Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of Motherwell

To be shared with Parishioners on Sunday 14 March – SCIAF Sunday

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I write on behalf of the Bishops of Scotland on this the fourth Sunday of Lent to thank you for your generous and prayerful support for SCIAF – the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund - over the past year.

In the Gospels, we hear of many occasions when Jesus heals the sick, reaching out with love and mercy to the most marginalised and the poorest, both in action and in spirit.

As Catholics we are called to follow his example, to recognise that we are our brother or sister's keeper. To reach out to the poorest with love. SCIAF is the embodiment of the love of our Church in Scotland, reaching out to our vulnerable sisters and brothers around the world. It is why during Lent, we ask you to give generously to support the vital work SCIAF does on our behalf.

This has been a difficult twelve months for all of us, but through WEE BOX and collection donations, gifts in wills and direct debits, SCIAF have continued to help the poorest people in the world.

SCIAF is extremely grateful that last year, generous parishioners raised £945,218 to help survivors of gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Victims of a devastating war which lasted more than 20 years. Where many were killed, displaced and are in need due to ongoing violence.

Through SCIAF's Church partners these vulnerable survivors, mostly women and girls, were given the medical care and trauma counselling they needed to recover, and gained new skills to build a better life. That is our faith in action.

This year, SCIAF ask us to look to another country where frequent conflict has left behind a legacy of fear, displacement and despair, making it one of the world's poorest and most fragile states. Children with disabilities were already the most vulnerable in society. Now, the coronavirus pandemic has deepened already existing issues of poverty, putting them at greater risk. When a crisis comes, be it conflict, famine or even the coronavirus, it's the poorest and most vulnerable children who suffer most.

Many children with disabilities in South Sudan are not able to go to school or, later on, to work and earn a living. They may have no access to support services or hospitals for treatment. They may face stigma and exclusion. Due to a lack of access to education and opportunities, disabled children can miss out on vital learning that helps them to break out of the cycle of poverty, unlock their potential and live life to the full.

Through SCIAF the Scottish Catholic Church can help children with disabilities in South Sudan to access the education and support they need to build a bright future. SCIAF will reach the poorest people first and put our faith into action.

With the support of parishes, SCIAF's work in South Sudan will provide a lifeline for children with disabilities and their families. Our support will help to adapt schools so that pupils with disabilities can access education. Children will be provided with aids such as wheelchairs, ramps, hearing aids and canes, as well as healthcare to help them live more independently.

For example, just £35 could buy a classroom desk so a pupil with a disability doesn't need to sit on the floor.

I am delighted to let you know that this year, all donations to SCIAF's WEE BOX, BIG CHANGE appeal, made before ***11th May***, will be doubled by the UK government. Your donations will help SCIAF's life changing work around the world, while match funding from the UK government will provide a lifeline to children with disabilities, their families and communities in South Sudan, helping them to build bright futures. Thank you for your continued generosity; know that it goes towards good work.

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As Lent continues and we look forward to the celebration of Christ's resurrection, please remember SCIAF and everyone they work with in your prayers.

May God bless you and your families during the holy season of Lent and throughout the year.

+ Joseph Toal,

Bishop President of SCIAF

On behalf of the Bishop's Conference of Scotland

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