

## A JOURNEY TO HOPE AND HAPPINESS



I am John Bosco Komakech Aludi; 43 years old.

A reflection of my journey in life to where I am as Executive Director of Caritas Gulu Archdiocese. Born in a poor family; my parents were peasant farmers with eight (08) children.

As a young man from Ariaga Village, Gulu District, Uganda, every Sunday as my parents would take me and other siblings for prayers. I would admire the priests and how they lead mass.

Immediately I developed interest to join the Seminary. With the help of my mother on one Sunday after mass, she took me to the priest and inform him that my son wants to be like you. (He was a missionary priests Fr. Guido). He told my mother that, in order for him to join the Seminary, he has to practice some activities within the parish so that we begin to know him better. From that time, I didn't look back. I enrolled as a crusader, later I joined the Altar servers. 2 years later, the Parish Priest informed me that I need to prepare for interview to join the seminary. I recalled, I had to walk about 13 kms from Gulu Town to the Seminary (Sacred Heart Seminary Lacor). As a young man, I was introduced to my colleagues waiting for interview.

Two weeks later, I was informed by the Parish Priest that the results are out and he handed to me my admission letter. Looking at the requirements for the Seminary School fees at that time 1991 at Ugx. 13,000=, a pair of shoes, a mattress, etc. my mother could not raise that immediately. We started to sell cassava from the garden to raise school fees. A day to going to school, my mother took me to the home of my distant uncle and requested for a mattress. He then asked his daughter to give to me her mattress since she is still in primary level. I will not forget this journey!

While at the Seminary I developed interest to play football. When I reached senior 2, I developed great talent in goalkeeping. I became the 1<sup>st</sup> goal keeper of the school within the same year.

Second term of the year two in the seminary was not easy, my mother could not raise the required school fees and I failed to return back to school. I remained home for about 2 weeks having no hope to continue with my education. I remember one evening when I had finished selling mangoes in the local market, a car drive passed me and suddenly stopped right ahead of me. It was the Seminary car and I saw the Rector calling me to go to him. The next question was how are you doing, why have you not reported to school up to now, it is two weeks, don't you think you have missed too many lessons? My answer was simple but heavy. Fr. Rector, I have not yet met the school requirements especially school fees. He asked me again who is there at home, I told him my mother is home. He asked me to get into his care, we drove home and luckily found my mother at home. Before coming out of the care he asked, why has John Bosco not gone back to school? My mother told him father, I have failed to raise the school fees and according to the letter from the Seminary indicated that unless you complete school fees you should not return.

The Rector asked, what are you doing right now to raise the school fees? She pointed at the cassava garden and said look there, we are uprooting the cassava for both food and selling some to raise school fees.

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The Rector was quiet and after a while, he asked me to pick my luggage and put on the car. I quickly did. He told my mother that he is taking me back to school, I just went on, freely and fully aware that this new burden was not wanted nor chosen by me. If this work of mercy began by Rector, was send from God it would go on otherwise it would stop. I knew Fr. Matthew, I admired him for his faith, for his trust in God and divine providence for his love in promoting vocation of girls and boys for all the needy and destitute. I put everything in the hand of God. I prayed to Jesus asking him to send him some people to help him with this new support to me. Soon after, I excelled in Football and played for the Seminary with all my heart and energy which made the Seminary administration to acknowledge my contribution in school sports.

Fr. Matthew then at the end of the school term asked me to remain behind in the Seminary as other students go back home for holidays. My major task was to help the Seminary with causal work In order to raise school fees, I quickly accepted. I would work on the school compound and carried out some errands (I had learned how to drive a vehicle as young as I was. Some of the errand was to help take some people from within the village of Lacor to hospital in case of emergency and also I would be asked by the Rector to help people who have lost their dear one from the hospital and need means of transport to transport the dead body home for burial. I became almost like a driver). My school fees was then paid. From 1992 Second term on wards my fees and basic requirement were met by Fr. Matthew Odong until when I completed my Minor Seminary formation at Sacred Heart Lacor (the school I am proud of to date). I joined the National Major Seminary with the same support from the benefactors of Fr. Rector Matthew Odong. One day, Fr. Matthew informed us that, one of his US benefactor is ill and we need to pray for his quick recovery in order to continue helping supporting the running of the Seminary and support vocation. We prayer for God healing hand for our benefactor, prayed for protection to this man with the “Bid heart” (Fr. Matthew Odong).

