TORORO ARCHDIOCESE TO LEAD 2018 UGANDA MARTYRS DAY CELEBRATION

Bishops in a procession during the 2017 Uganda Martyrs Day celebration at Namugongo
PHOTO BY JACINTA W. ODONGO

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Tororo Archdiocese to lead 2018 Uganda Martyrs Day celebration

By Jacinta W. Odongo
Media Officer, Uganda Episcopal Conference

The Archdiocese of Tororo has been chosen to lead the 2018 Uganda Martyrs Day celebration due June 3 at Namugongo Catholic Shrine.

Tororo Archdiocese will animate on behalf of Tororo Ecclesiastical Province which comprises of the Dioceses of Jinja, Kotido, Moroto, Soroti and Tororo. The 2018 Uganda Martyrs Day celebration will be marked in style as it will be celebrated alongside the centenary (100 years) celebration of the martyrdom of the two Catechists from Paimol: Blessed Daudi Okello and Blessed Jildo Iwaa who were killed in 1918. The two Blessed Martyrs are usually commemorated on October 18 but they will be remembered in a special way on June 3, 2018. Tororo Archdiocese last led the Uganda Martyrs Day celebration in 1998.

Meanwhile, millions of pilgrims thronged Namugongo Shrine last month to celebrate the 2017 Uganda Martyrs Day celebration. According to organizers, although they had anticipated receiving about 1.5 million pilgrims, over 2.5 million attended the celebration.

The 2017 celebration was led by the Diocese of Hoima under the theme, “Stand firm in the faith that you have been taught, Colossians 2:7.” In his homily, Rt. Rev. Vincent Kirabo, the Bishop of Hoima called upon the pilgrims to build their faith and practice good virtues just like the Uganda Martyrs who exhibited a high degree of discipleship to God.

“The 2017 celebration was led by the Diocese of Hoima under the theme, ‘Stand firm in the faith that you have been taught, Colossians 2:7.’ In his homily, Rt. Rev. Vincent Kirabo, the Bishop of Hoima called upon the pilgrims to build their faith and practice good virtues just like the Uganda Martyrs who exhibited a high degree of discipleship to God.” Bishop Kirabo said.

In his speech, the UEC Chairman, Most Rev. John Baptist Odama, also the Archbishop of Gulu urged pilgrims to pray for peace in the country and for the soul of the 23-year-old pilgrim from Lira Diocese who died while walking to Namugongo. The 23 year-old was three months pregnant at the time of her death.

The 2017 celebration attracted pilgrims from different countries including Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and South Sudan besides hosts Uganda. Others came from Italy, USA, Canada, Mexico and India. Tanzania had the largest contingent of registered pilgrims with over 2500, while Kenya had at least 2000 and 600 came from Rwanda and more from other countries.

The testimony of the Uganda Martyrs to die for their faith in the imitation of Jesus Christ has inspired many pilgrims who make this spiritual journey of renewing their faith each year. Robert Macharia from the Diocese of Nakuru in Kenya is one of the pilgrims who trekked for days to reach Namugongo.

“This is not my first time to walk from Kenya to Namugongo. I have been coming here on foot since 2015 together with my fellow parishioners. We usually converge at a place called Mabira Forest just a few meters from Jinja town with other groups of pilgrims who also walk from Kenya. At Mabira, we recite the rosary and pray for one of our fellow pilgrims from Kenya who was killed there some years back in a car accident on her way to Namugongo.” He said.

Macharia added that he would like the Uganda Martyrs to pray for his country for a peaceful general election that is due on August 8, 2017.

The devotion to the Uganda Martyrs has transformed many people’s lives and has become the source of strength amid the challenges and difficulties many Christians go through in their lives. Many pilgrims who go to Namugongo come back renewed in
their faith and encouraged to give testimony to it by their way of life.

For the first time, this year’s celebration also featured an award called ‘Pilgrim of the Year’ where one of the pilgrims from the Diocese of Lira won an air ticket to visit the Vatican City in Rome.

The celebration was graced by the Vice President of Uganda, His Excellency Edward Ssekandi, who was the Chief Pilgrim. There were also other dignitaries including the former First Lady of Tanzania, Mama Maria Magige Nyerere, wife of the late President Julius Nyerere and the Chief Justice of Uganda, Bart Magunda Katureebe among others.

Catholic faithful from across the world usually gather at Namugongo Catholic Martyrs Shrine every June 3 to celebrate the Uganda Martyrs Day in honour of the 22 Catholic Martyrs that were killed on the orders of Mwanga II the Kabaka (King) of Buganda between 1885 and 1887.

“CHRISTIANS SHOULD LIVE A TRUE VIRTUE OF CHRISTIANITY FREE FROM CORRUPTION, HYPOCRISY, IRRESPONSIBLE SENSE OF LEADERSHIP AND ANGER AMONG OTHER ACTIONS THAT ABUSE GOD.”

Pictorial of the 2017 Uganda Martyrs Celebrations
UEC mourns Social Communications Department Administrative Assistant

By Jacinta W. Odongo and Francis Jjunju

On Tuesday June 20, 2017 the Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) community woke up to the devastating news of the death of one of its dedicated staff, Geraldine Namirimu Lwanyaga.

Mrs. Lwanyaga, 54, passed away in the early hours of Tuesday at Nsambya Hospital after a short illness. She served as the Administration Assistant of the UEC Social Communications Department (SCD) at the time of her death.

According to Rev. Fr Philip Odii, the UEC Executive Secretary for the SCD, Mrs. Lwanyaga underwent an operation for intestinal obstruction on June 2, 2017 at Nsambya Hospital and she was discharged but the condition did not improve. She was re-admitted and was due for re-operation. The operation could not take place immediately because her breathing was not normal and she was quite weak.

“I was saddened to hear Geraldine had left us. She has been working in the SCD for a long time and I got to learn from her in each of her endeavors. She was a God fearing person, very dedicated in her work, very caring and loving. She will surely be missed. May the good Lord grant her eternal rest,” Fr. Odii said during the Requiem Mass that was held at Nsambya Hospital Chapel.

