



Uganda Martyrs University

# Remembering The FUTURE

Reflections on Repositioning Umu as  
an Outstanding Catholic University

“ Umu’s authentic future is buried in her history – the roots. She can’t go forward without remembering where she came from. At her very roots lies the forgotten well spring of her posterity. Her future does not need to be imagined; it simply needs to be remembered. ”

**Ambrose Kibuuka S. Mukiibi**

# **Remembering the Future**

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## About the Author

**Ambrose Kibuuka S. Mukiibi** is the current President of Uganda Martyrs University Alumni Association (UMUAA). He is a specialist in Human Performance Systems – the art and science of bringing out the best in people. He is a passionate educationist with special interest in mainstreaming experiential learning as the gateway to holistic education. He holds a Master’s degree in Development Studies (UMU) and a Bachelor’s degree in Social Sciences (Makerere). He received secondary education at St. Joseph’s Seminary, Nyenga and St. Joseph’s S.S.S. Naggalama.

Upon completion of his post-graduate studies he was retained at Uganda Martyrs University where he served as teaching staff and Deputy Director of the Centre for Extra Mural Studies and Distance Learning from 2000 to 2004. He also founded the Centre for Good Governance and Peace Studies, shortly before leaving service of the University in 2005. While at UMU, under the mentorship of Dr. Martin O’Reilly, Ambrose championed a number of student mentorship programmes, including the annual pre-university camp, work readiness mentorship, and the field attachment programme. This is on top of other non-tuition revenue programmes like tailor-made short courses and grant-funded trainings. He also developed the initial concept of UMU Outreach Programme (UMU-COP), a framework designed to mainstream community engagement as a core component of UMU. Unfortunately, these initiatives have since collapsed. Before joining UMU, Ambrose had served as the pioneer Community Development Officer for Lugazi Diocese between 1997 and 1999. Immediately after graduating from Makerere University in 1997, he founded KAMDA Community Secondary School in Mpatta Subcounty, Mukono District. It is now the main Government-aided school in the subcounty.

Ambrose Kibuuka wields vast experience in the field of higher education, cutting across the entire spectrum from classroom teacher to top Governance positions. He is currently a member of the Board of Trustees and University Council at Kampala International University (Kampala, Ishaka and Dar-es Salaam). He also serves as a member of the Board of Directors at the Public Policy Institute; a member of the Governing Council at the Real Estate Institute of East Africa (REIEA) and previously served as a Member of the Board of Directors at ACORD Uganda; as well as a member of the Board of Directors at the Institute of Advanced

Leadership-Uganda. He is widely consulted by Universities across the country in the areas of pedagogy; leadership and governance; strategy; innovation; and organizational change. He has also been occasionally engaged by the National Council for Higher Education.

Ambrose Kibuuka is widely experienced as a practitioner in participatory training, consulting and research methodologies. Since 2001, he has undertaken over 100 consultancy assignments with a variety of organizations locally and internationally in fields including: Creativity, Innovation and Change Management; Team Building; Transformational Leadership; Strategic Planning and Management; Entrepreneurship Development; Strategic Career Positioning; Youth Empowerment; Transformative Education; Personal Development; People Performance; and Organizational Development.

The spectrum of organizations Ambrose has consulted for includes UN Agencies, International Development Agencies, Foreign Embassies, Government Ministries and Departments, Intelligence/Security Agencies, Local and International NGOs, Banks, Private Sector Firms, Church establishments, Universities and other educational institutions. He characteristically focuses on awakening individuals and organizations to their untapped potential, inspiring them to operate at peak levels.

He is author of a number of youth empowerment books including *After University, What Next?* (2003/2008/2018); *Remaking the Youth* (2000); *Demystifying Capital* (2017); *Supercharging Youth Employability* (2016). He is occasionally hosted on various radio and television talk-shows. He is married to Doreen Metta Mukiibi and blessed with 3 children: Manuel Antonio Mukiibi (RIP), Gabriella Mirembe Mukiibi and Francesca Zaggwa Mukiibi.

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***Over the last 29  
years, UMU has  
done well. Now is  
time to do great.***

***“I have been studying your [Catholic] religion and I have come to the conclusion that, if it were only workable, it would furnish the solution to all mankind’s difficulties and establish world peace and happiness. But you do not take your own faith seriously. I feel you have cheated us”***

*(Words of a Japanese Atheist Professor talking to an American Missioner at the beginning of World War II)”*

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# Introduction

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This booklet is a compilation of my personal reflections on Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) and what its unique identity as a Catholic University actually means for the Church and society. My long-held view is that the enormous potential of UMU is terribly underrated, her limits erroneously overrated, and her mission vaguely appreciated by the key stakeholders. As a result, we are stuck with an institution, prophetically commissioned to champion national transformation, but now caught up in the rat race for its own survival. The purpose of sharing my reflections is to stimulate an open discourse on how to get UMU back to its foundational bearing as a Catholic University. For therein lies its assurance to thrive and the power to impact society in a mighty way.

Fr. James Keller, in his book, *Change the World From Your Parish* (1960), tells an illustrative story about a conversation between an American Maryknoll missionary and a Japanese atheist Professor, at the beginning of World War II. According to the story, the atheist Professor, in a tone of great disappointment said the following words to the missionary:

“I have been studying your [Catholic] religion and I have come to the conclusion that, if it were only workable, it would furnish the solution to all mankind’s difficulties and establish world peace and happiness. But you do not take your own faith seriously. I feel you have cheated us”

That atheist professor represents a foregone conversion – a missed opportunity for the Church. He represents millions who look up to the Church only to end in frustration and feeling cheated. What is it that the atheist Japanese Professor saw that we do not see in the value of a UMU as a Catholic University? If the ideals and promise of UMU as a living branch of the Church are so potent, what would stop it from being workable? What is it that we have to take seriously about UMU that needs to be reawakened? I choose to see UMU through the lenses of the Japanese Professor – great expectation and optimism.

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In September 1999 I reported at the remote campus of UMU, tucked away in the remote village of Nkozi to pursue a master's degree. Earlier, I had spent 3 years (1993-1996) pursuing the first degree at Uganda's iconic Makerere University. The two institutions were not comparable. At Makerere modest students like me would easily get lost in the crowd of students. Everything was massified and impersonal. At UMU, right from my first day, I received personalized treatment. My bags were carried by staff to my allocated room.

The simple missionary buildings were so homely. The green and flowery campus was so beautiful and serene. The social networks were so vibrant and worked for everyone. It was a knightly connected small community where everybody cared about everybody else. Despite its rural location, and presumably boring missionary aura, many students from Makerere University fancied having friends at UMU as a ticket to spending serene and celebratory weekends there. There was a magnetic pull effect about the culture of this place.

It was an extensively multicultural community, and this was one of its greatest attractions. Ironically, despite its remote location Nkozi was a spring board to the rest of the world for many staff and students. Educators saw their role as that bringing out the best in the students. In less than one year, I was identified by Dr. Martin O'Reilly as a potential mentee. Once he gave me a platform to show-case myself and grow, Professor Michel Lejeune the then Vice Chancellor and all the other educators all embraced me and did all they could to make me flourish. But it was not just me. This is what the educators did for all of us, generally. This explains why many UMU alumni of the generations 1993 – the mid 2000s have gone on to shine bright out there.

In the process of my reflection on UMU, I have learned that what I experienced in the culture of the university then, was not by chance;

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there is a script that details how a Catholic university should be. There is a broad framework of the Catholic Social Teaching that translates into an impression of the Catholic university. This is what the initial leaders and educators at UMU tried to play along despite enormous resource constraints characteristic of start-ups. It wasn't perfect but they ensured it was progressively moving towards becoming an iconic Catholic University. Apparently, somewhere along the way, the script was abandoned and overshadowed by the pressure to make UMU "competitive" in the league of other universities. This reflection is about how to take UMU back to the original script.

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# **Why a Catholic University in Uganda?**

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***“If Ex Corde Ecclesiae provides the institutional framework of a Catholic university, then Laudato Si provides the vision for why Catholic universities belong in the...higher education marketplace at all” (Scott Kelley)<sup>1</sup>***

There are over 50 universities in Uganda and still counting. Should direct involvement in provision of university education be a core concern for the Catholic Church in Uganda? Why can't we leave this to Government and the private sector so the Church concentrates on what it does best?

Well, in his article, *Do Catholic Universities Still Have a Value Proposition?* Scott Kelley has succinctly captured the unique value proposition of a Catholic University: “Catholic universities belong in today’s higher educational matrix because they imagine the development of the whole person and of all people. They do much more than educate for jobs or careers”. In this sense, Uganda Martyrs University has a unique and irreplaceable value proposition to society.

