

NEWS FROM SACRED HEART SEMINARY ARCHDIOCESE OF GULU, UGANDA

Volume 1 No 14 June 2004

FROM THE DESK OF MSGR. MATTHEW ODONG – RECTOR

Dear Friends and Benefactors,
The peace of the Lord be with you! Pax Domini Vobis! Kuc pa Rwotwa obed botwu!

The students and staff of Sacred Heart Seminary join me in sending you our sincere greetings of peace, love and joy in the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

It is our hope and prayers that the good Lord continues to hold you in the palm of His Hand. Please accept our sentiments of gratitude for your solidarity with us in prayers and all the support we have received from your kindness and love.

We know and feel your concern for us. We know how many of you are concerned and anxious to know how we are doing amidst the ongoing war in Northern Uganda.

As part of my update, let me begin by sharing with you my recent experience here. A few days ago, I visited one of the largest refugee camps at Pabo, a suburb 24 Km away from the Seminary. This camp has about 62,000 people living in it. It is really congested and doesn't reflect a healthy environment for human habitation. A few days before my visit, nearly a thousand grass-thatched huts were burnt leaving the refugees without shelter and basic necessities. As I walked among the burnt grass thatched huts, my mind and heart kept wondering in deep sorrow and one question came into my mind; if Jesus was physically present here what would He do for all these people whose dignity, income, economy, health and social life have been eaten up by the effects of the 18 years of war? I would imagine Jesus, full of compassion and love saying something like this; "Do not loose hope...I am with you in your suffering...I love you...get up, pick up your mat, be freed from these unbearable living conditions and go in peace." This compassionate attitude of Jesus Christ is what our world today needs for the liberation of the oppressed and all victims of war and conflict.

Northern Uganda has 63 internally displaced persons camps spread out in the three districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum in the Archdiocese of Gulu. Life in these camps can be compared to hell on earth. The most affected people in these camps are children and women. It is a real human tragedy. I appeal to all people of good will to come on board in solidarity with our people through advocacy and humanitarian aid to bring relief to these members of the Body of Christ.

PRIESTLY FORMATION

Since the abduction of 41 seminarians by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) on May 11, 2003, Sacred Heart Seminary continues to operate normally. 29 of the abducted seminarians have managed to escape from captivity. Thanks for your powerful prayers. We continue to pray for the remaining 12 seminarians still in captivity. We thank you for your

support, which enabled us to construct a perimeter wall around the seminary to provide security to our young future priests.

ORDINATION TO PRIESTHOOD

With great joy, I announce to you the good news of five of our deacons who will be ordained priests on Saturday, August 7, 2004 in St. Joseph's Cathedral Gulu. These are the men you have been praying for and supporting during their priestly studies. Please remember them in your prayers that they may truly live their priestly vows with love, commitment and shining examples of holiness in leading humanity to God. They are Rev. Deacon Uma Eric (Lacor parish), Rev. Deacon Opio Seraphine Richard (Gulu Cathedral parish), Rev. Deacon Oloya Charles (Patongo parish), Rev. Deacon Kolo David (Gulu Cathedral parish/Layibi sub-parish) and Rev. Deacon Olweny Charles (Patongo parish).

After their ordination, they will be assigned to parishes for pastoral work. The biggest challenge being faced by the Archbishop and I is lack of funds to provide transportation to these young priests. We would love to provide each of them with the cheapest transportation, a motorcycle for their apostolate. The cost of each motorcycle is \$4,000. They will also need a mass kit with chalice and vestments for the celebration of the Eucharist. You are invited to come to our aid. Again, thank you for supporting vocations to the priesthood.

ARCHBISHOP FLYNN COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Due to the high level of poverty caused by the 18 year old conflict in the Archdiocese of Gulu, we have felt the need to construct a comprehensive secondary school to be named after Archbishop Harry Flynn of the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis in appreciation for the generosity of our American friends in Minnesota. Our intention for construction of this school was accepted and blessed by His Grace Archbishop Harry Flynn in September 2003 at a reception hosted by Pete and Dottie Truax.



Msgr. Matthew carries the cross of Jesus in refugee camp on Good Friday.

