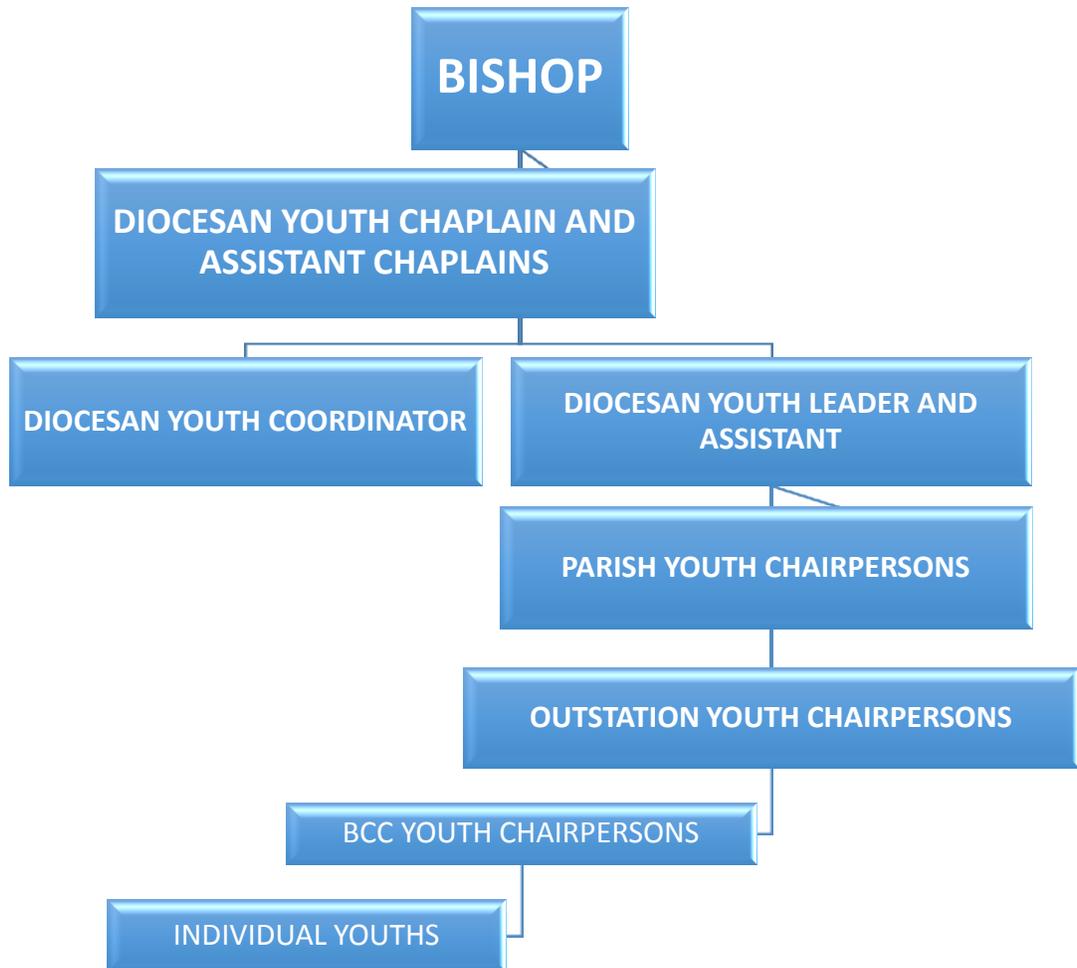


SOROTI CATHOLIC DIOCESE YOUTH APOSTOLATE CHAPLAINCY

Administrative Structure:



The Youth apostolate, although considered to fall under the Lay Apostolate commission, is a semi-autonomous Department. The Department coordinates youths' programs for in-school youths through associations such as *Youth Alive* and *Young Christian Students* (YCS), and of out-of-school youths through their parish and outstation youth associations.