Dr. Gabriel Martinez, Chair of Economics at Ave Maria University, USA, has expounded and illustrated this insight very aptly. He underscores that,

*“More than just a collection of books, scholars or students thrown together, a Catholic university is dedicated to the cause of truth and not caught up in convenient lies or trendy catchphrases. Their common vision of the dignity of the human person informs and directs their study, work, and fun. Some choices considered perfectly normal everywhere else (in the neo-pagan world) are unthinkable here because they demean people. All realize the distinctiveness of their*

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1. Scott Kelley, (2019). *Do Catholic Universities Still Have a Value Proposition?* Featured in Inside Higher Ed, February 26<sup>th</sup> 2019. <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/02/26/value-proposition-catholic-universities-today-opinion>

*school comes from Jesus Christ, who He was, and what He said. In everyday life, this means treating others with respect. No gossip, cynicism, or destructive criticism. Everyone gives each other the benefit of the doubt, learns from each other, and is willing to contribute and serve. Each strives to see Christ in their colleague.”<sup>2</sup>*

Gabriel Martinez makes a very instructive emphasis by adding that, *“It [the Catholic University] is built on rigor and critique, research and teaching, dignity and culture, autonomy and academic freedom, individual rights and the common good. However, if there is something good a secular university does, a Catholic university does it better. Because while both search for truth, the Catholic university already knows the fount of truth – Jesus Christ and His Church.*

*This translates to how it sets its priorities, goals, and strategies, in its choice of leaders, officers, staff, and faculty, in its admissions, athletics, and student life. It is Catholic in what it celebrates and commemorates, in what it criticizes and condemns. It is Catholic in its choices of academic programs, student activities, policies, rules, and regulations. It is Catholic publicly and unabashedly, without embarrassment or apology”<sup>3</sup>*

In modern society, universities are the most influential shapers of the dominant consciousness among elites and professionals, who go on to take charge of leadership and governance in the various sectors.

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2. Gabriel Martinez, (2020). What Does It Mean to Be a Catholic University? Featured in AMU Magazine, Summer 2020

3 Ibidem [https://issuu.com/avemariauniversity/docs/amumag\\_summer2020\\_issuu/s/10878800](https://issuu.com/avemariauniversity/docs/amumag_summer2020_issuu/s/10878800)

## Why a Catholic University in Uganda?

However, most universities are predominantly driven by a secular world view, most times devoid of the values required to build and sustain a just and harmonious society, as envisaged by the gospel. Absence of a well-grounded Catholic university means that the Church forfeits her right and duty to purposively and emphatically groom a critical mass of professionals who will influence society and the world of work by embodying the mandate of “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mathew 5:13-16). The Catholic university is the best suited place for the Church to effectively nurture a faithful breed of professionals who will stand by the Truth despite the opposing storm of the secular ecology in which they operate. Without an authentic Catholic university, the Church risks reducing herself to a mere spectator in the affairs of shaping society’s dominant culture.

Ideally, in Uganda’s context, an authentic Catholic university does not have competitors. It ought to enjoy a distinct identity and value proposition that no public, private or even other Christian universities can successfully imitate or afford. It would be the singular sought-after destination for multitudes of prospective students (sponsors) attracted by its unique attributes. The main competitiveness strategy an authentic Catholic university would have to pursue is to appropriately align itself with the teaching of the Church on what an ideal Catholic university ought to be. Therein is the true value

*“Without an authentic Catholic university, the Church risks reducing herself to a mere spectator in the affairs of shaping society’s dominant culture.”*

proposition that Uganda is looking for in UMU, but yet to find. In fact, this unique value proposition of an authentic Catholic university is highlighted in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities (Ex Corde Ecclesiae). "It [Catholic University] has always been recognized as an incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity." The emphatic usage of the phrase "incomparable centre" unmistakably points to the uniqueness of a Catholic university.

Finally, Ex Corde Ecclesiae also provides instructive counsel on what Catholic universities are called to focus on:

*"It is the honour and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to **the cause of truth**. This is its way of serving at one and the same time both the dignity of man and the good of the Church, which has "an intimate conviction that truth is (its) real ally ... and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith"(7). Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of **proclaiming the meaning of truth**, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished. By means of a kind of universal humanism a Catholic University is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God. It does this without fear but rather with enthusiasm, dedicating itself to every path of knowledge, aware of being preceded by him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"(8), the **Logos**, whose Spirit of intelligence and love enables the human person with his or her own intelligence to find the*



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*ultimate reality of which he is the source and end and who alone is capable of giving fully that Wisdom without which the future of the world would be in danger.”<sup>4</sup>*

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4. Ex Corde Ecclesiae, paragraph 4 of the Introduction

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# Why Uganda Martyrs University?

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## Why Uganda Martyrs University?

Apart from sharing the name, what tangible linkage is there between the Martyrs of Uganda and Uganda Martyrs University? Is there any significant way the public associates the two? How much have the graduates of UMU internalized the story the Martyrs? How have the lived values of the Martyrs inspired and influenced the graduates and staff of UMU? Apart from a symbolic name, why was this institution named after the Uganda Martyrs, and why should it matter?

By virtue of its naming and conceptualization, UMU is by design challenged to literally walk in the footsteps of the Uganda Martyrs. They sowed humble seeds of faith that have turned out to be the bedrock of Christianity in Uganda and beyond. Naming this institution after the Martyrs of Uganda should be understood as a prophetic inspiration of the Holy Spirit. By that very sign, the university, as a national institution of higher learning, was from the outset consecrated and commissioned to be the “light of the world and salt of the earth” amidst the darkness that engulfs the influential circles of professional practice in the various sectors of society.

A number of the Martyrs were well placed and trusted officials in matters of public service and governance. They had options but chose to stand by the Truth of their new-found faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ than follow the attractive but destructive standards of the world. But in the end, they hold the torch that

*Apart from sharing the name, what tangible linkage is there between the Martyrs of Uganda and Uganda Martyrs University?*

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will forever inspire the nation to walk in communion with Jesus Christ who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). The naming of this institution literally bestows upon it the same responsibility. To be the torch bearer of the light of Christ guiding the Church and general society in Uganda and beyond. This is the challenge that both the institution and its members (staff, students and alumni) are invited to live up to.

I have been part of the UMU family since 1999 when I joined as a Masters student and later as teaching staff, and now as President of the Alumni Association. Yet, through all these years, I have never seen or heard of any official document that elaborately explains why this institution was named after the martyrs of Uganda and what specific attributes of the Martyrs are to shape the core values and institutional culture of the University. If such a document does exist somewhere, then one thing is for sure, it has not been duly disseminated and its contents have not been effectively communicated to help the stakeholders draw the required intimate relationship between the martyrs of Uganda and the University, as ought to be the case. Under the circumstances, it remains just a name without much tangible and spiritual significance in the hearts, minds and actions of the stakeholders. This critical omission touches the very heart of the institution, and once it is addressed, the identity, culture and impact of the University will dramatically change.

Below I have taken the humble liberty to propose some attributes of the Uganda Martyrs that could translate into defining values for UMU. This means that the institutional set up, design of programmes and activities of the university should all be geared towards imbuing these values as a way of life among all students and staff of the University throughout their UMU experience.

**Pursuit of Truth** with open-mindedness and passion for continuous learning. By the grace of God, the Martyrs opened up to listen to a new spiritual teaching which turned out superior to the one of their ancestors that they grew up in. If they were

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too rigid they would have missed out. It entails listening to even those that are different and the ability to discern, in order to pursue transformative change at a personal level. It is a search for innovative and better ways of doing things. A student or staff's encounter with UMU is supposed to be transformative. In turn, they are also to be agents of transformation in society. It is enlightenment (Truth) that makes us light to the world.

**Passion for Mission** and commitment to bearing testimony to the goodness of God through service to humanity and influencing society. When the martyrs tested the goodness of God and the liberating message of Christ, they could not keep it to themselves. They were itching to reach out to others and share the new-found joy. They ended up shaping a new social order both within the palace and in communities where they came from. Students and staff of UMU should all be helped to develop this strong sense of mission. Social transformation cannot happen unless those who are transformed intentionally reach out with a systematic sense of mission. The humble seeds of faith in action that the Martyrs sowed has turned out to be a forest of Christianity in Uganda.

