

NEWS FROM SACRED HEART SEMINARY ARCHDIOCESE OF GULU, UGANDA

www.sacredheartseminary.com

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FROM THE DESK OF MONSIGNOR MATTHEW ODONG, RECTOR

"...Love one another as I have loved you..." (Jn 13:34)

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

The seminarians, staff and the entire community of Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor join me in sending you our cordial greetings and many best wishes for God's love and peace in this year of Our Lord 2008. We trust that it has been a blessed year for you and all your loved ones and that the Lord continues to hold you in the palm of His hand throughout the coming years.

On a joyous note, I am pleased to inform you that northern Uganda continues to experience some calm and peace, which is giving high hope to our people. A window of a peaceful society for a people who dwelled in the situation of conflict for a decade is evolving thanks to the Divine Mercy and Love of God. Half of the people in the refugee camps are reported to have returned to their homes and those who are left behind are expected to head home soon. Truly, your prayers, sacrifices and advocacy on behalf of the people are yielding the fruits of the relative peace we now have. Thank you on behalf of the people of northern Uganda. May Heaven reward you abundantly.

CHALLENGES

Though peace is now returning, the region faces three big challenges which every conflict leaves behind: resettlement of the victims of war, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

I recently attended a meeting of the Acholi Education Initiative Board of Trustees and learned that the 2002 census that was carried out in our region indicates that children (less than 18 years) constitute 55% of the population; those less than 15 years constitute 49% while the elderly (60 or older) make up 4%. The remaining 41% are between the ages of 19 and 59 years old. This, in part, explains the reason why the youth have always been primary victims of conflict. The same source of information placed the total number of abducted youth by the Rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) being as high as 66,000. Remember that 11 of my seminarians are among the abducted youth still not accounted for. From the report it is clear that the greater efforts toward resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction will focus on the youth who form the majority of the northern Uganda population and are the future of the country. Please pray for

our young boys and girls, especially those who lost their loved ones, were made orphans and missed opportunities for education. May the Lord provide for their future happiness.

SCHOOL TO PROVIDE HOPE TO THE YOUTH
Archbishop Flynn Comprehensive Secondary School, now under construction with the financial contributions from our American friends, is meant to be part of the answer to the magnitude of needs of young people in this region. The school is named after retired Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis in appreciation for the generosity of our American brothers and sisters. As part of their contribution and support, 60 women living in Pader are working to clear the school compound. They are convinced that this school will provide a future for their children. The local people are very poor but provide their labor as a contribution toward the building of the school.

In addition to the two classroom blocks, which are now ready for use, the completion of the following structures (already in progress) is mandatory for opening the school in early February 2009 as planned. They include Nun's living house, girl's dormitory, water tank, dining hall and teacher's house. We have placed orders for student's desks and chairs, beds, office furniture for administration and other furniture and fixtures. We do not have money



Fr. Sam, Bp. Sabino, Abp. Odama, Nuncio Abp. Paul, Card. Wamala, Msgr. Matthew, Fr. Okun at Wipolo Celebration Oct. 20th.

for a science laboratory (very important) and library. Science subjects have now become a priority in the educational curriculum of the Government of Uganda and it is mandatory that any new school has a science lab. We have made St. Joseph the patron Saint of our new school. Through his powerful intercession, we pray for Divine Providence to take care of these needs. Please join us in prayer to St. Joseph.

AMERICANS VISIT SACRED HEART SEMINARY

From July 30 through August 18, 2008, Sacred Heart Seminary was blessed with the visit of five of their American friends in the persons of Pete Truax, his daughter Susan Truax, granddaughter Denise Williams (18 years old), Wendy Ivins (wife of Dr. Gary Ivins) and her son Zachary Ivins (18 years old). It was a great visit.



Blessing of a well.

During the time they spent with us they fit very well into our daily routine of Mass, meals and other programs I had planned for them. They formed relationships with priests, seminarians, nuns and staff of Sacred Heart Seminary. They attended the ordination of Fr. Leonsyo Akena Angep at Pajule Parish on August 2nd, visited six of the 16 wells drilled this year and the site of our new school in Pader, participated in the blessing and handing over of motorcycles to our two newly ordained priests with Archbishop John Baptist Odama, visited several refugee camps, visited the two martyr's shrines at Namogongo and Wi-Polo at Primol, visited the national park to see animals and talked to and encouraged our seminarians to persevere in their vocations to priesthood as well as spending time with many new friends. Everyone enjoyed their company. They left behind lasting memories of joy and happiness.

AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS ARE WELCOME

Sacred Heart Seminary opens its door to all those friends and benefactors who wish to come and spend some time at Sacred Heart Seminary as lay missionaries to share their talents and skills with our seminarians, some work at our new school in Pader teaching or doing some construction work as a way of sharing knowledge with our youth and future priests. They would love to have you do something for and with them. We need teachers of science subjects (physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics) including computer skills. I always share

with my American friends that there are three ways to be a missionary:

By GOING to the mission to witness to God's love with one's presence,

By SHARING ONE'S BLESSINGS with the mission,

By PRAYING for the success of the mission.

These, among others, are some levels of participation in the missionary dimension of the Church as ordained and non-ordained ministers. The fact is that God has given to each one of us a gift and He desires that each one of us share it with our brothers and sisters in need. Sacred Heart Seminary will provide accommodations and meals. Our food is simple, tasty and nutritious and I'm sure you will enjoy it just as much as our recent visitors.

We are looking forward to receiving Zachary Ivins who has expressed the desire to spend several months with us beginning January 2009 before he returns to the U. S. to begin his university studies. He is a very brilliant young man and we look forward to having him spend more time with us.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the seminarians and staff of Sacred Heart Seminary I wish to thank you wholeheartedly for your prayers and support to the education of our young future priests, for Mass Intentions for our priests, for support of our new school in Pader and for providing our new priests with means of transportation for their ministry. Life here would not be the same without your prayers and generosity. In doing so, you are putting into practice the commandment of love given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ: "...love one another as I have loved you..." (Jn 13:34).

Wishing you a fruitful Advent Season, Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year, 2009.



Newly ordained priests receive motorcycles.

United in the Love of Jesus Christ and His mother Mary,

Rev. Msgr. Matthew Odong

Msgr. Matthew Odong
Rector, Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor

FR. BILL WHITTIER TO VISIT UGANDA

Fr. Bill is a diocesan priest from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. For over 30 years he has been working in the field of Addiction and Alcoholism at Hazelden Renewal Center in Minnesota as well as in the Philippines, Ireland, Nigeria, South Africa and India. You can read more on Fr. Bill on his website www.i35north.com.

During a four-month visit to Minnesota from July to November 2007 for hip surgery Fr. Samuel Mwaka Okidi had the opportunity to spend some time with Fr. Bill to discuss the ministry he is director of in the Archdiocese of Gulu. PACTA (Program for Awareness, Counseling & Treatment of Alcoholism) is a relatively new program in the Archdiocese of Gulu. Fr. Bill offered to come to Gulu to help Fr. Samuel with his program. Fr. Samuel was most grateful for Fr. Bill's offer of assistance and had his Archbishop (Odama) send a letter of invitation to Fr. Bill. Fr. Bill is scheduled to be in Uganda from mid December to mid February. You can read more on PACTA on our website.

BEHIND THE SCENES

By Bobbi Vaughan

Pete Truax put together the first Sacred Heart Seminary newsletter in December 1997. At that time it was composed of two sides of one 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper in black and white. Dan and Bobbi Vaughan were in charge of the mailing. The process has remained the same to this day.

The list of benefactors has grown considerably so the task of labeling, folding, stuffing, sealing and stamping the newsletters has grown as well. We thought you might like to take a look at the "professional team" that donates a day twice a year to help us get these newsletters to you. As you can see by the "small fry" in the picture, the eligible age of helping out is six years old. The only other requirements are a desire to help and an ability to stay on task. Over the years the main group has consisted of our grandchildren along with available friends on the date needed. This picture was taken this past June around the "assembly space" – our kitchen center island. The helpers are six grandchildren from 3 different families, one grandnephew, one daughter and one grandma (Bobbi). Not seen in the picture, but equally as hard working, are another daughter, who helped fold the newsletters, and the picture taker, Dan. He puts together the letters, labels and does all the financial accounting for our apostolate on his computer.

