

NEWS FROM SACRED HEART SEMINARY ARCHDIOCESE OF GULU, UGANDA

www.sacredheartseminary.com

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FROM THE DESK OF MONSIGNOR MATTHEW ODONG, RECTOR

Dear friends and benefactors,

The seminarians and staff of Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor join me in sending you our cordial greetings and prayerful best wishes for God's blessings and graces in your daily endeavors. We hope that 2007 has been a year of good health, happiness, peace and blessings for you and all your loved ones.

UPDATE

With great joy, I take this opportunity to update you on some of the events related to our apostolate here in the Archdiocese of Gulu of which you are a part.

The Lord blessed our Archdiocese this year with 7 new priests and 2 transitional deacons. I want to bring to your attention that these are some of the young men you have been supporting and praying for over the years. May the Lord reward you abundantly for your love for vocations to the priesthood. To pray for and support a young man to become a priest is a great gift to the Church. With your generous donations we were able to purchase motorcycles for each of the new priests for their pastoral ministry. They also received Mass kits for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Please accept their gratitude and appreciation.

Over the last several years, some of you generously contributed money for drilling some wells to provide safe and clean drinking water to our people. To date we have drilled a total of 12 wells and 12 more are planned within the next few months. The beneficiaries are appreciative of your generosity in sharing your resources with them.

RENOVATION WORK

Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor was founded in 1937 for the purpose of educating young men for the priesthood. It used to serve as a regional seminary where seminarians came from the northern regions of Uganda and southern Sudan until 1974 when it became a diocesan seminary of the Gulu Archdiocese. The seminary is now 70 years old. Each year we do some renovation work to keep the buildings in good shape. We recently did renovation work on the nun's living quarters and some major work on an old workshop we transformed into living quarters for visiting priests, major seminarians and friends of Sacred Heart Seminary. Adjacent to it is a room for a resident staff member. Thanks to you who make it possible for us to maintain our seminary.

CONSTRUCTION OF ARCHBISHOP FLYNN SECONDARY SCHOOL

In the months of September and October, north and northeastern Uganda experienced heavy rains and flooding which

destroyed crops, grass thatched huts, some bridges, roads and other property. Some people were reported killed by the floods with most roads being impassable for weeks. This phenomenon slowed down progress of the construction of our school for nearly two months. Thank God the floods have subsided and the construction work has resumed. Our goal still remains to have the school in operation in early February 2008. To speed up the construction work the Board of Directors has contracted with additional constructors to build student's dormitories, nun's living quarters, a three-bedroom house for the head teacher, bathrooms and kitchen. We are convinced that Archbishop Flynn Comprehensive Secondary School is an answer to the aspirations of many young girls and boys for quality education to give them a brighter future. Once the school begins to operate we shall invite all our friends, especially from the USA, to come and spend some weeks during which they can do some teaching or do some developmental work for the school as volunteers. This will provide some inter-cultural enrichment to both the students and teacher.

JUBA PEACE TALKS

It is now one year and four months since the Juba peace dialogue between the LRA and Ugandan government began July 14, 2006 in Juba, Sudan. Since then significant progress has been made in the interest of peace. Supported by the International Community, Government of southern Sudan, African Union, Acholi Religious and Cultural Leaders and the UN Special Envoy, former President Joachim Chissano of Mozambique, the conflicting parties have so far demonstrated a high level of commitment to observing the cessation of hostilities agreement signed in August 2006 in Juba. This has resulted in relative peace in the Acholi sub-region. Destructive activities such as child abduction, raids on villages, planting of landmines on roads and fighting between the government of Uganda and the rebels have stopped giving the population a big psychological lift, though great numbers of the population



