



Uganda



When most people think of the Nile River, the country that may come to mind is Egypt. One may even think of images of the Great Pyramids and vast stretches of desert. It may surprise you to learn that the source of the Nile—its starting point—is in a town in Uganda called Jinja.



Jinja, Uganda: The Source of the River Nile

Located on the shores of Lake Victoria, Jinja is the second largest city in Uganda after its capital of Kampala. It had its start in the early 1900's as a fishing village along a popular African trade route. The tribal peoples that lived on both sides of the River Nile crossed it freely because of the natural placement of large flat rocks from which they could launch their boats in relative safety.

Unlike many other regions of the country, this allowed the people to trade and cooperate in many areas of life. The locals called the area the "Place of Rocks" - in both tribes' languages, a word that sounded to the British that colonized the area like "Jinja". And so, the city was named.

Jinja is also the seat of a [Catholic diocese](#) headed by Bishop Charles Martin Wamika (pictured, left). There are over 800,000 Catholics in the diocese with 116 priests in 26 parishes which are spread across an area that is 1000 square miles *larger* than the Archdiocese of Boston. Most people do not live near a parish church. They attend Mass—when it is available—in a rustic, rural outstation, or chapel, many of which villagers have built from homemade mud bricks. Because there are so few priests, each may be responsible for 20 or 30 outstations where Mass is celebrated only every few months. Catholics still meet weekly, with a trained catechist, for a Liturgy of the Word service to listen to the weekly readings and learn basic faith formation.



Missionary Childhood in Jinja, Uganda

Many years ago, the Ugandan government seized control of all Catholic schools. While all religions were taught, no one faith was the focus. This meant that children became members of the Missionary Childhood Association only through their parishes, not their schools. Like some students here in Boston, MCA is a part of their parish religious education program.

Father Alex Okello is the Diocesan Director for the Pontifical Mission Societies in Jinja,



which is the parent organization of the Missionary Childhood Association. As part of his ministry, he travels to all the parishes and the few local Catholic schools that have reopened as well. Father Alex encourages the children to be as generous as they can with their time, talent, and treasure as they grow in their faith. As MCA members, students do service projects and sacrifice their time and talent—they clean the grounds, raise vegetables for the pastor to eat — because most of them rarely have spare change to give up. Most parishes and schools in Uganda have one communal box that all students can contribute to when they do have something to give to MCA.

Father Alex has also travelled to Boston and spoken in our parishes about his life in the missions and how our prayers and sacrifices make a difference to the children with whom

he works. After speaking at St. Peter Parish in Plymouth, students were inspired to run a lemonade stand, giving away the drinks for free will donations, if people would listen to a story about the work of Catholic missionaries the young ones had learned through MCA. They raised \$493.86 in one morning! Their good works inspired [a story by Chris Pineo in The Boston Pilot](#), our Archdiocesan newspaper, for which [Chris received the 2014 Archbishop O'Meara Award](#) for excellence in Catholic Journalism in the US.

The “Pay It Forward” of Good News doesn't stop there. Father Alex went back to Jinja and spoke to his MCA students about our students' prayerful efforts. He challenged his MCA members to “think outside the box” and do the same, telling them the story of Plymouth's lemonade stand.

Jinja's students rose to the challenge! They made World Mission Rosary bracelets and other jewelry, home-made soap, and sold tea and fruit juice to their fellow students and parishioners and raised the equivalent of \$38.57 for Missionary Childhood!



Although they received a total of \$34,500 from MCA worldwide for the maintenance of schools and orphanages, the students of Jinja went on to sacrifice almost \$200 so that other children can learn that God loves them too!