In the final Requiem Mass and prayers of commendation at St. Peter’s Parish Nsambya led by Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kaggwa, Bishop of Masaka Diocese Mrs Lwanyaga was applauded for her patience, hard work and dedication. She served UEC for 19 years as an administrative assistant in the Social Communications Department.

Bishop Kaggwa also acknowledged the contribution of all the staff of the Uganda Catholic Secretariat and the love for the late that gave her an opportunity to serve the Catholic Church with one heart.

The National Director of Caritas Uganda, Msgr. Francis Ndamira during his homily noted that Mrs Lwanyaga was not just lucky but blessed, as she managed to serve with diligence, humility, punctuality and above all as a God fearing person. He urged her two children and widower to emulate her exemplary life.

Later in Butoro village in Kamengo Ggoli Parish, Mpigi district where she was buried, the UEC Financial Administrator who is also the Managing Director of Radio Sapientia, Fr. Eustachius Lwemalika, in his homily described Mrs Lwanyaga as an enterprising woman who started small businesses to support her family which is a rare practice with many women.

He also commended her for her faithfulness to matrimonial vows as she recently celebrated 25 years in marriage in October 2016, a gesture that showed her love for the Sacrament of marriage and the family which are the foundation of the Catholic Church.

In the sports world, Mrs Lwanyaga loved to play netball and she always played for Radio Sapientia netball team whenever the Radio held their sports annual gala dubbed ‘Ekibbittu’.


Mrs Lwanyaga served as the Secretary/ Cashier at Kisubi Brick Factory from 1984-1986. She later worked at Bayana Co. Ltd, Lubiri Service Station, Office of Treasurer to the Kabaka of Buganda and Office of the Vocations Director of the Brothers of Christian Instruction at Kisubi under the same position before joining UEC in 1998. She is survived by her loving husband and two children.

May the Lord grant her soul eternal rest.
Pictorial Of Mrs. Lwanyaga’s funeral ceremony

The UEC Secretary General, Msgr John Baptist Kauta lays a wreath on Mrs Lwanyaga’s casket.

Bishop Kagowa performs rite of commendation with incense.

Mrs Lwanyaga’s family lay a wreath on her coffin.

A section of UEC employees at the funeral in Butooro village.

Fr. Lwemalika during the final Requiem Mass for Mrs Lwanyaga.

Fr. Odii gives eulogy of Mrs Lwanyaga.

Mourners at the funeral in Butooro.

Pallbearers carry the coffin of Mrs Lwanyaga for the burial.

The family of Mrs Lwanyaga during the burial ceremony (from right is her husband, her son (standing center with Mrs Lwanyaga’s portrait) and her daughter (left).

Mrs Lwanyaga’s body lowers in the grave for burial.

PHOTOS BY JACINTA W. ODONGO
The Catholic Bishops in Uganda have launched an appeal to priests from across the country to volunteer and provide pastoral care to the people living in the refugee camps.

In a statement released to the media on June 16, 2017, the Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) said the growing number of refugees in the Diocese of Arua is overwhelming for the pastoral possibilities of the local Church.

“We note with deep concern the growing influx of refugees into Uganda following conflicts and economic hardship in some of our neighboring countries, especially South Sudan,” reads the statement that was signed by the UEC Chairman, Most Rev. John Baptist Odama, also the Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese. “We, therefore, launch an appeal to all our priests from other dioceses to consider volunteering to go and provide pastoral care to the people in the refugee camps.”

The Bishops also encouraged all Catholics and local communities in the refugee host district to continue embracing refugees and providing them with the solace they need to live dignified lives. They called upon the local churches in those areas to put in place effective pastoral programmes that will enable refugees to draw strength and hope from the living Word of God and the Sacraments.

By Jacinta W. Odongo

However, they cautioned families and parish communities in the affected areas to take all possible measures to discourage young Ugandan men from joining the military forces of any of the factions involved in the South Sudanese conflict.

“Our part we will continue to provide services to refugees through our local churches and various agencies such as Caritas that is already on the ground. We also commit to praying for the various actors involved in the refugee response and for refugees themselves so that together we can find a lasting solution to the refugee phenomenon in the region,” reads the statement.

The prelates further condemned the recent cases of torture by some security agencies that have been reported in the country, which they believe is a grave violation of human rights guaranteed by the constitution.

They said that many suspects have remained under police and military detention beyond the mandatory constitutional 48 hours and those who get a chance to be taken to courts of law have been subjected to long periods of remand with clear instances of delayed trial.

“This in itself is a stumbling block to true justice since justice delayed is Justice denied. We, therefore, condemn any forms of torture, unlawful detentions, and long periods of remand for those who are under prosecution,” reads the statement.

They noted Article 24 and 44(a) of the national Constitution which mandates all people including security personnel to respect human dignity. Hence, they called upon government to bring to book all perpetrators especially within in security agencies and the outcome of any disciplinary measures taken be made public.

The bishops also urged government to consider undertaking special investigations aimed at finding a long-term solution to the problem in the Rwenzori region to avoid a repetition of the November 2016 Kasese killings and destruction of property.

Meanwhile, the prelates condemned the government’s plans to amend Article 26 of the 1995 Constitution which guarantees one the right to own property either individually or in association with others.

However, the Catholic Church is calling for the government to find alternatives to the proposal and look into the rampant land conflicts in the country that have already caused a great loss of lives and property.

The church leaders further condemned government’s plan of seeking to adopt and pass a law introducing contraceptives for children in member states through the East African Legislative Assembly.

According to the bishops, the danger with this law if passed at the regional level is that it will automatically bind the East African Community member states to provide contraceptives and abortion, among others, to all EAC citizens, including children.

They also pointed out some of the issues affecting youth which includes abuse of drugs and alcohol due to factors such as unemployment, domestic violence and breakup of families. The prelates said that the Catholic Church in Uganda is carrying out consultations to establish the pastoral needs of the youth ahead of the 2018 Synod of Bishops at the Vatican on young people, the faith and vocational discernment.

