



# RENEWAL MINISTRIES' IMPACT ON EVANGELIZATION IN UGANDA

Ministering to priests and seminarians is an important part of our outreach in Uganda.

*Renewal Ministries recently received the following letters (which have been abridged to fit space restrictions) and photos from Catholic leaders in Uganda. According to Bishop Joseph Ecirn Oliach, they were sent as a “vivid expression of our heartfelt gratitude to you.” We hope you are as encouraged by what the Lord has been able to accomplish through your support as we are! The bishop also asked for prayers for his “priests, who are now involved in the evangelization ministry during the Coronavirus pandemic.” He wrote, “Pastoral work in this context is risky and challenging, yet our people need our attention and care.”*

## FROM JOSEPH AONU OKIROR

I learned about Renewal Ministries in 1980 from a local Catholic Charismatic Renewal leader, Eric Okiror, who had encountered a missionary priest on fire for Jesus. The priest laid his hands on Eric and prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon him. That experience was revolutionary in Eric's life, as he resigned from his job to spread the renewal throughout eastern Uganda. Providentially, the priest continued to send useful books, newsletters, and magazines, such as *New Covenant Magazine*, which was edited by Ralph Martin.

The materials sent by that priest were our tutorials. We asked permission to translate some of them, especially the *Life in the Spirit Seminar Manual*, into our local language so that we could teach it at prayer groups. As a result, we saw many people give their lives to Jesus and live radically transformed lives.

Renewal Ministries offered much-needed direction for the renewal. Some of us wanted to see as many Catholics as possible experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so we made many sacrifices in order to devote ourselves to full-time evangelization. We started working and sharing our limited resources to live community life, which eventually led to the founding of Emmaus Centre.

## AN EVANGELIZATION ALLY

As a ministry, we faced a lot of opposition and yet remained obedient and faithful to the leadership of the Catholic Church. Renewal Ministries, through its writings and teachings, kept us motivated. Later on, when books like *A Crisis of Truth* came, they confirmed what we believed was also happening in Africa—syncretism and lukewarmness in matters concerning faith.

Our deepest desire was to form lay people for evangelization with full support from the priests. To achieve this, we felt inspired by the Holy Spirit to start a special ministry to help priests better understand the Renewal. The most effective tool we found for this was exposure to Life in the Spirit Seminars and other Charismatic retreats.

In 1993, we organized the first Life in the Spirit Seminar for priests, which was very successful. We began hosting the seminar annually.

In 1999, we wanted to honor priests as our “fathers” representing God the Father. We invited Renewal Ministries to facilitate two events: our first retreat for 125 priests from all over Uganda, and a few priests from Kenya and Tanzania, at our Emmaus Centre Katikamu; and a National Conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which drew over ten-thousand participants. We were so happy to host Ralph Martin, Peter Herbeck, and other

seasoned leaders like Sr. Ann Shields, Sr. Sarah Burdick, Fr. Tom Forrest, and many others.

## PRIESTS' FRATERNITY

As a result of the priests' retreats at Emmaus Centre, the priests in Uganda formed what is called the “priests' fraternity” in 2002.

In 2003, Renewal Ministries again sponsored a large priests' retreat, bringing together 350 priests from seven African countries for one week. Since then, Renewal Ministries has helped us sponsor six international priests' retreats, which are organized by the priests' fraternity together with Emmaus Centre. Between 350 to 450 cardinals, archbishops, bishops, monsignors, and priests from up to ten countries typically attend these retreats. Renewal Ministries invites the best preachers or facilitators from around the globe, including very gifted cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, sisters, and lay leaders to share with the priests from their wealth of experiences.

Many positive fruits have come out of these special retreats, including but not limited to: a renewed vigor to preach the Gospel with power and authority, rediscovery of Charismatic gifts, deeper prayer life among priests, improved community and collaborative ministry among priests, and much more. Today more than ever, many priests are open

to the work of the Spirit through the Charismatic Renewal throughout the country.