**Humility and Obedience** is core in the life of a Christian. But in the process of living and serving in the broader context of a secular society, a Christian must have a spiritual and moral guidance system that enables one to discern when to obey civic authorities, in cases of conflict with God's truth, to choose loyalty to the supreme authority – God. But in any case, and in all situations maintaining a Christ-like humility and respect for all is key. Students and staff of UMU ought to be helped to develop this sense of discernment between what is legal, morally and spiritually right.

**Honesty and Faithfulness** to God regardless of the challenges. The martyrs were honest to Kabaka Mwanga and his officials.

They did not hide the fact of their conversion to the new faith – Christianity. At the same time they remained faithful to Jesus Christ as introduced to them by the missionaries even when it meant death. This faithfulness to the truth should be a defining attribute that those who subscribe to UMU as students and staff strive to emulate.

**Courage and Resilience.** The Uganda Martyrs are a very illustrative example of what courage and resilience in the face of adversity means. They embody the ultimate expression of what it means to persevere in tough times, including carrying one’s cross as a Christian. The courage and resilience in confronting tough but worthwhile projects ought to be part of the grooming at Uganda Martyrs University. A high sense of steadfastness is what UMU graduates need to be effective agents of transformation in society.

**Compassion.** The Martyrs exhibited a great sense of compassion for one another, especially during the most trying moments of their persecution. In their case it was a question of “I am my brother’s keeper”. A product of UMU ought to be one who has a lived experience of what it means to be a Good Samaritan. Compassion has to be a defining attribute.

**Unity and Team Work.** The Martyrs stood in solidarity till the very end. They worked together as a team while working clandestinely to spread the word of God among the community members to the effect of recruiting some. It is only team work that sustains noble missions. The UMU experience should be one that practically teaches students and staff the invincibility of unity and team work. UMU uses the rallying call, “Making a Difference”. The seven attributes highlighted above ought to be the main differentiator of UMU graduates in the market place (society). Technical knowledge and skills are the same in all universities. The spirit with which they are applied is what

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makes the difference. These seven attributes will shape the spirit that makes a difference.

### **How to operationalize the virtues of the Uganda Martyrs.**

At this point, a living question arises: how then can we imbue these attributes of the Uganda Martyrs into organizational culture and student experience at Uganda Martyrs University? Here is my suggestion on how to go about this.

First of all, there needs to be a dialogue around these and other possible attributes of the Martyrs that could translate into defining values for UMU. Once this dialogue is completed, these attributes should be compiled into a booklet that expounds each of them. Examples of activities and tools will be developed to demonstrate how each attribute can be embedded as part and parcel of the university's lived experience - culture. Particular care should be taken to devise pedagogical strategies how the values can be embedded in the design and implementation of learning programmes.

As an institution specializing in knowledge generation and dissemination through research and teaching, Uganda Martyrs University ought to position herself as the obvious authority on the story of the Uganda Martyrs. This is more so the case given that the University is home to Catholic scholars in theology and Church history. Diverse research, packaging and innovative popularization of information related to the Uganda Martyrs ought to be a major aspect of the University. Think about it, if not UMU then who?

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**A New Strategic  
Direction: Reactivating  
the UMU Promise**

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## **A New Strategic Direction: Reactivating the Umu Promise**

The future of Umu is in its history. The winning strategy lies in going back to the roots. According to the original statement of purpose, Uganda Martyrs University was established “to serve the Church and Society”. Clearly, this statement of purpose sets the University apart. Umu is not meant to be just like any other university. From the outset, it was envisaged that the key to Umu’s greatness would be found in its unique value proposition to the Church and society. But what does it mean for Umu to “serve the Church and Society”? What are the real needs of the Church and Society? How can Umu respond to these needs with practical solutions? The answers to these questions embody the Umu promise. To define the University’s new strategic direction we simply need to look back to its roots. Therein lies the real answer.

More than ever before, Uganda Martyrs University must stand out as an oasis of professional sobriety, rooted in the true and deep spirit of Christian values as espoused in the broad spectrum of Catholic Social Teaching. We ought to resist the temptation of conforming Umu to the standards of the other universities. It was established for a unique noble mission that no other university can replace. It is imperative that we go back to the roots.

In the following segment, I present some of what I perceive to be the strategic pillars that will effectively catapult Umu into the future. In effect, these same pillars underpin the roots of Umu which will reposition the institution to effectively serve the Church and society as originally envisioned.

### Strategic Pillar 1: Reconfigure the Chaplaincy

Ideally, the chaplaincy is at the heart of an authentic Catholic University. However, before we reposition the chaplaincy to the center, we need to first of all rethink the concept of the chaplaincy and redefine its role in the big picture of the university's mandate.

The fundamental assumption in the notion of a Catholic university is that;

- a. the Catholic Church has a unique and systematic outlook to reality (Catholic Social Teaching) that it would like to propagate in the mainstream of society.
- b. this Catholic outlook to reality is essential for the running of the affairs of society in a manner that promotes life to its fullness as envisaged by our Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:10)
- c. if we are to have a society where the dignity of the human person, created in God's own image, is duly respected, we need a critical mass of professionals whose thinking and character is deeply shaped by the Catholic social teaching, serving in the various sectors of society as servant leaders.
- d. this extensive and systematic body of the Catholic Social Teaching offers a frame through which all the professional disciplines taught in university are synthesized. Therefore, whereas graduates

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from other universities would carry the technical competences in their respective professions, graduates from a Catholic university would embody a practical approach to applying their technical competences in a manner that seeks to promote full respect for human dignity and the glory of God in all situations.

- e. character formation based on the values and principles of Christ's teaching is a major differentiator of a Catholic university.

The above set of assumptions has far reaching implications for the nature and role of the Chaplaincy in a Catholic university.

First of all, the chaplaincy has to be one that is deeply immersed in the scholarly activities relating to the Catholic Social Teaching. The repository of Catholic social teaching on various subjects is so rich and would dearly help to establish a just society if widely applied. But much of it largely remains unknown to most professionals who would make a difference. A Catholic university is the most opportune place to disseminate them. But even then, most educators at Uganda Martyrs University are equally ignorant of the same. Moreover, given the national curriculum regulatory regime, it is not possible, nor desirable to integrate all the CST in all curricula.

So, the chaplaincy is best placed agency to stand in the gap and coordinate systematic discussions around the various documents on the Catholic Social Teaching within the university. This means that the chaplaincy would be charged with;

- a. Continuous research and compilation of the various documents on CST,
- b. Identifying resource persons from within and outside the university who would help to lead or facilitate learning sessions on specific aspects of the CST in the university
- c. Organize and coordinate a series of learning sessions on

CST targeting both students and staff, including seminars, workshops, symposia, conferences. These ought to be organized in such a way that the CST is customized along applied relevance to each professional discipline represented in the university. All students and staff would be required to attend a minimum threshold of such CST learning events per semester.

- d. Organize and coordinate practical projects related to the learning and application of the CST within the university and other communities.

For emphasis, some of the CST documents have content that is quite instructive and relevant for UMU's strategic direction but they have not been explored. Some of the issues raised and prioritized in recent popular consensus like the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) and Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP III), had been previously better articulated by the CST several decades ago. Had these CST sources been appropriately harnessed they would endear the University to many development partners, including Government of Uganda. For example,

- Pope Francis' *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, is a great expose' on the connection between environmental, economic, social and cultural systems. He argues that our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffective unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature". *Laudato Si* is certainly relevant in all the professional disciplines taught at UMU.
- *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. This Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities gives a detailed guide on the identity, mission and principles of a Catholic university. It is very instructive on how Catholic universities are to be relevant to the needs of Church and society. For example, it guides as follows:  
Since the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an

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institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture, every Catholic University, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics:

- a. a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
  - b. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;
  - c. fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;
  - d. an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life”.
- There are a lot other documents espousing various aspects of CST such as *Gaudium et Spes*; *Gravissimum Educationis*; *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life); *Magisterium*; *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life); *Familiaris Consortio* (The Family in the Modern World); *Lumen Gentium*; and many more.

These and many others do expound the Catholic approach to translating the living word of God as a lived experience. Graduates of the UMU will certainly leave the university more empowered to confront reality and witness to Christ in their respective fields of practice. Once blended well with the technical professional competences, this is the greatest competitive advantage UMU can give her graduates.

A more vibrant and engaged chaplaincy will be a game changer in giving differentiated meaning for studying at UMU. Scott Kelley, Associate Vice President for Mission Integration (Division of Mission and Ministry) at DePaul University shares an insightful reflection in this

direction. He wrote, “My job as a mission-integration professional is to mediate between the cultural matrix that our students inhabit and the role of a Catholic university within it.” In other words, his unit helps students to adapt to the broader secular ecosystem (cultural matrix) without foregoing their Christian values. This may include helping (guiding) those who may find themselves in situations of dilemma and cross-roads.

