

Pastoral Visit to Kenya and Uganda

A summary of the recent trip to East Africa by the Prelate of Opus Dei, with video highlights of his days spent in Uganda and Kenya.

01/10/2020

In Uganda (20-22 December)

Sunday, December 22

On the last day of his pastoral visit to East Africa, Monsignor Ocáriz preached and celebrated Holy Mass

in the morning before a busy schedule of events that included a visit to the Archbishop of Kampala.

In his last get-together in Uganda, he asked everyone to pray a lot for the Holy Father and for the Church. He also answered a number of questions about social media, family planning, corruption, and apostolate with priests, among others. A common thread in many of his answers was Saint Josemaria's advice on prayer as our first means, and the importance of the apostolate of friendship and confidence.

Andrew, a medical doctor, asked about how to speak with his friends about Natural Family Planning. The Prelate suggested that he begin by helping others see the great beauty of transmitting human life and of human life itself. That a child is much more important than a car or a house... Our Lord rewards this

generosity and openness to life with joy in the family.

Martin, the father of five children and a businessman, asked about how to make more time for his family. The Father pointed out that people are more important than things, and so we need to dedicate to our work the time that is necessary and no more. Sometimes we may feel tempted to work longer for other motives (out of pride or vanity), or just because we like our work, which is only natural. But we cannot dedicate time only to things that we like in such a way as to make our family suffer. It could also happen that dedicating the right time to our family means taking up an occupation that is less prestigious but that allows us more time with our family.

After the get-together, the Father planted a commemorative tree and

then left for the airport, where a number of families were waiting to receive him and wish him a safe journey back to Rome.

Saturday, December 21

On Saturday, the Prelate was received with great rejoicing and singing at at Pearlcrest Hospitality Training Institute in Entebbe. He began by encouraging everyone to be always joyful as a consequence of Our Lord's infinite love for us.

Commenting on the Advent season, he reminded them to identify themselves with Christ, who became little for our sake, by being simple in prayer, and in their dealings with others.

Cathy gave the Father a gorilla trekking permit for permanent residents, and when he read the words "permanent resident" everyone burst into applause. Montse, a convert from Islam, asked

him why God did not take away our freedom to avoid our offending Him. The Prelate explained that if He did so, we would cease to be human, and he stressed that we have been given freedom in order to love and not to do evil.

In line with the recent Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father, the young women gave him a gift of a Nativity scene made of wood and banana fibre.

In response to another question, the Prelate said that a vocation is a gift from God and therefore a great good. He reiterated the importance of making an effort to pray and to convert the distractions which may arise into prayer by speaking to our Lord about them. He answered Maria's question about helping friends who have doubts about the Church's teachings by stressing that Christ, who never makes mistakes, is

present in the Church and in the Eucharist. He then urged them to continue to support the Holy Father with their prayer. All were delighted when he gave the final blessing in English. Joyful song and dance accompanied him as he was leaving.

The Prelate then had another get-together, this time with young men. He began by sharing his reflections about the short pilgrimage he made that morning to Munyonyo Martyrs Shrine and what martyrdom means, which is to give witness to the faith. For those martyrs (even for the youngest of them, who was only 14), it was worthwhile giving their lives to stay faithful to the purity of their lives. We too have to be holy and give witness, above all in our ordinary Christian lives: in our prayer life, in our work, in our family, in our sports, in our rest, in everything.

Our holiness in ordinary life doesn't mean becoming perfect, without any defects: it means growing in love for God and in service to others... a service which includes being apostles: transmitting through our work, through our life of friendship, the formation we receive. Everything we receive in the means of formation (the meditations, circles, conversations, talks) needs to be passed on to others through one's life, words, and friendship. We don't have to be public preachers: we just need to have sincere friendships with others.

When someone asked whether it was a problem to want to be rich, the Prelate said, "It's not a problem to want to be rich, as long as that desire includes a right intention. What for? Why do you want to be rich? Because wealth could be something good precisely to help many people. When one wants to be rich only out of

selfishness, then it's not something good. Wealth is not bad in itself. So to desire to be rich, to desire a business that creates wealth is something good, but let it not be for our own selfishness. Let it be for our family and for many other people as well."

