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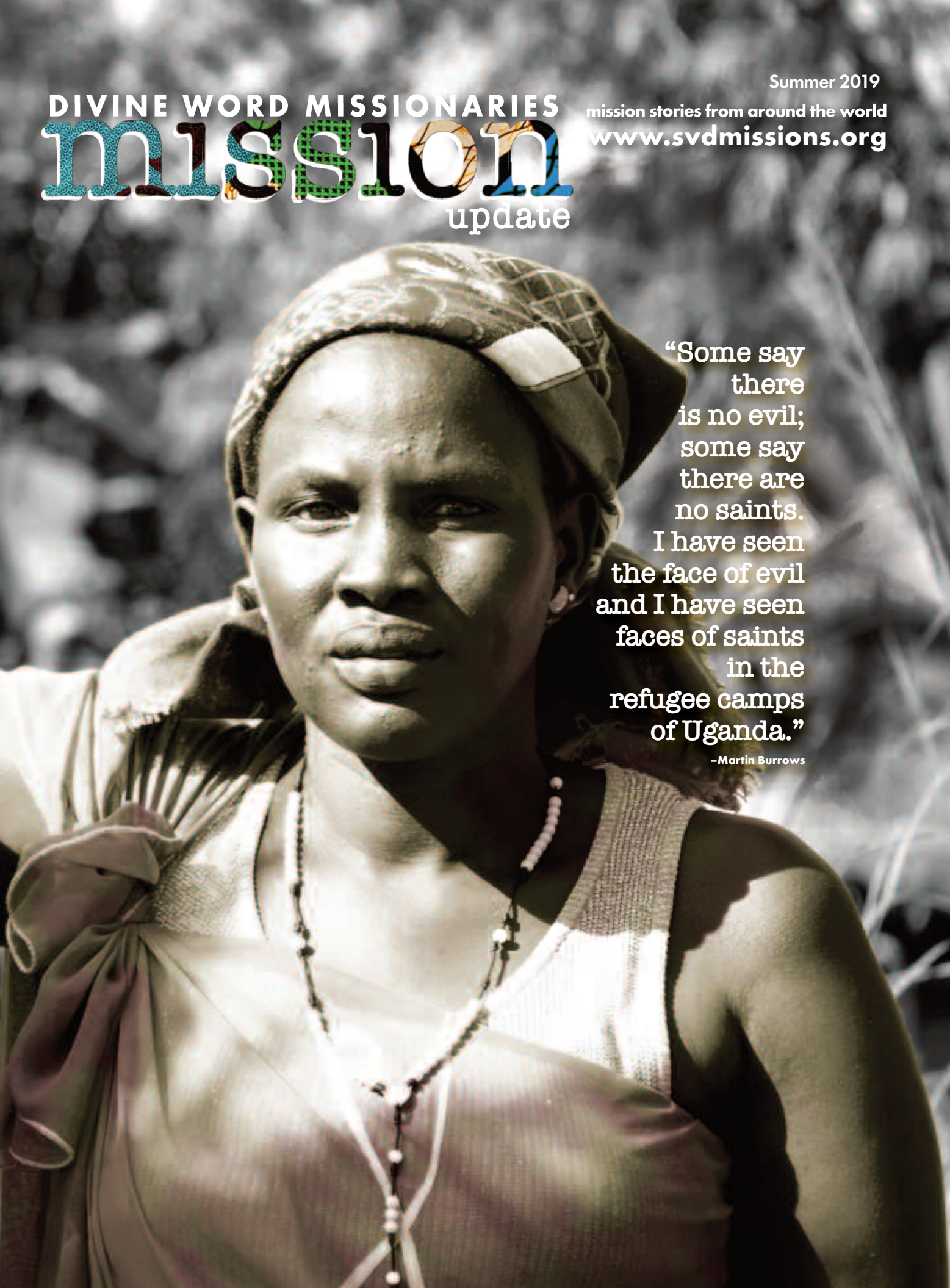
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DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES
mission
update

Summer 2019

mission stories from around the world
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“Some say
there
is no evil;
some say
there are
no saints.
I have seen
the face of evil
and I have seen
faces of saints
in the
refugee camps
of Uganda.”