All in all, the chaplaincy at UMU needs to reclaim its place as the unit that will help to breathe life into the powerful promise of a Catholic university in the assertion that, Catholic universities are in the business of integral human development (whole person, for all people). As the iconic custodian of the CST, the chaplaincy has a central role to play in “helping students [and staff] envision their contribution to society... through equipping them to address big problems like poverty, hunger, and injustice... Helping students discover God’s purpose for their lives and build capacity to live to that purpose through serving.”<sup>5</sup> In the complex context of the University, the chaplaincy is best placed to coordinate this complex endeavor.

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5. Scott Kelley, *Ibid*

## Strategic Pillar 2: Adopt Ignatian Pedagogy

The statement below gives a fair impression of the pedagogical approach consonant with a typical Catholic university of the new era.

*“As a fulfillment of their faith, Catholic colleges and universities have a tradition of promoting justice and opportunities for all people. Students are encouraged through their curriculum and campus culture to deeply understand social issues and participate in service opportunities. At Catholic colleges and universities, you’ll find that the call to service is much more than a way to build up your resume. It will give you a broader perspective and a compassionate heart, which you’ll carry out into the world upon graduation.”<sup>6</sup>*

According to Patrick McQuillan (et al), Ignatian pedagogy embraces three central tenets, “allowing for a transformation of people’s habitual patterns of thought through a constant interplay of experience, reflection and action.”<sup>7</sup> This approach to teaching and learning is also popularly known as Experiential Pedagogy. Experience largely entails learning that is transformational, requiring active engagement in matters relevant to students’ lives, ultimately forming “men and women for others.”<sup>8</sup>

The key idea here is that students in a typical Catholic university are primarily being formed to be of service to others – in the Christian sense of mission. They are not simply being “equipped” with professional

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6. Erin B. Ayrim, (2019). Five Reasons to Attend a Catholic University in Florida. Featured in STU (St. Thomas University) News, June 14, 2019. <https://www.stu.edu/news/5-reasons-to-attend-a-catholic-university-in-florida/>

7. McQuillan, P. et al, (2018). A Vision for Catholic Higher Education in the 21st Century: Reflecting on the Boston College Roundtable (pg. 114). Featured in the Journal of Catholic Education, Vol. 21, Issue 2, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1182423.pdf>

8. Kolvenbach, P. (1994). Ignatian pedagogy: A practical approach. In C. E. Meirose (Ed.), Foundations (pp. 22). Washington, DC: Jesuit Secondary Education Association

knowledge and skills to build a successful personal career as an end in itself. This requires that the process of their university education affords them an immersion into the discipline of learning by doing and reflecting through

engaging with the reality in communities. Only then will they develop respectful, informed, and culturally competent relations with the others in life. Liberative and impactful action of graduates from Catholic university should be a result of a lived experience combined with systematic reflection. Hence, the Ignatian position that “love is shown in deeds not in words”<sup>9</sup>

At this point let’s focus again on the original purpose for which UMU was established – “to serve the Church and society”. Living up to this purpose requires that the institution makes a deliberate continuous endeavor to understand the dynamic needs of the Church and society. This dictates that the university’s institutional culture be aligned to this orientation. But in turn this also calls for a community-oriented philosophy of education. In other words, we should see a significant paradigm shift in UMU’s approach to teaching and learning.

The point of departure is that educators will shift from being dispensers of information and knowledge to designers and facilitators of the learning process. This necessitates the educators to be well grounded in the philosophy and methods of experiential learning. To the greatest extent possible learning programmes ought to be designed in such a way that students learn the technical content of

their courses through interrogating theory in the context of the realities in communities/industry.

This also requires that the educators prepare students in the art, science and discipline of learning how learn - by engaging them with the tools

9. Ganss G.E, (ed. 1991). Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works. New York: Paulist Press.



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and techniques of experiencing reality and effectively reflecting on it to draw meaning and solutions. This is a critical formative process meant to shape the consciousness of students so they are able to see reality and make meaning out of it through the lenses of Catholic social teaching – their habitual attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as modes of thinking. At the end of the day, they have to be inspired and conditioned to move beyond knowing, to taking action that makes a constructive difference. In here is the method for translating that statement of purpose from paper to reality.

With this approach, UMU will find it far easier to render itself relevant to the needs of the dioceses across the country, government ministries, departments and programmes, the private sector and the civil society sector. It is this approach that will give UMU an authentic brand. As Scott Kelley rightly observed, “a brand is based on authenticity and integrity. A relationship between what [an institution] stands for and what [the public] wants”. A university like UMU should not be struggling to invest a lot of money and effort to mechanically craft a brand image. That brand image should largely be a result of the emotional and mental connection the public has with UMU’s unique value proposition.

UMU has a lot of opportunities to do this by adopting a grassroots outlook. The Church has already defined her “preferential option for the poor” targeting the bottom of societal pyramid. The onus is now on UMU to figure out how to operationalize this. How can we put to use the University’s capabilities to deal with the widespread dehumanizing poverty through transforming the productive capacities of the poor while at the same time addressing the injustices that propagate and sustain poverty in its broad sense? The University’s teaching and research activities should focus on this multidimensional and interdisciplinary question.

Fortunately, UMU has already taken the first steps towards adopting

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the Ignatian pedagogy. The university has for the past couple of years been involved in two international projects that seek to popularize this approach. One of the projects is the Partnership for Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PEDAL). The other is Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA). UMU now simply needs to build on the capabilities gained through these projects to mainstream this approach as the defining character of the entire institution. This is a matter of ultimate strategic importance and urgency.

### Strategic Pillar 3: Adopt an Innovative Business Model

UMU needs to operate on a strategically thought-out business model that enables the institution to stay on course with its mission while at the same time maintaining financial sustainability and consistent institutional advancement. Such a model will have to be an innovative one. Here are some key insights that could inform such a model:

- By virtue of its identity and what ought to be its unique selling point, UMU should not be bothered by the cutthroat competition in Uganda's higher education space. Its business model must be one that renders competition irrelevant (not applicable). The question is how do we make UMU the preferred destination for its target clientele in the East African region?
- Clearly define in specific and detailed terms, the impact that UMU is purposed to create in society and then identify the corresponding product mix that will help to realize that impact. This will be best done by examining the institution through the lenses of her mission and strategic vision. It will entail the detailed work of defining and rationalizing the target groups per product. This is important because it will enable the institution to make projections based on statistical evidence rather than blind speculation. Secondly, it provides the basis for a Public Relations (PR) and

*“Catholic universities cannot simply be places where well-to-do students receive a good education in order to assume their place in next generation of corporate and professional elites. How does education of the relatively affluent . . . relate to concern for those on the other end of the social and economic spectrum?”  
(William Werpehowski, 2014)*

Communication Strategy that is targeted and maximizes efficiency and effectiveness. Only a systematic and relentless engagement with stakeholders (community and industry) can endear the University to the market. Moreover, defining the desired impact, product mix and target market segments, will help resolve a hovering question: Can a private university like UMU target students from poor economic backgrounds and at the same time provide sustainable quality education? Who should UMU target as its clientele and still achieve the purpose for which it was established?

- Consider the fact that 21<sup>st</sup> Century society is rapidly moving away from massification to personalization of good and services. A winning business model needs to take this into serious consideration. How can UMU provide personalized learning programmes, customized to the peculiar needs of individuals and specific subgroups in society? For example, think about the various corporate executives who want to study in an environment and mode that suites their life-style. The world is also moving away from standardized curricula to a buffet arrangement where people choose their course mix depending on their unique career or business aspirations at a personal level. The implication is that the university will have to explore and induce new (non-traditional) markets. There are quite a number of high potential but unreached prospective students – new markets. Some of these are within the Catholic Church and more or less inaccessible to other private or public universities. It is a strong call and opportunity for UMU to be not just **demand-driven** but to rise to the status of being **demand-driving**. This is the true hallmark of a research-driven university.
- The advances in technology should be treated as a strong enabler of personalized products. This also means that marketing and promotional efforts should be packaged in the form of specific products rather than promoting the institution per se or general menu of products. People don't care about the institution. They only

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care what it can do for them – they choose to buy a specific product after understanding what value it can add to them.

