

## **Bishop Mtumbuka praises the lay *Ad Gentes* Missionaries for the door-to-door evangelization in the Diocese of Karonga**

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Bishop of the Karonga Diocese of the Catholic Church, Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, says the church needs to revert to traditional way of evangelization – that is door-to-door – to ensure the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ reaches to all the corners of the world.

His Lordship Mtumbuka stresses that time is gone when priests, nuns (sisters), catechists and the laity should be waiting for those who want to know Jesus Christ to come to their offices and rectories to quench their spiritual thirst.

This is contained in a letter the bishop has addressed to the pastoral workers (the clergy, religious, catechists and the laity) in his Diocese on the dissemination of the consolidated report on the first missionary journey of our *Ad Gentes* Missionaries in Karonga who were sent on the launch of Extraordinary Missionary Month on 9 February 2019.

Bishop Mtumbuka said much to the dismay of those who were sent as missionaries, not far away from those charged with responsibility to spread the Good News, there are extremely marginalized communities in all aspects of life.

“These communities feel so disconnected from the rest of the country that it makes no difference in their view who becomes the next president. In spite of the Catholic Church having been in this area for about 70 years, there are still so many people who have not been reached by the Church,” he says in the letter.

The bishop adds that even today, the Holy Spirit opens the hearts of men and women to receive the Good News, namely Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

He says the report has shown that the traditional way of evangelisation, namely of going from door-to-door instead of waiting for those who want to know Jesus come to our offices and rectories, is very effective in reaching out to hungering souls with the gospel.

“The fact that all our eleven *Ad Gentes* Missionaries are lay people shows that given sufficient orientation and support, lay people can do much more for the Church than we expect. Even today, the message of Jesus Christ is a stumbling block to some. The team of lay missionaries assigned have reported some challenges they faced in this missionary journey. The Jehovah Witnesses did not show interest to receive them, this time they turned violent. They chased Ignatius (one *Ad Gentes* missionary who was this time accompanied by one of our aspiring seminarians accusing them of representing the antichrist mentioned in the Scriptures (666). They had to run for their lives. On Sunday, they organised a prayer service during which they also distributed some items to children donated by the Coppel family from Mexico. One angry mother came to where the congregation was and grabbed her child and broke the cup and forks

her child was given while shouting that the said cups contained satan! Our founding fathers (the White Fathers) would have been very much accustomed to such incidents,” the Bishop explains.

However, Bishop Mtumbuka paints a ray of hope when he says the presence of two missionaries who are “very senior members of the Pastoral Commission and work in the Curia” demonstrates the abundant blessings the church has to have such young men among the staff.

He says the church is still waiting to see the participation of Caritas Commission staff in this as the report clearly shows how much work is there for them in the remotest parts of the Diocese.

The bishop says in almost all these extremely remote areas, the Church’s access to people has been through the radio, adding that the radio has proven to be a very effective means of reaching out to even remotest parts of the Diocese/country with the Good News.

“The extent of child marriages in the nine mission areas is shocking, especially in this day of HIV and Aids. Something has got to be done about it. I feel very humbled by this report, but we will do everything within our ability to carry out to the full this difficult but noble mission,” he concludes.

Bishop Mtumbuka declared this year (1 December 2018 – 30 November 2019) to be the diocesan year of ***Missio Ad Gentes*** through **proclaiming the good news, works of charity and promoting integral justice** as a priority of the Diocese in celebrating the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 for the 100<sup>th</sup> years anniversary of the missionary encyclical *Maximus Illud* of Pope Benedict XV of 1919.

The Bishop commissioned thirteen lay people as *Ad Gentes* Missionaries on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2019 at St Matthias Parish and sent them to nine selected hard-to-reach and neglected places within the diocese.

Their task is founded on the Great Commissioning in Matthew 28:17-20: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The *Ad Gentes* Missionaries went to their assigned places of mission for the first time from 11 - 17 March 2019. This report summarizes the pastoral and socio-economic situation or issues that the thirteen *Ad Gentes* Missionaries captured in their mission places as reported during their meeting on 19 March 2019 in the Diocese of Karonga.

Among others, the report says when the *Ad Gentes* Missionaries started meeting people and visiting them in their homes, they ended up receiving six more people willing to join the Catholic community from Tcharo area where there nineteen (19) Sunday school children.

And when the *Ad Gentes* Missionaries started meeting and visiting people in their homes, in Msuku area, they found 31 more people willing to be part of the Catholic community.

“However, the whole area is eager to receive Catholic Church and its pastoral and development services. Even non-Catholics respect the Catholic presence in the area; they asked for rosaries and prayers for their children to protect them from evil spirits. After meeting with community members and visiting some in their homes, 12 people registered to join the Catholic Community,” reads part of the report.

However, the report says the common and serious challenges noted on the pastoral front in almost all the nine places include absence of the Catholic Church or her weak presence in the areas; poor church leadership and, consequently, lack of pastoral care for the concerned people.

“Since our mission is ultimately about the salvation of souls, the people of the said areas deserve better; we have to do something about the challenges facing our brothers and sisters. On the socio-economic front, the common and serious challenges include lack of safe drinking water, health services, roads and bridges, access to education, early/child marriages, malnutrition. For integral development of these people, these issues need urgent intervention from us and all people of good will,” The Bishops concludes.