

GGABA MAJOR SEMINARY CLOCKS 50 YEARS

By Mathias Mazinga

When St Mbaaga's Major Seminary Ggaba opened its doors on February 16, 1976, Kampala Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere was one of the pioneer students.

"We were a class of 16 students, 10 of whom, including Fr Joseph Lubega, Fr Caesar Matovu, and Fr Ignatius Kivumbi, had come from minor seminaries, such as Kisubi, Bukalasa and Nyenga. All our buildings, save the chapel, were simple structures. We had very few lecturers. Our Rector, Dr John Baptist Kagawa [who later became the Bishop of Masaka], knew he had the manpower challenge. So, he turned himself into a jack and master of all trades. He would drive the seminary lorry and tractor.

"He would also go to the kitchen and cut firewood. At the same time, he would do pastoral work at Ggaba parish. As a class of 16 students, we formed a football team in which each of us had a role to play. I remember I was a goalkeeper. Bishop Christopher Kakooza played number 9. Ours was a tough team and every time we had a match with our brothers of St Mary's National Seminary, they would pray a novena," Ssemogerere recalled during the Golden Jubilee celebrations about three weeks ago.

GUESTS

The event was graced by Catholic prelates across Uganda and beyond. They included the chairperson of the Uganda Episcopal Conference (also the Bishop of Kiyinda Mityana Diocese), Prof. Joseph Antony Zziwa,



Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere delivers his homily during the Pontifical mass for the 50th anniversary of St. Mbaaga's Major Seminary Ggaba

Bishop Christopher Kakooza of Lugazi Diocese, Archbishop Dr Augustine Kasujja (Apostolic Nuncio), Bishop Francis Aquirinus Kibira of Kasese Diocese, Bishop Emeritus Mathias Ssekamaanya, Bishop Severus Jjumba of Masaka Diocese, Bishop Dominic Eibu of Kotido Diocese, the Charge de Affairs at the Apostolic Nunciature Msgr Georges Kwami Kouwonou and over 600 other priests, among them visiting clerics from Germany.

The celebration ran under the theme: *The Favours of the Lord I will recall (Is 63:7)*. The Pontifical Mass was presided over by Archbishop Ssemogerere.

SEMINARY BACKGROUND

According to Church records, the seminary was originally occupied by the now defunct St Mary's Major Seminary



A seminarian entertains guests with a cultural dance

that belonged to the Mill Hill Fathers (one of the pioneer Catholic missionary institutes).

Following the establishment of national major seminaries, the seminary was turned into a Pastoral Institute of AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) in the early 1970s.

However, owing to the political instability that rocked Uganda in the early 1970s, the bishops shifted the institute to Eldoret, Kenya and the buildings remained vacant.

As that happened, Emmanuel Kiwanuka Nsubuga, then Archbishop of Kampala, was facing a challenge; many young men, who had not gone through minor seminary, wanted to join the Catholic priesthood and others from minor seminaries were being denied admission to Katigondo Major Seminary because of limited facilities.

GEN. KATUMBA WAMALA

The minister of Works and Transport, Gen. Katumba Wamala paid tribute to the seminary's founder and successive leaders for their commitment to the seminary's holistic intentions.

"As we know, the impact of this seminary has gone far and wide. Let's keep the seminary and also promote what comes out of it."

He then said to the alumni: "Keep the torch burning for the seminary. Be change makers. Go out, talk and share with the community what you have been able to get at St Mbaaga," he said.

Nsubuga then conceived the idea of starting a diocesan major seminary, to cater for the adult vocations, as well as seminarians who failed to get a vacancy at the Grand National Major Seminary of Katigondo.

NEW SEMINARY IS BORN

The empty premises of the former AMECEA Pastoral Institute were used to accommodate the newly established St Mbaaga's Major Seminary Ggaba (belonging to Kampala Archdiocese) in 1976.

Apart from the human resource shortage, the new seminary faced criticism; some people were not comfortable with young men joining the major seminary without going through the minor seminary. They thought the seminary would produce "second-grade"

priests.

But of course, the seminary prevailed, thanks to the deep faith, determination and commitment of its founder, Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga and the successive rectors (including the Rev. Prof. John Chrysostom Maviiri, Msgr Charles Kimbowa (RIP), Msgr Kato Vincent Ssemuuma, Msgr Alex Mukasa (RIP) and Fr Dr Joseph Sserunjogi).

Since its inception, the seminary has produced over 400 priests and several hundred laymen, who are serving the Church, the country and humanity with admirable professionalism, in Uganda and elsewhere in the world.

The seminary currently has over 300 seminarians from various dioceses in countries, such as Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Sudan. Some of the seminarians also come from international religious institutes.

CARDINAL HAILED

Archbishop Ssemogerere praised the late Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga for his deep faith and courage, to which he attributed the establishment and steady growth of St Mbaaga's Major Seminary.

The reigning rector, Fr Dr Joseph Sserunjogi, thanked all people of goodwill, local and international organisations, such as the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle, Aid to the Church in Need, Missio Austria, Missio Munich and Friends of the Bishops, for supporting the seminary.

Sserunjogi later thanked the alumni for their contribution to the seminary's infrastructure development.