

NEWS FROM SACRED HEART SEMINARY

ARCHDIOCESE OF GULU, UGANDA

Volume 1 No 15 December 2004

FROM THE DESK OF MSGR. MATTHEW ODONG – RECTOR

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Peace and God's blessings to you in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. The year 2004 has flown by so fast. Incredible to believe that soon we shall enter into another year of salvation, 2005! Our prayers and thoughts turn to each one of you with many wishes for God's protection, love, care and blessings to accompany you to a peaceful end of this year 2004 and a happy beginning of the New Year 2005.

Allow me to give you an update of our situation here in Northern Uganda:

PRIESTLY FORMATION AT SACRED HEART SEMINARY

The seminarians and staff send you their love and prayerful wishes. We attribute the success of priestly education at Sacred Heart Seminary to your prayers and generosity. The good news for us this year is that four were ordained priests on August 7th and another one will soon be ordained a priest bringing the number to five.

The new priests are grateful to each one of you for your prayers and support, which enabled them to reach the altar of the Lord. We put together your generous donations and were able to buy five motorcycles for them to facilitate their movement in pastoral ministries. Our local Church in Uganda is blessed with many vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Most seminaries are full with young men who feel called by Jesus Christ to become priests. Convents also show significant increases in the number of young girls who want to consecrate their lives to the service of the Church.

The biggest challenge facing most formation houses for priests and religious is lack of money to support, educate and maintain the young men and women who have responded to the call of Jesus Christ to witness with their lives the values of the Kingdom of God to the poor, the marginalized and broken hearted in our world today.

