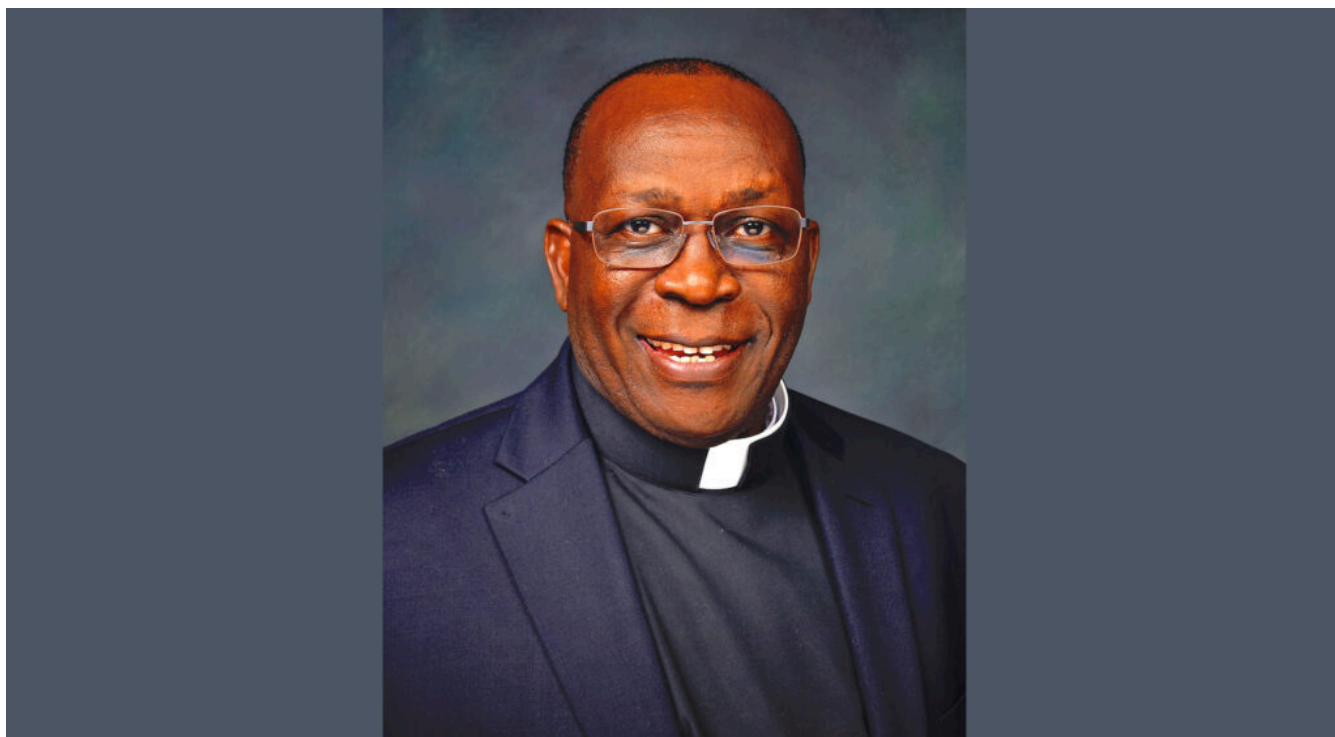




NEWS / LOCAL

Jubilarian's vocation is built upon grace, determination

By Janna Reynolds, The Catholic Virginian / May 16, 2021



Father Joseph Mary Lukyamuzi

Father Joseph Mary Lukyamuzi marks 40 years of priesthood

For 40 years, Father Joseph Mary Lukyamuzi has been standing on "the two legs of grace and determination" in his vocation as a priest.

Growing up in the Diocese of Masaka, Uganda, Father Lukyamuzi was raised in a "very staunch Catholic family" of seven children: two boys and five girls.

He began to consider priesthood in his youth when priests would visit his family's home.

"I just wanted to be like them," he said. "I was very much inspired by the priests who were visiting our family, and from there, that calling has never ceased."

