



RENEWAL MINISTRIES

CATHOLIC RENEWAL & EVANGELIZATION

SPECIAL
EDITION



ON MISSION IN
Uganda



A LETTER FROM RALPH MARTIN

Dear Partners in Evangelization,

I am excited to share with you the amazing experience a group of us recently had during an almost-two-week mission to Uganda.

I was joined by Bishop Scott McCaig, of Canada's Military Ordinariate, who is a long-time friend and member of the Canadian Catholic Renewal Ministries Board of Directors. The organizers also asked my wife, Anne, to come. We were grateful to experience the beauty of God's work in Uganda together. Deacon Larry Oney and his wife, Andi, who are involved in helping a school in Uganda, also assisted us. Deacon Oney is a member of Renewal Ministries' US Board of Directors. And Alicia Hartle, executive director of Pentecost Today USA (the National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the US), participated in the general conference.

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➤ Anne visited with primary school children from Emmaus Center School. They wanted to touch her skin to see what it was like and asked her when she could come back.



⦿ A police escort drove alongside our team to offer protection and help us get through the many red lights!



⦿ At the school, the boys' dorm is tightly packed and uses abundant mosquito netting to protect against malaria.

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Renewal Ministries has been blessed to support the work of the Emmaus Center, which is north of Kampala, the capital of Uganda, for more than twenty-five years. The Emmaus Center's efforts are bearing such wonderful fruit! A small community has grown there over the years that now offers an elementary school for poor children, some of them orphans; a medical clinic that provides the only affordable or free care available for many; a farm that raises much of their own food; and retreats and formation events that have had an almost unbelievable

impact on renewal in the Ugandan Church. Over the years, almost a thousand priests—a number of whom are now bishops—have participated in programs at the center, most often in Life in the Spirit Seminars. Also, the center can hardly keep up with the demands from many dioceses and seminaries to provide Life in the Spirit Seminars and other formation for their priests and seminarians. The leaders of the community and outreach are **Joseph and Francesca Aonu Okior**, who are among the wisest and most-gifted lay leaders I have ever met.



To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal's significant presence in Uganda, they wanted to have the biggest-ever retreat for priests and bishops, along with a massive celebration at the Shrine of the Ugandan Martyrs. They needed significant funding from us to make this happen—and our supporters stepped up! Thank you! Throughout our time there, the retreat organizers continually thanked the Renewal Ministries' supporters who made these powerful events possible. They have never met you, but they know you were there for them, and they sincerely thank you.



⦿ Bishop Scott McCaig is pictured with some young people of Uganda. Joy was the defining characteristic of the attendees!

To say the retreat and conference were well-attended is an understatement! Over five-hundred priests and numerous bishops gathered for a week of solid teaching and ministry, as well as the enormous celebration at the Shrine of the Ugandan Martyrs. As many as fifty-thousand people participated on the last night (although some say up to two-hundred thousand), and thirty-thousand people participated on each of the previous days (although some say up to eighty thousand). Counting huge crowds like this is tough but suffice it to say: a lot of people were there!

The retreat for priests and some bishops was very impactful. Two bishops of dioceses in Uganda came to the retreat with all their priests. What an amazing and wise thing to do! They wanted to come together so that the retreat's influence would extend throughout their whole dioceses. In fact, significant numbers of priests came from every diocese in Uganda and from many other countries as well. A South African archbishop came who was deeply touched. Priests from Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, and other countries came. Lay people from all over Africa—including the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Nigeria, Togo, Zambia, and Cameroon—also attended the big conference. Two very impressive young men, leaders of a community and mission in Croatia, attended too! They were involved in the translation and publication of the Croatian version of *The Fulfillment of All Desire*, and they use it for the formation of young people throughout Croatia.

Bishop Scott and I both gave five talks, and we were very much on the “same page”—the same pages of Sacred Scripture—even though we hadn't consulted much beforehand. Bishop Scott spoke with great clarity and fervor, giving some of the best talks I've ever heard on the basic Gospel message and who Jesus really is! Our Lord is not a tame pussycat but the Lion of Judah! The priests received our messages with their whole hearts and minds, and many said that they were leaving the retreat with a much deeper conviction

of the truth of our faith, the need for holiness in their own lives, and greater passion and urgency in their work for the salvation of souls. Who could ask for more?

The general conference was a sight to behold. Joy characterized the tens of thousands who were there. The participants were grateful for the work of the Holy Spirit in their own

lives and eager to worship the Lord in Holy Mass each day with some of the most enthusiastic singing and dancing I've ever seen. A different bishop or archbishop presided over every Mass. The renewal in Uganda clearly has the strong support of the nation's bishops, who realize what it has done to bring people to Christ and make them enthusiastic disciples.

