

# **"CANA IS ANOTHER NAME FOR MARRIAGE IN CHRIST"**

**By Rt. Rev. Robert K. Muhiirwa**

"CANA" Program or Movement is another name for the "Marriage in Christ" Program in our Diocese. I will address my personal view of the program or movement and its general impact on our Diocese of Fort Portal plus the challenge of COVID-19.

## **1. MY PERSONAL VIEW OF CANA**

In the first place, I thank God for the leaders of the CANA program who have worked hard for the last five years to spread its workings throughout our Diocese. It had been a resolution of our Diocesan Synod in 2011, that "family associations and family programs shall be promoted at all levels in the parishes"; among these was the mention of "CANA." Unfortunately, not much was being done in parishes to promote the same, between 2011 and 2017.

However, the leaders of CANA around 2017, started to mobilize themselves with our pastoral guidance to organize some conferences on the Diocesan level with a few couples. These gradually drew many more from all the parishes and became annual conferences which spread to all the three deaneries and all parishes of the Diocese.

Whenever the conferences are held, the leaders invite me for the official opening with Holy Mass and a brief talk on the Christian family. Being present at their opening, gave me great joy as I see the eagerness and great expectations of the couples who are so open to learning from each other especially from the main speakers in the programs. These facilitators have been with CANA for a long time from within Fort Portal Diocese or other neighboring Dioceses.

Furthermore, I was more touched by the testimonies I would hear in parishes of how some couples who were not finding much joy and love in their marriages, were starting to find great renewal in their relationships. They were now affectionate, with greater intimacy, care for each other and better communication. They now take more care of their children than before. For example in many instances, the fathers were quite irresponsible. They would

spend much of the money on drinking alcohol. It was the duty of the mother alone to cater for the tuition and scholastic needs of the children at school. With the help and guidance of CANA, both parents jointly are now more responsible.

As the annual conferences end, the couples return to their parishes, commissioned to promote fraternities where they hold meetings in smaller groups. Therein, the couples meet every month to discuss at least one or two of the following topics: praying together, forgiveness, sharing duties, parenting, communication, humility, care for their parents, and care for each other, natural family planning, family diet and incomes, having quality time together among others.

These topics are discussed with great openness. Those with difficulties are guided more by those who have had longer experiences in CANA.

## **2. THE IMPACT OF CANA ON THE DIOCESE**

I must state that generally, the impact of the CANA program has been very positive in the Diocese. Nearly all 31 Parishes have Parish Leaders of the CANA Movement and are quite active with fraternity meetings. They are all doing their best to promote CANA in their parishes.

I would like to mention one particular Parish which is outstanding in the promotion of the CANA Program; this is Holy Trinity Parish Bisozi. The Parish leadership made the promotion of CANA one of the pastoral priorities in their plan for the last five years.

Consequently, some of the following fruits have been realized: first, there is more peace and harmony in the families and even more love being promoted between couples. This has also impacted positively on their children.

Secondly, some boys have felt the call to join the minor seminary. As a result, ten boys have joined the minor seminary in the last five years contrary to the previous years.

Thirdly, the catechists who are responsible for Sunday Services in the village chapels, and other pastoral duties are more exemplary in their leadership towards other families. This is because all the catechists joined the CANA Program in the last five years. They have better communication skills in their

families hence the positive change of love and respect as regards their relationships.

Fourthly, many families have improved on the incomes for their households; this is through the different projects they put in place. The couples use their limited resources with good budgets and necessary expenditures.

Finally, last year on Bishop's Day 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the Parish Priest, the Catechists and the Pastoral Council made a pleasant surprise to me. They contributed to the Bishop's Development Fund (BIDEFU) a sum of 5,000,000 (equivalent to 1,400 dollars) which was quite outstanding while other Parishes offered quite smaller amounts!

### **3. COVID-19 SLOWS DOWN PROGRAMS**

While all was going well and making some good progress with CANA programs in the deaneries and parishes, COVID-19 proved so detrimental to the programs in the different levels, especially with the lockdowns.

However, the leaders at the diocesan and parish levels keep in touch with each other and encourage couples to shepherd each other, especially through phones. Those who can meet physically to do so by observing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) especially keeping social distance and are encouraged to pray together more at home as the first domestic church.

### **CONCLUSION**

Conclusively, I can say that the CANA Program is right on in implementing Pope Francis' message in *Amoris Laetitia* (JOY OF LOVE). This is bringing a great renewal in families especially among married couples.

The fruits of love, peace, joy, reconciliation, better parenting, overcoming poverty, among others, are being witnessed more and more.

I pray through the intercession of St. Joseph, the patron of families that CANA, Marriage in Christ continues to grow to greater heights so that all married couples in our Diocese and the Church may recognize what the Lord wants for them.