The Bishop's Office has in place an appointed Chaplain in the person of **Padre Gonzaga Ongereny Waziwazi**. Due to enormous youth demands, two other priests have been appointed to assist the chaplaincy, namely, Fr. **Josaphat Diyou, M.Afr** and Fr. **Deogratias Opure**. The chaplain is mandated, with due consultation, to appoint a lay person as the coordinator for the youth apostolate. Currently we have Mr. Denis Francis Ajaru as the Lay Youth Coordinator, while Mr. Okello Thomas Aquinas and Ms. Acom Proscovia are the Diocesan Youth Leaders

YOUTH APOSTOLATE CHALLENGES.

One of the most vulnerable groups to deal with in society is that of the youth; and yet it is a very essential Apostolate since the Church of today and tomorrow depends on them and their giftedness. The youth, if not properly nurtured, can be a dangerous lot. Keen attention needs to be paid to them without destroying their morale and moral fiber, which should be kept consonant with the African culture and the Church's authentic teachings.

For many years, the youth apostolate had been so difficult due to political upheavals and social unrest, which had driven a cross-section of our diocesan population into Internally Displaced Peoples' (IDP) Camps. This affected the moral fiber of the youth adversely. The life in IDP camps was so devastating that the young people had lost sense of direction. With the return of peace in the country and people getting back to their villages, there was need to swing into action to bring the youth on board and this has been the greatest task of the chaplaincy since 2009

With this treacherous and daunting background that gripped the region for over three decades, the youth of Soroti Catholic Diocese have been living a life characterized by several hiccups:

- **Poverty** is one of the worst challenges that the youth of the Diocese are facing.
- **Poor education**, since the camp life could not give them the best education; and this affected their performance for many years in the National Examinations.
- **HIV/AIDS** is among the worst disease affecting the youth in the Diocese. The disease is widely spread along the lake shores of Teso, and now in the trading centers where the youth have moved in search of petty jobs for a living.
- **Early marriages**: This has gravely affected the youth since these young people go into marriage before attaining the adult age of 18 years.
- **Substance abuse**: because of poverty, unemployment and bad peer influence, among others, the youth have turned to massive drinking of alcohol and the use of other drugs.
- Lack of entrepreneurial skills to fight the chronic poverty, this owes to our Education system which is more bookish and geared towards white collar jobs.
- Influence from the perverse social media and negative philosophies of life that are detrimental.

The youth apostolate of Soroti Catholic Diocese, therefore, has embarked on massive programs to address some of these challenges using the available youth's structures and planned activities right from the Outstations, Zones, Parishes and at the Diocesan level in the following ways: -

- ❖ Ensuring continuous good relationship with people who matter and are willing to support youth programs.

- ❖ Using the smallest resources available within the youth themselves, some youth have already started small income generating projects, i.e. poultry, citrus growing, bee keeping and brick molding.
- ❖ Organizing Annual Diocesan Youth Conferences where different developmental, social and spiritual topics are ably handled by experts to train the youth.
- ❖ Training youth with skills in tailoring, soap making, fabricating energy saving stoves, brick making and tree planting.



*Left: The youth from different parishes making bricks at the Youth Centre Soroti.
Right: The piggery project at Toroma parish*

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The following are the some of the activities that the youth apostolate of Soroti Catholic Diocese engages in:

- a. Youth radio program on DELTA FM 97. The youth radio program starts at 3:00pm to 4:30pm every Sunday, this program has helped youth apostolate office in education, mobilization and sensitization of the youth on many topics. The radio program is presented by the youth chaplain, the youth coordinator and other technical members that are invited from time to time.
- b. The Diocesan Youth Coordinator and diocesan team have been carrying out leadership trainings in different parishes. This is meant to equip leaders with skills to be able to guide other young people both in spiritually and entrepreneurship.