—Martin Burrows



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**Have you already included us
in your Will?**

**Let us know so we can
Thank You!**

Editor's Note

For the second time in two years, we are devoting an entire issue of **Mission Update** to the plight of South Sudanese refugees living in Uganda.

We first tackled this humanitarian crisis in depth in our Summer 2017 issue, which featured the reporting and photography of Martin Burrows. Martin, a writer, traveler and extraordinary friend of Divine Word Missionaries offered to journey at his own expense to Uganda and South Sudan to bring us the story. *How could I turn him down?*

Reaction to Martin's coverage was amazing. In the weeks after the Summer 2017 issue was published, donations totaling over \$82,000 poured in for our South Sudan mission! Clearly, this was a subject our readers cared about.

So when Martin offered to return to Uganda for an update, *once again, how could I turn him down?* This time accompanied by photographer David Smith, Martin delivered another unparalleled look at life in the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement.

We are also pleased to offer an interview with Father Francis Naduviledath SVD for his firsthand account of caring for the displaced persons of Bidi Bidi. Fr. Francis was part of the original team to establish a mission in South Sudan, and after our confreres were evacuated from that war-torn country, he was the first Divine Word Missionary—and the first Catholic priest—to arrive in Uganda to look after the spiritual needs of the refugees in Bidi Bidi.

The violence in South Sudan's civil war has subsided, and leaders on both sides of the conflict appear to be edging back toward peace talks. Please join us in praying that these positive developments continue and that the millions of people displaced by this war may be able to return home, and peacefully.

Yours in the Divine Word,

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my e-mail address is:
director@svdmissions.org

SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION
follow up from UGANDA



6

Joy and Agony in Bidi Bidi
as told by Martin Burrows

In the latter part of 2018, I took my third trip to Uganda and revisited the refugees and missionaries in Bidi Bidi. This time I took a photographer and engineer to operate our complicated recording equipment. David Smith donated his time and expertise to help bring attention to this awful humanitarian crisis.

—Martin Burrows

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**Father Francis
in
Uganda**

Modeste Munimi SVD



Divine Word Missionaries Mission Center • P.O. Box 6099 • Techny, Illinois 60082-6099
The Society of the Divine Word is an international Catholic missionary congregation with over 6,000 members from 84 countries.
Divine Word Missionaries work in over 80 different lands on all continents except Antarctica.

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Since
2013

brutal conflict in
SOUTH SUDAN
has driven nearly
4 million people
from their homes

South Sudan is bordered by Sudan to the north, Ethiopia to the east, Kenya to the southeast, Uganda to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the southwest, and the Central African Republic to the west

A young child with dark skin and short hair, wearing a patterned dress, stands in the foreground. The background is a blurred image of a settlement with simple buildings and a dirt path.

This has created a
challenging situation
for asylum countries
such as

UGANDA
that are
facing the
needs of
a projected
refugee

population of
1,380,000

Women and children
account for 83% of all
refugees—it is estimated
that 50,000 of the
children are orphaned
or unaccompanied

Over 5.1 million people
are in need of aid, and
4.8 million are facing
hunger and famine

SPECIAL EDITON

Story by: Martin Burrows

Photos by: David Smith





UGANDA
JOY
AND
AGONY
IN
BIDI
BIDI
follow up from

**JOY
AND
AGONY
IN
BIDI
BIDI**

Some say
there is no evil;
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in the
refugee camps
of Uganda.





South Sudan is a nation conceived in agony, an agony that has not let up for its people.