### POLITICAL LEADERS

Renewal Ministries also helped sponsor two retreats for political leaders, which included government ministers and Parliament members and staff. The joy and excitement were the same. One minister commented that it was the first time someone thought about organizing Spirit-filled retreats for politicians. In one of them, Deacon Larry Oney and Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw kindled in the political leaders a deep sense of Christian discipleship.

### MAJOR SEMINARIANS

The major seminarians requested that they also be exposed to radical missionary discipleship before being ordained priests, so that they could become priests who are strong in their relationship with Jesus. In 2007, Renewal Ministries started supporting this initiative. Since then, at the end of each academic year, major seminarians come to Emmaus Centre for Life in the Spirit Seminars and other leadership training courses, which have helped deepen their relationship with God. With Renewal Ministries' support, we host between 120 and 150 major seminarians from the five major seminaries of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania every year.

### SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELIZATION

Renewal Ministries has also supported the running costs of the School of Discipleship and Evangelization. These schools, so far twenty-four in number, have trained over four-hundred pastoral workers since 1991. Each training school runs between one to three years.

The students come from all over Africa: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, DR Congo, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, and Ghana. After their training, participants are sent to many other countries to evangelize. Some of them have formed similar communities in their respective countries that continue to bear fruit.

### SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES

In 2019, Renewal Ministries sent missionaries and financial support through the Emmaus Centre team to

reach out to the suffering communities of South Sudanese Refugees in Arua, after the bishop of Tambura Yambio in South Sudan and the Bishop of Arua Catholic Diocese in Uganda invited lay pastoral workers from Emmaus Centre to serve in the refugee camps. This was probably the most touching and meaningful of our ministries, as a lot of emotional and psychological healing was experienced by the suffering Church in those camps. Unbound helped many people to forgive their enemies. With Renewal Ministries' support, we also were able to provide participants with Bibles—rare commodities in the camp!

### DIOCESAN PRIESTS' RETREATS

Not all priests can travel to Ggaba to attend the International Priests' Retreats, so we have collaborated with local bishops to organize diocesan priests' retreats. In 2019, Renewal Ministries helped us pioneer such a retreat for Soroti Catholic Diocese. This retreat was very successful, as all seventy-five priests from the diocese attended. We hope this creative method of evangelization will continue, in order to reach many more priests who may not be able to attend the general retreat.

### CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL GATHERINGS

Over the years, Renewal Ministries also has financially supported several national conferences of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, attended by close to 30,000 people. In this way, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Uganda has received tremendous growth both in numbers and quality of Christian life. The bishops increasingly appreciate our contribution to the Church, as many Catholics have rediscovered their first love and started serving the Church with great commitment and generosity.

### UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Since 1994, Renewal Ministries also has invested in the formation and training of young Catholic university student leaders. As a result, most of the strong leaders of the Renewal today were formed with support from Renewal Ministries. From Uganda, these young Catholic evangelists have gone out into the whole world to evangelize.

We send our deepest appreciation to all Renewal Ministries' donors. Your generosity has touched hearts and populated heaven in ways only known to God.

FROM RT. REV. DR. JOSEPH ECIRN  
OLIACH, BISHOP OF SOROTI  
CATHOLIC DIOCESE

Cordial greetings from the Catholic Diocese of Soroti, in Uganda. . . I have always wanted to write to you to express our sincere appreciation for all the great work you do for our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Catholic Church around the world. I particularly want to thank you for the efforts you have invested in financially supporting the renewal of the priestly ministry. If a priest is strong in faith, so will the whole parish be brought to Jesus, but if he is weak, the consequences can be fatal.

I am very happy to report that I am one of the happy beneficiaries of Renewal Ministries' generosity in sponsoring the International Priests' Retreats in Ggaba National Major Seminary in Uganda. I still have great memories of the last retreat in 2018, just before my appointment to the episcopate. So enriching were the teachings and homilies that many of my brother priests yearn for the next one hopefully soon, God willing. . . .

In Uganda, priests often travel great distances—even through rivers—to baptize and provide the sacraments.