We are proud of our faithful crew so we wanted to share with you the generous gift of time they have given to this ministry for the past 10 years. Their only "earthly reward" is a trip to Dairy Queen for an ice cream treat.



Vaughan Mailing Crew.

UGANDA VISIT

By Pete Truax

In August of this year Wendy Ivins, her son Zachary, my youngest daughter, Susan Truax, my granddaughter, Denise Williams and I spent three weeks in Uganda. The abbreviated answer to how the trip went is: **"No one got sick, no one got hurt and everyone wants to return."** I consider it a great success. You can view highlights of our trip in a 9 minute video that Zach Ivins put together on our website www.sacredheartseminary.com. Click on "NEW VIDEO OF SHS." Below are comments from my travel mates.



Denise, Susan, Fr. Paul, Wendy.

Wendy Ivins: Our trip to Uganda was one of the most memorable experiences of our lives. We met so many incredibly faithful, joyful and courageous people who warmly embraced us into their community. The Acholi people welcomed us into their homes, their villages, their chapels and into their lives. We shared Mass, laughter

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

and sometimes tears. If we had to choose one thing that we will always remember about northern Uganda, it would be the stories of the people and their lives. From the brave priests who faced grave danger and violence during the war, yet refused to abandon their parishioners, to the young boys and girls who had been abducted by rebel soldiers, yet refused to abandon their faith in God. The individual stories were each different, yet the same, though each person had experienced immense suffering and had lost so much in their lives, the one thing they never lost was a belief in the goodness of God and the possibility of hope. For us, it was a testament to the power of the human spirit and a lesson in unwavering faith. Uganda is no longer just a country in Africa. It is the homeland of people we now consider family and friends. We will carry their stories with us always.

Zachary Ivins: I learned a lot about myself during my trip. I learned that I really enjoyed immersing myself in a different culture and developing friendships with people whose lives are very different from mine. My favorite memory is the time spent with the students and priests at the Seminary. The people I met have experienced so many hardships in their lives, yet there wasn't a single frown on their faces. We spent time together talking and sharing our lives. They taught me about their culture, their food and how to speak Acholi. I taught them about our schooling system, our laws and how to use a video camera. The friends I made in Uganda will be relationships that I hope will last a lifetime and that we will continue to learn from each other.

Denise Williams: Being in Uganda felt like being home. We gained many new friends who we now keep in touch with on a regular basis. I still cannot fathom how these people can be so exuberant after having suffered so much. They are in one word: joyful. Being around them taught me to really smile, not just make the facial expression, but to have the smile reach my eyes. I've brought that back with me, hoping to influence others to help the lively citizens of Uganda.

Susan Truax: Visually Uganda is beautiful. The mix of light, color and shape of the villages, towns and rugged landscape of the bush is ever changing – each image more astounding than the last. The sounds of strange birds and insects, the music during Mass, immense thunder and pouring rain of the rainy season fill the ears. Discovering the new aromas and flavor of the fresh, simple and delicious foods always most welcome. The exotic animals while on safari were a real treat. None of this compares to those we met. I have never encountered nor had the honor of spending time with so many astounding people. From those at the seminary, to those in the towns, villages and IDP camps. I went to Uganda hoping

to find a way to help the people rebuild their lives and I hope to continue on that path; however I quickly realized I was receiving far more valuable gifts from those I met along the way. They taught me about dignity, grace, enduring faith, pure joy, eternal hope and most of all I experienced a sense of peace I have never before felt. I am eternally grateful to those I met and I hope one day to meet them all again.

PORTLAND STAGES IT'S FIRST GULU WALK

Through the efforts of Susan Truax the City of Portland, Oregon joined cities across the world on October 25th to walk in solidarity with the children of northern Uganda. Although the situation in the north is stabilizing, and children in Gulu no longer have to fear abduction, reconstruction and rehabilitation must occur. There is still so much more we can do to raise our voices for peace and to be a partner in the future of the Acholi children.

The man in the picture with Susan is Julius Achon who is from Lira (100 miles from Gulu). The rebels abducted him when he was 12 years old and he spent 3 months with them before he was able to escape. He now lives in Portland with his wife Grace (from Kampala) and works for Nike training athletes.



Julius Achon & Susan Truax on October 25th.