

## From the Desk of Msgr. Matthew Odong, Rector

Dear friends and benefactors of HOPE FOR UGANDA,

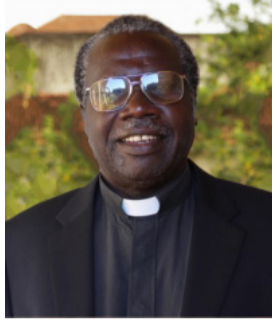
Greetings from Sacred Heart Seminary (SHS)! Like St. Paul, "I give thanks to God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you..." (Philippians 1: 3-6). You always bring happiness, joy and hope into our lives here in Northern Uganda.

As we all know, COVID-19 has brought devastating effects on economy, education, health and well-being. In early November, I was diagnosed with COVID and am recovering in St. Mary's Hospital in Gulu as I write to you. By the grace of God, I am doing well. I have asked Fr. Michael Oringa, Director of Studies at SHS, to update you on my behalf.

Vocations to the priesthood continue to rise in our Archdiocese of Gulu. We are blessed with 194 seminarians for the academic year 2021. The

staff remains strong and extremely grateful to HFU for support and timely salaries for teachers and staff. Once again, our students performed very well in the national Certificate of Education exams, achieving second place in the district. A majority of our seminarians who sat for the Advanced Certificate scored well enough to qualify them for major seminaries and universities. Just this year, five alumni have been ordained priests and deacons. We give glory to God for these new shepherds.

COVID-19 has forced the government of Uganda to close educational institutions since early June.



*continued on page 2*



SHS Students leaving due to COVID-19 shutdown.

## Farm Report by Fr. Paul Peter Dr. Rom



Heartfelt greetings! I thank God and you for the gift of progress at the farm. We have made huge gains in 2021, despite the corona virus pandemic. Please share in our success as I give you updates in crop production and sustainability.

Since our beginning in 2017, we have gone from cultivating 30 acres in one season to 100 acres in two seasons in 2021. It is our goal to grow every year. This year over the two seasons, we have cultivated 60 acres of corn, 40 acres of beans, 20 acres of sunflowers for oil, 10 acres of rice, 10 acres of cassava, and 5 acres of assorted vegetables. Tripling our production since 2017 is largely due to improved farming implements, such as the tractor and planter. Without your generous donations, we could not operate at such high efficiency.

Of extreme importance to the farm community was the funding for a clean water source, which will serve both the needs of the farm and the surrounding community. The farm continues to provide employment opportunities to local farmers for weeding, harvesting, threshing, and technical services. In serving the community, products such as cassava cuttings, watermelon, and assorted vegetables have hit the local market and are competing well. Earnings from the market provides some income that shows self-sustenance is possible when the farm is fully established. Praise God!

As we celebrate our achievements, we are still challenged by many things that are required to consolidate those achievements. With your help, we can create the tools that will ultimately provide the economic engine we envision for our school. The following are areas we want to address in 2022:

1. ACCESS ROAD TO THE FARM. A poor road exists and it does not hold up well to the movement of equipment and production.
2. STORAGE FOR CROPS. Our production has tripled and we are challenged by the need for a storage facility that will safely store our products for school consumption.
3. FARM ANIMAL PRODUCTION. We would like to establish a program for recovery from the pandemic that will improve the diet of students.

*continued on page 2*

## Hope, Patience and Resilience by Berna Atim Prisca

Greetings from Northern Uganda and Archbishop Flynn Secondary School (AFSS)! We thank God for his unending love for us as we continue to pray for protection, providence, and guidance more than ever before. On behalf of the management team, parents, staff and students, we thank you for journeying with us. You give us hope, and teach us resilience and patience. Together we have the courage to carry on!

It is an honor to reach out to you through this means. Your support has enabled AFSS to sustain staff members, carry out planned activities such as the construction of the Dan and Bobbi Vaughan Priest and Guest House, and continue to grow the farm school. In other words, you are keeping AFSS alive!

Unfortunately, students have not been on campus since the second mandated lockdown on June 7. All school staff and students 18 years and older are

required to be vaccinated before returning to campus in January. We will support compliance with these regulations.

