

‘Making Worthy’ Chaplaincy in Schools

Revd Richard Rukundo

Let me tell the untold story of Bishop Nathan Ahimbisibwe, one of the youngest bishops in the Church of Uganda. Bishop Nathan is the Bishop of South Ankole Diocese in south-western Uganda. Whether you are young or old you cannot miss Bishop Nathan’s passion and love for his work. He is also a veteran chaplain from his experience in a number of Church of Uganda founded schools and institutions. Prior to becoming Bishop in 2012, he was assistant chaplain at Makerere University Business School. He left that position but did not forget about those in this noble calling. While he was faced with the uphill task of beginning a new ecclesiastical ministry area, he was not new to ministry in schools so as part of his initial efforts he has ensured that every school in his diocese has a chaplain who is supported just like any other minister in the diocese!! This is not only the first time chaplains are being officially given such worth and significance but also establishes the precedent that school ministry is important and can groom church leaders too.

But we are yet to see many more dioceses in the Church of Uganda follow this example of ‘Making Worthy’ the chaplaincy ministry to the thousands of learners in our church-founded schools. During 2017, the annual regional chaplaincy workshops brought together over 600 ordained and lay chaplains and 200 Christian student leaders who spent time sharing experiences and discussing how they could improve their ministry. The challenges of most of the chaplains in schools are centred on lack of support for their ministry. Limited funding, housing, places of worship and administrators’ undermining their role are some of most frequent challenges. One part of the objectives of our workshops has been to stop the mere lamenting of the challenges and instead to share ways in which these challenges can be met: there has been significant progress towards the achievement of this objective. Most dioceses now have chaplains’ associations which create platforms for the chaplains to engage the diocesan leadership on their challenges. This a big step and we have seen some positive outcomes: for instance, in Ankole Diocese the chaplains’ association is now very active and has been well received by diocesan officials and support given to its members.

Rev. Caleb Musinguzi, formerly for 8 years the Chaplain in Kibubura Girls’ School (enrolment 700 girls) in Ibanda (now North-West Ankole Diocese) says that chaplaincy work should be shared and not just be the work of the chaplain alone. He recommends that each class should also have a chaplain! There is scope for prayers at morning assemblies and fellowships and there are daily opportunities for sharing God’s word and prayer with both staff and students plus their families. This is how worthy it is!!

Another senior chaplain; Rev. Bernard Mushabe, who has been chaplain at Ntare School (enrolment 1600 boys) for 12 years says chaplains do their best to see that the learners have morals. Learners begin lessons with prayers and share a scripture. He says that the importance of the chaplain being exemplary cannot be over-emphasized. All this makes his work worthy!!

The Uganda Church Association (UK) has walked with us on this journey of worth! Bishop Nathan was a trainer with children's ministry around the country reaching chaplains and creating awareness of the worth and giving hope. We appreciate that when the chaplains are treated as worthy they are more likely to make worthy what they do. As a Church the fact that schools are open for ministry to thousands each day, week, month and year gives us an enormous opportunity. Our challenge is how to take this opportunity worthily!

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