The school is meant to address the pressing needs of nearly 800 children in the war-affected district of Pader. Pader district does not have a secondary school to offer opportunity for quality education to the children in this area. Most of the parents of these children are in the internally displaced persons camps where they do not earn any income to support the education of their sons and daughters outside Pader district. The school will be for both girls and boys, age 13 to 22. We have acquired the land. Now we need to construct classrooms, dormitory, library, staff room, kitchen, dining hall and drill a well. We invite all our dear friends to support this viable project to give a future to the children. Remember the words of our Lord to His disciples; "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, that you have done for me... When I was hungry, naked..." (Mt. 25:45).

HUMANITARIAN AID

Nearly 950,000 people in Northern Uganda lack food, clothing, clean drinking water, medical supplies, educational facilities for children, shelter, etc. The number of orphans has increased dramatically. Every day nearly 10,000 children seek refuge in Catholic institutions in the three districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum for fear of being abducted by the rebels. The plight and the cry of the Acholi people need the concern of the International Community before genocide takes place. We thank you, our American friends, for sharing your blessings with your brothers and sisters in Northern Uganda.

With prayers and love always.



Msgr. Matthew Odong
Rector

GRATITUDE FROM SEMINARIANS

Dear Friends,

Greetings and prayers for you from all the Seminarians of Sacred Heart Seminary. On behalf of my fellow Seminarians I write to say "thank you" to each one of you for your continuous support, care, love and prayers for us. Truly, we have experienced the power of your prayers in various ways during the trying moments in our lives especially when the rebels attacked our Seminary on May 11, 2003 and 41 of us were abducted into captivity by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). Because of your prayers and sacrifices, some of us managed to escape from the hands of our captors in the bush. There was little food – often we would eat only every second day. We would eat raw plants like cassava, mangoes and other wild plants. Without your prayers, I would not have had the courage to escape. One night, while sleeping near one of the LRA commanders, I got up and moved away from where the group was sleeping to come back home. Along the way I passed through many difficulties and dangers from wild animals and snakes until I reached home. I thought I would die but Jesus protected me. Please continue to offer prayers for our 12 fellow Seminarians who are still in captivity so that the good Lord may be their protector, guide and light to lead them back home safely.

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude all the support you have given to us over the years. We thank you for the precious gift of the COMPUTERS, which have helped make tremendous progress in our studies at the seminary. About the middle of March a strong storm blew the roof off of our dinning hall and assembly hall. Thanks to your contributions, the roofs have been repaired. Last but not least, we also thank you for helping us construct a perimeter wall around the seminary to improve our security. May the good Lord bless and reward you for your kindness and generosity.

In spite of all the challenges we are encountering here, the good news is that five of our Deacons will be ordained priests on August 7th. Pray that we too may persevere in our vocation so that one-day we may reach the altar of the Lord as Deacons and Priests.

The Peace of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ be with you always.
Sincerely yours,
Jimmy Ocira



Deacon Phillip Maurice Apiya being presented by his parents for ordination.

MONSIGNOR ODONG VISITS FLORIDA IN MARCH

Monsignor John Scully of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida invited Monsignor Odong to do an appeal at three parishes in March 2004. He spoke at 21 Masses over three weekends at St. Anthony's in Brooksville, St. Cecelia's in Clearwater and St. Theresa's in Spring Hill. Monsignor Matthew's smiling upbeat personality was warmly received by all of the parishes. He spoke about the 950,000 refugees in his own diocese and the poverty and inhuman conditions under which they are living. He also cited the problems with the rebel activity and how it has affected his work in the seminary and the Archdiocese as Rector and as the Vicar General. He told them "There are now 29 seminarians that have escaped from the rebels but still 12 unaccounted for."

A special prayer card was prepared for distribution to each parishioner, which read as follows:

Blessed Mother Mary, in unity with the U. S. Catholic Bishops "Call to Solidarity with Africa" we ask that you look with tender loving care on your poor suffering children in Acholiland, Northern Uganda.

Intercede with your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to protect and guard them. We pray that the leaders of Uganda will be filled with the grace necessary to establish peace and restore order to a deeply suffering people.

Lord, help us to remember your words that "Whatever you do for the least of my brethren, that you do unto me." We ask this in the name of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Amen.

Monsignor Matthew Odong

He also told the parishioners how fortunate they are to be Americans, with all of the food, beautiful homes, schools and security that they have. He told of how he doesn't sleep well with the sound of guns and explosions he hears almost every night and how well he sleeps while he is here.