Although the pandemic has kept students at home for close to two years, many schools have adopted new methods of online learning. AFSS has a telegram channel where teachers are continuously posting notes for our students to download and read while at home. This has helped teachers stay in touch with their learners when critical face-to-face interactions were interrupted. Unfortunately, many students do not have access to a computer at home.

National testing results, once again, puts AFSS in good standing. 60 students (26 girls and 34 boys) sat for the Uganda Certificate of Education exam. 45% scored in Division 1 (best), 52% in Division 2, and only 3% in Division 3. Those scores placed AFSS in the 104th ranking in the nation of more than 3,000 secondary schools, which is lower than previous years – primarily due to the pandemic.

While this still represents a ranking in the top 3% of all schools in Uganda, it also illustrates a distinct disadvantage over students in Southern Uganda who have much better access to computers and the internet while at home. All 25 AFSS students who sat for the Uganda Advanced Certificate successfully passed their exams.

With the release of these results, AFSS has begun admitting new students for the January reopening. So far, 122 new students have been admitted. The Academic Department's goal is to admit 150 in senior one (seventh grade) and fifty in senior five (eleventh grade). We pray all these new students, as well as the old, will be able to resume classroom learning in the New Year.

May God bless you and yours during this Christmas Season. We thank you for helping keep our school alive, now and hopefully in a future filled with hope.



600 AFSS students impacted by shutdown.



Corn crop being processed to feed students.

## IN THIS ISSUE...

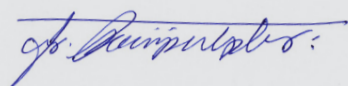
- Meet Robert - an AFSS Student – Pg. 2
- 2021 Annual Appreciation Event – Pg. 2
- 2021 Annual Fall Visit Update – Pg. 2
- Keeping Hope Alive – Pg. 3
- Son of Hope: Fr. Rom's Personal Journey – Pg. 4

## Farm Report continued from page 1

Please refer to the **Keeping Hope Alive** column in this newsletter for more information and details on how you can help.

Thank you once again for your generous support as we move forward on our path to sustainability through modern agriculture. I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year 2022.

God bless and keep you,



## Are You Being Called?

Does the Lord have your attention after reading this newsletter? That could be God's call to serve and bring hope to the people of Northern Uganda by sharing your talents as a committee or board member of HFU! Or maybe you know someone who may be interested... Right now our greatest need is for a communications specialist who can help in communicating our amazing story in parishes and beyond.

Please contact Todd at [info@hopeforuganda.org](mailto:info@hopeforuganda.org) to learn more about how you can help.

## 2021 Annual Fall Update

The annual fall visit by Msgr. Matthew and Fr. Paul is always a highly anticipated event. They travel thousands of miles to share the boundless gratitude of their people for the support they receive from Hope for Uganda. Nothing touches the human spirit more deeply than a smile, a hug, and a good story.

Unfortunately, their visit was cancelled again this year because they could not obtain US travel visas. We sorely miss the enthusiasm and real life touch they bring to our efforts to keep you informed. At the same time, we remain committed to providing periodic updates on the impact of your donations through parish visits, an appreciation dinner, this newsletter, and our website. You are valued partners in this mission and we aspire to be your preferred international outreach.

We are so grateful to our Parish Partners who welcomed Hope for Uganda representatives this fall in lieu of Msgr. Matthew and Fr. Paul. Our thanks to the following Minnesota parishes for their hospitality:

- Immaculate Heart of Mary in Minnetonka
- St. Patrick's in Oak Grove
- Holy Family in St. Louis Park
- St. Anne's in Hamel

One of the traditions associated with the fall parish visits is the opportunity to double the impact of your gift through a Challenge Grant. This year's \$50,000 challenge has already been fully funded by qualifying gifts of \$100 or more, matched dollar for dollar. A generous benefactor has offered to extend the Fall Challenge Grant by matching another \$20,000 through the end of the year! Thanks to everyone who has donated so generously to this annual fall campaign.



Robert working to support family and pay some tuition.