At the end of the get-together, the Father was given a carving of fishermen in a boat.

Friday, December 20

The Prelate arrived in Uganda on Friday, and was met with joyful songs at Entebbe airport by three families: the Rugumambajus, the Kigozis and the Kabenges. The Father greeted them warmly, signed a Christmas card, and blessed the children present before setting off for Tusimba Study Centre, where he will be living the next three days.

Some young people escorted the Prelate on bodabodas (motorcycles) a

short distance to Tusimba, with whistles, vuvuzelas and energetic singing of various chants and songs. After a late lunch, the Father received a number of families on the tranquil lawns of the study centre. With the immense spanse of Lake Victoria in the background, children darting in and around their parents, laughter and cameras clicking, it was clear that the Uganda-phase of the Father's visit to East Africa was happily underway.

In Kenya (14-20 December)

A 9-minute video summary of the Prelate's visit to Kenya:

Thursday, December 19

On his last full-day in Kenya, the Prelate of Opus Dei visited Strathmore University, where he is

the University Chancellor. Monsignor Ocariz began his visit with a meeting with the University Council and the Management Board. He then had a get-together with the staff and students. The Strathmore Chorale welcomed him with African songs and dance. The Prelate recalled how Saint Josemaría Escrivá had envisioned the University many years before it was started, and assured them that he prays often for Strathmore and many other universities with a Christian inspiration.

He urged faculty and students to work in an interdisciplinary manner, and encouraged the students to feel the responsibility of transmitting the knowledge they receive to many others for the good of society. The Chancellor also asked the students to take an active interest in all those around them.

The Staff and students had a chance to ask the Chancellor some questions and share some initiatives in the University. Joyce Akinyi asked him how she could use her work as a housekeeper to serve others. Dr Magdalene Dimba asked for advice on how to use academic research to foster the growth of the country in the human, cultural and academic fields. Philip asked him how he could be innovative in raising the living standards of people in the slums.

Ian asked how to help students get the right balance in the use of social media, to which the Chancellor replied that the key is to teach them to use their freedom well so that they can make the right choices and also to teach them that virtual friendship is not very deep: to be a friend, one needs real personal contact.

Ian presented the Father with two gifts from the University: a coffee

table book on Kenya and three Kitengela glass giraffes so that he could remember us by them.

After this he walked to the Holy Family Shrine, where he blessed the image of Saint Joseph and planted a tree. Finally, he met with the organizers of programmes in support of the family: the Institute of Family Studies, Family Network International and Programme for Family Development. He encouraged the teams to keep up the good work of forming families to be strong and stable units of society and promised them his continued prayers. He then gave his blessing to everyone and thanked them for receiving him.

Wednesday, December 18

At 11 am, the Prelate arrived in Eastlands College of Technology, where he was received by the Chairman of the Board of the College, Dr. Godfrey Madigu, and led to the

Chapel to greet our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

He then met with members of the staff at the College, to whom he addressed some words of encouragement to continue fostering unity and to seek solutions for the many difficulties faced by the students at the College, and by the people living in the impoverished district in which Eastlands is located.

Monsignor Ocariz was then shown a model of the final Eastlands College complex, and updated on the more proximate plans for developing the facility. Then, after putting on safety jackets, he was given a tour of the workshops by some of the students and teaching staff. Several of the students, during this tour, had the opportunity to ask him some questions about working better.

The tour ended at the College fields, where the Father planted a

commemorative *Mwarubaini* (or Neem) tree. The students and staff there chanted a few songs in typical rugby-fashion, and then the Father blessed a foundation stone for the new academic building, and a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After being presented with a College T-shirt and having his photo taken with everyone there, the Father gave them his blessing and encouragement, telling them, “It’s a great job you’re doing here.”

