

# NALC missionary begins work with refugee children from South Sudan

*By Pastor Frank Rothfuss*

On Sunday night, Dec. 15, the dry tinder of political unrest and tribalism was ignited by a gunfight within the elite Palace Guard. The fighting spread to the streets of South Sudan's capital city, Juba, where the bodies of soldiers and civilians began to litter the streets.

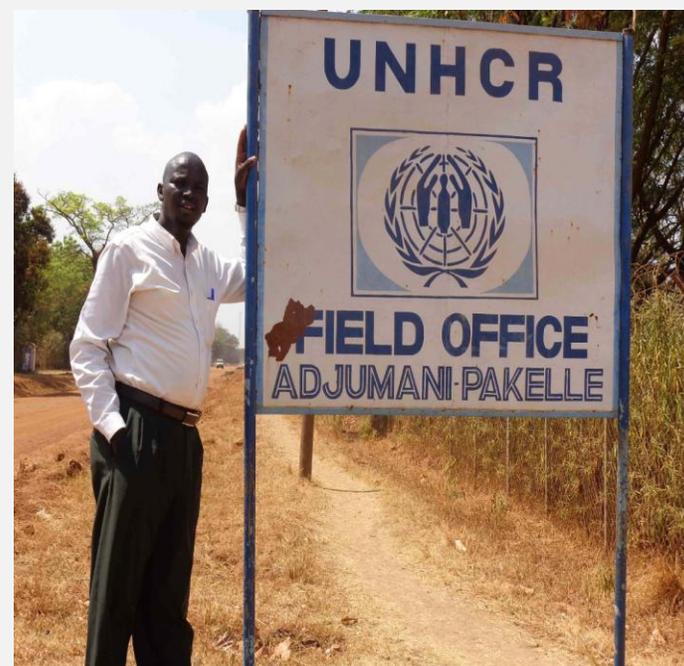
A civil war quickly spread throughout the country, with the heaviest fighting happening in Bor where St. Luke's Theological College had just finished its first year of classes.

NALC Missionary, Pastor Matthew Riak, founder and principal of the College, was in Juba. Three days after the fighting broke out, the The college itself was looted by the rebels, and

U.S. Embassy evacuated him to Nairobi, Kenya, people fled Bor in fear and panic, swelling the ranks along with other American citizens. of refugees to over 500,000 displaced persons.



*NALC Missionary Pastor Matthew Riak visits refugees from South Sudan at a refugee camp in Adjumani, Uganda. Pastor Riak has started a ministry to the children in the camp.*



*Pastor Matthew Riak poses at the sign for the refugee camp at Adjumani, Uganda, of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee agency.*

It is Matthew's most sincere hope that the fighting in South Sudan will dissipate and that St. Luke's Theological College will be able to reopen its doors in September for the new semester.

Matthew, who had felt called by God to help equip leaders for church and community in South Sudan, now felt called to do something to help the South Sudanese refugees.

Having spent 20 years in a refugee camp as one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan," Matthew knew something about such camps, and he thought St. Luke's Theological College could help.

In January, Matthew visited Adjumani, Uganda, where more than 36,000 refugees flooded a camp

built for 400 people. Basic resources were in short supply — new arrivals had to wait for shelter; people stood in lines for hours to get water and food. Eighty-five percent of the refugees in Adjumani were women and children. Many of the children were separated from their parents and families.

Matthew's heart went out to these children, who were at great risk of neglect, abuse, trafficking and forced military recruitment. As Matthew discussed the situation with relief agencies, and St. Luke's administrators and supporters from the United States, the vision of a mission center where displaced children could find a child-friendly environment where they could feel safe and secure began to take form. Recreational activities would draw children in and give them something to do: playing soccer or dodge ball, singing and dancing, listening to Bible stories and praying together. Volunteer adults from the camp would lead small-group discussions as the children reflected on the Bible stories and their own experiences.



These small-group leaders would encourage children to express their feelings and talk about the trauma they had witnessed and experienced. A professional counselor would be available to help those children who needed more in-depth counseling to process their terror and trauma. The mission center could also be used to provide some food — perhaps snacks during the day or even a meal once or twice a week.

St. Luke's CORE — Child Outreach in Refugee Empowerment — is a short-term mission at the Adjumani refugee camp with a capacity for 100 children. This ministry of St. Luke's with refugee children in its short time of existence has already brought God's message of hope and love in the midst of fear, uncertainty and need.

Working together with various NGOs, Lutheran World Federation, the United Nations' World Food Project, and other United Nations' agencies, Matthew is seeking to provide for the most basic of people's needs.

At this time there is great need for prayers and financial assistance. Please consider supporting this mission by visiting the Great Commission Society's website to adopt this family and mission today: [www.thenalc.org/great-commission-society](http://www.thenalc.org/great-commission-society).



*Pastor Matthew Riak poses with sign from St. Luke's outreach program to refugee children.*