The statement concluded by reminding Ugandans to reflect on Pope Francis’ message of hope during his 2015 visit to Uganda. “Remembrance amid new challenges,” he said in the last talk of his visit, “fidelity to memory and fidelity to prayer … With these three pillars, the ‘Pearl of Africa’ will continue to be a pearl and not just an empty word.”
My visit to “Bidi Bidi”: The new home for South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda

By Jacinta W. Odongo

About two months ago, April 5, I got an opportunity to visit Bidi Bidi Refugee Camp, which is a settlement in north-western Uganda for South Sudan (S.S) refugees. Initially I had not entertained the possibility of going there, as I heard that it is located in a very remote area making it difficult to travel by road. However, I got the chance to visit the camp after getting sponsorship from Caritas Uganda. I traveled together with a team of Caritas Uganda staff based in Yumbe District, who work closely with the refugees at Bidi Bidi.

Bidi Bidi covers 250 square kilometers of the eastern half of Yumbe, stretching southward from the South Sudanese border and coming into Moyo District along the western bank of the Kochi River. Thus, it took us almost two hours of drive to reach this settlement from Yumbe town. Upon our arrival, we were warmly welcomed by a Communication Extension Worker (CEW) for Caritas, Charles Akimu who is also a refugee at the camp. Akimu gave us a brief history about the camp before he took us around for a visit and, to meet other refugees who shared with us some of their stories as well as their future plans.

“I came to this camp with my siblings in August 2016 after the civil war erupted in my country, S.S between forces of the government and opposition forces. Many people fled in the wake of the turmoil while others were killed,” Akimu says.

This camp was just a bush in 2014, about a year after the civil war broke out in S.S. But by the beginning of 2016, the landscape was densely populated and filled up with tents housing the refugees. Currently, Bidi Bidi is a home to over 270,000 refugees from S.S and is believed to be the largest single refugee settlement in the world according to a recent report by the UN refugee agency. The report further says that Bidi Bidi is now bigger than Kenya’s Dadaab camp, which has been receiving Somali refugees for more than 20 years.

“By the end of last year thousands of people were cramped into a plot of land meant to hold just a portion hence the camp got so full that Ugandan authorities started opening new camps. The settlement has currently been divided into five zones to accommodate all of us. However, in all these zones, each refugee family has been allocated with a piece of land 30x30 by the government. So for now, this place is our stepping stone to making it in the world,” Akimu explains.

Bidi Bidi is very huge, actually much bigger than I could have ever expected. It is like a small town not just in its size, but in its way of setting as well. Hence, we only managed to visit Zone 4. Refugees have built shops that sell household items and repair things like motorcycles, schools, churches and play grounds where football matches take place. Health centers have also been set up by the UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Uganda under the office of the Prime Minister to treat thousands of refugees. I also noticed that some families have built semi-permanent grass-thatched houses while a few still live in tents that they received upon arrival. At Bidi Bidi, solar energy has also been installed; some refugees can listen to their small radios and light their solar power at night making the camp to look like a small town.

With all these in place, I think it is easy to assume that these refugees have just started a new life for themselves at this camp, but they are still facing some major challenges. There is water supply and medical services provided by UNHCR, but it was clear that this wasn’t enough. Access to food and water is a daily struggle. These refugees receive food donation after a long duration hence malnutrition among them remains high, particularly severe acute malnutrition, visible mainly among children below five. The place also hardly receives rain making the ground hard for cultivation even though the place is fertile.

I asked one of the female refugees, 26-year old Jane Monday, whom I interviewed on how she survives in this situation?

Her weary face reflects frustration as she describes how terrifying it was back in S. Sudan when the war just began and how horrific it was when her two-year old baby died in her arms as they were fleeing.

“`My wife and I decided to run away when we saw how bad the war had turned out. It was too dangerous to stay in our homeland so we decided to run away together with our two children and our neighbours. The situation along the way was unbearable, gun shots kept following us from behind but we kept running. After reaching a few miles, my husband suddenly disappeared from us and I couldn’t dare look for him because the crowd was massive. One of the people in the group offered to help me carry my two-year old daughter. It was in this process that my daughter became ill due to the bad weather and unfortunately she died along the way. When I arrived at Bidi Bidi things were not easy, the pain of losing my daughter and husband was too much for me. I could hardly do anything because I was still mourning. But, I was counseled by the CEWs of Caritas Uganda and with time I accepted the situation,” Monday narrates.

Monday also explains that Caritas Uganda took her for one-month train-
Jane Monday a South Sudanese refugee who leaves at Bidi Bidi

BidiBidi has fertile soil but some of the refugees do not have the farming implements and inputs for planting. Thus as Caritas Uganda we are reaching out to as many refugees as possible,” she states.

Caritas Uganda, which is a department of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, in collaboration with Caritas Belgium, Austria, Germany, Spain, Norway and Irish Trocaire among other partners, have committed to assist over 3000 newly arrived South Sudanese refugees and the host community that are living in and around BidiBidi camp in Yumbe District. Caritas Uganda supports them through food production and non-agricultural income generation.

Last year on October 22, Caritas Uganda launched an appeal to assist the refugees for a one-year period. They began by giving them support through food production skills and non-agricultural income generation which includes seeds and tools distribution. Within days volunteers helped to distribute 10,000 hand tools and 10 tonnes of vegetable seeds. These allow the refugees to grow pulses and vegetables to improve their diet.

Caritas Belgium also procured seeds and agricultural tools to be used by the refugees and host community for this planting season. Both the seeds and tools were supplied and commissioned on October 15.

The Caritas Uganda Project Coordinator for the Refugee Emergency Response in BidiBidi Camp, Godfrey Onentho, says that not only do they focus on food security and livelihoods but also health, nutrition, hygiene and environment.

“Every refugee was allocated a plot of land measuring 30mx30m for construction of shelter and gardening by the government. It is for this reason that Caritas Uganda began an intermediary response to provide targeted households with knowledge, skills on farming to produce food themselves. We have also been providing reusable sanitary pads to the women and girls in the refugee camp,” he states.