In the afternoon, the Prelate made his way to Kianda School for a get-together with young women from all over Kenya who take part in the Prelature's apostolic activities. He was met by girls from various youth clubs dressed in the colours of the Kenyan flag, who danced and sang a Swahili song of welcome. Drum beats echoed from the auditorium as the Father approached and, at his entry, joyful ululations filled the air.

He began the get-together by encouraging the young women to take advantage of the spiritual formation they receive in the youth clubs and study centres to help them to get to know Christ better. He challenged them to ask Him for a contagious joy and to take a genuine interest in their classmates, friends and family. “With Jesus, you too can draw people closer to God, just like the apostles and the saints,” he said.

Jelina presented the Prelate with a walking stick, explaining that every father in her community (Samburu) owns one. The walking stick is a symbol that the father is the head of the family and provides for and protects his family. She told the story of her own father, who has encouraged her to receive the best possible education, despite coming from a community which often does not encourage education for girls. “Father, I know that you are a good

father to your children in Opus Dei. How can we show our gratitude to our parents for all that they do for us?” The Prelate responded by saying that it is only natural to love our parents but one can always grow in that love. This is possible if children appreciate the sacrifices parents have made for them and pray for all the concerns their parents have in their minds and hearts.

Rosa, a student at Tewa Training Centre in Kilifi, asked a question on behalf of other young people trying to discern their vocation. She wanted to know how to overcome the fear of commitment. Similarly Valentine, a former student at Kibondeni, asked him to speak about the beauty of marriage especially when examples in society make young people afraid of making this commitment. To these questions, the Prelate answered that the vocation both to celibacy and marriage calls for sacrifice. “We all

have a vocation – to be holy and to be apostles. Within that general call, we have to discover our own particular vocation. Ask Our Lord to give you light and strength to do his will,” he said.

Assumpta, a South Sudanese student at Kibondeni College, described the experience of war in her home country and all the suffering it brings with it. The Prelate responded by stressing the need to truly forgive others. “A sign that shows we have truly forgiven is the resolve to pray for those who have offended us.” He ended by urging them to pray for the Holy Father, reminding them that the Pope had celebrated his birthday the previous day.

Tuesday, December 17

On Tuesday morning, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz met with fifteen families from all over Kenya. The

meeting took place in the Kianda School Common Room.

Among the gifts the families gave the Prelate were a painting, children's catechism books given by the author, a nativity scene, and a live Turkey to celebrate Christmas! He had a brief conversation with each family, blessed the children who were present, gave the families rosaries and imparted a blessing.

His next destination was Kibondeni College of Catering and Hospitality Management. The College imparts technical skills in the hospitality sector to young women with the aim of making them self-reliant and improving the standard of living of their families.

This year, Kibondeni College celebrates its golden anniversary. The culmination of the celebration was the visit of the Prelate to the College today. He was warmly

received by the Management of the College and led to the newly inaugurated Marian Shrine. Many of the staff, students and their families were gathered at the Shrine singing a Kiswahili hymn to Our Lady.

The Father arrived amidst joyful ululations accompanied by the African drum and kayamba. He greeted those present and encouraged them to always be joyful even amidst the difficulties they may encounter. He then said a short prayer and lit the candle which Sheila, a student who was baptized in April this year, presented to him. Bakhita, the youngest daughter of the College receptionist, Victoria, offered him some flowers to present to Our Lady. The Father did so as all clapped and spontaneously broke into a Marian hymn.

Tyler and Joseph, two sons of some staff members, then presented to him

a young seedling of a Thika Palm tree which he planted next to the Shrine. The Father was then accompanied to the College dining room where he signed the visitors' book and filled out a personalized certificate declaring him a golden member of the Friends of Kibondeni Association.

He then cut a beautifully decorated 50th Anniversary celebration cake. Jade and Venic, two Diploma students, offered him a handy snack bag with the College logo containing pre packs of the cake that he could take along with him in his East African travels. The Father laughed and gave a blessing to all present before leaving. The students broke into song once more and he left the College accompanied by a dancing guard of honour of elated staff and students. It was the perfect climax to their Golden Jubilee Anniversary.