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🕯️ A massive celebration at the Shrine of the Ugandan Martyrs marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Uganda. Up to two-hundred-thousand people participated in the last evening. Below, the procession of the gifts before Mass was generous and colorful.



During the priests' conference, I had two strong senses from the Lord. One, that the "hour" of the Church in Africa has arrived. When the African bishops as a whole pushed back hard on the ambiguous and gay-friendly documents coming out of Rome, they reached a certain maturity. No longer suffering from an unhealthy subservience to the declining European churches and unreliable theologians, the Church in Africa now knows it needs to stand strong for the faith even when Europe isn't. I felt like the Lord wanted to encourage them in this.

Secondly, I felt that some very significant breaches in the "gates of hell" have been achieved in Uganda, that many doors are now wide open, and that we should pour reinforcements into the breach. We should continue to help the Emmaus Center respond to the many calls to help form seminarians and priests, not just financially, but also by continuing to stand shoulder to shoulder with them by sending seasoned men and women of God to participate with them in their missions.

👇 During the priests' conference, it became clear that the "hour" of the Church in Africa has arrived!

Anne put together a ten-minute video that depicts the highlights of our mission. You can watch it at:

bit.ly/RMUGanda2024



Rectors and spiritual directors in the four or five national seminaries in Uganda asked us directly if we would help them. With your help, we will do as much as we can.

These were great days that revealed how much God has already done; deepened the faith of many priests, bishops, and lay people; and spread the faith among many. One night, two bishops from Uganda and a priest representative from Zambia asked to meet with Bishop Scott and myself to thank us personally and at length both for being there with them and for our financial help that made the priests' retreat possible. They asked us to thank you, our supporters—knowing that you stand behind us and make all we do possible.

You truly are making possible significant renewal of an entire national Church. Thanks be to God. As they say in Uganda:

*"God is good. All the time.
All the time. God is good
because that is his nature.*

Wow!"

Your brother in Christ,

Ralph Martin

Ralph

P.S. As you get this, my new book is about to begin shipping! After many people asked me to tell the "true, full story" of my spiritual journey, I finally agreed. I very much enjoyed writing *A Life in the Spirit* and was amazed as I stepped back and looked at the whole journey to date. Sometimes when I was in the middle of it, I wasn't aware of the "big picture." I think you'll find it inspiring and interesting—and many of you are part of the story! You can purchase the book and read the tremendous endorsements at www.renewalministries.net/RalphMemoir. Presales continue until Sept. 1, and the books will begin shipping on Sept. 5.



THE UGANDAN MARTYRS: AN ASTOUNDING WITNESS



In this newsletter, I've written about our recent—and ongoing—work in Uganda. One of the most special things about Uganda is the extraordinary example of the Ugandan martyrs.

In the late nineteenth century, a king who was greatly angered by his Christian pages' resistance to his homosexual advances went into a rage and ordered their executions. They refused to deny Christ and truly died as martyrs. Researchers have compiled firsthand accounts from the many eyewitnesses to the events leading up to the persecution and deaths. Of these, I highly recommend *African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs*, by J. F. Faupel (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2015).

King Mwanga took the Bugandan throne after his father's death while he was still a teenager. The Bugandan king had absolute power over his subjects. King Mwanga grew increasingly self-indulgent and unpredictable in his views and behaviors. At some points, he seemed to seriously entertain becoming a Christian; at other times, he played the Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and pagans against each other and saw religion as an instrument of manipulation to his own benefit.

The king initially welcomed Catholic and Protestant missionaries, who saw growing success in their efforts. But as their numbers grew, the king became alarmed, because his Christian subjects no longer viewed him as the highest power in their lives. Eventually, the Catholic missionaries heard rumors of an impending persecution, and under orders from their religious superiors, they left the country for almost three years.

The relatively small number of converts they had baptized, and the many catechumens who were being taught both the catechism and prayers that lead to an uprightness of life, rose to the occasion in the missionaries' absence. The missionary priests had

known that their new converts might face persecution, so they had taken care to provide them with several years of instruction and preparation before baptizing them. The missionaries also explicitly asked new converts if they were willing to die for Christ. As in other situations where clergy were expelled—such as in Korea and Japan—the new converts continued to evangelize, catechize, and care for one another even in the missionaries' absence.

Most of the believers were young men in their teens or twenties, but some were older, had high positions in the kingdom, and were highly regarded by the king for their loyalty and competence. His closest friend and constant hunting companion was Andrew Kagwa, a leader among the Christians. This did not restrain the king's rage, however, and Andrew was brutally tortured and murdered. His arm was cut off, then he was beheaded, and his body was hacked to pieces.

