

Kasese Diocese seeks Shs5b for Martyrs Day celebrations

Bishop Francis Aquirinus Kibira of Kasese Diocese shared that the Martyrs Day animation preparation will cost about Shs4.5b.

BY YOWERI KAGUTA

The Kasese Catholic Diocese has launched preparations to lead the 2026 Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations at Namugongo Catholic Shrine, unveiling a Shs4.5b budget to facilitate activities for the national pilgrimage slated for June 3.

The diocese, under the Mbarara Archdiocese, will animate this year's celebrations for the first time in more than two decades since it last organised the event in 2005.

The preparations were officially launched last weekend at Our Lady of Assumption Kasese Cathedral in Kasese Town during a ceremony attended by religious and cultural leaders, as well as hundreds of Christians.

Speaking at the launch, the Bishop of Kasese Diocese, Rt Rev Francis Aquirinus Kibira, said the celebrations will begin with spiritual preparation alongside nationwide mobilisation of resources.

"We are here to officially launch preparations for our turn to animate the Uganda Martyrs celebrations this year. We have begun with prayer because everything comes from God. Our hearts should wholeheartedly give towards God's work," Bishop Kibira said.

Fundraising drive begins



Kasese Bishop Francis Aquirinus Kibira (centre) leads Mass at Our Lady of Assumption Kasese Cathedral on March 1. PHOTO/YOWERI KAGUTA

Bishop Kibira revealed that the diocese requires approximately Shs4.5 billion to organise the celebrations, which annually attract millions of pilgrims from Uganda and neighbouring countries.

The diocese, which covers Kasese District and comprises 14 parishes, has already started mobilising funds through zonal fundraising initiatives.

The eastern zone, comprising Kakone, Kitabu, Katwe, Kasese, Ibanda, Hima, Kidodo, and Kitswamba parishes, held its first fundraising meeting at the diocesan headquarters, raising Shs60

million.

The western zone, including Kyarumba, Nsenyi, Bukangara, Kasanga, Nyakahya, Kisolhotho, Kabuyiri Catholic Shrine, and Kyabikire parishes, will follow on April 12 at Kabuyiri Catholic Shrine in Mpondwe Lhubirihwa Town Council.

Bishop Kibira urged Christians to view their contributions as a spiritual commitment rather than a financial burden.

"I know people have many responsibilities, but this function will attract blessings for our district," he said.

PREPARATION

During his homily, Bishop Francis Aquirinus Kibira called on Christians to prepare themselves spiritually by embracing reconciliation and rejecting revenge, division, and tribalism, which he said undermine the growth of the Church.

Parallel cathedral construction

The bishop acknowledged concerns from some Christians about fundraising while the diocese is still constructing a multi-billion-shilling cathedral, which has reached the roofing stage.

"With God's grace, we shall roof it by

the end of April," he said.

During his homily, Bishop Kibira called on Christians to embrace reconciliation and reject revenge, division, and tribalism, which he said undermine the growth of the Church.

"We from Kasese will be special pilgrims to Namugongo, so we must first prepare ourselves spiritually through confession and reconciliation," he said.

He also announced that all priests from Kasese Diocese will attend a one-week retreat beginning March 8 in Luweero as part of spiritual preparations for the celebrations.

The steering committee chairperson, Rev Fr John Baptist, said 16 sub-committees have been established to coordinate logistics and mobilise resources ahead of the pilgrimage.

"We are praying for the generous hearts of Christians so we can raise the funds needed to successfully animate this year's Uganda Martyrs celebrations," Fr Baptist said.

He added that accountability measures have been instituted, including opening a dedicated bank account, Kasese Diocese Namugongo Pilgrimage 2026, at the Centenary Bank Kasese branch, where all contributions will be deposited before expenditure.

During the launch, several items were auctioned to support fundraising efforts, including a portrait of President-elect Yoweri Museveni that fetched Shs2.6 million, while a souvenir for Bishop Kibira was bought for Shs8 million by the chief guest, Mr Benjamin Cadet Buturo.

Rwenzururu Kingdom Prime Minister Benson Kule Baritazale called on residents to promote unity and peaceful coexistence.

"We cannot achieve development without peace in our homes. Unity and reconciliation are key for social transformation," he said.

Uganda Martyrs Day, celebrated annually on June 3 at Namugongo, commemorates Christian converts killed on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga II between 1885 and 1887 for refusing to renounce their faith. The event draws millions of pilgrims from across Africa and beyond.