It is the policy of the Uganda Government that whatever support is given to the refugees 25 percent of it must go to the host communities. Thus, in a bid to comply with this rule and avoid tension between the refugees and host community, Caritas Uganda also trained over 60 youths from the refugee community and more than 20 from the host community in various trades such as catering, tailoring, metal fabrication, agriculture and farming, motor vehicle mechanic, hair dressing and beauty. Majority of these refugees rely heavily on external assistance therefore such skills helps them to become self-reliant.

Uganda currently hosts more than 1 million refugees residing in nine rural settlements. These refugees rely heavily on external assistance. The time it takes for the refugees to achieve self-reliance depends on the duration of time spent in Uganda and access to productive land as well as the quality of their livelihoods.
As a parent, you are your children’s first teacher. You have the privilege to show your children the meaning of life. You have the duty to assist them in knowing who they are, how they were made, and how they should live.

You have the obligation to help your children identify their God-given gifts as well as to teach them to share their uniqueness with others. As a parent, you are called to joyfully share love (to will the good of another) with your children. By being an example of self-giving love to your children, you will deepen your relationship with them and your family will become one spirit, one heart, and one mind.

When it comes to parenting, I see a lot of Catholic moms and dads falling back on, “Everybody has to do what works for them. We all just have to do what works best for us.” Of course this is true on a certain level. All we can do is our best. But that begs the question, “What does doing our best as Catholic parents really require? What does ‘doing our best’ mean?” Does it mean, “Do what comes naturally?” Does it mean, “Do what’s easiest or most familiar?” Does it mean, “Do what my parents did?” How do we know what doing our best as Catholic parents really entails, and how do we know if we’re really doing it?

Parenthood is a very funny thing. You are trying to do something that nobody has ever known how to do well. Even if you have twelve children, you are still learning. You may raise the first eleven properly, but the twelfth one can give you lots of work.

As a parent you should create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others, that your children become personally and socially well-rounded. Your home is the first school for the everyday human virtues which every society needs.

Consider it a privilege to show children the meaning of life and love. You have been given the ability by God to assist them in knowing who they are, how they were made, and how they should live. It is your obligation to help your children identify their God-given gifts as well as to teach them to share their uniqueness with others.

If you put your heart and soul into this amazing role you will see your children grow up to be happy, healthy and holy adults. By being an example of self-giving love to your children, you will deepen your relationship with them and your family will become one spirit, one heart, and one mind. What a blessing!
LITURGICAL READINGS FOR JULY

July 2- Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 97
Reading 1 2 Kgs 4:8-11, 14-16a
Responsorial Psalm Ps 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19
Reading 2 Rom 6:3-4, 8-11
Gospel Mt 10:37-42

July 3- Feast of Saint Thomas, Apostle
Lectionary: 593
Reading 1 Eph 2:19-22
Responsorial Psalm Ps 117:1bc, 2
Gospel Jn 20:24-29

July 9- Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 100
Reading 1 Zec 9:9-10
Responsorial Psalm Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14
Reading 2 Rom 8:9, 11-13
Gospel Mt 11:25-30

July 16- Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 103
Reading 1 Is 55:10-11
Responsorial Psalm Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130
Reading 2 Rom 8:26-27
Gospel Mt 13:24-30 OR Mt 13:1-9

July 23- Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 106
Reading 1 1 Cor 4:7-15
Responsorial Psalm Ps 126:1bc-2ab, 2cd-3, 4-5, 6
Gospel Mt 20:20-28

July 30- Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 109
Reading 1 1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12
Responsorial Psalm Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130
Reading 2 Rom 8:28-30
Gospel Mt 13:44-52

Why we should care for our environment

By Rose Kababikira
National Coordinator, Uganda YCS

Dear friends in Christ,

In this month of June, I would like to focus my reflection on the environment; our common home. Since 1973, every June 5 is celebrated annually as the World Environment Day, also known as the Environment Day or Eco Day. This day has always been celebrated worldwide by the people aiming to protect the unique and life nurturing nature. This year, I was glad to participate in the celebration at the United Nations offices in Nairobi together with other young people from the Eastern Africa Sub region (Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) Rwanda and Burundi too were invited as guests. In Uganda, it was celebrated under the theme “Connecting People to Nature, appreciate biodiversity”. The celebration and training session that I attended was aimed at raising the global awareness about the importance of the healthy and green environment in the human lives, to solve the environmental issues by implementing some positive environmental actions as well as to make aware to the common public worldwide that everyone is responsible for saving his environment and not only the government or organizations working for it.

It was resolved that we pay attention to the environment from this year onwards as the environment happens to be one of the major concerns of our Global Campaign 2015-2019 “Protecting our Common Home”. The International Young Catholic Students aims at “Reducing Global warming by 2 degress by 2019” and as a National Movement, we have outlined activities such as tree planting competitions, hygiene and energy and other areas of concern. Our call to all our animators, patrons, matrons and chaplains is to collaborate with us;

A quick look into the Bible, God said in Gen 1:29-30, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”

In conclusion, as Christians we should continue to be models of ethical responsibility and care towards creation as well as others to the global community. Those who live in the high-income industrialised nations have a particular responsibility in their stewardship, an imperative to care for those elsewhere in the world adversely affected by climate change. ‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.’(Lk 12:48) The time has come for us to carefully seek to learn all that the Bible teaches us about the Creator, creation, and stewardship of His world. We must discover what creation teaches us about its God-given order and the principles by which it works. We must not selfishly keep the good news to ourselves. We must proclaim. We should so behave on earth that our testimony to our Creator is clear and that heaven will be our reward.
As Christians we need to walk the streets of the digital highway, to have an encounter like the Good Samaritan especially to those who are lying on the side of the road and witness to them in tenderness and love”, wrote Pope Francis in his message for 48th World Communication Day. Being a Good Samaritan is the hallmark of being a Christian. Jesus concluded his parable of the Good Samaritan with the challenge, “Go and do likewise.” Some years ago it was said, there are over 1.2 billion people connected to facebook and today we do not have a clear statistics of how many are on whatsapp, it is believed to be staggering figure of over two billions! Indeed many of them are young people busy walking along this Digital Highway.