The African refugees I met and interviewed told their tale of beatings, rapes, killings—many atrocities too awful to repeat—with brute frankness. No emotion was expressed on their faces. They had suffered and were still suffering too much to express anything but stone darkness; a reflection of their scarred souls written on the tribal scars on their foreheads.

Such was my introduction to these South Sudanese peoples' nightmare. They let me peek into their world briefly. Many I spoke with now live in the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement. Some of them had walked 10 miles to share with me stories of the horrors that drove them from their South Sudan homeland.





These chilling stories were an extreme contrast to the joyous faces I saw and photographed during my visit to Bidi Bidi. I had to remind myself that behind those beautiful smiles were those most awful tales of the nightmare South Sudan had become.

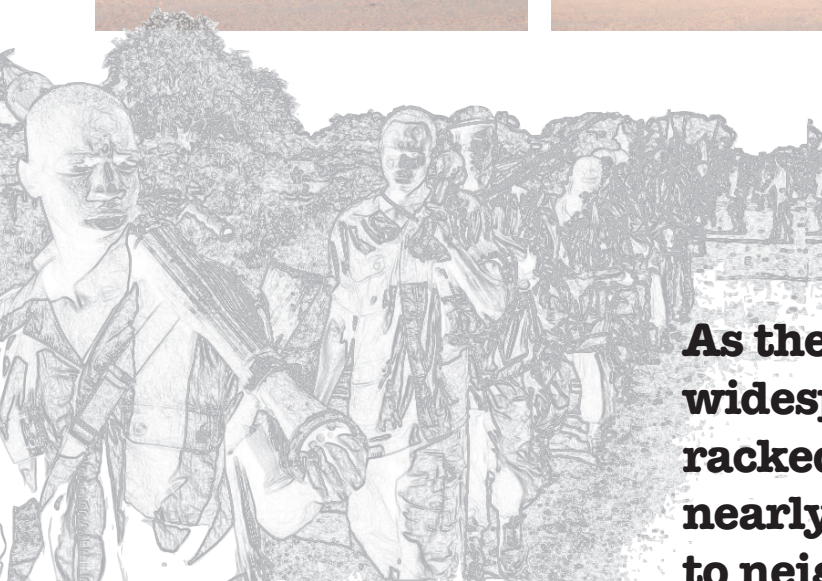
South Sudan declared independence from war-torn Sudan in 2011, becoming the world's youngest nation. Two years later, civil war broke out.



A History of Violence

The conflict began as a feud developed between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir Mayardit, a Dinka, and Vice President Riek Machar, a Nur. The feud soon spiraled into fighting among several factions, engulfing the country in ethnic violence and eventually producing a devastating humanitarian crisis.

The current death toll is estimated at 400,000 out of a population of 12 million people. This puts the number



of casualties on par with Syria's civil war, but with a third of that country's population. Human rights abuses, mass rapes and potential war crimes have been documented on both sides of the conflict.

As the violence became widespread, hunger and disease racked the new nation and nearly 2 million people have fled to neighboring countries.



The Wall Street Journal has described this as the worst refugee problem anywhere in the world.

Most of the people fleeing South Sudan have sought shelter in Uganda. With its compassionate refugee policy, Uganda is now host to 1.2 million refugees—the majority of them from South Sudan. Most of the South Sudanese refugees have settled in Bidi Bidi, which stretches 100 square miles along the western bank of the Kochi River. Bidi Bidi is the largest refugee camp in Uganda, and for a time it was the

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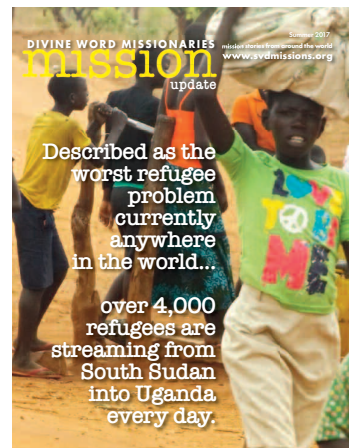
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largest refugee camp in the world (it has been surpassed by a camp for displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh).

