

# Vocations

## African clergy experience Elmira

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

African priests Fathers Martin Erapu (right) and Severine Yagaza have studied at Elmira College with the aid of parish sponsorships. Father Erapu spent three years in the Eastside Catholic Parish and the St. Patrick/St. Anthony cluster, and Father Yagaza currently resides at St. Casimir's Church.

### Bishops and orders must communicate

By Candy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Catholic Church in Africa owes much to the women and men religious who serve as missionaries, but the orders must coordinate their work with the local church, several African bishops said.

When the activities of the orders and the dioceses clash, "the consequences are inner suffering on both sides" and a bad example to the faithful, said Bishop Martin Luluga of Gulu, Uganda.

Religious must understand the governing role of the local bishop, and bishops must understand the special mission of religious, he said.

When religious orders or diocesan councils meet to plan programs, they must invite each other to send representatives in order to promote coordination and avoid duplication, Bishop Luluga said.

"What is more important is to nourish mutual respect and love for each other — Christian love, which may overcome many difficulties in the field of relationships," he said.

Bishop Louis Ncamiso Ndlovu of Manzini, Swaziland, thanked the religious men and women who have worked with dedication in his country "throughout our strife-torn history."

"Among the bishops, there are some who rely entirely on religious personnel for all the pastoral work in their dioceses," he said. Some poorer dioceses have no local clergy.

With the religious clergy outnumbering secular clergy in most dioceses, the bishops feel that they lack sufficient control to direct the pastoral affairs of their diocese, Bishop Ndlovu said.

The problem is particularly serious when religious superiors decide to pull some or all of their members out of a certain diocese or region, he said.

ELMIRA — Fathers Martin Erapu and Severine Yagaza don't take for granted the opportunities they have received in carrying out their vocations.

Hailing from African nations where simple lifestyles are the rule and Christianity is a relatively recent development, these two priests have defied their share of odds along the way.

In his native Kenya, said Father Erapu, "if you go to college, oh my goodness, you are a very important man."

In Tanzania, Father Yagaza noted, "almost 90 percent of the people are peasants — small-scale farmers. There are only four universities in the country, so there is a big competition to enter into the universities."

Not only have these two men gone on to become priests, but they have also pursued their graduate studies by coming to Elmira.

Father Erapu, 38, recently concluded two stays in this city totaling three years. While attending Elmira College, he served first at the Eastside Catholic Parish and later at the St. Patrick/St. Anthony cluster. Following a going-away party at St. Peter and Paul Church in September, he returned home earlier this month with a master's degree in adult education.

Father Yagaza, 32, arrived in Elmira in late August and currently lives at St. Casimir Church. He plans to study at Elmira College for four years.

For both priests, their time in the United States has been made possible by Elmira parish sponsors who volunteered to cover their tuition and living expenses.

Comparing Catholic cultures of the United States and Kenya, Father Erapu acknowledged that Christianity has only become widespread over the past half-century in his native land due to the influence of missionaries. Because of this, Father Erapu initially had trouble gaining the support of his family and neighbors when he decided to enter the priesthood, since Teso tribe tradition dictates that everybody should marry.

"It was very hard. I was the only son and I had four sisters," said Father Erapu in a recent interview. "People (in the Teso tribe) would say, 'The white men

bewitched him into not believing in the tribal way.'"

However, he added that this perception changed by the time he became a priest, when more than 5,000 people attended his ordination.

Father Yagaza, on the other hand, said that, in Tanzania, "the tribes had already been dissolved by the 1970s, so I didn't get much rejection."

Father Erapu estimates that 30 percent of Kenya's population is now Catholic, whereas Father Yagaza puts Tanzania's Catholic representation at 23 percent.

Due largely to limited educational opportunities in Kenya, Father Erapu noted that there is only about one priest

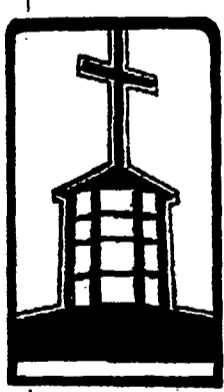
for every 20,000 Catholics in that country.

"Send somebody from America to Kenya. When people say there are no vocations here, they don't know what they're talking about," he stated.


Although he is glad to be returning to his home country, Father Erapu spoke fondly of the many people he made friends with during his time in Elmira.

"As I've stayed here I've come to like them. Even if I was given a choice, I wouldn't mind staying here," he said.

So far, Father Yagaza has enjoyed a similar experience. "The people are good and kind. They are very cooperative, and that encourages me. I think I will survive," he laughed.




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