Social Network is the gigantic world.

As Good Shepherds and Good Samaritans we cannot pastorally overlook this huge flock. We as people of faith need to be in there with them, dialoguing with the inhabitants of this new world, with the young and others who dwell in this digital world. This digital world is a virtual world, the new space that is awaiting evangelization. It is the ‘digital continent to be won for Christ’, a huge ship that must be put to sail for Christ. It is ripe for our evangelizing mission.

A creative evangelizer is never in lack of pastoral space and pastoral moment. A conscious shepherd finds his flock anywhere and everywhere. Every moment of his day is a pastoral opportunity. He takes different and appropriate roles to serve his or her flock; he or she is a priest, teacher, animator, leader, counselor, and a friend.

Today the digital world is a fertile ground for ministry. We need to be present in this electronic age with its digital gadgets and social media. It is the new Areopagus such as that of St. Paul which he encountered in Athens. As St. Paul, the great Evangelizer directed the Greeks to encounter the true the God, we ought to lead them to the true God in whom they will find meaning and peace. In the moment of disorientation, idleness and confusions of the modern world, the young people take shelter in social media and internet sites. Momentarily they shift from the real world to a virtual world—a dream world of fantasy.

They are spending huge proportions of their time in this virtual world, so much that for many it is becoming increasingly the place where they live their lives, and what we call the real world of face to face seems often dull, uneventful to them, and their secondary existence. We are often amazed at the ability of young people to text on Whatsapp, Facebook with others while talking to those near them or involved in other activities!!

Media, a tool to evangelize and a tool for evangelization

There are different ways of looking at the use of this new media in evangelization—the social media and the internet. One way is to see the new media as yet another tool to reach people with the message of the Gospel and another way is to evangelize the media itself—to put Christ and the values of the Gospel into them. By means of the various forms of new media, we can reach out to the peripheries and draw people in, so that they can hear the Word of God and understand it better. They may then be open to a face to face encounter with a Church or parish priest who runs an internet based radio with young volunteers reaching out to over 10,000 listeners in living all over the world. As Pope Francis suggests, through this Christ-Network, ‘Christian witness can reach the peripheries of human existence’.

Pope Francis rightly said: “The digital highway is a street teaming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope. By means of the internet, the Christian message can reach “to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). May the image of the Good Samaritan who tended to the wounds of the injured man by pouring oil and wine over them be our inspiration. Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts.

www arasulazar.org
Any Catholic Media organization within the AMECEA Region and indeed Africa at large has at one point or the other interacted with SIGNIS, which is the World Catholic Association for Communication that brings together radio, television, cinema, video, media education, Internet, and new technology professionals.

Every four years since its inception in November 2001, SIGNIS has always held a world congress which gives a forum for interaction among the Catholic Communication practitioners from across the world. The world Congress is a culmination of two key events, namely the Plenary Assembly, which involves discussions, learnings, and speeches and is open to all members and the Delegates Assembly, where elections of board members are done as well as presentations of reports.

The Congress in Quebec, which was held from June 19-21, attracted approximately 500 participants. It was a beehive of activities, which included plenary discussions as well as learning through sharing of experiences, best practices and success stories. The congress organizers planned the activities in such a way that every aspect of communication was given a focus in order to cater for the various needs of the participants.

Participants were spoilt for choice as the plenary discussions provided rich topics that touches the core of communication practices. Among some of the plenary discussions, which were of interest to AMECEA included the new funding and marketing methods for media where speakers from different regions discussed how media initiatives are adapting new forms of multi-media marketing, crowd funding and other innovations to support and sustain operations. Also another topic of interest was the round table discussion on how creative communication can contribute to building peace and hope in a world of cultural and religious diversity.

Other topics for the Plenary discussions included Communicating faith and hope when the going gets tough; Faith Formation, storytelling and social media; finding truth in the age of digital propaganda and promoting stories of hope about the environment among many others.

The Congress was an opportunity for Catholic communicators to interact, learn from one another and build networks that would go a long way in the field of communications. The next Congress is scheduled to take place in Korea in 2021.

Meanwhile during the Assembly of delegates, the executive board members are usually elected; these includes the President and two Vice Presidents, Ecclesiastical Assistant (Secretary), the General Treasure and the Secretary General. These elections are usually held after every four years during the World Congress. As such the executive Board members who were elected during the Quebec Congress included Ms. Helen Osman from USA, formally of Catholic Media Campaign as President; Mr. Lawrence John Sinniah from Malaysia First Vice President; Rev. Fr. Paul Samasumo, who is former AMECEA Delegate Second Vice President; Rev. Fr. Luis Garcia Orso, SJ from Mexico as Ecclesiastical Assistant and Mr. Emmanuel Bonnet from France as General Treasurer while Mr. Ricardo Yáñez from Argentina retained the position of Secretary General.

Due to lack of quorum, SIGNIS Africa elected delegates on interim basis to serve for the next two years after which the SIGNIS Africa Members will hold a meeting to elect their leaders. Rev. Fr. Walter Ihejirika from Nigeria was elected Interim President for SIGNIS Africa and Rev. Fr. Alberto Buque from Mozambique Interim Vice President. Rev. Fr. Chirsantus Ndaga will represent AMECEA as an interim delegate until AMECEA appoints one from among its Members.
Pope Francis asks Catholic media professionals to proclaim the Gospel of Peace

By AMECEA Online News Reporter

The Holy Father Pope Francis has asked the Catholic Media Professionals to continue seeking all technological and social means of cooperating in the Church’s universal mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Peace.

In his message which was delivered by Msgr Dario’ Edoardo Vigano, Prefect of the Secretariat for Communication at the Vatican, to the participants of SIGNIS World Congress 2017 held at Laval University in Quebec City – Canada from June 19-21, the Holy Father said that he is confident that the stories of hope which was the theme of the Congress, will inspire hope of accessible to everyone, at the very cross roads where life meets the bitterness of failure.

Msgr. Edoardo said that The Holy Father was pleased to learn about the forth coming SIGNIS World Congress in Quebec and invoked through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, God’s blessings of Peace and Joy to the Congress participants.