As usual Monsignor Matthew sang and played his African musical instrument, the "Adungu" at the conclusion of each homily. He challenged each of the pastors to learn how to play it so they could lead their parishioners in song after he is gone.

He went back to Gulu on March 30th to be with his seminarians for Holy week. He said he gained over 15 pounds while he was here "after eating all of that ice cream and beef." He said, "Now I feel more like an American!!!!"



Carolyn Marhefka and Msgr. John Scully with Msgr. Matthew.



Msgr. Matthew, Sr. Josephine, instructor and seminarians in the computer lab.

SEMINARY HAS A NEW COMPUTER LAB

Two years ago, Bobbi Vaughan was reading a Jesuit magazine that featured a story about an organization called "Computers for Africa." It was started by a couple from Omaha that was refurbishing and upgrading used computers that they were shipping to Africa at no charge, except for freight and duty. It turned out that the couple was old friends and former parishioners with Dan and Bobbi Vaughan at their home parish, St. George's in Long Lake, Minnesota. Dan then contacted Tim and Ruth Leacock, who are now living in Omaha, about the possibility of getting 15 computers and printers for a computer lab for Sacred Heart Seminary.

They advised Dan that they were getting a container of computers ready to be shipped later that year and would be happy to help. Tim and Ruth were always very active at St. George's so it was no surprise that they would be doing something in a big way to help others. Sacred Heart Seminary received the pallet of computers in early 2003, but because of the abduction of the 41 seminarians and the extreme security problem that created, the computers could not be immediately installed. The good news is that they are now installed and are eagerly being used by the seminarians.

This is just another example of how "The Holy Spirit" has worked in this Apostolate for Monsignor Matthew and his people. All of you benefactors are gifts of The Holy Spirit. We want to extend special thanks and all of our blessings to Tim and Ruth Leacock, their family and all that are helping Computers for Africa in their wonderful work.

TWIN CITIES COUPLE WORKING IN UGANDA



Amy Finnegan and Mike Westerhaus

Amy Finnegan and Mike Westerhaus will be spending the months of July and August of this year working in Gulu, Uganda. This will be their second time visiting Uganda. After completing their undergraduate studies at Washington University in St. Louis they spent a year (2000-01) in Masaka, which is in the southwestern part of Uganda. The work they were doing then was working

in secondary schools on an after school, leadership program and on a pit latrine sanitation project. They visited Monsignor Matthew at Sacred Heart Seminary during Easter of 2001 and have kept in touch with him since that time. They view their time in Uganda as important in their formation and understanding of social justice.

Mike and Amy met at the Catholic Student Center at Washington University. Both were active in programs that linked faith with responsibility for social action. They were engaged in Uganda and have been married for nearly two years.

Amy, originally from Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is currently studying conflict resolution at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy-Tufts University in the Boston area. She will be working with the NGO, Human Rights Focus in Gulu as well as working with the Justice & Peace office in the Archdiocese of Gulu and the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative. One of the reasons that Amy decided to go to Uganda this summer is because she envisions a career in the field of conflict resolution and she felt it was paramount to then personally understand the challenges of living in a conflict zone. In addition to the internship, she hopes to collect information and experiences from a variety of people for her master's thesis.

Mike, originally from Cold Spring, Minnesota, is completing his third year of study at Harvard Medical School. Monsignor Matthew put him in touch with Dr. Bruno Corrado, director of St. Mary's Hospital Lacor. Dr. Corrado has assigned a mentor for Mike to work with during his rotation. Mike wants to work in the field of infectious diseases (malaria, HIV/AIDS, etc.). In general, he also hopes to work for a better understanding of the social and cultural forces that enable better healthcare in resource-poor settings. Mike and Amy will be living on the hospital grounds during their stay in Gulu. They will be departing for Gulu on July 5th and returning on September 3rd.

What an inspiration these young people are to all of us to give of their time and talent to improve the lives of our Ugandan brothers and sisters.

ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS WIN PEACE PRIZE

An inter-religious organization in troubled northern Uganda, which for the past seven years has struggled to restore peace to the region, has been declared winner of a peace prize by a Japanese foundation. The award consists of a certificate, a gold medal and 20 million yen (approximately \$185,000).

