

Chama Ordained New Bishop of Mpika

... As hundreds celebrate

By Mwansa Pintu

All roads leading to the St. Josephs Cathedral in Mpika were filled with bishops, priests, the religious and lay people who went to witness the ordination of the new bishop for the diocese, Bishop-Elect, **Ignatius Chama**.

Jubilation, singing and dancing characterised the ordination Mass, which was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio to Zambia and Malawi, Archbishop Nicola Girasoli. Also present were Archbishop James Spaita of Kasama Archdiocese and the Bishop of Chipata and President of the Zambia Episcopal Conference Bishop George Lungu .Several other Bishops and priests also attended the colourful ordination ceremony.

Deputy Minister of Energy, Mr. Guston Sichilima represented Government while in opposition party leaders Mr. Michael Sata of the patriotic front (PF) and Mr. Hikainde Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UPND) represented their respective parties.

Speaking immediately after his ordination, the new Bishop Chama called on the priests, the religious, government, traditional leaders and all the people of Mpika to collaborate with him in alleviating the suffering of the people of Mpika Diocese.

He said that he is aware of the numerous challenges facing the people of Mpika Diocese, among them the shortage of farming inputs, poverty, fewer schools and hospitals, erratic medicines and staff, HIV/AIDS, witchcraft on so on. Bishop Chama committed himself to work with government and other stakeholders in finding solutions some of the problems.

“The role of the church is supplementary. Government should do its duty by providing service to the people and the citizens should demand for the services,” observed Bishop Chama who is the sixth Bishop of Mpika Diocese once known as Mbala Diocese.

The first Bishop of the then Mbala Diocese was the Right Reverend J. Van Sambeck of the Missionaries of Africa (1933 – 1936), followed by the Right Reverend Henry Horst, M. Afr. (1938 – 1946) who was succeeded by the Right Reverend Joseph van den Biesen, M. Afr from 1948 – 1958. The Right Reverend Adolf J. P. Furstenberg, M. Afr., succeeded Bishop Biesen in 1959 and shepherded the diocese up to 1989 when current Archbishop of Lusaka Archdiocese, Telesphore-George Mpundu took over.

However, the Diocese of Mpika has had no bishop since 2004 following the appointment of Archbishop Mpundu to Lusaka Archdiocese .

The new Bishop, Ignatius Chama, thanked his predecessor, Archbishop Mpundu, for laying a good foundation by entrusting the Diocese of Mpika into the hands of local priests. He appealed to priests and the religious in the diocese to support him in his new appointment.

He said “I desire to be a shepherd who listens to your desires and working with you in realising the aims of our diocese.”

Bishop Chama called on the traditional leaders and other churches in the area to work with the Catholic Church in improving the lives of the people.

Mpika traditional Chiefs Kopa, Nabwalya and Chikwanda attended the ordination ceremony.

Speaking earlier, Fr. Robert Lavertu who until the appointment of Bishop Chama, Apostolic Administrator of Mpika Diocese, welcomed the new Bishop and assured him of the support of the priests and the religious in the area.

He also thanked the Diocese of Mansa for “the gift of Bishop Chama”.

“A gift is not a debt,” he said “But we thank the people of Mansa for this rare gift.”

Speaking at the same occasion, Mr. Sichilima who stood in for the Vice President and acting Republican President Rupiah Banda, thanked the Catholic Church for its contribution to health, education and other sectors of the economy.

He observed that Zambia faced a lot economic challenges such as poverty, poor service delivery, HIV/AIDS and corruption. Mr. Sichilima assured the congregation that Government required stakeholders such as the Catholic Church to partner with in dealing with these issues.

“Installation of a new Bishop always brings happiness and joy to the Church and the nation. But you have a challenge, to rise to the standards set by your predecessor Archbishop Mpundu and Archbishop James Spaita of Kasama,” he told Bishop Chama. Zambia Episcopal Conference President Bishop Lungu, advised the new Bishop to always draw strength from God in his new responsibilities and assured him of ZEC’s support in his pastoral duties.

“I will always be with you till the end of time”, is what the Lord assured us” Bishop Lungu said and that we should therefore never give in to fear.

Apostolic Nuncio to Zambia and Malawi, Archbishop Nicola Girrasoli, thanked the new Bishop for accepting the challenge to shepherd the Church in Mpika Diocese and urged the people of Mpika to support him in his work.

Before his appointment, Bishop Chama served as the Judicial Vicar and Development Coordinator for Mansa Diocese. The new bishop was also a member of Mansa Diocesan Consultors and Chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy. Bishop Chama also served as assistant and parish priest in several parishes in the Diocese of Mansa.

He was born on August 12, 1957 in Kawambwa District, situated in Mansa Diocese. He completed his primary and secondary school education in Luapula province. He followed his priestly studies at St. Augustine Major Seminary in Kabwe and St. Dominics Major Seminary in Lusaka, where he obtained a Diploma in Philosophy and Bachelor in Sacred Theology. He also holds a diploma in Accountancy studies.

The new Bishop says, he will always be guided in his work by Bible verse from John 8. 32 which states that “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”.