

## Interview with Severino – Conducted March 2006

::: Bob Schnidler, Severino Maira Janus

Severino – founder of the Evangelical Free Church of Sudan

\* Bob: What does Partnership mean to you?

\* Severino: Partnership is the tool that 2 or 3 organizations come together for a common purpose; both can work together to glorify God. Ecclesiastes 4:9 – says that 2 are better than one because if one is lacking something the other one can try to help and that is the meaning of the partnership. Partnership is people coming together to compliment each other's efforts.

\* Bob: How has partnership helped you in your ministry?

\* Severino: Partnership has helped us in various ways. 1. Helps us to connect with the outside world and that is a very important thing for us partnering with you. 2. Helps us to help the pastors to go ahead in evangelism and do the work. 3. Helps partners to join together in fellowship and further the kingdom of God.

\* Bob: Do you find that without partnership it is a harder, isolated, lonelier attempt to advance the gospel?

\* Severino: Of course, the work of the gospel is not man's work because with Jesus it is about being a disciple. Therefore, go and make disciples. He said this continuing to be with us, and we are partnering with Jesus. At the same time, the Holy Spirit is the one helping us. If you do not have anyone helping you, it would be very hard for someone to work alone. We cannot work on our own, Severino or Mission One, because we need each other and we compliment each other's efforts.

\* Bob: What would you say to someone who said that when you partner together especially when it involves sending funds to help with projects or support for workers that it causes the indigenous church to be weak and dependent instead of strong and independent?

\* Severino: That is the nature of men. In most cases if we say that we do not need support it would be very difficult for the ministry to go ahead. We know that the only person that we rely on day to day is Jesus Christ. Whatever you give, you are not only giving to us, but you are giving to the work of God, and that is what I know. Whatever we do together, it is not for our own good, but for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

\* Bob: one time recently, you and I were talking about partnership, and we talked about the importance of partnership being brother to brother. It's not father to son, or strong to weak, but brother to brother and a partnership is between 2 equal partners. Each brings something to the relationship. Let's talk a little bit about what it is that you feel the church in America can bring to a healthy partnership and what the church of Sudan can bring to a healthy partnership.

\* Severino: I am a child of God and all of us are the children of God. When I lived in college, the child of the US, God has blessed them and given them material things and

also we in Sudan and elsewhere in neighboring countries have the zeal of the Word of God and we can share. We not only share the material things, but also information about how we can advance the kingdom of God and that is very important. We need to live together as brothers who have been saved and you have a common goal to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ and that is what ties us together.

\* Bob: So you bring to the partnership the same zeal and call and the common vision that we have to the least reached peoples and minister to the poor and needy and ultimately be the light of the world and the salt of the earth that Jesus commands us to be. That is the basis of which we come together as brothers to advance the gospel, right?

\* Severino: Exactly, and actually we as partners are refreshing one another. To partner and to pull all the partners together is to focus on something that is refreshing one another and shepherding one another for a better ministry, that way bringing glory to God.

\* Bob: And it's about the glory of God, right?

\* Severino: Oh, yes.

\* Bob: That's your passion and that's our passion.

\* Severino: Yea, that's right.

\* Bob: You bring to the partnership also, not just a calling of God and a zeal for the gospel, but you also bring language skills, understanding of the culture, a consistency of ministry, you are on the field, and don't come back to your country of origin so you have a consistent, effective ministry on the field that is a very valuable part of the partnership.

\* Severino: We partner with our brothers to establish connection and build bridges to the nations, because we are not the same, and with that you may have something that you know better than myself and I can learn from you at the same time you can learn from me. Maybe I know something that you don't know and there we strengthen our relationship to better the kingdom of God.

\* Bob: I have heard you say on several occasions that your desire for the church of Sudan is to be self-supporting and self-governing. Talk a little bit about your desire for the church in your part of the world.

\* Severino: I want to eliminate some of the feelings that other partners might have most of the time that you are relying on us and here it brings interruption to the relationship. It brings interruption to the fellowship that we should associate as children of the light, and children of the kingdom. What I want to see in the church in Sudan is the ability to work. God has given us the land, we need to utilize that land and we also need to teach our people that our help does not just come from outside, but God is rich and he had made these things also available to us so we need to take them and use them to advance the gospel and use skills and become responsible. Then they will be able to support their workers and become self-supporting. Now when they do become self-supporting, etc that does not mean that we can stop our partnership but continue in strength, as we are strong in the Lord together.