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in which the members of different religions, including Islam and Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican), work together, becomes the first organization in Africa to win the prize offered by the Niwano Peace Foundation of Japan.

"The Niwano Peace Foundation has decided to award the 21st Niwano Peace Prize to the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which works to promote an end to conflict, the defense of social justice and human rights, and the peaceful coexistence of different peoples in the East African country of Uganda," the Foundation said in a statement.

The Foundation said it had asked for recommendations from about 1,000 well-informed people in 125 countries around the world and conducted its deliberations in strict fairness before coming to their decision.

"In commemoration of the ARLPI's tremendous achievements, and in the hope that numerous more like-minded people will follow in their footsteps, we are most honored to present the 21st Niwano Peace Prize to the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative," the statement said in part.

ARLPI leaders, who include Catholic Archbishop John Baptist Odama (Archdiocese of Gulu & Chairman ARLPI), Anglican Bishop Nelson Onono-Onweng (Northern Uganda), the Acholi Khadi Sheikh Musa Khalil and the head of the Orthodox Church in Acholi, Father Julius Orach traveled to Tokyo to receive the prize on May 11, 2004.

Niwano was established in 1978 by a lay Buddhist Association to honor and encourage those who are devoting themselves to inter-religious co-operation in the cause of peace.

The award has previously been awarded to Catholic Archbishop Helder Camara and Cardinal Paulo Arns of Brazil.

100% of all funds received go directly to Monsignor Matthew for the work of the Church in the Archdiocese of Gulu. All of the costs of mailing, printing of the newsletter, accounting, office expenses, non-profit reporting to Federal and State agencies and travel expenses to Africa and Washington, DC are paid by the Vaughan and Truax families.



Msgr. Matthew comforts children returned from captivity. Boy in front was shot in the leg.

STEPS TOWARD PEACE

Pax Christi International-Festival of Hope Archbishop John Baptist Odama was invited to attend a workshop on International Peace and Reconciliation at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ May 19th to 23rd. Because of a conflict due to a prior commitment Odama sent Monsignor Matthew Odong, his vicar-general and secretary of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, to represent him at this conference. Following the workshop Odong will travel to Washington for high-level meetings with the U. S. Government arranged by Father Michael Perry, African Policy Advisor to the U. S. Bishops (USCCB). Pax Christi International funded this trip.

Cardinal Martini – Vatican Department of Justice and Peace will be visiting Uganda May 28th through June 3rd. Archbishop Odama and Archbishop Christopher Pierre (Apostolic Nuncio) will be traveling with him to Gulu, Kolongo, Kitgum and Ugandan Martyrs University. They will be at Ugandan Martyrs on June 3rd for the Ugandan Martyrs Feast Day.

Notre Dame Summer Institute for Peace – June 20-28 Archbishop Odama (bishop of Gulu) and Archbishop Paul Bakyenga (bishop of Mbarara & Chairman – Uganda Catholic Bishops) have been invited to attend this conference. Prior to their arrival at Notre Dame they will be in Washington for meetings with U. S. Government Officials being arranged by Dan Griffin of Catholic Relief Services (CRS). This trip will be funded by CRS. A comment that is often heard in Washington is that a particular issue is or is not on their **radar screen**. Certainly efforts made by many groups and individuals have put and are keeping the conflict in Northern Uganda on their **radar screens**. Let us hope that the attention being given to Northern Uganda by the International Community will bring peace in the near future.

BOOKS FOR AFRICA

We recently learned of Books for Africa, located in St. Paul, that has shipped millions of books to Africa since 1988. Publishers, schools, libraries, individuals and organizations donate the books. They are sorted and packed by volunteers, choosing books that are age and subject appropriate. They are shipped in containers to Africa. A 20-foot container contains about 25,000 books. The cost of shipping a 20-foot container to Uganda is \$9,600. Msgr. Matthew is very excited about this opportunity and is having the headmasters and headmistresses of schools in the Archdiocese of Gulu put together their wish lists of books they can use. Books are sorted by general categories of primary, secondary and post secondary schools. The wish list would then further be broken down into reading, math, science, etc. We hope to get a container shipped within the next couple of months.



Children at refugee camp waiting for food.



Msgr. Matthew holds baby after baptism.