## Msgr. Matthew continued from page 1

Although a national survey determined that only 4.9% of Ugandan households have computer access, children were advised to study online. This means that many students will abandon their education, including some of our students who simply cannot afford to return to school as a result of the pandemic. There are also intelligent and disciplined alumni of SHS and Archbishop Flynn Secondary School (AFSS), who cannot find the funds to finish their advanced education to become important and useful members of the society.

Uganda is in an educational crisis. Your support for the Good Shepherd Scholarship Fund will help keep our needy students off the streets and away from resorting to a life of crime. As always, your gifts provide hope to those who want to praise God, help their brothers and sisters, and make their community a better place.

Thank you for your continued prayers and financial support of this mission. Please read the section in this newsletter for details of the current funding priorities. May God bless you abundantly during this Christmas season and in the New Year 2022.

Sincerely,  
Monsignor Matthew Odong



P.S. – At the time of this printing, Msgr. Matthew has returned to SHS and is regaining his strength.



A great turnout at the Annual Appreciation Dinner, unfortunately missing our friends from Uganda.



Fr. Paul celebrating Mass at St. Aloysius in Olivia, MN in 2018.

## 2021 Annual Appreciation Event

The annual Hope for Uganda appreciation event was held on September 29th at Providence Academy. The evening began with Mass offered by Fr. Corey Belden, pastor at St. Anne's in Hamel, followed by a social time and dinner. Bill Kottemann, HFU board president, served as emcee for the program.

In the absence of Msgr. Matthew and Fr. Paul, Executive Director Todd Ziesmer gave a brief presentation celebrating the accomplishments of Hope for Uganda over the past two years. Then he shared a video update from Msgr. Matthew, Fr. Paul, and AFSS Head Teacher, Berna Atim. That video may be viewed on the Hope for Uganda website ([www.hopeforuganda.org/videos](http://www.hopeforuganda.org/videos)).

After treasurer Corrina Conley updated attendees on Hope for Uganda's good financial position, Advancement Committee Chair, Jerry Powaser, made a heartfelt appeal for continued support of our brothers and sisters in Northern Uganda.

The evening concluded with an inspiring story from Fr. Allan Eilen, pastor of St. Patrick's in Oak Grove, of his personal visit to Uganda.

Thanks to all of the 82 benefactors and friends who made this first COVID-19 era event a success. Please consider joining us next year as we celebrate how your commitment to the HFU mission is changing lives, both in Uganda and here in the United States.

## Meet Robert – an AFSS Student

Odera Robert Padyamba is a student at AFSS. He is 20 years old, lives with his mother who is a single parent, and five siblings. His father passed in 2002 when Robert was very young and has no recollection of him.

In 2015, Robert completed his primary studies at Holy Angel primary school in Pader district. As the best student in the district, he certainly qualified to go on to secondary school, but his mother was struggling and sickly, trying to provide for her family as a street market vendor. She approached the school authorities at AFSS and Robert was admitted on a full scholarship under the Good Shepherd Scholarship Fund. The school year was into the second month when Robert arrived, so his beginning was difficult. Hard work and discipline was his way of coping and he soon became acclimated.

Robert has been one of the best performing students at AFSS. In 2019, when he sat for the senior four national exams, he scored one of the highest results ever recorded at the school. He is currently a senior five student (11th grade), pursuing biology, chemistry and mathematics. His dream is to become a medical doctor.

Robert's mother's business failed during the pandemic. To help with expenses, he now works as a barber in a small salon where he brings in about \$15/month (see photo). During the lockdown, while both Robert and his mother were working away from home, one of his siblings accidentally started a fire that burned two of the family's grass huts. One of them was Robert's. All of his earthly belongings, including his books, were destroyed in the fire. Needless to say, it was a major setback for the entire family.

In spite of their hardships, Robert and his family find a way to smile. They are grateful to God and to the Good Shepherd Scholarship Fund for giving them hope for a brighter future. They believe the opportunity for education provided by the generous benefactors of Hope for Uganda will give Robert the chance he needs to support his family, follow his dream, and become an example to his peers in building a better tomorrow. Please consider giving generously to the Good Shepherd Scholarship Fund to help young people like Robert.