In the late afternoon, at 5 pm, the Prelate went to Strathmore School for a get-together with young men. He began by reminding the standing-space crowd that December 17th was indeed a joyful day, since it was the Pope's birthday, and that we should all pray very much for him. And especially these days are joyful because they lead up to Christmas, to the birth of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Alaine, an ardent soccer player, asked how to help his friends fight against the enslavement of the social media. The Father's advice was that each person should have a very clear goal for their lives, what one really wants to achieve in life. And "the greatest goal we can have is to look for Christ, to fulfill his will, and to do so we need to form ourselves very well, knowing we are called by God."

Andrew, a university student, asked about the unrest that can arise in

trying to discern one's vocation. He was advised "to go to Jesus, to go to the tabernacle." And not to fear or be anxious that our Lord will demand something that is too difficult.

"Rather what God wants will make me happy, which is what God wants for everyone, that we be happy. 'That my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full' (Jn 15:11)."

In response to a question about the struggle for purity, the Father advised him to pray "especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary, without getting discouraged because of our falls." He made the analogy that even physically when we fall to the ground we don't stay down. So too in the spiritual life. And it is this sporting spirit combined with being prudent that will help us in this struggle. He gave the example of someone facing temptations from the mobile phone at night, who makes the decision to leave it outside the

room. "Ask for advice from a friend, someone who has more experience, a priest, so that your effort will be more effective." He then shared Saint Josemaria's advice to pray three Hail Mary's before going to bed every night, and to begin again in this struggle like a true sportsman.

Towards the end of the get-together a choir sang a moving rendition of Sauti Sol's "*Baba Yangu*" -- a song of thanks to one's father.

And with that, it was already time to finish. He reminded everyone to pray a lot for the Holy Father and then gave his fatherly blessing.

Monday, December 16

In the morning the Prelate preached a meditation and celebrated Holy Mass in Kianda School. The women present were very grateful for the effort he made to speak in English when guiding their prayer before

Mass. His words centered on the astounding reality that we can all be co-workers with God – which is far beyond our own skills and talents and requires overcoming both internal and external obstacles.

“Nevertheless,” Monsignor Ocariz encouraged us, “we must see all these challenges as our Father did: with a great faith that looks far into the fruitful future with supernatural optimism.”

This optimism is based on God’s love for us: “If God is for us, who is against us?” (*Rom 8:31*). God our Father has given us the means to conquer in our personal struggle and to be fruitful in our apostolate. Our only weapon is prayer. As Saint Josemaria often stressed: “the only path for us is prayer: we have to pray!”

It is an optimism that leads us to pitch in with our own effort and to

struggle constantly. Then we will see God in every task and in every person. This is true Christian love.

The Father ended this time of prayer with some words on Christian unity, stressing that is everyone's responsibility. He entrusted all of us to the care of our Lady, teacher of prayer and Mother of Fair Love.

The rest of the day he spent working with the Regional Commission and Advisory and meeting faithful of the Prelature in small groups.

Sunday, December 15

In the morning, Monsignor Ocáriz celebrated Holy Mass in Strathmore School.

The rest of the day was focused on two get-togethers in Nairobi with faithful of the Prelature: at Strathmore University, with men, and Kianda School, with women.

Mid-morning he went to Strathmore University, Madaraka Campus, where he greeted some families coming to see him from Tanzania. He then met with a large group of members of Opus Dei in the Auditorium of the University.

A number of those attending got a chance to present the Father with mementos. Nicholas – the first supernumerary in Africa – gave him a small statue of some shepherd boys. Leshan gave him a *shuka* and decorative neckpieces, worn by men in his Maasai community. A group from the Coast made him a Mijikenda elder in a brief ceremony.

But the heart of the get-together were the questions addressed to the Father, which he answered with great simplicity. John, the principal of a local boys' day school, asked how he and his staff can give equal importance to all aspects of

formation for their students, rather than just focusing on the academic. Monsignor Ocariz emphasised that an integral education addresses the intellect, will and heart of each person, and that this depends also on the environment at the school and on how teachers treat students as individual persons, with the role of tutors being very important. And last but not least, of course, on the prayer of the teachers for their students.