Left: Xaverians during their weekly meetings. Right: Youth leaders from Anyara parish taking a photo from their garden of beans after the training

- c. A number of leaders have been able to marry in Church. This has been largely due to the policy set at diocesan level that to be in the diocesan executive committee, one has to be sacramental. Besides this, the Diocesan Youth Office freely avails her public address system to any youth chairperson who marries in Church.
- d. We promote development of leadership skills among the youth through conduction of regular elections of youth leaders at the various levels.
- e. The youth have participated fully in both parish and diocesan functions, especially in the Episcopal and Priestly ordinations, and in diocesan and parish level conferences.
- f. Every year, in December, we organize a grand youth conference that gathers throngs of young persons from across the diocese. The annual diocesan youth conference covers 5 days of intensive programs that equip the youth to fend for their lives in society.
- g. A number of parishes have conducted their parish youth mini-conferences as a follow-up of what they get during the grand December conference.
- h. The youth are also engaged in a number of sporting activities, i.e., football and other games.
- i. The youth ecclesial movements are very vibrant in Soroti Catholic Diocese. They include: young Franciscans, Xaverians, Young Christian Students (YCS) and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). They have been conducting trainings, sharing, exchange visits and meetings.



Left: The youth saluting, a gesture of solidarity with their Chaplain, 'IKOPOLON'.....'SIR', during the conferences

Right: The youth dancing for Jesus during one of the parish youth conferences

- j. Mini youth conferences at parish level have become a source of engaging the youth before the school terms open.
- k. The youth in Soroti Catholic Diocese have also embraced pro-life program with Human Life International (HLI). This program is now established in many schools and also in many communities in the Diocese. The program, now working with the youth apostolate, has so far reached out to a total of 22 and, as a result of these outreaches and follow up, 18 girls have been rescued from committing abortion.
- l. The youth apostolate has promoted youth ministries, like intercession ministry, that have greatly impacted on building the youth spiritually.
- m. We have acquired of space for training the youth on playing different musical instruments. This has made and will continue to make many youths busy, instead of being idle.
- n. Through our Bishop, who happens to be our patron, we have a deep borehole in the youth center, which is giving us clean water.
- o. There is a new program of tree planting which is cutting across the Diocese, an initiative from the National Youth Secretariat.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE APOSTOLATE

- Support from the youth and some parish priests is still low, most especially when it comes to youth and parish financial contributions. This makes the office unable to achieve its planned targets.
- Challenges in managing young families.

- Lack of proper shelter/tents during functions like youth conferences and meetings. Whereas the apostolate has a large youth center site where the youth would go and carry their events, it is difficult to conduct large activities at the site due to shortage of essential infrastructure.
- There is a challenge of communication with some parish youth offices, since some parishes have no access to any telecommunication network.
- A big section of the youth who usually are attracted by the novelty of the diocesan and parish youth programs have little knowledge about the Catholic Church leadership structure. There is often a challenge, therefore, of understanding Catholic Church leadership among some youth leaders.
- We have a big challenge of water and lighting to cater for huge numbers that turn up to conferences in December. Our Centre has only one borehole yet we need a lot of water at the center
- We need an equipped library and computer lab at the youth center for the youths to do research and private reading. We need to instill in the them a reading culture.
- Early marriages and cohabitation is rampant among the youths. This requires adequate training for the young families. However, we have insufficient trained personnel and resources to handle this across the Diocese.
- Lack of transport and communication system to cover the Diocese at large.

PLANNED STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE CHALLENGES: -

- Leadership trainings to be conducted at different parishes.
- Use of other means of communication to reach to places where there are network challenges.
- Training the youth on poverty alleviation programs that are non-donor dependent
- Build capacity to scale up guidance and counseling for the youths at parish and outstation levels.
- Continuous sensitization of the youth and parents on radio.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for catechesis to help the young leaders understand our Church doctrine.
- Parishes to initiate income-generating activities to help run youth activities.

- Massive engagement in sporting activities to built varied talents amongst the youth across the Diocese.
- On-going leadership training for effective delivery of youth programs and management of youth projects.
- Develop the Youth Center into a fully-fledged youth centre with library, computer laboratory, sports facilities and equipment, a multi-purpose arena, training materials and adequate workshop structures with better amenities.

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