## Executive Notes by Todd Ziesmer, Hope For Uganda Executive Director

Dear Friends,

May the peace and joy of Jesus be with you! In this season of thanksgiving, I am profoundly grateful for your interest in partnering with Hope for Uganda in our mission of hope. Many in Northern Uganda continue to suffer greatly, but through their inspirational trust in God's love and providence, and assisted by our prayers and financial support, they move forward in hope.

While the pandemic has created many challenges for our friends in Uganda, several important projects have made significant progress.

- Your generosity has helped to attract and retain talented teachers by paying their salaries and allowing their children to study tuition free. This support will be ever more important as the impending teacher shortage affects the nation.
- A well was drilled for the farm and donated by a family in honor of their parents. This clean water source, named "Donita Springs", is a contribution to the farm that will have lasting effects on the entire community.
- The Geography Block renovation is nearing completion, thanks to your generosity to SHS. This gift will provide much needed safe and clean classroom space.
- The Dan and Bobbi Vaughan Priest and Guest House is now fully funded and nearing completion. What a blessing!



"Donita Springs begins to flow on the farm!"



Priest and Guest House ready for your visit.

We anticipate classes will resume in January. Many hard-working families have been devastated by the pandemic and will no longer be able to pay tuition and fees necessary to send their children to SHS or AFSS. The people in Northern Uganda have known suffering for decades, yet continue to live in hope and trust in God. Many have come to know your generosity and how it offers their children a way to also have hope. As partners in this mission, we can be God's vessels that make their hope a reality.

Please read **Keeping Hope Alive** — to the right — to learn about the needs of highest priority.

We extend our sincerest thanks to those of you who already increased your support in 2021 – for putting your trust in us and recognizing the increasing needs. I also want to give a special THANK YOU to our Parish Partners (see "2021 Annual Fall Update" column for details). We know the Lord will not be outdone in generosity. **Please consider making the most generous gift possible, from your heart to theirs.**

Your brother in Christ,  
Todd Ziesmer



Farm road is urgently needed.

## Remembering Loved Ones

One of the greatest gifts you can give loved ones (living or deceased) is offering their prayers and intentions with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Unfortunately, because of its popularity, many parishes are booked months in advance or do not have dates available that are meaningful to you.

There is a way to address your wishes AND encourage priests in Uganda. For a modest stipend (\$7-\$10 per Mass), you can have your special intentions offered by a priest from the Archdiocese of Gulu, Uganda. Because priests in Northern Uganda receive no other compensation, a Mass stipend is often the only money they receive to help perform their ministries.

To bless your loved ones, as well as to help support the priests in Uganda, please send a list of your intentions, preferred dates, and a donation to Hope for Uganda and we will coordinate with the Archdiocese of Gulu. Thank you!



## Retiring Board Members

The Hope For Uganda board and staff are sincerely grateful to retiring board members Steve Holm, Peter Westerhaus, and Brenda Arndt for their leadership and wisdom while serving on the board. Each shared their time, talent, and treasure generously to advance the HFU mission in Northern Uganda. May the Lord bless them abundantly for their generosity!

## Keeping Hope Alive

This newsletter tells a story of perseverance and success in a year that has pressed us all to the limits of our endurance. You are part of a growing community of people who care about keeping hope alive for children and a community nearly 8,000 miles away.

Year-end giving from people like you will once again be an answer to prayer for students, parents and a community struggling to make life work in the face of a pandemic. Your generosity is essential to keeping two schools and a farm operational and meeting the future with a promise of hope.

We know that people give to programs that change lives, and changing lives is why Hope for Uganda exists. The stories in this newsletter testify to the ways your gifts are redefining the future for a whole community in Northern Uganda.

