

Do not commercialise education – founder warns Uganda Martyrs Namugongo

WAKISO

By Betty Amamukirori

Hellen Namazzi, one of the founding members of Uganda Martyrs Secondary School Namugongo, has warned the school administration and government against commercialising education, arguing that it denies 'low-income earners' a chance of getting quality education.

While speaking during the celebrations to mark 50 years of existence of the school, held at the school on Saturday, Namazzi said that by turning away low income- earners and the needy, the school is deviating from its founding vision, mission and aim.

"The mission of the school was to reach out to the needy and offer them an education that enables them to compete favourably with their counterparts in other schools. The school was to seek out and identify the needs of slow learners and help them excel," she noted through a message read on her behalf.

The 93-year-old said that it is because of that mission that the school depended solely on donor money, Government and church grants, with its staff earning a paltry sh2,500, while surviving on food grown on the school's land.

"None was a millionaire and thanks to their toiling, Uganda Martyrs Secondary School is what it is today," she said.

"I am impressed by the good



Father Kasasa (second left), Musingo, Ssekandi, Lwanga and others cutting a cake to mark 50 years of Uganda Martyrs SS Namugongo on Saturday. Photo by Juliet Lukwago

buildings and the increasing number of students, but from what I see and know, 50 years from now the school will be just another best school in Uganda, unless it retains its original founding mission of associating itself with the less privileged learners," she stated.

Namazzi noted that she has learnt with great sadness that the school admits and retains only the best students in the country, while throwing out the slow learners, fearing that they will not get first grades and deny the school a place in the newspapers as

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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one of the best performing school.

She asked the teachers to revisit the founding vision, mission and aim of the school and rethink their acts.

Founded in 1967

Uganda Martyrs Secondary School Namugongo (UMSSN) is a Catholic-founded school, which was started in 1967, by the late Jeremiah Munyigwa, Namazzi, Joseph Mugerwa and the late Lawrence Mbwega, the then parish priest.

On September 3, 1967, the founders held a meeting and raised sh2,570 as start-up capital. On January 15, 1968, the school opened as a mixed boys and girls day school, with only 27 students and four teachers. In 1971, it presented its first candidate and in 1991, the A' level section was started.

According to Fr. Henry Kasasa, the headteacher, the school became popular when the current minister of state for higher education, John C. Musingo, was appointed the headteacher in 1992. Fifty-two of their students passed in first grade and in 1995, still under the stewardship of Musingo, the school was fifth best in the then Mpigi district.

The celebrations were held under the theme: "Turn 50 years with excellence". The celebrations attracted old students, several officials from the education ministry.

The Vice-President, Edward Ssekandi, was the chief guest, while the Archbishop of Kampala, Dr Cyprian Kizito Lwanga, was the main celebrant.

The guests were entertained by students, who performed a variety of dances.

The event was opened by a prayer session, conducted by Lwanga.

Sexual immorality

Lwanga warned students against giving in to peer pressure and to keep away from sexual immorality, stating that he who engages in sexual immorality sins against himself. He asked them to always think critically before engaging in any activity.

Lwanga told students to stay away from homosexuality, saying it is wrong and unbiblical and asked parents to monitor their children in this era where pornography has become so pronounced.

Lwanga urged parents to stop fighting before their children and learn to solve their differences in an amicable manner because students learn from them.

"To the students, be committed to the faith and your academics and to the parents. Do not leave the role of parenthood to the teachers; you should be involved in the upbringing of your children," he said.

Speaking at the function, Ssekandi asked the students to take advantage of the serene environment to read and excel in their academics.

"Always remember that the past belonged to your grandparents, the present to your parents and the future is solely your responsibility. Utilise this golden opportunity to excel in your academics," he said.

Ssekandi donated sh5m towards the celebrations.

The school also launched its 10-year strategic plan, which will focus on quality assurance, academics and co-curricular activities.