

## **A Journey Home part 2: Reuniting Children with Families through Collaborative Efforts**

In the heart of Eastern Africa, a profound collaboration blossomed between the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya – Catholic Care for Children in Kenya (AOSK-CCCK) and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Social Communication Department. Their shared goal was to champion and implement the Comprehensive Catholic Care for Children (CCC) movement throughout the region, emphasizing family and community-based care for children.

This transformative partnership commenced its journey in Malawi in February 2024, and now, the torch has been passed to Uganda, the vanguard of the CCC move-



*Figure 1 The AMECEA/AOSK-CCCK team, ARU executive represented by Sr. Genevieve Silver and Sr. Lilly Mary Driciru, Uganda Episcopal conference Represented by Monsignor Kauta, Rev. Fr. Frederick Tusingire and Fr. John Baptist Kaganda after a conversation on care reforms stakeholders collaborations*

ment in Eastern Africa. In Uganda, the AMECEA/AOSK-CCCK team had the privilege of meeting esteemed figures such as Rev. Fr. Kauta, the Secretary-General of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, Rev. Fr. Fredrick, the Family Commission Coordinator, and other key personnel. Their discussions centered around the pivotal role of family in the upbringing of children, acknowledging it as the cornerstone of cultural transmission and individual identity. Rev. Fr. Kauta expressed heartfelt appreciation for the collaboration, recognizing its timely intervention in

addressing pastoral challenges concerning families. He pledged closer collaboration with ARU through the family desk at the UEC, underscoring the commitment to nurturing family values.

Venturing into Jinja Diocese in Ikanga parish, the team engaged in soul-stirring conversations with the parish priest, council, and CCCU staff. These heartfelt exchanges resonated deeply with the parish community, evoking poignant testimonies. One such testimony came from a catechist who recounted his decision to place his twin children in an orphanage years ago, unaware of the underlying reasons for institutionalizing



*Figure 2 AMECEA/AOSK-CCCK/ARU-CCCU and parish council of Ikanga parish conversing on what are the opportunities and challenges that hinder children from growing up in the family and planning how to use opportunities in the parish to promote family and community*

children. His narrative echoed sentiments shared by villagers, attributing poverty and cultural erosion to the alarming rates of child abandonment and neglect. This collective realization underscored the imperative of shifting societal paradigms towards prioritizing family-based care over institutionalization.

The culmination of the journey was witnessing the reunion of a child, Aron, with his extended family, symbolizing the triumph of familial bonds over institutional care. Amidst joyous



*Figure 3: Children Officer officially closing the case of Aron from St. Philomena children home and committing him to his Uncle Mr. Marin and extended family in the presence of Sr. Teddy the administrator of St. Philomena, the small Christian community and villagers.*

celebrations and a communal Eucharistic celebration, the community embraced Aron, reaffirming their commitment to safeguarding the well-being of their children. This heartwarming reunion underscored the profound impact of reintegrating children into familial settings, dispelling misconceptions surrounding

orphanages.

Reflecting on the experience, the journey underscored several invaluable lessons. Firstly, the imperative of dispelling myths surrounding institutional care and fostering a culture of positive parenting within communities. Secondly, the transient nature of charitable children institutions underscores the paramount importance of family-based care. Lastly, the collective responsibility of safeguarding children's welfare resonated deeply, emphasizing the need for community support in lieu of institutionalization.

As the journey culminated with a meeting with Bishop Martin of Jinja diocese, his impassioned plea for cultural reform echoed the sentiments of communal responsibility towards children's welfare. His call for clergy sensitization and advocacy for care reforms underscored the pivotal role of religious leaders in effecting societal change.



*Figure 4: In the middle Rt. Rev. Bishop Martin of Jinja diocese along with AMECEA/ARU/CCU and CCK team after meeting and planning how the clergy of the diocese can be sensitized on care reform.*

In essence, the journey encapsulated the timeless African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." Through collective action and communal solidarity, the journey exemplified the transformative power of embracing familial values and communal participation in nurturing the next generation