We are pleased to report that HFU financial goals for 2021 are on track with the hope that year-end giving can take us over the top and into the new year. HFU works closely with our friends in Uganda to ensure faithful and responsible stewardship of resources we provide. As we look to the new year, we see the following as four top priorities deserving our attention:

1. Top of mind is student financial assistance for as many as 600 students at Sacred Heart Seminary (SHS) and Archbishop Flynn Secondary School (AFSS) who cannot afford full tuition and expenses. The **Good Shepherd Scholarship Fund provides financial help to those students most in need.** The goal for 2022 is **\$300,000.** We are very grateful for donors who have responded generously with \$900 gifts - enabling a student to attend SHS or AFSS for an entire year!
2. **Safety and security** needs grow as the schools grow. We are committed to providing a security fence and related equipment at AFSS. A fence to keep unwanted animals and wildlife outside the campus is phase one of the security project for which we are **seeking \$29,000.**
3. We are almost halfway to meeting a \$60,000 government required technology upgrade. **Internet and computers will bring the educational programs into the future and into compliance with national standards. \$35,000** will complete the basic technology requirements in the two schools HFU supports.
4. The Farm, as a school and pathway to sustainability, has shown great progress in 2021. Improved equipment provided by HFU has made multiple crops and increased production a reality. Provisions for students and for sale in the larger community are now part of the Farm school story. Gifts in 2021 met several needs. In 2022, we **need \$50,000 to build a usable road on the farm property and a crop drying and storage facility** to protect and preserve the increased production of the farm.

With grateful hearts we thank God every day for your prayerful support of this mission. Succinctly put, Hope for Uganda wants to be your preferred focus of international outreach. And when you pray, we encourage you to pray a steward's prayer, "Lord, what do you want to do through me and our family to help fulfill your work in Northern Uganda?"

## Son of Hope by Fr. Paul Peter Dr. Rom

As early as the age of seven, I admired my parish priest who also baptized me. I wanted to be like him even though I didn't know what the priesthood demanded apart from celebrating the Mass and being good to everyone. My favorite game was celebrating the Mass with dry potatoes as the host and banana vines for the vestments. Funny enough, my elder brothers were my altar servers and did it with such devotion that now it makes me see God's hand in it all.

With joy in my heart, I entered Sacred Heart Seminary in 1993. That same year, St. John Paul visited Uganda. I traveled by foot with other pilgrims 75 miles from Gulu to witness the event. That experience gave me even greater motivation to pursue the priesthood, but that childhood dream soon had to change.



Fr. Paul while a student at Sacred Heart Seminary.

Being from a large family, it was difficult for my parents to pay the school fees and tuition. My only option was to leave the seminary and pursue a shorter course that would quickly make me self-supporting. My life's dream was at the brink of being shattered simply because my family could not afford to pay the seminary tuition. It was then that Msgr. Matthew introduced me to Mike and Sue Wood, benefactors of Hope for Uganda. They offered to sponsor my education until I was ordained a priest in 2007.



Fr. Paul happy to complete doctoral studies.

Because of that one door opened for me by the Woods, I became a son of hope. Not only did their generosity offer me a future in the priesthood, it also brought a world of new possibilities. Following ordination, I was able to pursue higher education in the Church. My first course of study was a master's degree in Philosophy, which I acquired in Rome between 2010 and 2013. In 2018, I was recalled to Rome to begin studies for a PhD. I completed the degree in June 2021. My thesis was on The Rationality of the Christian Faith and the Rationality of Science. I chose to study the thorny rapport between science and religion as a way to help Christians understand well what science can and cannot do in relation to faith.

I am proud to say Hope for Uganda has made me what I am, perhaps mostly as an ambassador for Sacred Heart Seminary and Archbishop Flynn Secondary School. Both of these institutions, and the many benefactors who support them, helped me realize a precious dream and reach the peak of my academic life. However, my story is not unique. There are so many like me - sons and daughters of hope - who by the grace of God and help from Hope for Uganda, will one day also share their stories as they respond to God's calling.