The Congress was attended by about 500 Catholic communicators from around the world who participated in various workshops and plenary discussion about various communication topics.

The immediate former President of the SIGNIS Mr. Gustavo Andujar said during the opening ceremony that the Congress presented an opportunity to participant to make new friends and collaborators in their various fields of communication activities.

“The world will not be destroyed by those who are evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything”

Albert Einstein

The Sanctum

The Sanctum (an apartment hotel) is a private company that has been in existence since January 2009. We offer accommodation, conference, food and beverage and banqueting services. Located at Kitala - Entebbe Road, we are engaged in every aspect of hotel and luxury, setting international standards of hospitality and comfort. We are 10 minutes' drive from the airport and 40 minutes' drive from the capital city of Uganda, Kampala, we also operate a shuttle for airport transfers at a sur charge. We are an apartment hotel built to suit individuals, corporates and long term holiday makers who seek a quiet, comfortable and truly authentic African environment.
African Delegates miss out on the 2017 SIGNIS World Congress due to visa complications

By Pamela Adinda, AMECEA Online News

Last month, majority of African delegates missed out on the just concluded SIGNIS World Congress due to visa issues. From AMECEA Countries Delegates from Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi and Tanzania who had applied to attend the congress painfully missed out because they could not get visas to Canada.

Among the people who missed out due to visa complications included the immediate former SIGNIS Africa President Fr. Ernest Kouacou from Cameroon and immediate former AMECEA SIGNIS Delegate Fr. Andrew Kaufa from Malawi.

According to the newly elected President of SIGNIS Africa Fr. Walter Ihejirika, many African delegates expressed interest to attend the congress but unfortunately they couldn’t travel; for instance, from Nigeria, 30 people had registered to attend the congress but unfortunately only eight people managed to get the visas to Canada.

“My appeal to anyone who wishes to attend the congress is to start the process early enough so that they have enough time to process the travel documents. At the same time, I appeal to future host countries to make prior arrangements that would ease the visa issues for delegates willing to attend.” Fr. Walter told AMECEA Online News.

Fr. Walter explained that during the 2014 World Congress in Rome, the Vatican Secretariat of State intervened making it easy for the delegates who had expressed interest to attend. He cited the Rome Congress as one of the best attended.

SIGNIS World Congress is held after every four years. The first Congress was held in Rome, Italy in 2001 followed by Lyon, France (2005) and Chiang Mai, Thailand (2009). The following World Congress was scheduled for Lebanon in 2013 but due to security issues, it was later on convened in Rome in 2014.

Kenyan doctors applauded for a successful operation of conjoined twins

By AMECEA Online Correspondent

Kenyan Doctors have been commended over heroic and professional standard that led to the successful operation of conjoined twins who left Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) on Thursday June 15, after staying in the hospital for three years.

A cross section of people interviewed by AMECEA Online News said that the successful operation is a testimony of the vast improvement in the quality and capacity of Kenyan Medical Specialists who can handle complicated human health challenges.

The team comprised of a multidisciplinary medical team of fifty specialists including paediatric surgeons, neurosurgeons, plastic and reconstructive surgeons, anaesthetists and nursing teams performed the delicate and historic surgery on the two lovely girls named Blessings and Favour Mukiri for 23-hours at KNH.

The Kenyan twins, born on September 4, 2014 in Meru (about 250 km from Nairobi), were cojoined at the lower back and shared a spinal cord, rectum, anus, some muscles, tissues and skin a case which led them to be transferred to KNH the following day.

After more than 24 months to allow the development of the key organs and also enable them gain appropriate muscles to withstand the surgery, monitoring, consultations and planning, the two were wheeled into the hospital’s theatre where a medical team of 50 experts made history in Sub-Saharan Africa by separating them. The two brave girls came out from the surgery separated but still sharing a fighting spirit.

Thursday of June 15, the two girls whose surgery captivated the entire country took their first journey home. Their mother, Caroline Mukiri, called it the happiest day of her life, one that she had been waiting for, for the past 33 months.

Dr Joel Lesan, a paediatric surgeon, who took part in the separation, assured the single mother that the hospital would continue monitoring the progress of the two girls. However, he expressed confidence that Mukiri had learnt enough about handling the girls.

Doctors said the two might need to make some trips back to KNH in future for check-up.
Pope Francis marks 25 years as a Bishop

By Vatican Radio

Pope Francis celebrated Mass on Tuesday morning June 27 in the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, together with the members of the College of Cardinals present in the city, in order to mark the 25th jubilee of his ordination to the episcopacy.

The Dean of the College of Cardinals offered greetings and best wishes to Pope Francis on the occasion, recalling the words of St. Paul the Apostle in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, “Make room for us in your hearts,” Cardinal Sodano said. “Holy Father, you need not tell us to make room for you in our hearts,” he continued, pledging him all the love and reverence due the Successor to Peter.

In remarks following the Readings of the Day, the first of which was taken from the Book of Genesis, recounting the episode in which Abraham and Lot part ways, Pope Francis focused on the three imperatives that God gives the Father of Faith: “Arise!” “Look out!” “Be hopeful!”

“When Abraham was called, he was more or less our age,” Pope Francis said to the elder statesmen of the Church. “He was going to retire, to go into retirement for some rest – he started out at that age.”

“An old man,” the Pope continued, “with the weight of old age, old age that brings pain, illness – but [God said to him], as if he were a young man, ‘Get up, go, go! As if he were a scout: go! Look and hope!’”

The Holy Father went on to say that the message God gave to Abraham in that day, He also gives to each of those present in this day: to be on the way, about the journey; to look toward the ever-retreating horizon, and to hope without stint, despite it all.

