**MISSION APPEAL FOR SOROTI CATHOLIC DIOCESE**

*Introduction*

My names are Fr Alex Ojacor, ordained for the Diocese of Soroti, Uganda. I am currently Associate Pastor in St. Leonard Church, Berwyn, as an extern priest, where I have been for seven years.

I am glad to be here to celebrate Eucharist, God’s love and saving presence and to make an appeal to you to support your brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Soroti, Uganda.

*Soroti Catholic Diocese*

Soroti Catholic Diocese is in the rural Eastern part of Uganda. It was erected in 1980.

In the last 40 years, there has been a rapid growth in population creating the necessity of more personnel, structures, and resources to serve the bulging population. The region now has 3.4 million people, 1.4 million of them Catholics (45% Catholic population). This is in the backdrop of a poor population that relies heavily on subsistence agriculture, which has been confounded by adverse weather conditions due the changing climate patterns. Rains are unpredictable making it hard for people to grow the food they eat and earn a living from the sales. Life is precarious.

As St. Paul says in the Second Reading:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”*

The answer is a resounding NO!

St Paul adds:

*“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*

The people of the Diocese of Soroti have gone through a lot of challenges in the past 40 years:

* Civil wars (soon after the Diocese was created, the Diocese was plunged in civil war that lasted almost two decades leaving the region economically devastated.)
* Drought
* Floods
* Famine
* Sicknesses (and now covid-19)
* No bishop for 5 years

But in all this, the faith continued to grow in leaps and bounds. Nothing of those challenges has separated them from Christ Jesus. In fact, they have been drawn closer to God.

Last year, after five years without a shepherd, the diocese got their first native son as bishop, Rt. Rev. Joseph Eciru Oliach, showing that the Church has come of age. He is an alumnus of the Junior High School Seminary, St. Peter’s Madera. This Junior Seminary was opened in 1983 soon after the Diocese was erected and has since produced more than 80 priests who are ministering in the Diocese as well as in various missions around the world. It currently has about 300 young men between the ages of 11 and 17 who are discerning their vocations in life, offering them spiritual, moral and academic formation. This is the reason the new bishop is keen in supporting and strengthening the Junior Seminary. Most of the boys come from extremely poor families who cannot support their tuition and boarding fees. The Seminary is right now congested as the facilities are limited. They sleep on bunk beds two feet apart, learn in congested classrooms, their food is cooked outside as the kitchen collapsed, they eat under trees because the dinning room is incomplete, the library and the science laboratories are incomplete, and feeding them is a constant challenge.

The new bishop is pastorally enthusiastic. Because of dire pastoral care and services in the different corners of the diocese, he created 15 new parishes. Last year alone the Diocese had 31,000 infant baptisms. Between June and December 2019, right after his installation as Bishop, the bishop had over 23,000 confirmations.

All the new parishes, however, either have no Church and Rectory at all or are taking over small village grass thatched Churches. Our parishes usually cover an area of about 20 square miles with villages divided by swamps and rivers as the population lives in their farmland rather than in concentrated villages. Most villages are connected by small footpaths making it difficult for the pastors to easily reach their people.

The Church is also involved in many other areas of socio-economic life of the people. As the Prophet Isaiah says in the First Reading:

*“Ho, everyone who thirsts come to the waters; and he who has no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*

Indeed, God has compassion on his people with their needs. He teaches them, heals them, and nourishes them. Like the crowds in the Gospel of today, the people always look up to the Church for guidance and provisions of needs. Right from the time the missionaries arrived in Uganda, Churches have been centers of spiritual growth, education, health, human development, and entertainment. Every parish has schools, health centers, playing grounds, and socio-economic development agents. Our development office, which is the development arm of the diocese, works hard to empower the communities to attain sustainable socio-economic development. Their vision is to have a prosperous self-reliant Diocese. Like the Apostles in the gospel of today, the diocese has answered to the request of Jesus “the people need not go away. You give them something to eat yourselves.”

**REQUEST**

I am here today, to extend an invitation to all of you people of God to support your brothers and sisters. Remember that we are one Church together: “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,” as we profess in the Creed. Jesus clearly said that “whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it unto me.” (Mt 25:40ff). This missionary cooperation plan gives each one of you and opportunity in participating in the missionary dimension of being Church.

1. Please pray for the mission. Pray for your brothers and sisters in Africa and all over the world, especially those who are in need and are suffering. If you have a roof over your head, a cloth on your back, food on your table, knowledge in your head, health in your body…thank God for his goodness. There are so many who lack even the most basic of needs.
2. Some give to the mission by going. You can consider going to have firsthand experience in the missions by visiting.
3. Others go to the mission by giving. Like the disciples of Jesus in the gospel, we may think that what we have is a drop in the ocean of need, it is too little: “*what is five loaves and two fish to all this crowd of people*?” But I can assure that it makes a significant difference.
* One dollar can feed a family of five for a day.
* If you put aside one dollar a day, a child can stay and learn at school for one year.
* $50 can buy 5 bags of cement ($10@) for the construction of a church in one of the new parishes.
* $50 can save a mother from dying during childbirth.
* Malaria is the number one killer disease, yet a dose that can be live-saving costs only $5.

Like the Apostles in the Gospel, if we just surrender and offer what we have to Jesus, he can multiply our small and limited gifts into something that benefits thousands. It is said that ‘**one by one makes a bundle’**. Any and every amount of your contribution goes a long way to help

On behalf of Bishop Joseph Eciru Oliach and on behalf of my brothers and sisters of Soroti Catholic Diocese, I thank you so much for your generosity and impart blessings upon all of you.