\* Bob: tell me a little bit more about the thesis that you did in your studies and how that fits into your vision for the church.

\* Severino: Well, I see that the church is having many problems, many pastors are deserting their ministry and believers are not taking the responsibility to support the ministers of the church. I found that it was bothering me as a leader. I found that it was difficult to continue in such leadership. When I went back to school, I thought it was very good to see something that would help and I came up with that thesis which the title is: the significance of integrating curriculum for training. What I mean here is that the Word of God has to be taught to those men and women who are to go and win the lost to the Kingdom of God. But, also we need to empower them by giving them some of the skills so that they will be able to utilize those skills in order to be able to care for their families and to be able to train men and young men to support and get food for themselves and to strengthen the youth and the church. Then, many will see that through their ministers and the church how far they have come. That was my aim, my passion, and my zeal. I would love to see those things happen in Sudan.

\* Bob: so, your thesis had to do with teaching 70% theology and 30% vocational skills.

\* Severino: Exactly, 70% theology because that is the main focus, but the support is key because it gives some light to the pastors.

\* Bob: They can use that to not only help to provide for their families, but they can then in turn teach the skills to other church members and brings the whole economic status of the whole community higher.

\* Severino: The Word of God says that we need to be the light and the salt of the world. How do we become like that by affecting the lives of the community. We have to influence the community by offering them such skills so that they can see the importance, and from there it will not only build up the church but also increase the economic status.

\* Bob: Tell us what is going on in the Sudan right now and bring us up to date with the current situation.

\* Severino: Well, what is happening in the Sudan right now, in Southern Sudan we are currently experiencing relative peace and many of those who left and those in refugee camps are not coming back home. We are experiencing the challenges of how we can help these people resettle and that brings us to the middle of our concern here. We see when helping them the needs. We have a lack of clean water, lack of clinics, etc.

- Bob gave brief history of the Sudan...

\* Bob: Give us a feel for what is happening in southern Sudan right now and what you see as the opportunities as Sudanese church leader.

\* Severino: Generally what I see is that people are happy about the peace and everyone wants to see what they have been separated from for a long time. We are now receiving large influx of people from east Africa including Uganda, Congo, and Kenya, also some that are displaced in Khartoum who are now coming back to southern Sudan. Their return to us is a true gift, because our concern for the people is to help them settle and thinking about how we can provide them with education, and how we are able to provide them with clean water and how we can help rehabilitate them so that they can settle in their land. We are looking forward to the integration of communities and it provides

opportunities for churches and organizations to come in and help us to provide services to these people who are coming.

\* Bob: If you were speaking to the church in America and some of your friends here what are some things that you would say are important first of all for us to pray about in regard to Southern Sudan today?

\* Severino: Well, I know there is a huge need in Southern Sudan because we are starting to rebuild at a zero level and we have nothing that the people can depend on. We have the land, but with that land we need to know how cultivate that land. We need help developing clean water specifically with many people coming in order to prevent disease such as cholera and others.

\* Bob: You told us recently that even the cholera epidemic has affected your own family.

\* Severino: Yes, cholera has happened in many regions in Southern Sudan and my wife lost 8 of her relatives due to that epidemic. That is the cause of unclean water and people share the water with the animals and because of the lack of proper hygiene and people misuse the little bit of water that is there and that is what brings sicknesses.

\* Bob: Tell us about the infrastructure of Southern Sudan, because of the war, it has destroyed the development, right?

\* Severino: Yes, in fact, those like me who live in Uganda, planning on going back to Southern Sudan; I have to think about my children. How are they going to learn since the schools have been destroyed? Hospitals and even roads have all been destroyed. In fact, there is no infrastructure in Sudan and that is one thing where the government and the church work hand in hand to get some things in place. The church comes up with some Christian schools. If we can begin to help with these things then that is the beginning of the infrastructure of the nation.

\* Bob: So, the American church should be praying that God would work mightily among you for even some of the basic needs that much of the rest of the world often takes for granted.

\* Severino: Yes, in fact it's not only just praying. Yes, but we also need you. We need you to come. Come because most of our people lack the skills. We need the skills that you have to bring to us the teachers, the doctors, etc. We need all these people to come to help build the infrastructure of Southern Sudan and the peace stays stronger. We need your prayers, but also your presence.

