

STUDENTS DECRY SEXUAL PREDATORS, SOCIETAL NEGLIGENCE

By Mathias Mazinga

Take it or leave it, many young people are suffering in silence both at home and at school. They are victims of sexual harassment, child-labour and violence. The unfortunate thing is that the victimised children, often times, are so vulnerable that they cannot defend themselves, or do not know where to run to for protection when they are in an abusive situation.

The challenges that the young people face both at home and at school came out even more clearly during the 13th Kampala Archdiocese Pro-Life Convention that took place at St. Michael Lubaga Hospital Training School recently.

Pro-Life is a Catholic movement that nurtures and promotes human life. Members of this group denounce ideologies and practices, such as abortion, drug-abuse, alcoholism, violence, pre-marital sex, child-abuse, environmental degradation self-harm and suicide, among others, which destroy life and its sanctity.

The convention attracted over 3,000 students from about 30 secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The students discussed various societal and family challenges that lead them into destructive habits. They also performed songs, poems and skits with pro-life messages. Testimonies of personal experience with abuse and recovery were also shared.

TESTAMENTS TO MANIPULATION

One student (name withheld) from one of the secondary schools in Mpigi district made a number of guests shed tears as she explained how she was defiled by her teacher when she was in primary school. The brave girl later beseeched the Government and religious leaders to do more to protect children from monstrous teachers.

"When we are at our boarding school, our parents are far away from us. This increases our vulnerability. Every time I watch a skit on defilement, I cry because a teacher did that to me when I was in primary school. We need to be protected from errant teachers," she said.

Some other students complained about harassment from stepmothers, as well as sexual abuse from family members.

Noeline Yanoba from Kyambogo University had no kind words for parents who do not provide their children with the basic needs of life.

"Some of you our parents are part of our problems. You don't provide us with the basic needs of life. Lack of basic necessities, such as pocket money and clothes is what compels some of our sisters to go for older men, who they think will give them money for their survival."

Valeria Naimanda from St Mary's



Archbishop Ssemogerere (centre) with some of the Pro-Life student leaders after their pilgrimage Mass at Rubaga Cathedral early this year

ATTENTION...
Parents who do not provide basic needs, career guidance and are emotionally absent make their children susceptible to predation.

Senior Secondary School Nkozi sounded even more perplexed as she gave her submission: "What do we do when those who should safeguard our rights are the ones that abuse them?"

SOLUTIONS TO PREDATION

Patrick Kayabula from St Pius Secondary School Kiziba-Masuullita called for more sensitisation of young people about contemporary social problems that affect them.

Gloria Asimwe from Uganda Martyrs University advised fellow students to consider doing social science courses, such as mental health psychology, to be in a better position to advocate for human life.

Phionah Namugabo (Uganda Martyrs University) advised fellow young people to seek counselling services, parental support and guidance from religious leaders instead of turning to the bottle and drugs when they are stressed.

Susan Naggita from Uganda Catholic Management and Training Institute encouraged fellow young people to go to their respective communities and sensitise the people about Pro-Life issues.

Martha Nansubuga from St Michael Lubaga Hospital Training School blamed parents who harass their daughters when they become pregnant. She said the girls could fully recover from their misfortunes and still achieve their aspirations if they are handled with love and understanding.

Sarah Apeno from the University of Kisubi encouraged fellow students to report the abusers to the Police because the relevant laws are in place.



Students from St. Michael Rubaga Hospital Training School presenting a poem on abortion during the Pro-Life Convention

Priscilla Mungu na Weza attributed suicidal ideologies among young people to acute depression. She encouraged the young people to share their challenges with their friends because "a problem shared is a problem partly solved."

PILGRIMAGE TO RUBAGA CATHEDRAL

Earlier before the convention, the youthful pro-lifers made a pilgrimage of faith to Rubaga Cathedral, where they had Mass with Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere, the Cathedral Administrator Fr Achilles Mayanja, and several other priests. The Mass was animated by the mass choir of St Michael Rubaga Hospital Training School. The pilgrimage was in celebration of the Catholic jubilee year.

During the Mass, Archbishop Ssemogerere launched the Pro-Life Apostolate magazine, *The Po-lifer's Eye*. According to the President of the Pro-Life Apostolate of Kampala Archdiocese, Dr Sandra Nabachiwa,

all the articles in the magazine were written by the students themselves.

UGANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (UEC) CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The policy prioritises the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable individuals. This policy aligns with the global child safeguarding standards set by the Catholic Church and includes a commitment to a culture of vigilance, transparency and accountability.

The policy encourages those that have concerns about a child's safety to report the issue to the nearest police station or call the national Child Helpline at 1325.

A respective struggling parent or guardian can seek assistance from support programmes rather than using children to earn a living, as this is unacceptable and illegal.

The policy further encourages vigilance and awareness among all members of the community to help protect children from harm.

PRELATES SAY

Msgr Gerald Kalumba, Vicar General, Christ the King Church

We very well know the challenges our young people face. They are bombarded with a lot of destructive information as they engage social media. They also have challenges of school fees, relationships and family anomalies. Associations, such as Pro-Life can be helpful in restoring hope in our young people so that they are not ruined by bad habits and social media perpetuated loneliness.



Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere

The Catholic Church has a Child-Protection Policy. Actually, we the Catholics Bishops of Uganda also

developed our child protection policy. So, I request our young people not to keep quiet if they are abused. They should report the abusers and the policy will protect them.



Fr Dr Nicholas Kiruma

Many of our young people have mental health problems. They are stressed by family and social challenges including security, anxiety, bullying, poverty and absence of parental guidance. They then turn to smoking, drug-abuse and alcoholism. I encourage all young people to be on the lookout for each other, support each other, be there for one another, pray together and share issues with one another.



Fr Peter Mulyanga (Counseling Psychologist, Confrère of the Spiritan Fathers)

I encourage the youth to manage their stress by attending to themselves, by appreciating and being affectionate to themselves. Young people need to learn relaxation techniques. They need to do meditation about the worthiness of their life. They should thus get involved in sports. They should endeavour to eat well and have enough sleep, between seven and eight hours.