Father Lukyamuzi began formation after his high school education, attending St. Thomas Aquinas National Seminary, Katigondo, and St. Mary's National Seminary, Ggaba.

He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Masaka on May 10, 1981. Father Lukyamuzi came to the United States in 2001 and professed vows as a Benedictine monk at Mary Mother of the Church Abbey, Richmond.

While with the Benedictines, Father Lukyamuzi studied spiritual direction and formation at the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm in Rome.

"I would say that at least every Catholic should visit Rome, because when you are in Rome, you are really at the core, at the ground, of where your faith comes from. It's wonderful," he said of that experience.

At the abbey, Father Lukyamuzi gave retreats and spiritual direction. He also taught at Benedictine High School for seven years.

During that time, in 2010, Benedictine Father Adrian Harmening was pastor of St. Joseph, Richmond, where Father Lukyamuzi worked as his associate.

"Having gone through the different weekend Masses, I decided to see if I could be part of the diocese," said the priest.

His first assignment with the Diocese of Richmond was to serve as parochial vicar of St. Bridget, Richmond, while still a Benedictine monk. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Richmond in 2019.

Father Lukyamuzi has served as pastor of Church of the Holy Comforter, Charlottesville, since 2013. Previously, he served as administrator of the parish (2012-2013) and as pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Mission, Crozet (2018-2019).

Bishop Barry C. Knestout appointed Father Lukyamuzi vicar forane, or dean, of Deanery 10 in November 2018. In this role, the priest assists with parish visits within the deanery; works with pastors, deacons, parish staff and laity; and helps communicate pastoral messages and concerns from the bishop.

Of his 40-year vocation, Father Lukyamuzi said that his focus in catechizing has always been helping the people "know and appreciate the message of the cross and the message of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who helps us and who protects us from anything that could distract us away from God."

He noted that the strongest devotion he has is to the Blessed Virgin Mary "because she is the one who worked out my way through the seminary formation even up to the priesthood."

A love of serving people has brought Father Lukyamuzi great happiness in his life as a priest.

"Looking at the life of Christ and being able to identify whatever challenges I receive with him, it gives me joy to see that I am able to serve the people, to find joy in following Christ," he said.

The priest recalled a time when he was traveling by motorcycle to anoint the sick in Masaka. It was raining, slippery and muddy:

"I was carrying Jesus with me to the sick, and I fell! And when I fell, I did tell Jesus, 'Thank you, now I have shared the fall that you experienced when you were carrying the cross. But the good thing is that I'm falling with you!' So that was something which to me I always searched for — that identification with Christ, his life, that helps me serve the people with joy."

Helping other men on their journey to priesthood has been another source of joy for the priest.

Father Lukyamuzi, who has two cousins who are priests — Father Gerald Musuubire, pastor of St. Timothy, Tappahannock, and another who lives in Uganda — said that because he knows personally the difficulties that he and other seminarians had to go through, he would "from time to time see how they could be supported."

"I knew a lot about how the families in Uganda are struggling," he said. "And of course, they have some good children who really desire to be priests."

Currently, Father Lukyamuzi's efforts support the formation of 10 seminarians in his home country.

As part of Holy Comforter's celebration of their pastor's 40th anniversary, parishioners took up a special collection to further support those men — just one of the surprises they planned.

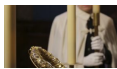
On Monday, May 10, parishioners decorated the church with special flowers, compiled a slideshow from the priest's personal photo collection, and ordered holy cards with his ordination date. Children of the parish decorated banners and devotions.

The priest was presented with images of the Sacred Heart and Immaculate Heart for pillars in the sanctuary from the parish council, a custom stole from parishioners who attend daily Mass, and a statue of St. John Vianney, to whom the priest developed a devotion after a visit to Ars, France, in 2016.

Despite the positive impact he has clearly had upon those to whom he ministers, Father Lukyamuzi remains humble.

"I would say that I cannot take credit for anything, but the credit I can always give to God and especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has been my mother throughout up to now," he said.

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