

UGANDA



When most people think of the Nile River, the country that may come to mind is Egypt. One may even think of images of the Great Pyramids and vast stretches of desert. It may surprise you to learn that the source of the Nile—its starting point—is in a town in Uganda called Jinja.



Jinja, Uganda: The Source of the River Nile

Located on the shores of Lake Victoria, Jinja is the second largest city in Uganda after its capital of Kampala. It had its start in the early 1900's as a fishing village along a popular African trade route. The tribal peoples that lived on both sides of the River Nile crossed it freely because of the natural placement of large flat rocks from which they could launch their boats in relative safety.

Unlike many other regions, this allowed the people to trade and cooperate in many areas of life. The locals called the area the "Place of Rocks" - in both languages, a word that sounded to the British that colonized the area like "Jinja." And so, it was named.



Jinja is also the seat of a Catholic Diocese headed by Bishop Charles Martin Wamika. There are about 650,000 Catholics in the diocese with 89 priests in 21 parishes. They are spread across an area that is 250 square miles *larger* than the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Most people do not live near a parish church. They attend Mass—when it is available—at an outstation that is closer to their village. Because there are so few priests, some parishes may be responsible for 20 or 30 outstations and only have Mass every few months. Catholics still meet weekly for a Liturgy of the Word service to listen to the weekly Bible readings and learn basic faith formation. The children also do the same and meet for 3 to 4 hours to learn about Jesus.

Focus on Uganda

Many years ago, the Ugandan government took control of all Catholic schools. While all religions were taught, no one faith was the focus. This meant that children became members of the **Missionary Childhood Association [MCA]** only through their parishes, not their schools. Like some students here in Philadelphia, learning to be Missionary is a part of their parish religious education program.



Reverend Alex Okello is the Diocesan Director for the **Pontifical Mission Societies** in Jinja, which is the parent

organization of the **Missionary Childhood Association**. As part of his job, he travels to all the parishes and now the few local Catholic schools as well. Father Alex encourages the children to be as generous as they can with their time, talent and treasure as they grow in their faith. As **MCA members**, students do service projects and sacrifice their time and talent—they clean the grounds, raise vegetables for the pastor to eat— because most of them rarely have spare change to give up. Most parishes and schools in Uganda have one communal box that all students can contribute to when they do have something to give to MCA.

Father Alex and Missionary representatives from the Diocese of Jinja, have travelled to the United States, including to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and spoken in our parishes about his life in the Missions and how our prayers and sacrifices make a difference to the children he works with. Father Alex also spoke in the city of Boston. After one of his visits there, at the

parish of St. Peter's, the students were inspired to run a lemonade stand, giving away the drinks for free will donations, if people



would listen to a story about the work of Catholic Missionaries, especially in Jinja, Uganda. They raised \$258.01 in one morning!

Just like in the Bible, where the Apostles brought the Good News to everywhere, the Good News and works from Boston didn't stop there. Father Alex went back to Jinja and spoke to his **MCA students** about the students' prayerful efforts. He challenged his **MCA members** to "think outside the box" and do the same, telling them the story of Plymouth's lemonade stand.



Jinja's students rose to the challenge! They made and sold **World Mission Rosary** bracelets, hand-made jewelry and soap, along with tea and fruit juice, to their fellow students and parishioners and raised the equivalent of \$38.57 for the Missionary Childhood Association!

Although they received a total of \$31,000 from **MCA worldwide** for the maintenance of schools and orphanages, the students of Jinja sacrificed almost \$200 so that other children can learn that God loves them too!