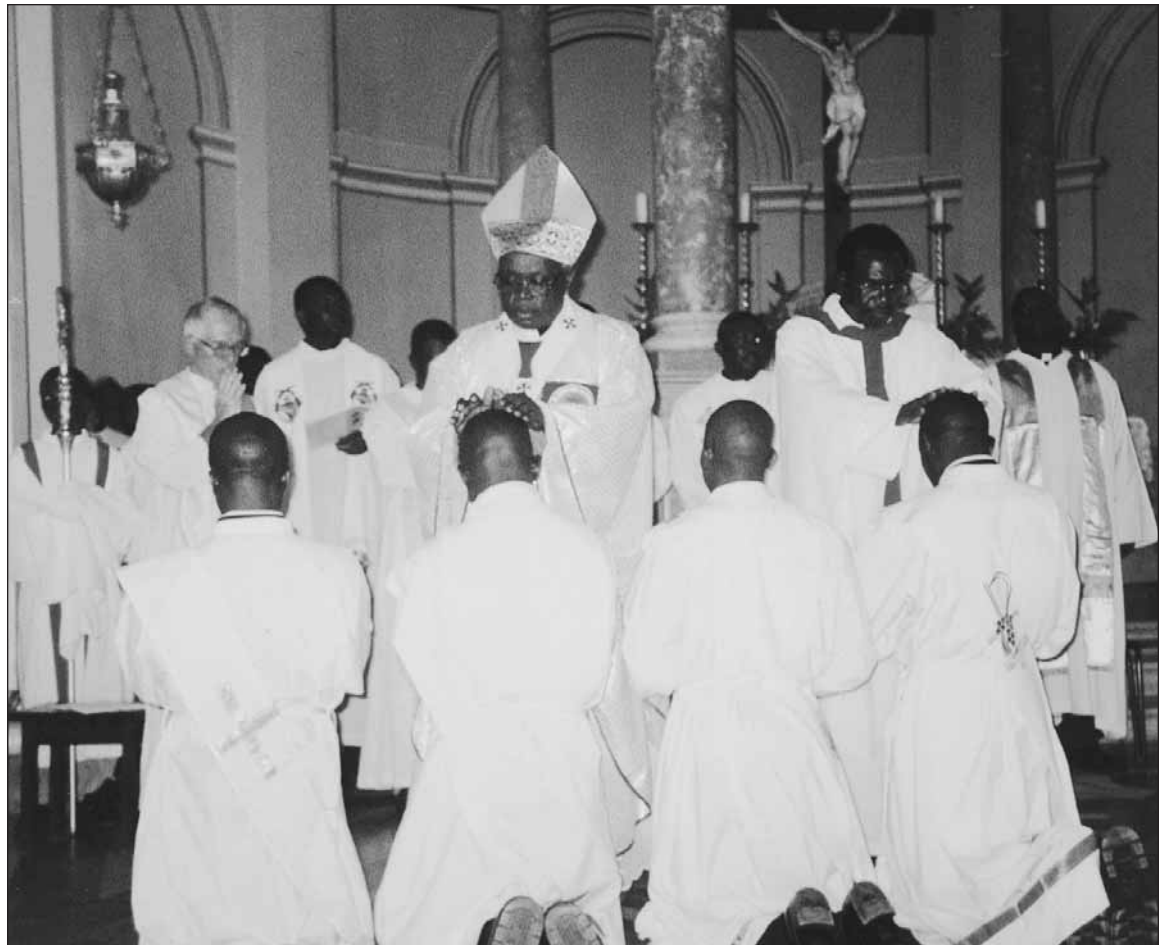
I would also like to

inform you that of the 41 seminarians abducted by the rebels on May 11, 2003, 30 of them managed to escape from captivity. A total of 11 seminarians are still in captivity in need of your prayers. We hope that the rebels have kept them alive. May Jesus Christ be their protector and may He lead them back home safe and sound.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The 18 years of conflict in Northern Uganda has created one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world with 1.6 million people displaced in the refugee camps. The level of poverty, the rate of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, child mortality, number of orphans and poor living conditions in the camps are appalling. Furthermore, for 18 years the conflict has denied the population from engaging in meaningful economic activities such as agriculture, business, transportation and capacity for making their lives better.

This has led to a serious humanitarian crisis in which our displaced people depend on charity for their daily sustenance. The charity has to come from outside their own land because the conflict has confined them to the refugee camps where they feel



Archbishop Odama and Msgr. Matthew laying hands on the new priests during ordination liturgy.

protected from the brutality of the rebels. Thousands of people have lost their lives in this conflict.

The hope of the people now is in the recent move by both the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to observe a seven-day ceasefire for the purpose of entering into dialogue to achieve lasting peace. We hope both parties will embrace this golden opportunity.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

For 18 years, the education of young people in Northern Uganda has been badly affected by the on-going conflict. Most schools (physical buildings) in the suburban areas have been abandoned by the population who fled for their lives. The rebels burned classrooms with grass-thatched roofs. Amalgamated schools have been formed in town areas where children and teachers feel more protected from rebels' threats. The problems facing the educational sector are lack of educational facilities, textbooks and basic school supplies. Thanks to Divine Providence, a 40-foot container of textbooks donated by Books for Africa in St. Paul, Minnesota is scheduled to arrive in Gulu within the next few weeks.

Plans for the construction of a new secondary school in Pader district with a capacity of 800 children is in progress. The school is going to be named ARCHBISHOP HARRY J. FLYNN COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL. We hope that once peace returns to Northern Uganda, some American teachers will come to lecture in this school. We need your support to assist us in constructing this school, which will provide hope for many young people. Education is the best tool for fighting ignorance and poverty. Please join hands with us in this valuable project for our youth.

ASSISTANCE TO THE NEEDY

Opportunity is being offered to you to sponsor a seminarian, an orphan or needy student who are bright but have financial constraints. Assistance is very much needed for students in secondary schools, higher institutions of learning and university studies. Right now the number of children from Northern Uganda who are enrolled in higher institutions of learning is extremely small compared to the rest of Uganda. Investment in education is the only hope for future development of Northern Uganda. Please come on board to give a future to our young people. The Lord will bless your generosity.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE PEOPLE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The International Community has acknowledged the long suffering of the people. You can help alleviate the suffering. Here are some recommendations:

Children and women are the most affected group of people. Please pray for them. It is so moving to see children spend nights in the cold under the verandas in the streets because they cannot sleep in their homes for fear of being abducted by the rebels.

Do some advocacy on behalf of the people by writing to your Congressman and Senator asking them to influence the cause for peace.

