



SSS Grapevine

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“Most, Welcome, Most Grateful” Returning to Our SSS Uganda Foundation



Pictured to the left are the three SSS religious who administer the Philosophy Program for Aspirants in Jinja, Uganda, featured in their chapel.

By John Thomas Lane, *Provincial*

In 1959, the Province of Saint Ann (USA), Blessed Sacrament religious (SSS) first came to Masaka, Uganda. They were invited by the local bishop and the Superior General, Godfrey Spiekman SSS, from Rome to establish a parish community. (*Uganda is a country on the equator in Eastern Africa, hovering over the second-largest freshwater lake in the world, Lake Victoria.*) Masaka is two hours west of the capital city of Kampala, and the international

airport is located in a district called Entebbe.) With the help of the parishioners, the SSS purchased an almost 50-acre area of land. In 1959, this was a rural area of Masaka that would become a vibrant suburban landscape for “Blessed Sacrament Parish,” outside the city center. First, the community would build a rectory for the religious of the Blessed Sacrament, and, shortly thereafter, a temporary church building that would become a parish hall. *(This never happened due to the other expansion needs. Saint Jean Baptiste, New York City, inspired the new church architectural plans.)* Following the two main buildings, a Catholic elementary school was built on the acres and, as it is today, serves first through seventh graders, currently holding 1,400 students. There is also an outdoor shrine that accommodates 3,000 for Masses and other events on the grounds. *(See picture below with the canopy above the altar.)*

With the rule of the military dictatorship of Idi Amin during the 1970s, all foreign-born religious communities, including the SSS religious, were deported in 1973. *(Pictured to the Right is the Basilica of the Ugandan Martyrs in Kampala, Uganda. The Catholic Community keeps very connected to the seeds of the martyrs who inspire their faith today.)* The parish continued to thrive with the help of a few diocesan priests, despite the challenges posed by this regime. With the facilitation of the General Superior during the 1990s, Very Reverend Norman Pelletier SSS *(currently living in Highland Heights, Ohio, USA)*, and at the request of the local bishop, the Blessed Sacrament Filipino Province returned to the parish to administer it. In 2002, with the growth of native Ugandan SSS religious, a formation house was purchased in Jinja, Uganda, 400 kilometers northeast of Masaka. Jinja is a city at the mouth of the Nile River and the beginning of Lake Victoria. *(A bigger house was purchased*



in 2010 for aspirants studying philosophy, which is used today, and the photo is of the three permanent members in the chapel. In the late 2010s, the Filipino religious began transferring all leadership and administration of the foundation to the native Ugandan religious, as it is now. The Uganda missions are in collaboration with the SSS Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Province within the SSS's international structure. In 2020, the SSS Ugandan religious were offered another house and parish community two hours west of Masaka in Mbarara. We have

three members serving in this parish. The current census for the Uganda foundation is:

- 11 philosopher/aspirants (in Jinja)
- 4 novices (in the SSS Africa Novitiate in Senegal)
- 10 students (in the DRC seminary)
- 2 in pastoral ministry (year between studies and diaconate ordination at Masaka parish)
- **3 communities:**
 - 3 religious in Jinja, 11 aspirants studying philosophy
 - 5 religious in Masaka (3 priests & 2 pastoral year)
 - 3 religious Mbarara

SSS serving outside of Uganda are:

- 1 in Senegal (assistant novice director)
- 1 in Rome (studies for a second master's degree in spirituality)
- 1 in Kinshasa (pastoral ministry)
- 1 in Brazzaville (pastoral ministry)
- 1 in USA (at Saint Jean Baptiste, Father Fred Bugembe, featured in previous *Grapevine*)



On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the Province of Saint Ann, Father Simon Peter Zikusooka SSS invited Father John Thomas Lane SSS to come and see how the donations were being used and to bless the addition to the rectory. The SSS and the local parish wished to show their gratitude for the generosity of the Saint Ann benefactors and donors, the donation from the USA Province, and the donations from the “sister parish,” Église Saint Jean Baptiste in New York City. Father Lane would also use the opportunity to interview fellow religious for future service in the USA and address the Aggregation

of the Blessed Sacrament monthly gathering about their worldwide mission. They enjoyed a special talk on living the virtue of hope as a characteristic of living a Eucharistic life.