When the missionaries returned, they found a thriving community of about one-thousand believers, with a truly impressive lay leadership, and many more interested in the faith.

However, there were those who hated the growth of Christianity, includ-



*Wisdom
from*
**ST. JOHN OF
THE CROSS**

*“In sorrow and suffering,
go straight to God with
confidence, and you will be
strengthened, enlightened
and instructed.”*

ing the chancellor—the second most powerful man in the kingdom—who detested what he saw as an overthrow of traditional religion and pagan gods.

The refusal of the king's pages to go along with the king's homosexual advances was a significant cause for the persecution, but it wasn't the only one. At first, the king only practiced this vice privately, as the Bugandan people did not accept homosexuality. Only after the persecution did he more openly practice it.

He saw the growth of Christianity as a threat to the loyalty of his subjects, who now placed Jesus as a higher authority in their life than the king. Just like the Roman emperors, who "tested" the absolute loyalty of their subjects by requiring that they burn incense to them and treat them as gods, every totalitarian power eventually requires the same test. The never-ending rank of martyrs throughout Church history attests to this demand that man be worshipped even above God.

While trouble had been brewing for a variety of reasons, it all related to the king's fear of losing power to Christianity. The event that triggered the ferocious persecution was when the king asked for all his pages, and his favorite sexual partner, a son of the chancellor, was among those who did not respond. The king discovered that the Christians were evangelizing this page, and his personal instability and various addictions fueled his anger and jealousy. He ordered the death of all the Christians in his court, which now were many.

Joseph Mukasa, the leader of the Christians, had already been speared to death by the king himself six months earlier. The hatred behind that death spread to whomever the king could get his hands on among his closest attendants and collaborators. On May 26, 1886, three Christians were murdered at the king's residence at Munyonyo. Charles Lwanga sensed the coming slaughter and secretly baptized four catechumens to prepare them for

their ordeal and heavenly entrance. One of these was fourteen-year-old Kizito. While Kizito was afraid, Charles Lwanga told him, "When the decisive moment arrives, I shall take your hand like this. If we have to die for Jesus, we shall die together, hand in hand."

All the Christian pages and officials were arrested and led on a forced march, chained to each other, and beaten. Some were brutally executed along the way and left on the road to rot and be eaten by wild animals as a warning to others. On June 3, 1886, they were all finally killed at Namugongo, one of the kingdom's designated execution sites. They were burned to death, usually after being fiendishly tortured. In some cases, family members were enlisted to plead with the Christians to not be foolish and to abandon their faith. Encouraging one another, the Christians refused.

The chancellor's own son refused to apostatize despite fervent pleas, promises, and threats. His own father ordered him to be killed—but out of pity told the soldiers to kill his son with a blow to the head before they put him on the fire.

One of the executioners later described what he was ordered to do to Matthias, a martyr killed on the journey to the execution site:

The chancellor had ordered us not to kill him quickly, but to make him suffer a long time. Therefore, we began by cutting off his arms at the wrists, and later at the elbows. And then his legs at the knees. After that we cut pieces of flesh from his body and left him there.

More than a hundred executioners participated in the slaughter of the Christians. Perhaps they were experiencing pangs of guilt at the brutal tasks they undertook when they said, "It is not we who are killing you but the gods, whom you called demons, who are doing so."

Twenty-two Catholic martyrs were canonized during a session of Vatican II in 1965, and perhaps as many Anglican

martyrs. Probably at least one-hundred faithful were killed throughout the kingdom, speared to death or bludgeoned by those hunting Christians at the king's command. Of those killed, many could not be identified or documented.

The courage and fidelity of these "new Christians" is an astounding witness. Many had until very recently been catechumens, just learning the faith. Their recitation of the Our Father and Hail Mary throughout their ordeals, professions of faith in the resurrection of the dead, and professions of loyalty to their true king, Jesus, is extraordinary. So too is the care they took for each other. They continually encouraged one another to remain faithful, supported the wavering, and anticipated the joy of heaven.

Some of the scripture passages that they repeated to each other were inspired by the Holy Spirit precisely for times like the ones they faced:

• *Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. (Mt 10:32)*

• *For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Mt 16:25)*

• *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom 8:18)*

There were ongoing tensions between the Protestant and Catholic missionaries when the persecution came, but both the Anglicans and Catholics remained equally faithful to Christ and in solidarity with each other.

What an example of lay holiness and mission, true and deep faith, and brotherly love! What a testimony to the truth of Jesus' promise that when we are brought before kings and judges, the Holy Spirit will be with us and show us what to say! Holy martyrs of Uganda, pray for us!