A businessman and father of four, Robert, asked the Father how to deal with the corruption that he encounters in his daily work. This corruption has so concerned the Conference of Catholic Bishops that they have launched a nation-wide campaign against it. His response focused on two aspects: first, fulfilling our professional duties as well as we can; and second, helping those around us – our family and friends – to do the same. He also

added that when we fight against corruption, when we reject it, we shouldn't "do so in a violent way; we reject corruption but not the corrupt person. Don't look at that person as someone worse than you. Don't despise that person. Seek the good of that person and the good of your country."

After a few more questions, the get-together ended just before midday.

At 4.30 pm, the Prelate was received again amidst joyful African songs reflecting the three weeks of joyful expectation for his visit. This time it was the women in Kianda School who welcomed him. Dressed in traditional regalia and bearing gifts on their heads as is the custom, they gave him a warm welcome with a procession of songs and dances from various local dialects. In the get-together, Monsignor Ocáriz stressed the joy of Advent and reiterated the

importance of fostering a joyful spirit even in times of trial.

A number of social initiatives organised by faithful of the Prelature were highlighted during this gathering. Domtila spoke about her Pregnancy Crisis Centre for young women in Kibra, a city slum, and the lives of the unborn babies that had been saved through her work. The Prelate assured her of his prayers. In response to a question by Virginia, he spoke about the importance of spiritual poverty and detachment, since happiness is not found in material possessions. Mary expressed her admiration for his intense schedule during these days and asked him for advice on how to make her time as fruitful as possible in the apostolate. Her question led the Father to speak about friendship and the virtue of order. He stressed the importance of setting priorities and working with serenity.

There was a light moment when Monica and Jennifer presented him with a Safari package to entice him to make a return visit. He delighted them by trying on the Safari Hat. The gift pack also contained a backpack, a pair of binoculars, sunglasses and a map of East Africa.

Responding to a question by Rose on how to react supernaturally to terminal illness, he spoke about the example of Our Lord when, during his Passion, he experienced the sensation of being forsaken by God the Father. He encouraged those present to contemplate Jesus on the Cross and learn from Our Lord to abandon themselves in God's hands.

He urged everyone to intensify their prayer for the Holy Father and for the Church and reminded them of the trust Our Lord is showing them in the mission He has entrusted to them. After imparting his blessing,

he smiled as he left, accompanied once again by songs and dancing.

Saturday, December 14

The plane arriving from Rome touched down at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport at 7:45 pm. Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz was making his first visit to East Africa as Prelate of Opus Dei. He was warmly and joyfully received by the Vicar of Opus Dei in East Africa, Rev. Fr. Silvano Ochuodho, and three families: the Njaïs, Sibondos and Beauttahs.

The Beauttahs welcomed Monsignor Ocáriz with a bouquet of flowers and a song in *Kiswahili* (Kenya's national language). The couple was accompanied by their children and grandchildren, representing three generations educated in corporate undertakings of Opus Dei in Kenya. The Njaïs and Sibondos also joined

the welcoming entourage together with their families.

This week will be a beehive of activity as Monsignor Ocáriz will meet with the faithful of the Prelature as well as their families and friends. He will also, in his capacity as Chancellor, meet with the staff and students of Strathmore University. His agenda also includes visits to several corporate undertakings of Opus Dei:

Eastlands College of Technology, a project of Strathmore Educational Trust established in Kenya to train Micro-Entrepreneurs in basic business skills and provide ICT training as well as Electrical and Automotive technology for the youth who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Kibondeni College, a school of hospitality which aims to provide women with an all-round formation

which will enable them be excellent professionals of high integrity in the service of society through the hospitality industry. This year marks 50 years since Kibondeni College was founded.

pdf | document generated automatically from <https://opusdei.org/en-uk/article/the-father-arrives-in-kenya/> (01/12/2026)