



# MISSION CONNECTIONS

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Spring 2022



## Listening

**Sharon Kandel**  
*Mission co-worker  
serving in the Horn of  
Africa*

Dear friends,

### Listening.

That is what my trip was all about: reconnecting and listening.

It had been two years since I visited with many of these partners, face to face, in person, sitting under trees, in offices or on long car rides. It felt wonderful to be in South Sudan, even if some of the conversations were difficult. Just to be able to sit and talk, laugh, and drink tea or coffee together was a gift. I will admit that being asked why I had been “afraid” to visit before now was hard to take. How could I explain that I was not afraid but rather that PC(USA) was being cautious in not wanting to expose people to COVID-19? This was not something easily understood in places where COVID was not seen as much more than just another disease that they had to deal with, like malaria and typhoid. But I did take the time to explain all of that. It was important to make sure there was a good understanding of my, in person, absence so that we could move forward. I was blessed by there being good, open conversation on this subject and the ability to move forward.

### Reconnecting with partners in South Sudan.

I was there for two weeks and, believe me, they were two very busy weeks. I spent my time just listening. Listening to the struggles of a church that is in conflict with each other, and where everyone is hurting. Listening to the hopes that everyone has for reconciliation. Listening to the hopes and dreams of a united church that can be a witness to those around them of what the church can and should be.

## Being a witness to the General Assembly of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SSPEC).

Listening to the opening comments and sermons. Listening to the hopes and dreams for a peaceful General Assembly with a peaceful change in leadership. Then listening to that peaceful change happen and the joy that all expressed in things going so well. Not that there were not some disagreements – I mean really, don’t we all have disagreements? Yet these were dealt with and not allowed to fester. Listening to the former moderator express his support for the new moderator.

## Visiting Ethiopia.

Listening to all the things that the church is doing with so little in the way of funds but with a commitment to God. Listening to the success of two Community Health Evangelism (CHE) programs and getting to visit those places. What a wonderful opportunity that was for me. It was also a challenge to hear the pain in the mothers’ voices as they lament the lack of education for their children. This is a very rural area that only just recently even had a road built to their community. Their words were, “we want our children to have a



Rev. James ParTap giving his opening message at the SSPEC GA

better life than we have had.” Listen as they tell of remembering the Hoekstra family who brought them the Word of God and how that family will always be a part of who they are. Also, listening to how thankful they are for their new synod president, a young man with lots of ideas and energy.

I also listened to the impact that COVID-19 has had on communities and pastors. The impact was found in closures and job losses. Some congregations were no longer able to support their pastors who have even more work now due to COVID and political unrest. Depression is a real concern as is displacement due to conflict.

### **Virtual versus in person.**

For the past two years I have listened via Zoom to these same partners but listening in person is so much different. When listening in person you can give support through gestures and facial expressions much better than you can on a Zoom call. In addition, when you speak to someone in person you can easily ask for quick clarification if you need to. This is often difficult to do during a video chat. The best part about in-person meetings is there is not quite the same time constraint as there is in a video call. So much is often said in the time before a meeting starts or as you are walking out of a meeting. There is also the opportunity to touch base with others who were in the same meeting and have something extra to add or might need extra clarification on a certain point. Zoom and other types of video calls are good, and I am glad that we are using them more and yet I hope they never take the place of opportunities to sit together around a good cup of coffee and just get to know each other better. It is often in the getting to know each other, our sense of humor, how we raise our children, challenges of caring for aging parents



**Sharon Kandel and Ariel Phillips enjoying mangos from a CHE location**

and even how we met our spouses, that relationships grow and become stronger. It is how we learn to understand that even though there are cultural differences, there are so many things that we can connect on.

I listened a lot on this last trip and by listening I learned about myself and about the people I am blessed to call partners and friends. There is more than just listening to be done but I think we start with listening and then moving forward together. I pray I can continue to listen and learn and to be challenged to grow and change.

Thank you for your prayers as I travel, listen and learn. Pray that I can have an open heart and mind to what I am hearing, and that God will give me the words to say when it is my turn to be listened to.

Sharon

**Please see below for updated fund numbers to give in honor of Sharon's ministry.**

## ***Thank you for reading my letter!***

*Please consider supporting Presbyterian Mission through my ministry. I am grateful for your prayers, personal communication and financial support.*

### **Gifts may be sent to:**

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
P.O. Box 643700  
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

### **On the memo line, please write:**

**"in honor of Sharon Kandel's ministry—E132192" (individual giving)**

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**Give online: [pcusa.org/sharon-kandel](https://pcusa.org/sharon-kandel)**

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*Thank you for your faithful support.*