Humanitarian assistance is badly needed to respond to the many material needs of the displaced people in the refugee camps. Remember the words of Jesus: "whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you have done it to me" (Mt 25:40).

Wishing you peace and blessings at Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Your friend,



Msgr. Matthew Odong

GRATITUDE FROM FR. CHARLES OLWENY

Our dear Benefactors,

We send you cordial greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of the Advent Season, 2004.

With gratitude, I write this letter on behalf of all my brother priests with whom I was ordained to the priesthood on August 7, 2004 to express our sincere acknowledgment and appreciation for all your prayer and financial support toward our priestly formation.

We thank you for the gift of five motorcycles to help us in our pastoral ministries. May the Lord bless your generosity and love for His Church. Our prayers and thoughts are with you always.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2005.

I remain yours in the Lord,

Fr. Charles Olweny

Curate/Associate Pastor – Pabo Parish

Archdiocese of Gulu



Mike, Msgr. Matthew and Amy with newly ordained priests.



Mike and Dr. Yoti Zabulon (right rear) with hospital staff.

TWIN CITIES COUPLE'S REFLECTION ON TWO MONTHS IN GULU

During the months of July and August Amy Finnegan and Mike Westerhaus were privileged to spend time in Gulu working with and learning from the Acholi people. They lived at St. Mary's Hospital Lacor, approximately 6 km west of Gulu town on the road to Sacred Heart Seminary. The time in Gulu was formative, disturbing, difficult and inspiring. They returned to the US with a greater energy to bring home the stories of Northern Uganda and connect what happens in the United States with what happens in Northern Uganda. More than ever, they realize that the world is a very interdependent place and that their actions in the US have a profound impact on the lives of individuals in Northern Uganda. On August 17th Msgr. Matthew hosted a reception at the seminary to celebrate Amy and Mike's second wedding anniversary.

Reflecting back on her summer, Amy realizes how unique it was to have had the opportunity to learn firsthand about war from people involved in human rights advocacy and peace initiatives on a grassroots level. She spent two months interning with Human Rights Focus (HURIFO), a well-managed local initiative that started ten years ago in response to the rise of human rights violations in the region. It was very valuable for her to be immersed in a local NGO, which was not driven by outside donors or resources but rather by local commitment to human rights issues. Specifically, she developed and led mediation training for community paralegals, she wrote both a concept paper for an advocacy strategy as well as for some local publications on issues of conflict and human rights and assisted in the development of a questionnaire designed to assess prevalent attitudes of the conflict. In addition to beginning to grapple with the severity of war as she listened to the tragic narratives of those she met in IDP camps, those encountered at HURIFO and at Lacor Hospital, she also was blown away by the powerful voice of forgiveness of the Acholi people. Still suffering today from atrocities instigated by both parties to the conflict, many speak insightfully of forgiveness and nonviolent means to end the war.

During his stay at Lacor Hospital, Mike worked with Dr. Yoti Zabulon, an infectious disease and public health specialist. Dr. Yoti organized a weekly schedule which consisted of one-hour



Msgr. Sebastian, Mike, Amy and Msgr. Matthew at reception at the seminary for wedding anniversary.

morning conversations on tropical medicine topics (including malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS, bacterial meningitis) followed by a variety of daily rotations including the Young Child Clinic, the Adult Out-patient department, Pediatric ward, AIDS clinic, TB ward, Medicine ward and Nutrition ward. Additionally, he had the opportunity to deeply involve himself with the HIV clinic. Currently, the hospital runs an HIV/AIDS clinic on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons that are attended by approximately 6000 patients over the course of the month. Eighty percent of the patients attending the clinic are women. Two years ago, antiretroviral medications (HIV treatment) were made available in the hospital's pharmacy, but only for those who could pay for them. The medications were priced around \$100 per month, far above the yearly income of most patients living within the hospital's service area. During his time in the HIV clinic, he witnessed numerous individuals who were sent home to die because they could not afford the medications. He learned how the forces of war and poverty foster the rapid spread of HIV in young women through rape and prostitution in the IDP camps. These experiences furthered a sense in him that something is not right with the world. Thankfully, in September of this year, a large-scale HIV treatment program was started.