This was not my first time in Bidi Bidi. My previous trip was recounted in the Summer 2017 edition of ***Mission Update***. At that time, the only priest serving Bidi Bidi's 300,000 South Sudan refugees was Father Francis Naduviledath SVD, assisted by Brother Vincent Oki Knaofmone SVD.



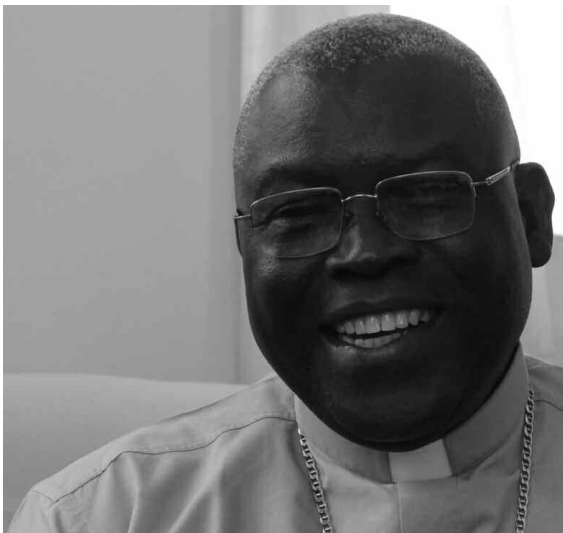


Divine Word Missionaries Respond

After my 2017 visit, Archbishop Michael Blume SVD, who was then the apostolic nuncio to Uganda, appealed to the Superior General of Divine Word Missionaries in Rome for additional help. Three more priests were sent, while the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS) sent four Sisters.

Archbishop Blume was not the only prelate worried about this refugee crisis. Pope Francis sent for Bishop Sabino Odokis of Arua, Uganda, for a report from the field. Bidi Bidi is located in





Bishop Odokis' diocese, as are most of the South Sudanese refugee camps. The Holy Father asked what was needed, and Bishop Odokis said the greatest need was for priests and other religious to minister to the traumatized victims.

In an effort to minister to the South Sudanese refugees in Bidi Bidi, Divine Word Missionaries have begun training the South Sudanese to help themselves. The success of this project is exemplified by one African's story.





William Dak is a young man from Unity State in South Sudan. He escaped death by the Dinka tribe, which controlled the government. He was marked for death because the tribal scars on his forehead identify him as a member of the Nuer tribe. William, a former college student, is now helping fellow refugees by ministering to them as a catechist.



The Sacrifice of Missionaries

Several of the women I interviewed told me how much help and comfort Fr. Francis and the other Divine Word Missionaries have given them. They feed the poor and comfort the afflicted. Most importantly, they are proof that God has not abandoned the refugees. In 2018, the Holy Father honored Fr. Francis and the mission to the South Sudanese refugees by meeting with him at the Vatican.

The sacrifices these Divine Word Missionaries make on behalf of their charges is humbling. I have witnessed true love in its most holy form. The hours





put in and the hardships shared with the refugees are inspiring.

I offered to give the missionaries respite by buying them some battery-operated fans to provide a degree of relief from the oppressive heat. They declined my help but thanked me for my concern. They said they wanted to share the hardships of the refugees.

Thanks to generous donors, *readers like yourself*, Divine Word Missionaries continue to provide food and shelter, for those in Bidi Bidi. They will also build another chapel. But help is still needed as refugees continue to cross the border. South Sudan's third peace agreement, never very effective, has unraveled.

I asked Bishop Odokis if there would be peace. He said, "As a bishop, I will say one thing, but as an African, I say no because this is tribal." As I write this, I pray he is wrong.

Please pray he is wrong.