L - R Fr. Patrick Lakwera, Fr. Peter Paul Rom, Fr. Anthony Nyeko, Fr. Samuel Norbert Ocaya, Msgr. Matthew, Fr. Thadhacous Opio, Fr. Seraphine Opio, Fr. Martin Agwe

are still in the refugee camps. But that is not the end of the struggle. Two critical agenda items are still on the table of the government of Uganda and the LRA rebels. The most critical one is "accountability and reconciliation." It asks the questions, what should be done to those persons who committed crimes and atrocities against humanity? Should they be tried before the court of law or be forgiven by the victims? The international criminal court of justice (world court) based in The Hague, Netherlands has issued warrants of arrest for the five LRA top leaders to be tried and prosecuted if found guilty. The majority of the Acholi and the neighboring communities who are the victims of the crimes and atrocities are willing to forgive the Rebels so as to end the long conflict that has eaten up their lives, culture and economy. They want the peace process to move in the direction of forgiveness and reconciliation, a view advocated by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative and Acholi cultural leaders.

Our website may periodically have some updates for you: www.sacredheartseminary.com.

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

In the Gospel of St. Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus invites his followers to encounter Him in the face of those who need some spiritual and material support: "...whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do it to me. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me water; I was a stranger and you took me in..." The local church of Gulu is being challenged by those inspiring words of Jesus. It is a call to respond to the needs, the struggles, the desperation and the level of trauma in the victims of conflict in this region.

We thank all our friends and benefactors who have been in solidarity with us in responding to the needs of our people in this portion of the Universal Church. Know that you are always in our prayers and thoughts. May Heaven reward you abundantly for your solidarity. Peace and Blessings! Wishing you a Blessed Advent Season, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Yours in the Hearts of Jesus and His Mother Mary,



Msgr. Matthew Odong
Rector

FR. SAMUEL IN MINNEAPOLIS FOR HIP SURGERY

During his trip to Uganda in February 2007, Pete Truax met Fr. Samuel Mwaka Okidi (47) who is pastor of Palabek Parish located about 80 miles northeast of Gulu near the Sudan border. Fr. Samuel is also founder and director of PACTA (Program for Awareness, Counseling and Treatment of Alcoholism). When questioned about why he was on crutches he explained that he had hip surgery on April 9, 2003 at Nsambya Hospital in Kampala and had since been on crutches and in a lot of pain.

When he returned to Minnesota, Pete contacted a friend of his, Dr. Leo deSouza who is an orthopedic surgeon. Ironically Pete had met Leo through a contact in Gulu, Dr. Piero Corti, founder of St. Mary's Lacor Hospital in Gulu. Leo and his wife Dolly,



Renovation of sister house at Sacred Heart Seminary.



New Priests with their motorcycles for pastoral work.

The delegation of the LRA are in Uganda to consult with the population on the way forward and to find out if the community is ready to forgive them for the crimes and atrocities they have committed against them. We hope that the process will move fast to its conclusion.

YOU CAN DO SOMETHING TO BRING AN END TO THE NORTHERN UGANDA CONFLICT

Pray for the success of the on-going Juba Peace Process that it may not be derailed.

Follow up the progress being made.

Write to your government representatives in Washington to request their involvement in the Juba peace process. The conflicting parties may need some pressure.



L - R Dottie, Bobbi, Dan, Pete, Fr. Samuel,
Dolly DeSouza, Dr. Leo DeSouza.

THE LOVING HAND OF GOD AT WORK

By Fr. Samuel

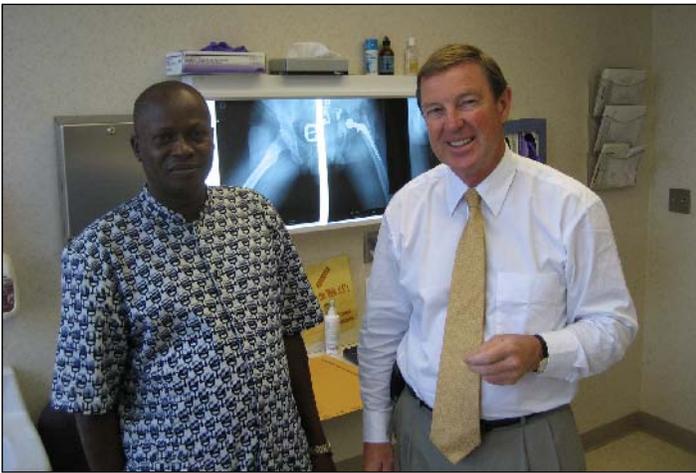
who is also a doctor, had worked in Uganda from 1961 to 1971 when they had to leave because of some problems with Idi Amin, then president of Uganda.