- Consider a franchise model that will enable UMU to easily take its services to foreign markets across Africa. Once UMU takes the path of a solid Catholic university with a values-based education and its quality hallmarks, many families across Africa will yearn for it. In this case, the practical thing is to take the services closer to the clients through a franchise arrangement with local institutions of like mind. Inversely also, UMU should seek to host more international programmes offered by big brand universities around the world. This will make UMU attractive to students who would like to access higher education from those high-rated universities at affordable cost. The E4Impact MBA programme provided by Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, in Italy and exclusively hosted at UMU in Uganda has proved that this approach can be a game changer if well planned and managed. UMU should build more global partnerships in this line as a deliberate and aggressive pursuit.
- Diversify revenue streams by ensuring that non-traditional sources account for at least 50% of the university's annual budget. There are 3 major dimensions to achieving this: (a) making the university a unit of production through establishing projects that function as teaching and learning aids where students learn by producing for the market. For example, the university farm could engage in basic agricultural production and a fleet of agro-processing projects; (b) establish systematic business-oriented UMU-industry linkages. Real and sustainable wealth is created in industry. No university in Uganda has worked effectively with industry in a spirit of symbiotic relationships. First of all industry has a lot of needs in information and knowledge through research and think tanks. Secondly, there are key sectors of industry with a lot of business opportunities that UMU could engage itself in. This will require UMU to forge partnerships with industry players in a value-chain matrix.

Such industries include agriculture, tourism, ICT, transport, real estate, etc. Achieving this goal will require UMU to become an entrepreneurial university, characterized by a solid ecosystem that promotes an entrepreneurial spirit and innovation culture among students and staff. The lead question here is, how do we nurture and translate the resourcefulness of staff and students into liquid assets?

- Tap into the underutilized global Catholic network. If there is any institution that can boast of a unified grassroots global network, it is the Catholic Church. But very little advantage is taken of this great potential in terms of creating grassroots networks that can translate into business partnerships and professional partnerships that can yield impactful synergies. Africa is increasingly becoming a continent of interest to strategically-wired professionals and business people from other parts of the world. One way UMU can capitalize on this is by linking up with other Catholic universities around the world. Students from these other places could come to UMU for a one-semester or one year exchange programme. The exchange programme would carry transferable credits to be recognized back at the student's university. The student would then have to pay tuition and other related fees to UMU for the period of the exchange study. If well designed and promoted, each semester UMU could be able to attract not less than 100 foreign students per semester from all over the world. Moreover, this is just one aspect of how UMU can tap into this global Catholic network. There are many other prospects.
- Maximize the technology advantage by investing heavily in ICT capabilities. We are already in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). There are a lot of advantages UMU can tap to scale its heights and achieve a leapfrog institutional transformation. The lockdown regime triggered by COVID-19 has taught us the enormous ways in

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which technology can help reduce the cost of service delivery while at the same time improving the quality of services. All the foregoing components of the innovative business model will greatly rely on a robust technology capability at Umu. Whether we talking about exceptional customer experience (care), effective quality assurance processes, reduced cost of service delivery (administration), providing high quality education at more affordable rates, effectively running a multi-campus operation, tapping into the resourcefulness resident in cutting-edge catholic universities around the world and the general global wealth of expertise, Umu's technological capabilities will be a Key Success Factor. This has to be prioritized as a top investment area.

- Operate only viable Umu campuses. Currently Umu has 7 campuses including Nkozi main Campus, Lubaga Campus (Kampala), Masaka Campus, Mbale Campus, Fort Portal Campus, Kabale Campus and Ngeta Campus in Lira. The university has to use evidence-based trends analysis to determine the sustainability prospects for each campus. There might also be need to explore the best mode in which campuses shall operate, including the option of maximizing technology. In addition, could there be some existing campuses that have to be closed while new ones have to be opened in more opportune locations? Nevertheless, clearly, emphasis needs to be put on Lubaga Campus because of its location in Kampala the capital city. A capital city is a capital city. It comes with all sorts of advantages. That is why for example in Kenya every university wants to have a campus in Nairobi. In Uganda, most rural-based private universities endeavor to establish a campus in Kampala. Umu should take Lubaga Campus more seriously as a strategic source of mission and financial sustainability. Secondly, as a core aspect of the business model, Umu needs to capitalize on Lubaga Campus as the preferred destination for post-graduate studies – especially among the working

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class. This will call for corresponding investment in infrastructure, technology, staffing, and a strong administrative attention. It must be quickly transformed into a world-class customer-focused campus. There is a huge unexploited potential in Kampala that UMU can tap because of its brand image. UMU may also consider the option of having each of the upcountry campuses specialize in a niche set of programmes. Finally, the other option to consider is to have UMU campuses run under a franchise model. This means that UMU bears no direct administrative or capital investment costs as these are met by the proprietors of the campuses. UMU concentrates on provision of the core product (learning programmes), quality assurance of the same, branding, and issuance of certification.



#### **Strategic Pillar 4: Realign Governance and Management**

The performance of an institution reflects the stature of its leadership both at governance and management levels. The leadership guru John Maxwell has succinctly put it, “Everything rises and falls on leadership”.

***Uganda Episcopal Conference.*** Transforming UMU into a vibrant, sustainable and impactful Catholic University will need insightful guidance from Uganda Episcopal Conference as the legal holder and vision bearer. This means that UEC itself needs to be on top of the game by doing a lot of benchmarking against leading Catholic universities around the world. What best practices could be learned and adopted? What warning signals could we take note of in order to avoid mistakes made elsewhere? What excess baggage do we have to eliminate in order to move forward with ease?

In 21<sup>st</sup> century governance there is no alternative for exposure. Moreover, in a private university like UMU, the burden of ensuring institutional sustainability rests more on the legal holder (proprietors, promoters, founder body) than on the Governing Council. Members of the Governing Council are temporally appointees who may not necessarily have full time and perpetual responsibility for the university. But the legal holder is perpetually and fully responsible for what happens to the university. In the case of UMU, the burden of mistakes made by the Council (omission or commission) comes back to UEC to bear.

In view of the foregoing imperative for benchmarking, UEC could task the Governing Council to annually present a report that monitors the trends in the higher education sector globally, in Africa, East Africa and Uganda. In addition to the generic picture, particular interest should of course lean towards trends in Catholic universities. Insights from this annual activity alone will greatly help UEC to provide effective leadership by asking themselves, the Governing Council and University

Management the right questions. It will help UEC to fine-tune their strategic priorities for UMU. Effective leadership at governance level is primarily about asking yourself and the organs under you the right questions. Hence, arguably the most vital leadership capability is not providing the right answers; it is rather the ability to ask the right questions.

***The Governing Council.*** On the part of the university's Governing Council, it plays the two critical functions of being the apex policy-making organ and overseeing the performance of the university' Management team. Ideally, it is the technical intermediary between the legal holder (UEC) and the hired employees who run the day to day operations of the institution (Management and Staff). As such therefore, the Governing Council is too critical not to be at the cutting edge of things. Every member of the Council should be appointed on the basis of a known capability that they bring on board to form a multi-capability team. The University Council needs to reflect balanced capability covering the salient areas such as Catholic social teaching, higher education, law, financial governance, strategic leadership, community and industry engagement, alumni matters, organizational development, and international linkages.

Moreover, it is one thing to bring together a collection of highly qualified and experienced individuals and another to constitute them into an effective team. The Governing Council also needs to have proper induction and periodic capacity building sessions, including exposure tours if they are to perform effectively. The Council works through well constituted, well facilitated committees that enjoy latitude to think independently without undue interference from internal or external environment – as long as they ensure consistency with the policy regime. Finally, on the Governing Council, there are two critical areas that need to be consolidated. The first is strategic planning and strategic

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management. The second is organizational structure and systems. These two determine the success of the Governing Council.

UMU has been weak in the area of strategic planning. Usually, the strategic planning processes are hardly based on rigorous strategic analysis. Moreover, the Governing Council tends to rely mostly on the ideas drafted by Management team and staff. As a result, the strategic plans turn out being a shopping list reflecting conventional wisdom rather than helping the institution to leap into the future. Moving forward, the Governing Council ought to take full responsibility for giving the university strategic direction, based on thorough and technical analysis of trends. Only then will UMU's strategic plans effectively function as tools for optimum impact and institutional sustainability in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's volatile environment.

Similarly, the university's organogram and management structures have to be informed and shaped by the strategic plan. It is the strategy that determines structures and systems. The Governing Council will have to ensure that these are harmonized.