For those who have an interest in knowing more about my thesis, I am happy to share my thoughts. The following is a brief summary that will give you some understanding:

**Reason is the fundamental distinguishing mark of the human person. Science and religion are two distinct realities integrated by human reason, as both pertain to the core of human existence. In science, man tries to decipher the content of nature,**

*what it is made of, how it functions, and how he can use it for his benefit and the benefit of others. Man's other natural ability is the ability to transcend the natural world and ask metaphysical questions about the nature of things. He relates concretely to this reality beyond in the practice of his religion. Religion and science, therefore, have two common denominators: reason and natural things. Philosophy should be the unifying master of the two, integrating them without fusion. The words of Etienne Gilson summarized it all:*

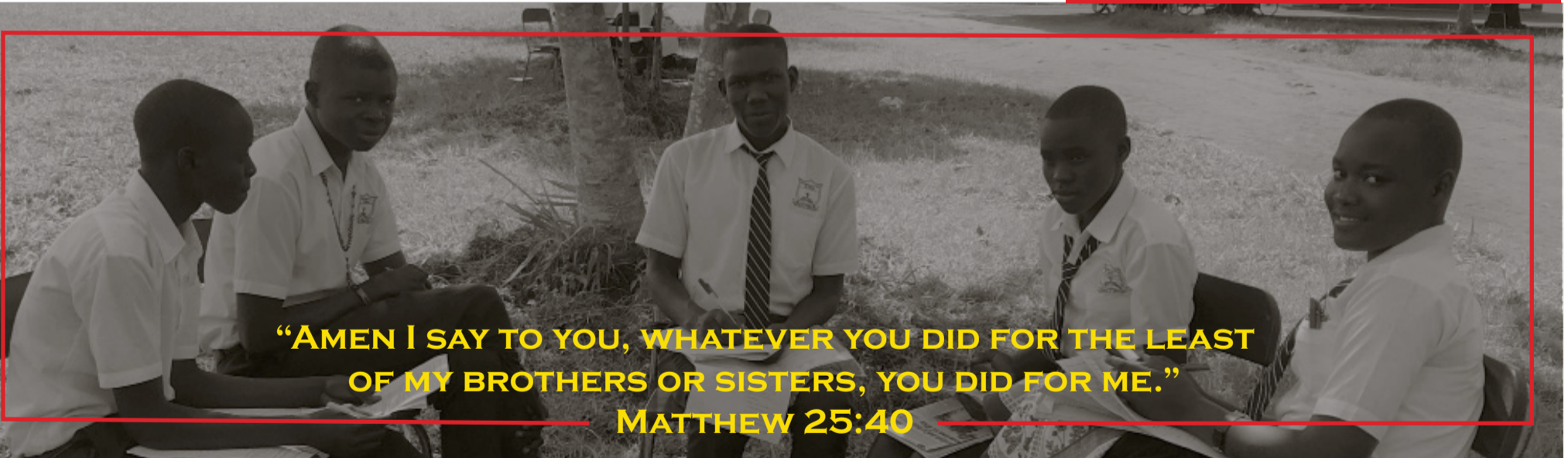
*Were it in my power to do so, I would rather leave you with a gift. Not wisdom, which I have not and no man can give, but the next best thing: the love of wisdom, for which philosophy is another word. For to love wisdom is to also love science, and prudence; it is to seek peace in the inner accord of each mind with itself and in the mutual accord of all minds.*

*Stanley Jaki delved deeply into philosophy from his study of the history of science after reading Gilson's beautiful book, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (1973). It is wisdom and prudence that guarantees the equilibrium both in doing science and in the search for the ultimate explanation of things in religion. The love of that wisdom plays a bridging role between science and religion.*

Editor's note: an expanded version of Fr. Paul's summary of his thesis can be viewed on the Hope For Uganda web site.



Fr. Paul Peter Dr. Rom (2nd from left) after thesis defense.



Hope For Uganda  
PO Box 1863  
Minnetonka, MN 55345



(952) 222 8330



info@hopeforuganda.org



Visit us on the web at  
www.HopeForUganda.org



**Hope For Uganda is a Minnesota 501(c)(3) Non-profit corporation legally established in 1998 to support educational, faith formation, and relief activities in the Archdiocese of Gulu in Northern Uganda.**

## Make a Difference

### Pray

Please keep the people of Northern Uganda and our mission in your prayers.

### Volunteer

If you would like to offer your skills or time to the organization, please contact us.

### Donate

Financially support the organization, which in turn provides hope to the people of Uganda.

**YES!** I want to give hope to the people of Uganda through my generous donation.

See enclosed donation form.