Dr. deSouza made arrangements with Dr. Richard Kyle, chief of orthopedic surgery at Hennepin County Medical Center, to do the surgery. Fr. Samuel arrived in Minneapolis on July 14th and the following week met with Dr. Kyle & had a pre-op physical in preparation for the surgery. On July 23rd Dr. Kyle did the procedure to remove the prosthesis put in in Uganda and inserted a new prosthesis. "This was as tough a surgery as I've ever had," said Kyle, who labored five hours on the initial operation. "I like to help people. If I can get this guy walking, he'll be able to help a lot more people." Kyle and his colleagues, as they do in extenuating circumstances, are donating their services. A week following the surgery a bacteria called PSEUDOMONAS was discovered in his system. The infectious disease doctor, Dr. David Williams, thinks this infection has been in his system ever since the surgery in Kampala and was a major factor in the pain he experienced for the last four years. To effectively

What started as a simple, slightly painful apparent hip joint dislocation in October 2001 (before the feast of the Paimol Martyrs - Daudi and Jildo - Catechists martyred for the faith on October 18, 1918), resulted in an unsuccessful first hip replacement surgery in April 2003 at Nsambya Hospital - Kampala. On crutches for over four years, and after I had almost given up all hope of recovery, a miraculous intervention took place and I found myself flying to the US for three more hip surgeries, the final one on October 24, 2007. This last most successful surgery took place after the prayers and intercession through the Blessed Daudi Okello and Jildo Irwa during their annual commemoration at Paimol - Kalongo on October 20, 2007. I attribute this great event and radical positive change in my life to the loving hand of God at work in my daily pilgrimage. To Him I offer all my sufferings for peace in the world and the salvation of all souls. I have been able to endure all my pain with a smile because I consider it much less than the painful agony of Christ on the Cross.

Due to an unforeseen bacterial infection and its complications, the originally scheduled six weeks of treatment was extended to seventeen weeks (from July 14 when I arrived to November 22, 2007 when I departed for Uganda).

This extended period also turned out as an opportunity given by God to me to share the lives of our American benefactors and they in turn to learn about us. On behalf of their other friends, the family of Pete and Dottie Truax truly impressed me by their spirit of love, generosity, sacrifice and patience (bordering on tolerance). Just imagine this American family had to adjust its life style to take care of me just like one of their own



Fr. Samuel with Dr. Richard Kyle.

treat the infection the prosthesis had to be removed and a spacer inserted coated with antibiotics, which was done on August 3rd. Fr. Sam was released from the hospital on August 7th. He then had to wear a brace to hold his left leg in place while he continued on the antibiotics for eight weeks before a third surgery could be scheduled to put the prosthesis back in place. The third surgery took place on October 24th and he was released from the hospital on the 28th. Dr. Kyle gave Father a green light to return to Uganda on November 6th. Father was very anxious to return home and left on November 22nd (Thanksgiving Day) to resume his priestly duties in the Archdiocese of Gulu.

What was originally planned to be a six-week visit turned into four months because of the infection. During this period Fr. Sam lived with Dottie and Pete. The good news is the infection is gone and he is very comfortable with the new prosthesis. While it will be a couple of months before he will be able to move around without crutches, he feels he is on the way to a total recovery. Having Father with us has been a real blessing.



Pete, Fr. Samuel, Dr. Kyle, Msgr. Mathew.

sons. In fact Pete became a fulltime nurse to me. The daily Masses I celebrated with this family in their home cemented this love and relationship. "Fr., what are you going to bring for me from America?" This and many others are a sample of frequent questions and concerns of some of my brothers and sisters back in Africa. The mentality is that Americans are rich and the moment you have the opportunity to visit them you get everything you need,

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.

hence becoming a local benefactor. On the other hand this lack of understanding goes both ways. You can hear some of our American friends who have never been to Africa asking me whether in Uganda we have air conditioning, floor carpets, door and window seals, computers, electricity etc. I feel it will be my duty to bridge some of this gap in knowledge.

