Thirty years ago, William Deng made the decision to flee Sudan as a 10-year-old.. Born in the small town of Marialba within the Aweil diocese, he was living in the African nation during the civil war between North and South Sudan in the late 1980s when his home was targeted by arsonists.

“I was young then, I did not really know what went wrong in the country, so I ran. My house was burnt down, my cows and goats were taken. There was shooting and we were looted. There was nothing left, so I decided to run for my life. It was really fight or flight for me.”

Bishop Deng lost his family when he fled to Ethiopia. He stayed there for four years before moving to Kenya, then to Seattle, Washington for almost 12 years as a Lost Boy of Sudan. The Lost Boys of Sudan was the name given to more than 20,000 orphaned or displaced South Sudanese children who fled to escape death or induction into the northern army during the war. They walked thousands of kilometres to reach the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, with many dying on the trek.

“In 1997 I heard from my mum, my sister and two brothers. I said to them, ‘Where is my dad?’ and nobody knew where he was and it was the same with my two sisters. In 2002, I found out my dad was alive … he had run to the western part of Sudan and I had run to the eastern part.”

In 2001, he was one of almost 4000 boys granted asylum in the United States. “I had separated from my family because they ran in a different direction in Sudan,” he says. Deng went through the ordination process in the Diocese of Olympia, having been sponsored by St. James Episcopal Church in Kent, and was ordained a priest at St. Mark’s Cathedral in 2011.

Deng moved to Adelaide, Australia in 2013 to be with his wife, Linda, and children. He served as priest in charge at the Anglican Parish of St Mary’s since 2014, in the suburb of St Marys and was also appointed Canon for South Sudanese Ministry on staff at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Adelaide, where he served beside the Aboriginal Bishop of Australia and Dean of the Cathedral The Rt. Rev. Chris McLeod.

Earlier this year, Canon Deng traded the familiar pews of St Mary’s Anglican Church in South Road, Adelaide, for a diocese of more than 600,000 people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan, when he was elected as the second Bishop of Aweil, Canon William is stepping into a role that is as daunting as it is prestigious – and he is doing it for free.

The greatest sacrifice is personal, though. His wife, Linda (Achol), and their six children – Mawien, 21, Deng, 19, Amiir, 17, Leek, 12, Abak, 10, and Wol, 5 – will remain in Adelaide.

“I spent 12 years in the United States and I moved. Now, 12 years in Australia and I move again,” he reflects. “So the next 12 years will be in South Sudan… God knows,” says Deng

He returns to a church in Sudan that is exploding in numbers. While Anglicanism in Australia and the Episcopal Church in the United States faces declining attendance, the church in South Sudan is a powerhouse. Canon William estimates his new diocese alone covers a city population of roughly 500,000 to 600,000 people in a country where there are nearly 4 million Anglicans and 61 dioceses.

The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan has grown to such strength from a base formed by early missionaries from the Church Missionary Society, such as Archibald Shaw who arrived in 1905, establishing a mission station at Malek, just south of Bor. Despite baptising only one person in his first 10 years, Shaw’s commitment to living among the Dinka people laid a foundation that helped the church become a pillar of hope during the country’s long civil wars.

Deng received his Australian citizenship just days before he travelled to the Sudan for his consecration in Febreuary. “It is God’s grace and I will still trust God will provide,” he says. “I will still believe that God has something for me and that something is greater than the salary I got.”

Deng has travelled to Washington State to visit with friends here and will be preaching at Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett at both morning services (8am & 10am) this Sunday, September 27, 2026, with The Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton presiding.