of Sudan school, it was initially supported by St Francis Church, Salisbury, who had undertaken to renovate their own church and, at the same time, pledge £40,000 to be seed money for a project in South Sudan. Construction commenced and, in April 2007, the school opened its doors to its first intake of students. The Friends of JDMSS has provided support that has enabled the growth of the School ever since.



**Headmaster Robert Kei with Dr Margaret Griffin, Educational Advisor from Friends of JDMSS**

Over the last 13 years, JDMSS has developed into one of the leading secondary schools in South Sudan, a country where access to secondary education is scarce; total enrolment is around 10%. The School Sign at the Main gate includes the strap line: 'Quality Education with Christian Values'. Christian values are all important at the school. At Daily Assembly, it is students who lead worship and prayers, praying for their teachers, their School & their Country.



Students leading morning assembly

Typically, students enter at the age of 14 and graduate at 18, taking South Sudan Certificate of Education exams at that point. However, instability has meant that there is much more diversity age-wise amongst the students. There are 885 students across the 4-year groups, with applications heavily outnumbering places. Generous supporters in the UK ensure that, each year, over 25 students from needy homes are given bursaries, providing £150 for each of the four years of schooling. There are now 200 sponsored students at the School, 110 sponsored by Salisbury Diocese and the 90 supported by the Rotary Club of Canterbury.



Headmaster addressing sponsored students

The school is attracting much international attention due to its excellent standards. In March (prior to the lockdown), Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex visited students as part of an official visit to South Sudan. JDMSS was selected because of its excellent reputation and the fact that it benefits from UK Government aid via the Girls Education in South Sudan programme.

Of course, Covid-19 has hit schools everywhere particularly hard. The pandemic reached South Sudan on 5<sup>th</sup> April. According to the UN, South Sudan is particularly vulnerable, with social isolation a virtual impossibility. JDMSS had to close its doors to students with just a day's notice. Immediately, headmaster Robert Kei called a meeting of all staff and it was agreed that teachers would set worksheets for the students so that their education could continue. With online working not being a viable option, photocopying worksheets using a copier funded by Salisbury Diocese has been ongoing since then. Students collect the worksheets and bring them back for marking, often travelling from far afield. One student, the daughter of a clergyman, travels in from an IDP camp near the Ugandan border to collect her worksheets and to drop off those she has completed. As restrictions are eased, students are gradually returning to the school. On 5<sup>th</sup> October, 130 out of the expected 141 final years students returned to prepare for their exams that they will sit in the New Year, allowing them to graduate on schedule.



Teachers' computer training using the JDMSS ICT facility

To find out more about the school & how we support it, please do visit our website at [www.jdmss.co.uk](http://www.jdmss.co.uk). Sponsorships are always needed as are other donations to improve the school's infrastructure. Many thanks to all those who pray for and donate to JDMSS; both are essential to the continuance of the school.