***The University Management Team.*** The alignment between the governance function and the management function of the university is first of all reflected in the nature of team that is assembled by the Governing council to manage the day to day affairs of the university. Both the composition and alignment of this team mirror the performance of UEC and the Governing Council. At the level of university management two things matter the most: (i) the value that each individual brings to the team; and (ii) the synchronicity among the members to synergize into a functional team. Again, bringing together well qualified individuals together is only the minimum requirement. More important is building the team. Once the later fails then we can only expect failure, or at most, to score goals by chance.

Both Uganda Episcopal Conference and the Governing Council can only look to management to realize the good intentions of the university. In this sense, management is the most critical organ of the three. Why? Because a strong and competent management team can bridge in for the weaknesses of the UEC and the Governing Council. It is possible to have the university steered into great performance despite weaknesses at governance level. But it is impossible for UEC or the Governing Council to fill in the gaps of a weak management team. For this reason, both UEC and the Governing Council ought to apply a systems thinking approach whenever they are assembling a management team for the university. They should hire individuals with the **“team”** in mind, rather than hiring people for their individual qualifications only.

That said, what kind of management team does UMU need at this material time?

Every context calls for a particular kind of leadership. In light of the entire foregoing discussion, we clearly note that for the next ten years UMU will need a transformative leadership team in the senior management echelon. One that is so strong on leadership rather than one that is merely strong on administrative competence. Leadership in this sense has a lot to do with clarity of a compelling vision, ability to inspire and rally stakeholders around the desired change, and ability to champion strategies that operationalize the vision. On the other hand, a management team that is constituted because of its administrative competence mainly serves the purpose of effectively maintaining the status quo. Its major competence lies in effectively running the day to day operations of the university’s bureaucracy.

The latter category is very easy to come by. You can easily assess a candidate’s suitability for this kind of competence by simply looking

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at their profile on paper. However, discerning a candidate's capability in the former category needs a more compound form of assessment. The challenge right now is putting in place a senior management team that wields clarity of strategic vision for UMU in line with the original aspirations of the Church, and the energy to pursue that vision.

Let's try and break this down a little further.

First of all, the ideal senior management team would be one that is capable of conceptualizing and translating the broad vision of a Catholic University into UMU's institutional culture, structures and systems. For this to happen, you need people who have proven capability in operationalizing abstract concepts. A good grounding in systems thinking helps a lot here. More tangibly, they should demonstrate ability to shape an institutional ecosystem where educators, students and staff find living, working and learning: - practical, exciting, fulfilling, rewarding, fun, challenging, engaging, enlightening, awakening, empowering and drawing them closer to the Truth – Jesus Christ - by the day.

Secondly, it has to be the kind of team that exhibits an entrepreneurial mindset that is well aligned with the CST and UMU's aspirations. The challenge at hand for UMU right now is to embody the stewardship as implied in the "Parable of the Talent" (Mathew 25:14-30); the "Lord's command to take charge of creation" (Genesis 1:28); the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37); and the metaphor of the "Light of the World and Salt of the Earth" (Mathew 5:13-16). In all these instances UMU is invited to lead by example.

The point is that UMU has such an enormous potential to generate a surplus beyond her recurrent and development needs. But much of this potential remains untapped. It is a leadership issue. There is so much resourcefulness of staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders that lies untapped and or abused. There are lots of material resources available to UMU or potentially available but remain largely unharnessed.

The senior management team should be one that ably addresses such questions as: how can we have a staff remuneration regime and working conditions that uphold the human dignity of everyone? How can we generate and attract the resources needed to achieve the mission of the university in its comprehensive sense?

As in the case of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, UMU will not be able to live out the love of the gospel if she does not have the resources needed to express that love in action. Likewise, UMU cannot be effective light to the world and salt to the earth if it lacks the saltiness in itself. The burden is on the shoulders of the senior management at UMU to fix this leadership challenge. Otherwise, how will UMU effectively bring Christ to communities if it lacks the practical strategies to sustain the mission?

Such a senior management team has to be one that is quite dynamic and can swiftly respond to emerging opportunities. It has to be composed of high energy individuals able to go an extra mile and burn the midnight oil when need arises. This points to a combination of personality, character, formal qualifications, experience and exposure.

In the USA and Europe there seems to be an emerging shift from academic and intellectual leadership being the major criteria for appointing Vice Chancellors (University President). High voltage academic achievement is not what is needed to successfully lead a university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century dispensation. Therefore, it should not be the most important criterion. According to a 2017 study published by **Deloitte Insights**, the top 5 most critical roles of Vice Chancellors of the new era in order of importance are: *(i) Strategist; (ii) Communicator and Story Teller; (iii) Fundraiser; (iv) Collaborator; (v) Financial and Operational Acumen; and (vi) Academic and Intellectual Leader.*<sup>10</sup> This set of roles and the

10. Cole Clark, (2017). Pathways to the University Presidency: The Future of Higher Education Leadership. In Deloitte Insights 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

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corresponding qualifications will have big implications for the kind of professionals successful universities will be appointing in top leadership positions.

In addition to being well grounded in the ideals of the Catholic mission in higher education, this spectrum of criteria in its very order, seems to be what UMU needs for her top leadership at senior management. But the question might arise, how do you tell a candidate who truly possesses them? Well, this then brings to surface a key issue regarding the method used to assess candidates for the senior management positions. The top 5 capabilities referred to in the Deloitte article above have a lot to do with a candidate's personality, character, training, experience and exposure. They cannot be easily assessed in a traditional interview setting. They are best assessed in comprehensive recruitment protocol that also includes a practical experiential set of scenario-based assessment activities.

The process of searching for a Vice Chancellor and other members of the senior management team is too important to be hurried at the altar of convenience for those involved. This also means that the composition of the assessment team (interview panel) needs to be

considered with the same regard in mind. Ability to plan and execute such 360° assessment of candidates at such a senior level is a key factor.

Modern breakthrough in management science have afforded us tools and techniques (people analytics/psychometrics) that can be used to assess a candidate's personality and character with reliable accuracy. These have become a common place in up-to-date HR practices that UMU should take advantage of, to the extent possible. Otherwise, the traditional interview approach may find a candidate highly qualified for <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/college-presidency-higher-education-leadership.html>

the job but while in actual sense the candidate is a misfit to the job due to personality and character issues. If a candidate is found strong on other fronts but only deficient in exposure or experience, the appointing authorities may develop a backstopping plan.

In particular, the Vice Chancellor needs to be a good custodian of the University's vision. This implies being able to create a vision community – inspiring all stakeholders to own the same vision and rally behind its realization. It also means being an effective team builder and team player, able to stimulate and sustain high energy levels for peak performance among staff. In equal measure, the Vice Chancellor ought to be someone keen enough and capable of keeping an eye on the business side of the university. It is a numbers game; one has to effectively build a culture of evidence-based planning and decision making through capturing all transactional data and rigorously analyzing it through business lenses. Major decisions are better off based on data and less on intuition, speculation or even sheer routine patterns.

Thinking about the senior management layer as a collective team, it is important that at the end of the day, its composition constitutes the following attributes: Open-mindedness and flexibility, innovativeness and entrepreneurial drive, ICT intelligence, astuteness in administrative procedures, experience and expertise in strategic financial management, wide exposure including local and international networks both in higher education and industry, as well as good working knowledge of the Catholic concept of higher education as earlier discussed. Collectively, the team should be capable of continuously subjecting the institutional management structure to scrutiny in the face of unfolding operational realities and proposing its realignment. In any case, the senior management team should undergo a continuous capacity building programme composed of trainings, exposure tours, exchange programmes, seminars, workshops and conferences.



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Lastly, **Student Experience** is the key that the entire senior management team should never take their eyes off. UMU needs a management team that understands the concept of **Student Experience** in thought and action. Students are the reason why the university exists. Therefore students ought to be seen and treated as the most important stakeholder. They are the ultimate customer, who must be treated as king. Literally, they pay everyone's bills and sustain the institution. Leaders of world class universities begin by putting themselves in the shoes of the students and ask the question: how do we want the student to experience the university? How the university answers this question determines the institution's ability to attract students as the preferred destination.

