

## St. Francis and Ezo, South Sudan: The Recent Years (March 2024)

Although St. Francis has had a covenant relationship with the Diocese of Ezo, South Sudan, for 26 years, it has been just in the last few years—since the arrival of Bishop Isaac Bangisa in 2021—that much of the St. Francis support has become evident. Bishop Isaac and his staff have developed a 5-year plan for Ezo that focuses on developing self-reliance and sustainability. It's a big job in an area where the Episcopal Church is the institution that provides schools, health care, and social services. The photos and captions below tell that story.

**2021:** At the 2020 St. Francis Gala, about \$20,000 was raised and earmarked for Ezo. However, Covid made it impossible to get the money there. But, with Bishop Isaac's arrival in Ezo, communication and cooperation improved, and the bishop was able to identify one of the greatest needs as CLEAN WATER! So, St. Francis sent most of that money to repair a water well on the Ezo Diocese compound, as well as to drill a new well outside the Masumbu Primary School to provide clean water to families in that area.



*People line up their water buckets to fill them from a working well!*



*Bishop Isaac and Mama Nora*

**An added benefit:** Girls are the ones who traditionally carry water from rivers to their homes to boil when there is no well nearby. Providing wells allows girls to stay in school because they aren't needed for hauling water.

**2022:** St. Francis sent funds to help support the schools of Ezo, which are run by the church. Much of the money was used for feeding the children. The Masumbu Primary School, one of several schools that the church runs in Ezo, has more than 700 students.

South Sudan is the poorest country in the world, and warfare and strife often disrupt the farming cycle, leading to famine.

Bishop Isaac initiated a vegetable gardening program at all the schools so that the children learn about growing their native foods, and the school gardens provide food for them to eat.



*Children at the Masumbu Primary School eat lunch.*





Also in 2022, St. Francis sent funds to help feed the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from neighboring areas like Tambura who ended up in Ezo after warfare. Bishop Isaac and the people of Ezo were extremely grateful for St. Francis' support in providing food for more than 100 people seeking refuge in Ezo.

*Displaced people in Ezo receive food and supplies.*

**2023:** St. Francis held its first "Ezo Sunday" during Lent and kicked off a fundraiser to provide bicycles for about 3 dozen clergy in Ezo. There are very few cars in Ezo, and people walk most places. Before they received their bicycles, the clergy throughout the diocese walked many miles while serving their parishes. The bicycles were gladly received, and there was a ceremony to bless them.



*Clergy from around the Diocese of Ezo receive bikes.*

**Also in 2023,** St. Francis sent funds to support Ezo's Peace Event, which brought together tribes that had been at war. Among the activities were evangelism and a multiday soccer tournament for the young men who had previously engaged in violence.

**2024:** This year's Lenten fundraiser for Ezo will go toward helping them build a community hall. The church members will make the sun-dried bricks and build the structure, but they also need to buy cement, metal supports, doors, windows, and other supplies. If you'd like to contribute, make your check out to "St. Francis Episcopal Church," and put "Ezo fundraiser" in the memo line.



**How can St. Francis afford to support Ezo so generously when our church has its own financial struggles?**

That's a fair question. Almost all of the money that we send to Ezo comes from fundraisers and from the donations of individuals. Only a small percentage comes out of the church's operating budget. It's very important for St. Francis parishioners to pledge and support St. Francis; beyond that, giving to Ezo is a way to share our bounty with our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world.

**Would you like to become involved in the St. Francis ministry with Ezo?** Contact Jack Mathias at [jackmathi@aol.com](mailto:jackmathi@aol.com).