

Soroti University launches interfaith dialogue to tackle mental health

By Emmanuel Alomu

Soroti University has launched its first interfaith prayer

breakfast aimed at promoting unity and addressing mental health challenges among students and staff.

The event was held at the university dining hall and organised by the dean of students together with

university chaplains, including an imam.

It was held under the theme, *Unity in Spite of Diversity*, inspired by Matthew 3:16-17 and Quran 5:2.

Organisers said the idea followed a survey by religious leaders which found significant levels of depression among students and staff caused by stress, academic pressure and heavy workloads.

The gathering brought together Muslims, Christians, faculty members, support staff, administrators and students.

Guild president Wilfred Ocen called for a review of the university's religious policy, saying the council currently recognises only three faith groups; Muslims, Anglicans and Catholics.

He asked the university to provide equal support and funding for all recognised groups.

Dean of students Zaitun Okot said similar events would now be held twice a year, specifically every last Thursday in September, to promote harmony and respond to concerns raised by students.

Academic registrar James Gregory Okello, representing vice-chancellor Prof. John Robert Ikoja Odongo, said the university remains a secular institution that respects diversity.

He shared that as a Protestant married to a Catholic, mutual respect had helped his family navigate faith differences.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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Okello said the university intends to refine guidelines to allow all religious groups on campus to conduct their activities freely.

University imam Sheikh Abubakar Umar Obilan said such initiatives are important for inclusion, especially for people facing stress and academic pressure.

"Our goal is to build a united community beyond religious boundaries," he said.

During his reflection on *"Religious Tolerance: A Critical Antidote to Bigotry in Society,"* Obilan called for humility, love and compassion for all people regardless of faith.

He said individuals should understand their purpose and avoid discriminating against themselves or others because of religion.

The university imam added that the prayer breakfast would now be held annually in September to strengthen unity among religious leaders and the university community.

Catholic chaplain Rev. Fr. Dr. Jerome Agelu urged participants to examine their spiritual lives, saying life feels incomplete without a relationship with God.

Anglican chaplain Rev. Canon Dr. Samuel Opol spoke on "God First Despite Work," saying work is a means through which God provides, but spiritual foundations must come first.

A report from Makerere University's Public Health Department shows depression among university students in Uganda remains high.