The 1959 rectory is a four-sided building with an inner courtyard. One wing of the Blessed Sacrament rectory was replaced with a new two-story building (*see the picture above with the local community – the left image shows the church facade*), attached to the original courtyard. The upper floors are bedrooms for visitors (with *en-suite rooms*), and the lower level is offices for the local SSS community administration. The building has solar panels for electricity and sustainability. Special canisters collect the rainwater. Due to years of leaky roofs, there is a need to replace ceilings throughout the buildings. They hope for further

grants and support from our benefactors. Also, there is only one working car now, which they have adjusted to by using ride-sharing.



Recently, the local community purchased a working farm on the outskirts of Masaka. Currently, there are a few on the parish grounds, but they will soon join the others on the farm. They raise goats, pigs, and chickens for their income. Construction on a farmhouse is in progress. On the 40 acres, trees have been cut down and sold for wood to support the SSS communities. *(Picture to the left is the new building being created on the farm, Father Simon Peter in front. Look to our website for video presentations for more details about the visit.)* Also on the acreage are coffee groves, banana and mango trees, and plans to plant other vegetation to be sold after feeding the local SSS men. With farming, the local SSS community will have a sustainable income to support themselves.

At every turn, I was always greeted with, “Father, you are **most welcome** here! We are so grateful for your presence and the American contributions to our lives. **Most welcome and most grateful.**” I loved this mantra with each new person. Actually, it was I who felt most grateful and truly welcomed, as we remember the great religious SSS pioneers who began our SSS mission, such as Fathers Roger Pageot, Dennis Ruane, and Leo Bourke, and Brothers John Bourke and Gary LaVerdiere. They also shared how the Filipino SSS men, such as Fathers Willy, Lito, and Victor *(who started the Aggregation seven years ago)*, were instrumental in restoring their focus as an Eucharistic Center in Maska. In the Masses and talks that I offered, I recalled how the local community and SSS continue the legacy and build upon the heritage and broad shoulders of other Eucharistic witnesses. I shared the story of my 90-year-old dad, who wrote letters to his mom in Boston every week from our suburban Cleveland, Ohio home, and ended each one with, “Let us continue to pray for each other.” That has become our mantra after each gathering to unite the Ugandan and USA Eucharistic missions together, supporting each other in a partnership in Christ our Eucharist. That partnership has become truly real with the sharing of Father Fred Bugembe with the Saint Jean parish in NYC, giving back to the province that first started their Eucharistic foundation in 1959.



I am grateful to my host, Father Simon Peter Zikusooka, and his family for arranging a very special day-long tour of Lake Victoria and the Nile, and to the local communities for sharing their stories and dreams for the future. The food (with my surprise at eating Indian cuisine at some meals due to this heritage in Uganda), the comfortable rooms, the great weather, the lived reality of church life, and the sharing of our charism are truly alive and well. Seeing the great spirit of our religious in formation and the “soon-to-be-ordained” priest gave me great hope for the future and growth of the SSS.



Aggregation Members of Blessed Sacrament Parish meet with Father Lane for a presentation

On behalf of our SSS religious, Eymard Family, and parishioners, I bring greetings of being **most welcome and thanks to you, our dear benefactors and donors, who have supported a seed of Eucharistic love to grow.** It grows one vocation story, one brick at a time, as houses are updated and a farming community house is built. Over these 67 years, great hopes have been realized, and many dreams for the future are emerging in a growing Catholic Uganda. Our young SSS priests and students are working hard to keep the warm, welcoming tradition of the Eucharistic mission of Saint Peter Julian Eymard alive. The Eymard Family is growing with the Aggregation, three new members in formation with Servitium Christi (*the fourth branch of the Eymard family*), and other vocations to the religious life. We pray for their continued success and growth. This would be most welcome, most grateful!



The three religious and Father Simon Peter in front of our parish in Mbarara.



Fathers Lane and Simon Peter with the three women in formation for Servitium Christi



Father Lane receives an appreciation plaque from the president of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Masaka.



Shrine to the Martyrs



Tourist day with Zikusooka Family to the beginning of the Nile at the "top" of Lake Victoria with the natural springs that flow upward to create the Nile



Masaka SSS House Chapel at Evening Prayer, with lovely sung prayer
(hear the video on our website)



The remembrance statue of Saint Charles Lawanga received martyrdom.



The Blessed Sacrament Parish at worship, where we enjoyed vibrant singing and movement.