Mike and Amy believe that they are both deeply indebted to the many people in Northern Uganda with whom they had the opportunity to learn from and interact with. Spiritually, they are left with a desire to further understand forgiveness and the role it plays in the context of our powerful country's policies and culture. As well, after witnessing the intensity of life embedded in conflict and disease, they still search for an answer to the questions of: What is enough? What can and should we be doing to address inequality, violence and suffering in Northern Uganda and beyond? What does a genuine commitment to following Jesus really entail?



Amy doing HURIFO mediation training for community paralegals.

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.

NORTHERN UGANDA PEACE INITIATIVE (NUPI)

The Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI) was formed during a meeting between President Museveni and senior U. S. officials in Washington in June 2003. It was agreed that resolving the conflict in Northern Uganda was a top priority and necessary to alleviate the suffering of the people of that region. NUPI subsequently established offices in Uganda in March 2004.

The broad purpose of NUPI is to provide expert assistance to the Government of Uganda in the peace process. Conflict resolution is viewed as a wide process that includes addressing the underlying issues at the root of the conflict. NUPI works simultaneously on two levels to build consensus for this process: at the grassroots level with civil society in northern Uganda and with the central government in Kampala. In efforts to seek consensus on where to start the process, NUPI regularly consults with prominent civil society and government persons and organizations in Uganda, and has opened a field office in Gulu to increase its presence in the north.

Uganda's post-colonial history of ethnic-driven political violence – a history often referred to as cycles of revenge and mistrust – underscores the need for a peace-building effort that attempts to heal the deeper-rooted divisions within the country. National reconciliation, as both a process and an ultimate objective, is a bridge to guide Uganda to a more inclusive and unified socio-economic-political environment and lasting peace.

The first stakeholder's workshop is scheduled for December 9-10.



Children collecting clean drinking water.



A family on the move.

BOOKS FOR AFRICA

The first container of books for teaching children in the primary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Gulu left St. Paul on September 13th and arrived at the port of Mombasa in Kenya on November 11th. The container will then move by truck to Kampala for customs clearance and then on to Gulu.

On October 1st Msgr. Matthew met with Pat Plonski of Books for Africa and three principals of Better World Books. Better World Books is a major contributor of money to cover shipping costs of getting containers of books to Africa. The people from Better World Books asked Msgr. Matthew how many additional containers of books would be required to take care of the needs of all primary and secondary schools in Northern Uganda. He was not able to answer this question but said he would speak to his headmasters and headmistresses and get an answer. It was left that Msgr. Matthew would write a letter to Pat Plonski and advise him of their needs. Pat also advised Matthew that they have a co-operative program through World Food Program (UN Agency) to provide books to schools where WFP has feeding programs. Matthew is checking through his contact at WFP in Uganda to see if this could be a resource. It appears our partnership with Books For Africa will be a great help in educating the children of Northern Uganda.

ARCHBISHOP FLYNN SECONDARY SCHOOL

In our June 2004 newsletter Msgr. Matthew told you of the need for a secondary school in the Pader district of Northern Uganda. He has purchased a 7-acre plot of ground in Pader and has put together a preliminary campus plan of 14 buildings to house and educate 800 students. The projected cost of building the campus is 1.3 million dollars. We feel we can cover the operating costs of running the school but don't feel we can fund the building of the campus. We recently learned through contacts at USAID (U. S. Agency for International Development) that they administer the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) grant program, which offers assistance to competitively selected private, non-profit universities, secondary schools, libraries and medical centers abroad. The objective of the ASHA program is to foster the development of institutions as they nurture and develop leadership of their citizens in a wide variety of disciplines while at the same time fostering a positive image of these institutions that serve as "demonstration centers" of U. S. ideals and principals.

We are in the process of making application for a grant.



Children wait for food at refugee camp.

For more information call Pete Truax at (952) 934-2720 or Dan Vaughan at (952) 473-3660
U.S. Office: Sacred Heart Seminary, c/o Dan Vaughan, 3440 Bayside Road, Orono, Minnesota 55356-9218