“There are those, who do not love us, who say that we are the ‘Gerontocracy’ of the Church. This is mere mockery. Whoever says so knows not what he says. We are not tired old fools [It. geronti]: we are grandfathers. And if we do not feel this, we must ask the grace to feel that it is so. We are grandfathers, to whom our grandchildren look – grandparents who, with our experience, must share with those grandchildren a sense of what life is really about - grandparents not closed off in melancholy over our salad days, but open to give this [gift] of meaning, of sense. For us, then, this threefold imperative: ‘Arisel! Look outward! Hope!’ is called ‘dreaming’. We are grandfathers called to dream and to pass on our dream to today’s youth: they need it, that they might take from our dreams the power to prophesy and carry on their work.”

After the Mass, the Holy Father greeted the Cardinal-concelebrants one-by-one.

He also greeted members of the household staff and the professional staff of the Secretariat for Communications, who had done the live Vatican Radio commentary for the liturgy in several languages, including English.
Pope Francis on Monday June 26 told believers not to look to horoscopes or to consult fortune-tellers to foresee the future; but to allow God to guide them in a journey full of surprises.

The Pope was speaking during the last Santa Marta Mass of the season before the summer holidays and his return from an apostolic visit to Colombia in September.

Inviting Christians not to be “too settled, stationary, fixed,” Pope Francis reflected on the liturgical reading of the day in which God asks Abraham to leave his country, his homeland, his father’s house and go forth with his kinsfolk, and Abraham – who was seventy five years old – went, as the Lord directed him.

“There is a Christian life-style” the Pope said, “a life-style based on three dimensions: “renunciation”, “promise” and “blessing”.

“To be a Christian always implies this dimension of stripping oneself” of something, it’s a dimension that reflects Jesus’s renunciation on the Cross, he said.

There is always the need to “go forth”, to take a first step and “leave your land, your family, your father’s house.”

The Bible and the Gospels, the Pope said, are full of stories and episodes in which the prophets and the disciples are called to go forth.

And yet, Francis continued, Abraham did not build a house, he pitched a tent, indicating that “he was on a journey and trusted God”; he built an altar “to worship Him” and then he kept on walking: he was always on the go.

The journey of a Christian, the Pope explained, starts anew every morning, trusting in the Lord and open to his many surprises.

He pointed out that at times these surprises are good, at others bad – “think of an illness or of a death” – he said – but we must always be open because we know that He will take us to a safe place, to a land that has been prepared especially for us.

Another trait of the Christian is that he or she always carries a blessing. Christians speak well of the Lord and of others, and ask for God’s blessing to go forward on their paths.

This, the Pope said, is the pattern of our Christian life because everyone, “even lay people, must bless others, speak well of God and of others.”

Too often, he added, we speak badly of our neighbor, “our tongues wag too much” instead of following the order that God gave to “our father” Abraham as a lesson for life:

“That of walking, of letting ourselves be stripped by the Lord, of trusting in his promises and of being irreprehensible” he said.

“Deep down, Francis concluded, Christian life is so simple!”

WISE QUOTES FOR REFLECTION

‘Everything that happens to you is a reflection of what you believe about yourself. We cannot outperform our level of self-esteem. We cannot draw to ourselves more than we think we are worth.’ – Iyanla Vanzant

‘In silence and movement you can show the reflection of people’ - Marcel Marceau

‘Remember that when you leave this earth you can take nothing with you, nothing that you receive – only that which you have given.’ – St Francis of Assisi

“You cannot see your reflection in boiling water; similarly truth can’t be seen in a state of anger so always analyze before you finalize” – Unknown

‘Nothing can have value without being an object of utility’ – Karl Marx

‘Never let it be said that dream is a waste of one’s time, for dreams are our realities in waiting. In dreams we plant the seeds of our future.’ – Anonymous

You have a gift that only you can give the world - that’s the whole reason you’re on the planet. Use your precious energy to build a magnificent life that really is attainable.

The miracle of your existence calls for celebration every day – Oprah

‘Anger is the most impotent of passions. It affects nothing it touches and hurts the one who is possessed by it more than the one against whom it is directed’ – Claredon
Pope donates funds to support aid projects in South Sudan

By Vatican Radio

Pope Francis has pledged to donate about half a million dollars to support Church-run education, healthcare and agricultural projects in South Sudan. At a press conference in the Vatican on Wednesday June 21, Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the office for Integral Human Development, led a panel of speakers giving details of those humanitarian projects, run by Caritas and by missionaries from different religious institutes. The cardinal also outlined numerous initiatives that the Holy See has taken to stop the war, which flared across the country in 2013.

Pope Francis may have postponed a planned visit to war-torn South Sudan this year, but he’s clearly more determined than ever to raise awareness about the need to support those suffering from conflict and starvation.

Over half the population doesn’t have enough food to eat, a million and a half people have fled their homes, thousands are suffering from a cholera epidemic and untold numbers are victims of killings, rapes and other violent crimes.

Faces behind the statistics

But beyond the shocking statistics of this largely forgotten war, it’s vital to remember the individual victims – that’s why aid workers have started a Twitter campaign using the hashtag #southsudanwecare.

Among those speaking at the Vatican press conference was Sr Yudith Pereira-Rico, from Solidarity with South Sudan, an organisation founded by male and female religious congregations over a decade ago:

“We don’t talk about numbers, we talk about individuals who are suffering…any time a young man or woman in South Sudan clicks this hashtag they will know how many people care…..this moral support is very important”

Part of the pope’s donation will go to support a college in Yambio run by Solidarity with South Sudan to train teachers, nurses, midwives, farmers and community leaders. As well as learning vital job skills, the students from many different ethnic groups learn about the values of diversity and collaboration, an important sign of hope for the country which gained independence in 2011.

Caritas and Comboni missionaries

Other beneficiaries of the initiative entitled ‘The Pope for South Sudan’ include two hospitals run by Comboni missionaries and an agricultural project, run by Caritas, to provide livelihoods for 2,500 families in the dioceses of Yei, Yambio and Torit. Michel Roy, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, told journalists that while peace must be the priority for South Sudan, the international community must also do more to save lives of those dying from hunger and disease.

