

July 4, 2005

Dear friends,

As a father of a five-year-old boy, I found it difficult to look at photographs of starving children in Sudan. So for many years I turned away from those images when they appeared on television or in newspapers and magazines. I knew that genocide was occurring in Sudan but I couldn't reconcile those terrible images with the image of my beloved son, who was healthy, happy and full of life.

Then one night, a discussion about the Sudan crisis was broadcast on a public television station. I remember having a long argument with myself about whether or not to watch it. Finally, I decided not to turn away. As I listened to the discussion about the tragic plight of millions of innocent Sudanese, I realized that there wasn't any difference between my son and the little Sudanese boy on the television screen. The chasm between my son and the Sudanese boy disappeared in an instant. I looked at the parents in the refugee camps and realized they had the same feelings and hopes for their children as I did for my son. When I heard the story of a young mother carrying her child across a hot desert for days without food or water, I knew that I couldn't turn away any longer. I had to do something.

The first thing I did was to write this letter:

Dear Sudan,

We see your suffering, dying people. We refuse to turn away from genocide. We care enough to feed 55,000 refugees in Sudan for one day. That is the population of our community. We trust that other communities will do the same. We strive to ensure that hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees who face death by starvation and disease will not have to die. We know what it is like to be mothers and fathers, children and grandparents, friends and community. We also know that even though you are far away, you are just like us, mothers and fathers, children and grandparents, friends and community. We are making a small contribution so that you may live another day. You may never know our names, and we may never know your names, but we are one.

Love, Petaluma

After writing the letter, I showed it to several local pastors. They responded by forming a small committee that organized the "Dear Sudan, Love Petaluma" campaign. We raised \$8,800 for the refugees in Sudan, enough to feed 55,000 people for one day – the population of Petaluma. Later, a few nearby cities organized similar campaigns. Today, we are asking communities across North America to organize Dear Sudan campaigns so that we can feed all the refugees in Sudan and bring an end to the genocide in Darfur.

I hope you will explore our Web site and launch a Dear Sudan campaign in your community. You can call, email or submit a blog entry with any questions, comments or ideas you want to share. Since that moment when I decided to no longer turn away, I've learned that the words and images of the Sudanese refugees are sacred stories. We want to hear your stories too.

Tim Nonn