Most of our supporters in the US are simple faithful people ready to share their resources with us who are faced with insecurity, poverty, ignorance and diseases. What ever the case, every human being created in the image of God has something to offer to the other. The materially poor Africans can pray and offer their sufferings for their American benefactors who are faced with various issues like over 25,000 religious sects, abortion, homo-sexual/gay phenomenon, drug abuse, violence, and natural calamities such as hurricanes, wild bush fire etc. We the recipients of charity should be honest, grateful, accountable and appreciative. We appeal to our donors/benefactors not to let their left hands see what their right hands are doing in their almsgiving. It is God that rewards you for your generosity and humility in this great act of service. We are very grateful and ready to learn from you, the spirit of hard work and honesty in your dealings. The often-rare human approvals should neither be our priority nor discourage us in our charitable acts.

Personally I studied at Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor from 1978 – 1979 and I feel it is still the hand of God that has led me to benefit directly from this USA Sacred Heart Seminary Program initiated by Msgr. Matthew Odong. We were ordained on the same day (July 19, 1987) and I served together in Lacor Seminary with Matthew from 1990 to 1993. When Pete met me in February this year, I was staying in Lacor Seminary since 2002 receiving medical care from the nearby Lacor Hospital. From there also I carried out regular pastoral visits to Palabek Parish (as Parish Priest).

While in the USA, I have had the opportunity to visit many families for meals and other get togethers. That enabled me to learn more about their lifestyle and background. As I return to Uganda, I appeal to our benefactors and friends to understand and continue to support us towards the attainment of true and

everlasting peace, poverty alleviation and care for our greatly traumatized people, including us religious leaders.

In a special way I would like to thank Msgr. Matthew Odong, Pete Truax, Dan Vaughan, Dr. Leo de Souza, Dr. Richard Kyle –Orthopedic Surgeon, Dr. David Williams - Infectious Disease, other staff of Hennepin County Medical Center and all who contributed to the success of my treatment. Be assured of my love, prayers and concern.

In appreciation of all that God has done for me through others, I promise to dedicate my service to all the suffering people, especially the victims of drug and alcohol abuse (so much responsible for diseases, poverty and conflict in our traumatized communities of the war torn Archdiocese of Gulu). Please feel free to support where you can.

I thank God that my time in the States has also been a time of great spiritual renewal in addition to the physical treatment itself. In all tribulations, let us fix our eyes on Christ hanging upon the cross. The Blessed Virgin Mary is ever ready to direct us to Jesus her son. Whatever our faith, however little, it will move mountains.

May the blessings of God the Almighty Father, the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit descend upon you and remain with you forever. I wish you a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Fr. Samuel Okidi Mwaka.
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WATER IS LIFE

Within the past few months we have received 12 donations specifically allocated for wells. Cost of a well is \$6,500. Lack of clean water is a very big deterrent to prevention of disease and the good health of the people of northern Uganda. Msgr. Matthew is working now with a group of people to determine where the greatest needs lie. Once the locations have been determined drilling will begin. Within the next few months thousands of people will have access to clean water. These 12 wells will be in addition to another 12 wells we have drilled in recent years.

NEW WEBSITE

John Desautels recently agreed to volunteer his time and expertise to be our web master. In recent months he has spent considerable time with Msgr. Matthew, Dan and Pete in learning from us what we wanted the website to accomplish, helping structure it and gathering information to be put on the site. John has been a good friend and contributor to Msgr. Matthew's apostolate since 1994 when they first met during a Cursillo weekend. We are most grateful to John for joining our team with this contribution. If you have not already looked at www.sacredheartseminary.com take a look. We think you will be most impressed with the professionalism and the amount of information on the work being done in the Archdiocese of Gulu.



A typical well.

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