“The UN has launched an appeal, right now it is half funded, there’s a real need for the international community to engage more, much more. This cannot be just another forgotten conflict, like Darfur…”

Holy See mediation efforts

Asked about Vatican initiatives to try and stop the fighting, Cardinal Peter Turkson said he had been personally involved in two mediation efforts to bring together warring leaders President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar. Amid concerns that the conflict was spreading across the region, the nuncio in Kenya also met with Machar last December to urge the parties to come to the negotiating table.

Planned peace pilgrimage

So far, these attempts have failed to bring peace, but Cardinal Turkson stressed the Holy See continues to do all it can to stop the fighting in South Sudan. That’s a key condition before a planned visit to the region by the pope and by Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, can take place. While they had hoped to travel together in October to endorse peace efforts of all Christians in the region, that trip has been postponed until at least 2018.

KEY EVENTS FOR JULY 2017

Monday, July 3 - Feast of St. Thomas

On this day, the Church celebrates the Feast Day of St. Thomas the Apostle. Best known for his initial unwillingness to believe the other apostles in their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead, St. Thomas can teach the faithful about believing without seeing.

After Pentecost, St. Thomas is traditionally believed to have preached the Good News to the Persians and Medes, until he reached India, where he evangelized and was eventually martyred in 72 A.D. St. Thomas’ feast was formerly celebrated on December 21, and he is the patron of architects and builders.

Tuesday, July 25 - Feast of Saint James, Apostle

St. James, known as the Greater, in order to distinguish him from the other Apostle St. James, our Lord’s cousin, was St. John’s brother. With Peter and John he was one of the witnesses of the Transfiguration, as later he was also of the agony in the garden. He was beheaded in Jerusalem in 42 or 43 on the orders of Herod Agrippa. Since the ninth century Spain has claimed the honour of possessing his relics, though it must be said that actual proof is far less in evidence than the devotion of the faithful.

In Spain, he is called El Senor Santiago, the patron saint of horsemen and soldiers, and his great shrine at Santiago de Compostela in that country has been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. He is one of those that Jesus called Boanerges, “son of thunder,” the brother of John the Evangelist and the son of Zebedee the fisherman from Galilee. St. James the Greater and his brother John were apparently partners with those other two brothers, Peter and Andrew, and lived in Bethsaida, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.
For the Islamic Month of Ramadan and the feast of ‘Id al–Fitr, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has published a message to Muslims entitled “Christians and Muslims: Caring for our Common Home.”

In the message, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the President of the Council (PCID), offers best wishes to Muslims and “prayerful solidarity during this time of fasting in the month of Ramadan and the celebration of ‘Id al–Fitr that concludes it.”

The PCID points out that this year it is drawing from Pope Francis’ encyclical “Caring for our Common Home”, which it notes is addressed to the whole of humanity.

Pope Francis, Cardinal Tauran says, “draws attention to the harm our lifestyles and decisions are causing to the environment, to ourselves and to our fellow human beings”.

The greeting goes on to say that “as believers, our relationship with God should be increasingly shown in the way we relate to the world around us. Our vocation to be guardians of God’s handiwork is not optional, nor it is tangential to our religious commitment as Christians and Muslims: it is an essential part of it.”

The Cardinal concludes with, “May the religious insights and blessings that flow from fasting, prayer and good works sustain you, with God’s help, on the path of peace and goodness, to care for all the members of the human family and for the whole of creation.”

The month of Ramadan concludes with celebration of ‘Id al–Fitr on June 25th.

Below please find the English translation of the message from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the month of Ramadan and ‘Id al–Fitr.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Christians and Muslims: Caring for our Common Home

MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF RAMADAN AND ‘ID AL-FITR

1438 H. / 2017 A.D.
Vatican City

Dear Muslim Brothers and Sisters,

We wish to assure you of our prayerful solidarity during this time of fasting in the month of Ramadan and the celebration of ‘Id al–Fitr that concludes it, and we extend to you our heartfelt best wishes for serenity, joy and abundant spiritual gifts.

This year’s Message is especially timely and significant: fifty years ago, in 1967, only three years after the establishment of this Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) by Pope Paul VI on 19 May 1964, the first Message was sent for this occasion.

In the years that have followed, two Messages have been particularly important: the Message of 1991, during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, entitled “The Path of Believers is the Way of Peace”, and the Message of 2013, in the first year of Pope Francis’ pontificate, entitled “Promoting Mutual Respect through Education”. Both Messages were signed by the Pontiffs.

Among the many activities of the PCID for promoting dialogue with Muslims, the most important and longstanding is this yearly Message for Ramadan and for ‘Id al-Fitr addressed to Muslims throughout the world. To share this Message in the widest way possible, the PCID is assisted by local Catholic communities, as well as Papal Representatives present in almost every country.

The experience of both our religious communities affirms the value of this Message for promoting cordial relations between Christian and Muslim neighbours and friends, by offering insights on current and pressing issues.

For this year, the PCID offers a theme related to Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’– On Care for Our Common Home”, which was addressed not only to Catholics and Christians, but to the whole of humanity.

Pope Francis draws attention to the harm our lifestyles and decisions are causing to the environment, to ourselves and to our fellow human beings. There are, for example, certain philosophical, religious, and cultural perspectives that present obstacles which threaten humanity’s relationship with nature. To take up this challenge involves all of us, regardless of whether or not we profess a religious belief.

The Encyclical’s title itself is expressive: the world is a “common home”, a dwelling for all the members of the human family. Therefore, no one person, nation or people can impose exclusively their understanding of our planet. This is why Pope Francis appeals “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet…, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affects us all” (n. 14).

Pope Francis states that “the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (no. 217). What is needed is education, spiritual openness and a “global ecological conversion” to adequately address this challenge. As believers, our relationship with God should be increasingly shown in the way we relate to the world around us. Our vocation to be guardians of God’s handiwork is not optional, nor it is tangential to our religious commitment as Christians and Muslims: it is an essential part of it.

May the religious insights and blessings that flow from fasting, prayer and good works sustain you, with God’s help, on the path of peace and goodness, to care for all the members of the human family and for the whole of creation.

With these sentiments, we wish you once again serenity, joy and prosperity.

From the Vatican, 19 May 2017

Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran
President
Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.I.
Secretary
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