Father Francis in Uganda

By Modeste Munimi SVD

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Father Francis Joseph Naduviledath SVD was one of three Divine Word pioneers to establish a mission in the new nation of South Sudan. They arrived in March 2012, less than a year after the country won its independence from Sudan. The three missionaries settled in the newly established Holy Family Parish in Lainya, a village about 30 miles north of the Uganda border, and were eventually joined by two more confreres.

At the end of 2013, civil war broke out in the young nation, with forces loyal to the Dinka tribe fighting forces loyal to the Nuer tribe. Hostilities reached Lainya in July 2016. After soldiers occupied the Holy Family compound for four days, killing a local man who had sought shelter there, the South Sudan mission team was evacuated to Kenya.

By that point in the civil war, hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese had crossed into Uganda and were living in refugee settlements. In September 2016, Archbishop Michael Blume SVD, who at the time was the apostolic nuncio to Uganda, asked the Generalate in Rome if Fr. Francis and the others could be relocated to Uganda to continue their outreach to the South Sudanese people. That November, Fr. Francis arrived in Uganda to begin this new dimension of the mission to South Sudan. He has since been joined by three of his confreres from South Sudan.

We are pleased to present this interview with Fr. Francis that originally appeared on Witnessing to the Word website.



Father Francis in Uganda

What is the situation for South Sudanese who lived in Uganda?

Fr. Francis: Today, South Sudanese refugees in Uganda exceed 1 million. They are housed in different refugee settlements. Most of the refugees are still in shock. They still remember horrible scenarios they have experienced. They speak of barbaric violence, with armed groups reportedly burning down houses with civilians inside, relatives being killed in front of family members, sexual assaults of women and kidnapping of boys for forced recruitment.



Currently, Divine Word Missionaries are working in the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Uganda's Yumbe District. The total number of refugees in this settlement alone count for more than 272,000. The Bidi Bidi settlement is divided into five zones, and each zone is subdivided into villages for easy administration. Refugees have the freedom to go anywhere they want. People are not put together according to clans or tribes. Most of the refugees who are in the Bidi Bidi settlement are from the Central Equatoria State of South Sudan and speak different tribal languages. Many of these refugees are from the Catholic diocese of Yei, and Holy Family Parish in Lainya was part of Yei diocese.



Can you describe the life of the refugees within the settlements

Fr. Francis: When I first visited the settlements in the middle of October '16, I could only see miles and miles of huts made of tarpaulin sheets provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Every household is provided with a land area of 30 by 30 meters and this is meant for one hut, toilet, bath area and a small garden. There are a number of child-friendly areas for the children to play. Also there are schools, health centers, food distribution centers, problem-solving centers, etc. Today, the refugees are more or less settled in. Most of them have constructed semi-permanent huts using unburnt bricks for walls and grass for roofs.



Do local people welcome them?

Fr. Francis: My immediate answer is "yes." But of course, always all kinds of strings are attached to the locals welcoming the refugees. Before the refugees were brought to Yumbe, nobody knew there existed a place called Yumbe. Today because of the refugee population business is thriving in Yumbe.

Is there any hope for those people going back home one day?

Fr. Francis: I don't think they will be able to go back home in the immediate future. At the moment 90 percent of the settlers are women and children. Most of the men are still in South Sudan. Many of the refugees told me that they will have two homes once peace returns to South Sudan: one here in Uganda and the other one in South Sudan.

Can you describe your work in the settlements?

Fr. Francis: My involvement in the settlements is purely pastoral. I celebrate various sacraments for the refugees and with them, visit their huts, talk to them, give counselling and guidance, etc. Also, with the help I receive from the Society as well as from benefactors, we organize workshops and seminars for different groups in the settlements.

Did this work change you as a person, and what has it given you?

Fr. Francis: First and foremost, working among these "God-forgotten or Godforsaken" and helpless people has made me more compassionate and more loving towards them. I feel for them and I sympathize with them and try to do the best I can for them. Listening to their struggles and concerns makes me strive to be more patient with people and tolerant towards other people. Working among and for these refugees has made me a better human person.

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