\* Bob: At Mission One, we have just launched what we call the Sudan Initiative and we want to come along our partners in Sudan and do what we can to help. What is it in partnership that we can provide that would be of greatest benefit to you?

\* Severino: I just want to say that having a move to an initiative in Southern Sudan is the greatest one. That you have wisely thought about it, we need you to come and help us in order to mobilize the church to help the national missionaries who are now taking the task to spread the gospel – that is something that you need to do. And I want to appeal to even the church in America, that an organization like that of Mission One, those are the organizations that are working directly with those in the field and they need to be

supported so that they will continue to be able to support other people, like us at the Evangelical Free Church in Southern Sudan. They need to continue to be given a push so that they can continue to do things better.

\* Bob: We have partnered with the evangelical free church of Sudan for many years now and partners with you since 1991 and the evangelical Free Church that was founded in 1993. Through our partnership we have been able to come alongside several national missionaries and as your team has developed and gone into the refugee camps in northern Sudan and Kenya, Uganda, southern Sudan, etc. Tell us a little bit about the fruit of your ministry and what you have seen happening in these years even though the war has been going on and has been very difficult.

\* Severino: Indeed, it has been a time that God has used us in various ways. We have been able to plant many churches. We have been able to plant 54 churches in the different areas. We have been moving and we do not do that by our own effort alone but because you have stood by us and supported us.

\* Bob: So, our partnership has made a difference?

\* Severino: Yes, I will say Yes.

\* Bob: Would it be true if I said that our partnership has accelerated the growth of the church in terms of reaching the least reached and ministering to the needs of the poor?

\* Severino: Yes that's right. Because the Free Church of Sudan and Mission One have a partnership we have been able to reach out to the people and win some of them to the true knowledge of God. It is true that through the partnership that we have, even for ladies providing some of them with sewing machines, that was a great thing. It has been a great support and help that you have done and we work together.

\* Bob: it is an honor to be your partner and come along side of you. As a result of humanitarian relief, I believe that you have told us more than one church has sprung up in that area, how many congregations are there and is the gospel taking root?

Severino: The church is growing and moving out and ahead to others.

\* Bob: In short summary, what has the partnership with Mission One meant to you personally and to the workers with you? Has it been an encouragement, has it been helpful, and if so, how?

\* Severino: It is helpful because of the support that you are bringing to us. It means a lot to us. You have helped me, my family, and that has given me strength to go to the field and sharing the Word of God with people and the growth of the ministry has spread and started new ministries among other people.

\* Bob: Do you feel that the future for Sudan is bright and hopeful?

\* Severino: If peace holds, I would say yes. The future is there when people utilize the land and people settle, many things will happen in Sudan. The building of University will happen and I am sure that will bring hope to the people of Sudan.

\* Bob: You have told us recently that you have become aware of a plan that Muslims have to go into Southern Sudan. Tell us about that and how that needs to be combated.

\* Severino: Well, that's right. In fact, the first time that I came across the document, the organization of spreading Islam in Southern Sudan they were asking the Islamic world to give \$28 million for their plan to 1. Build a mosque, 2. Build schools, 3. Build clinics, 4. Provide people with clean water, 5. And train. These people are able to spread Islam, and defend Islam. Since they think that Southern Sudan wants to secede from northern Sudan, with the money they will be able to win the people to Islam and fall for unity where the Islamic religion will be dominant, and we as a church know that that is a threat. It is a very big threat where we need to devise means of ways to combat.

\* Bob: What do you think the answer is? What is the responsibility of the church?

\* Severino: Come alongside us so we can continue to move against the Islamic plan. We together, we can do it.

\* Bob: We can do it together.

\* Severino: Yes, we can.

\* Bob: None of us can do it by ourselves,

\* Severino: Right.

\* Bob: If you could give us one prayer request, what would it be?

\* Severino: Pray for us to go and minister to the people and for the church in the US to provide resources so we can empower the church and spread the gospel. Further than that, for the people to come and work with us side by side.

\* Bob: We love, appreciate, and honor you for the work that you have done and have a vision to do in the coming years. We will be praying for you and coming along side of you brother to brother, not just you personally, but all working in Sudan.

\* Bob: What does heaven mean to you?

\* Severino: I, as a Christian, longing to be there to be with my God in fellowship with Him. Also, where all work that we talk about, we don't, because it is complete, and we come together becoming one race, one language, praising God.