The University of Edinburgh for example, in defining the goal of student experience, have stated that, "The experience of being a student at the University of Edinburgh, from applicant to alumni should prepare you for life beyond your studies and begin a positive lifelong relationship with us". After making that statement of purpose, they then go ahead to articulate how they want their students to experience the University. Their full statement of student experience reads as follows:

*"Students at the University of Edinburgh will benefit from excellent teaching, both on-campus and online, and a strong academic and pastoral support framework which responds effectively to the range of individual circumstances, experience, expectations and interests.*

*Extensive curricular and co-curricular opportunities include opportunities to study abroad, learn a language, and develop skills to improve employability such as gaining the Edinburgh Award or taking on a role as a student ambassador.*

*Students have access to excellent recreational and sports facilities and can enjoy membership of hundreds of student societies and sports clubs.*

*When leaving the University, our students should be equipped*

*with the expertise and graduate attributes needed to achieve their full potential within the global community.”<sup>11</sup>*

Whereas this may not be the perfect statement of student experience, it serves the purpose of exemplifying the point. Moreover, it is not

merely a question of crafting an attractive statement as a promissory note. It reflects the university’s actual life in its entirety. Student experience is the key determinant for alumni engagement. It determines the level of attachment to the institution the alumni will have after graduating. It determines if they will choose to come back for further studies (repeat business), and as well if they will refer other people to enroll at the same institution (referral business). It determines whether the alumni will feel obliged to give back to their alma mater, let alone proudly associate with it.

For this reason, the university’s senior management needs to take keen interest and responsibility in ensuring the University develops a compelling statement of student experience as the ultimate quality assurance tool. It should be comprehensive enough and intricately rooted in the mission of a Catholic university. It then becomes the standard by which all staff, students and other stakeholders are held accountable. It is the key differentiator of UMU from all other universities.

As we conclude this relatively long discussion on strategic pillar 4, let me pose some questions to stimulate deeper dialogue between UEC, UMU Governing Council and UMU Management:

- How do we ensure that the UEC, the Governing Council and University Management operate along a shared conceptualization

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11. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/enhancing-student-experience/about/what>

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- of Catholic higher education?
- How do we create effective opportunities for UEC to interact closely with the university community in order to build a shared vision for the institution through regular dialogue?
  - How shall we ensure that young people in search of truth, meaning in life and justice find it at UMU?
  - How do we ensure that the university's strategic vision is informed by a clear sense of UMU's tactical and strategic human resource needs/issues?
  - Given the new realities and the unfolding trends of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, what is the university's comprehensive ICT strategy and ICT investment plan?
  - What is the strategic vision regarding the university's physical infrastructural development at all campuses? What projections is this based on?
  - How can we ensure sound strategic financial management in the university to guarantee sustainable revenue generation, frugal cost management, and effective risk management systems?
  - How do we make research, innovation, community engagement and entrepreneurial culture key defining features of UMU?
  - What is the ideal institutional culture and brand image we would like to define UMU to both the internal and external publics?
  - What is UMU's statement of Student Experience?

### **Strategic Pillar 5: Capitalize on the Alumni**

Alumni are the face of the university. The value and visibility of the “UMU Brand” is directly mirrored in the value and visibility of UMU alumni in the market place (society). With this in mind, UEC, the Governing Council and UMU Management need to work closely with Uganda Martyrs University Alumni Association (UMUAA) to foster innovative interventions for elevating UMU’s visibility and the value of “UMU Brand” locally and internationally. This will be achieved through tapping the vast resourcefulness of the alumni force on a number of fronts.

To this effect, the Alumni Association has already embarked on a number of initiatives, including;

#### **Outstanding Alumni Awards**

Since its founding in 1993, Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) has had significant impact in society and turned round the lives of thousands. But this impact has not been duly documented and the story told loud enough. There are many UMU alumni spread cross various parts of the world, who have made outstanding strides and impact in their respective fields of practice, but their connection to UMU is little known and celebrated, both among fellow alumni and the general public.

In December 2021 Uganda Martyrs University Alumni Association (UMUAA) embarked on a project of continuously tracking all alumni. On 26<sup>th</sup> February 2022, UMUAA, in close collaboration with the Management of UMU, launched the Outstanding Alumni Awards. This is will be an annual event where outstanding alumni in various fields will be recognized and a bright light shone on them for the world to see. The inaugural event was presided over by Rt. Rev. Lino Sanctus Wanok,

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Bishop of Lira Diocese, who is also the Chairman of UMU Governing Council. He represented the Chancellor of the University and Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference, Rt. Rev. Joseph Anthony Zziwa, Bishop of Kiyinda Mityana Diocese.

Twenty four (24) outstanding alumni were awarded at this inaugural event to symbolically rhyme with the 24 Catholic Martyrs of Uganda. In addition, Centenary Bank was specially recognized as Outstanding Employer of UMU graduates, while Mr. Vincent Morris Mukasa Ssenyonjo was recognized as Outstanding Parent of UMU. All his five children were educated at UMU and three of them were among the 24 recipients of the outstanding alumni awards because of their outstanding performance in the world of work, locally and internationally.

Going forward, this could become a significant annual project on the calendar of UEC, the Governing Council, UMU and UMUAA. It is an opportune platform to show-case the best of UMU to the world in an amplified fashion. This is strategic marketing for the University, based on proven performance. Moreover, it is a win-win scenario since it also elevates the market value of the individual alumni who are recognized and widely publicized in media. Already, the initiative has greatly helped to rekindle the pride and interest of alumni to participate in the affairs of the Alumni Association and their Alma Mater.

### **Direct Interventions by UMUAA**

The current strategic plan of UMUAA is built on four strategic objectives. The fourth strategic objective is entirely committed to: “Elevate the UMU brand at the national and international scene”. Under this strategic objective are a number of interventions that have been identified. These include;

- ***Alumni providing technical advisory services*** to the university on

a pro-bono basis. This could be in areas like financial strategy and systems, investment, academic management, ICT, collaborations and partnerships, fundraising, strategic planning, management systems, governance systems, student affairs, innovation and entrepreneurship...etc. The ultimate goal is to ensure that UMU's value proposition to its clientele is of superior quality, thereby making the university popular and sustainable. A great external brand is built and sustained on an excellent internal brand.

- ***The “Bag-of-Cement” Law Block Project.*** During the inaugural edition of the Outstanding Alumni Awards, UMUAA launched a campaign coded “Bag-of-Cement” project for mobilizing funding towards the completion of the Faculty of Law block at Nkozi, main campus. Under this project, alumni as individuals and groups are being mobilized to donate bags of cement (in cash) as many times as they can, until the project is completed. Similar initiatives will be launched to meet other needs of the University.

### **The Alumni Think Tank.**

As earlier noted, UMU's alumni force has such powerful men and women moving and shaking industry in their respective fields of practice. Certainly, they have accumulated massive wisdom and expertise to contribute to the Church and general society as thought leaders. To this end, UMUAA has initiated and constituted a think tank among the alumni. The think tank is called Global Impact and Forward Thinking (GIFT) Institute. UMU will be a priority beneficiary of the think tank endeavors.

Since 2021, UMUAA has been coordinating with the Management of UMU to identify priority areas where alumni can make contribution to UMU's advancement and transformation. To this effect, the think tank has already designed and launched two surveys. The first is the Alumni

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Tracer Study, while the other is the UMU Needs Assessment Survey. Both are online surveys. The former seeks to build a dynamic alumni data base by sending an online link and asking alumni to take five minutes filling in their up-to-date details. This is ongoing. The second is designed to capture the perception of staff and students of UMU from all the 7 campuses in regard to the priority needs of the university. The report from this will greatly inform the alumni agenda for UMU.

Some of the other UMU-specific projects that the think tank will pursue include generating answers to such questions as;

- How can UMU transform into an innovative model for sustainable institutional development?
- How can UMU build a big portfolio of partnerships and collaborations locally and globally?
- How can UMU establish and sustain a high performing endowment fund?

Let's use an illustrative example to explain how the thin tank will be of practical value to UMU. One day the think tank was brainstorming on how to attract high-impact partnerships for UMU. One member of the think tank, Dr. Alex Mbaziira, hinted on possible collaborations in the USA where he works. Dr. Mbaziira is a double graduate of UMU with a Bachelor of Computer Science and Economics (2000) as well as a Masters in Information Systems (2004). He is currently Assistant Professor of Cyber Security at Marymount University (a Catholic University) in, USA. Following the discussion from that day's session, Dr. Alex and the Vice Chancellor of UMU have since launched an aggressive pursuit of collaboration avenues that could soon see UMU benefit a lot. Dr. Mbaziira has connected the VC to some powerful contacts. Specific tangible projects are being pursued. This example illustrates the power of an alumni think tank in regard to generating innovative solutions through systematic dialogue and intentional networking.