Deep inside me, had a very strong faith and conviction of becoming a priest. As I continue with my pastoral work at Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, looking back home, my siblings and mother, I applied to the Archbishop through the Vocation Director to allow me be out of the Seminary for a period of 1 year. In the course of my 1 year outside the Seminary, I met a young lady, my current wife, Rosemary Nyakato the mother to my five children (Bridget, Michelle, Merina, Jacob and Joshua). That is how I ended my seminary formation.



At the same time, I had very high hope to make it in supporting the pastoral work of the Church. After I started my work at Caritas Gulu Archdiocese in 2002 as a Social Worker placed within a Reception of Rehabilitation Centre for the formally abducted person. My placement with the reception and rehabilitation Centre gave me opportunity to work with the most disadvantaged children and mothers. I learned that it can be a sign of hope in their life. “Despite my dreadful past, today am a sign of hope to many people because I was purely supported by Benefactors – people I have never seen or met physically. This is a sign of solidarity for humanity. Again, Devine providence sent to us. “Hope for Uganda”. I have to thank God for all the people he has send us. Over the years to carry on this work of

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mercy and solidarity. I remember some by names and others I have met like John D., David Forgallee, Anna & Andre, Todd, without exception, Msgr. Matthew Odong who took care of me and in turn given me the strength and courage to take care of myself as an independent person, my family and those needy one around me. I am still hoping that the dream of Msgr. Matthew Odong and the benefactors will come true. It is a clear manifestation in my life.

I am the Director of Caritas Gulu Archdiocese. One of the largest charity organization in Northern Uganda offering support to the most vulnerable person's (Elderly, Child mothers, child headed households, widows and widowers, the people with special needs, the refugees, etc.) with clean safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene promotion, food and non-food items, psychosocial support counseling services, livelihoods, etc.

Additionally, I am helping support the Educational of many children/vocation around me.

Additionally, I am the Chairperson, Finance Committee for the AFSS - a job that I do with passion and heart to make the school grow with strong and good management systems.

My work experiences:-

I worked as a Social Worker in Caritas Gulu supporting the returnee (abducted children and mothers at the Reception and Rehabilitation Centre of Caritas, 2002 – 2003).

I became the Emergency Relief Officer at Caritas, 2003 – 2004. While doing that, I entered a rebel ambush and was shot with two bullets - in my thigh and very lower abdomen – and received treatment for about 1 year.

When I returned to the office, I was promoted to manage the office of Caritas in Pader as Branch Administrator and Program Coordinator and that was the time Msgr. Matthew asked me to look for land for a new school – which is the current location of AFSS. Since then, I became a member of the steering committee for AFSS.

Later on, I was promoted by Caritas to the level of Deputy Director, a position I stayed in for 3 years. While holding this position, I was seconded to support the Peace Project of Caritas Uganda National Office in South Sudan - my placement was within the rebel assembly areas of Garamba.

Later on, I received a message from Archbishop Odama that I take care of Caritas Gulu as Director, a position which was not easy but with God's help I am managing since February 2008 to now.

I am married, been Best man in holy matrimony for 11 married couples, and been the godfather for 21 infant children, and now supporting 6 children of my late sister and brother in my small home with my 5 children.

All the above achievements, I give credit to Msgr. Matthew Odong and the benefactors who supported him. In turn he changed my life to see the light and be what I am right now.

Despite my dreadful past, I have hope and I am happy that I am able to extend this same hope to others in need. As I sit at my table, deeply reflecting on the journey of my life, I feel like crying especially thinking of where I came and those whom I have not met but were able to change my life and built me up! **God is great and miracles are real.** I feel my life is transformed and that makes me not regret my seminary formation. I would not be what I am without the generosity and the good will of the

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benefactors. To the benefactors that I have never seen, **THANK YOU for touching my life** and transforming me to be a leader within the Catholic Church more so leading charity organization.

God gives you more grace. Amen!