Catholic Church calls for parish-based celebration

By Juliet Anna Lukwago

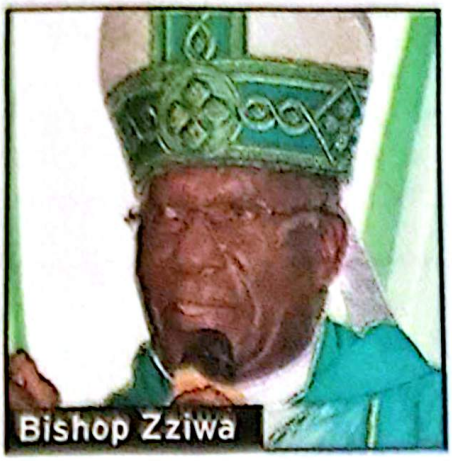
The Catholic Church in Uganda has cancelled this year's National Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations over Ebola outbreak concerns. The Church has instead urged the faithful to observe the day on June 3, through prayer services and Masses in their local parishes and dioceses.

The Uganda Catholic Episcopal Conference, which brings together the prelates of four archdioceses and 19 dioceses, in a statement signed by its chairperson, Dr Joseph Anthony Zziwa, said the National Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations at Namugongo Catholic Shrine 'will not take place this year'.

This year, the Diocese of Kasese had been entrusted with co-ordinating and animating the national celebrations and had launched a fundraising drive to cover logistics, transport, accommodation and liturgical preparations. Some contributions had already been received, including one from the Government of Uganda.

Zziwa, who is also the Kiyinda-Mityana bishop, said Kasese Diocese, which had been earmarked to animate this year's celebrations, will animate next year's commemoration.

The pastoral statement directed that this year's commemorations be decentralised, with each diocese and parish organising its own liturgical celebrations while strictly adhering to the health ministry guidelines aimed at preventing the spread of the Ebola virus.


Bishop Zziwa

Zziwa said local churches, under the guidance of the respective diocesan bishops and in consultation with the relevant government authorities, will hold the commemoration.

"We call upon the Catholic faithful and all people of goodwill to continue praying for our nation's health workers and all those affected by the Ebola outbreak," the statement added.

The bishops emphasise that despite the postponement, the day remains a profound moment for the Church in Uganda to honour the martyrs' heroic witness of faith and courage.

They urged the faithful to use the day for fervent prayer for the nation, health workers and all those affected by the Ebola outbreak. They called on Catholics to remain calm, united and hopeful, living out the martyrs' enduring legacy of fidelity to Christ, love, sacrifice and truth.

ABOUT THE MARTYRS

The Uganda Martyrs, who were 22 Catholics and 23 Anglican converts ,were executed between 1885 and 1887 on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga II of Buganda for refusing to renounce their Christian faith.

Pope Benedict XV beatified the 22 Catholic martyrs in 1920. On October 18, 1964, Pope St Paul VI canonised them in a historic ceremony at St Peter's Basilica in Rome,Italy.

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