However, on a larger scheme of things, given its composition, the think tank is aiming at doing thought leadership projects at national and international level. The think tank so far has about 50 members, all of them alumni of UMU. These are spread in different parts of the globe including Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, Rwanda, USA, Portugal, Switzerland, and Nigeria. All of them are highly qualified, extensively experienced, exposed and strategically positioned international professionals. They carry vast resourcefulness which they are willing to share with society through this think tank. The think tank is systematically structured in five thematic working groups. Each of the members belongs to one of these thematic working groups in accordance with their capabilities: *Education and Research; Partnerships and Collaborations; Econometrics; Digitalization and Innovation; Governance and Leadership.*

Through this think tank, the alumni of UMU look to engaging in high-impact, social responsibility, knowledge-based interventions that help to generate innovative solutions to critical development challenges in society. This will be achieved through partnering with Government, the Church, civil society, and the private sector along sectors like education, manufacturing, energy, transport, health, agriculture, business, technology, communication, ethics, and the built environment...etc.

The think tank serves as a platform through which the UMU fraternity makes direct contribution to generating innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in society today, such as:

- How can we solve the growing challenge of youth unemployment and apathy?
- How can we transform the work culture among Ugandans for a more sustainable economy?
- How can we mainstream alternative sources of energy and move away from environmentally destructive sources?



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# **Recommendations to Uganda Episcopal Conference**

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**1. Optimally Utilize UMU.** In UMU, Uganda Episcopal Conference has an extremely valuable asset that seems to be under-conceptualized and therefore, underutilized. As an institution of higher learning and research, moreover a chartered private university, UMU is supposed to be the Catholic Church's gateway to the modern day Ugandan society. The primary function of a university is knowledge generation. The Lord's cry (Hosea 4:6) "My people perish for lack of knowledge" highlights the function of knowledge in the equation of human transformation. The Church would be in better position to influence public policy and development programmes if UMU was effectively conceptualized as a think tank – a powerhouse whose research work informs the thinking processes at Uganda Episcopal Conference.

In modern society, those who generate and control strategic information and knowledge are the ones who determine socio-economic agenda. This is even much truer in the current knowledge-based economy of the new era (Fourth Industrial Revolution). The Church cannot effectively pursue its mission without being able to influence the policies that affect the livelihoods of the flock. UEC should be looking to the scholars at UMU to provide research-informed position papers, policy recommendations and alternative development programming in various sectors of society: Health, education, agriculture, transport, youth empowerment, gender, family, trade, industry, governance, religion and faith, culture, energy, environment, etc.

Moving forward, UEC could consider asking UMU to make annual presentations of research outputs that are relevant to the work of the Episcopal Conference. This would yield three important results: (i) Challenging the scholars at UMU to become directly accountable in terms of usefulness of the kind of research they engage in; (ii) empowering the Episcopal Conference with research-based insights that can yields

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innovative approaches to the broad mission of appropriate evangelization; (iii) Challenging UMU to do more outreach in communities across the country to engage with the real life issues, hence making the university more relevant to the real needs out there. UMU ought to occupy its rightful place as UEC's arm of intellectual rigor and scientific innovation.

**2. Build a Strong Brand of UMU.** I make this recommendation with utmost humility and yet with equal measure of firmness. Yes, humility, because who am I to tell them? But also firmness because I have worked in the field of higher education for over 20 years. I have taught in University classrooms at UMU and elsewhere and sat in University boardrooms at all levels, in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. I have been privileged to work as a consultant for the National Council for Higher Education on matters higher education. But above all, am a keen observer and student of trends in higher education in Uganda, East Africa, Africa and globally. The insights am about to raise here are informed by that exposure and strategic sensibility.

Yes, it is true that there are now more than 50 universities in Uganda. Only 10 of these are public (Mountains of the Moon University was recently transitioned into a public university, while Busoga University is also in process) the rest are private. Moreover, more entrants are still in the queue. However, if the regulator sticks to the required standards, most of these private universities are not sustainable. Many of them will close shop soon or later. Sustaining a private university worth its name is tougher than what most initiators ever imagine.

There is a growing trend for Catholic Dioceses to establish their own universities. Whereas this might be a response to real needs on the ground, there is another way of meeting the need without establishing an independent diocesan university. And this is where my recommendation comes in.

The entire Catholic fraternity in Uganda should focus on building a strong brand of UMU. All efforts should be made to make sure that UMU is a high-quality and affordable university that addresses the real development needs of society. Once this brand stands out, then the dioceses that so wish (of course informed by proper feasibility studies) can establish Constituent Colleges of UMU in their localities. The Constituent Colleges will belong to the Dioceses and only tap into the UMU brand for quality assurance and brand allegiance. In fact, each constituent college may decide to specialize in a given set of disciplines and this will be known all over the country. There is a clear framework for this kind of arrangement. This franchise model is a win-win and in my view, the most appropriate in the context. Details can be explored and discussed. With this arrangement, we shall have one strong Catholic University reaching out to the whole country as a big powerful brand. Otherwise, there is a huge risk of fragmenting the Catholic university and leaving it too weak to be effective at what it is meant to be.

**3. Effectively Utilize Alumni Resourcefulness.** I have come to the conclusion that there is no challenge that UMU is facing for which we do not have alumni whose resourcefulness holds the key to the solution. I am talking about technical capability, experience, character and networks. I have been greatly inspired and humbled to interact with an extremely resourceful breed of UMU alumni. Some of them are so good that they are head-hunted by some of the world's leading brands based in Europe, North America and all over Africa. For example, as am reflecting on the state of UMU and how we can transform the institution and leapfrog her into the future, the alumna Gloria Evelyn Byamugisha keeps flashing in my mind.

Gloria is currently the Group Chief Human Resource Officer for Dangote Cement Plc (Lagos, Nigeria), overseeing Dangote Cement Group's Human

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Capital with a total staff base of 30,000 across 11 African countries. She has in equal measure worked in the financial sector as well as telecom sector at continental level. She has managed mergers, transitions and organizational transformation of multinational businesses like Celtel to Zain, and Zain to Airtel. As a human resource generalist, with 20 years of demonstrated wealth of experience in championing thought leadership, organizational change, talent management and implementing mergers and acquisitions such, a person definitely has a lot to offer to her alma mater. Moreover, she is not an isolated case; she is just a representative example of the caliber of about 30,000 UMU alumni spread all over the world. The good news, many are willing and eager to give back to their alma mater in different ways.

As earlier discussed, the current UMUAA leadership is continuously championing initiatives for identifying the alumni wherever they are and engaging them. This is an ongoing endeavor. The online alumni data base we have put in place, together with the online tracer study currently underway, will go a long way in bringing the alumni together for greater action.

While these initiatives go on, UEC, the Governing Council and Management should also intentionally create more avenues for deeper engagement with the alumni. It is a great thing that there is a slot for alumni representative on the Governing Council of the University. This has been such a powerful connector. The current alumni representative, Professor Vicent Bagire has done so well that he was recently appointed the Vice Chairman of the Governing Council, deputizing Rt. Rev. Lino Sanctus Wanok. In the spirit of this submission, it would be of great advantage to the Governing Council to provide for a second slot of alumni representative. This would ensure that at any given time there are two resourceful alumni who contribute to the work of Council while at the same time helping to create direct connection between the alumni

Uganda Martyrs University

# Remembering The FUTURE



**Ambrose Kibuuka S. Mukiibi** is the President of Uganda Martyrs University Alumni Association (UMUAA). He is a specialist in Human Performance Systems – the art and science of bringing out the best in people. He is a passionate educationist with special interest in mainstreaming experiential learning as the gateway to holistic education. He carries over 20 years of vast experience as a practitioner in participatory training, consulting and research methodologies. Since 2001, he has undertaken over 100 consultancy assignments with a variety of organizations locally and internationally. The spectrum of organizations Ambrose has consulted for includes UN Agencies, International Development Agencies, Foreign Embassies, Government Ministries and Departments, Intelligence/Security Agencies, Local and International NGOs, Banks, Private Sector Firms, Church establishments, Universities and other educational institutions.

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Reflections on Repositioning UMU as  
an Outstanding Catholic University

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This booklet is a compilation of my personal reflections on Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) and what its unique identity as a Catholic University actually means for the Church and society. My long-held view is that the enormous potential of UMU is terribly underrated, her limits erroneously overrated, and her mission vaguely appreciated by the key stakeholders. As a result, we are stuck with an institution, prophetically commissioned to champion national transformation, but now caught up in the rat race for its own survival. The purpose of sharing my reflections is to stimulate an open discourse on how to get UMU back to its foundational bearing as a Catholic University. For therein lies its assurance to thrive and the power to impact society in a mighty way.