

# Ugandan Children's Hospital to Add Surgical Center

San Diegans were key to hospital's founding

RANCHO BERNARDO — After a three-year fundraising effort, construction of a long-awaited surgical center is underway at Holy Innocents Children's Hospital Uganda (HICHU).

On Oct. 17, the hospital staff hosted a groundbreaking ceremony, complete with a blessing of the building site by Archbishop Paul K. Bakyenga of the Archdiocese of Mbarara and a formal handing over of the building plans to the contractor.

"Establishing a surgical center at HICHU will have a significant positive impact on the children in our communities," said CEO Andrew Ndamira, M.D. "There is a serious shortage of surgical space for children in general hospitals, which are overwhelmed with emergency adult surgeries for accident victims, and obstetric emergencies."

Archbishop Bakyenga presided over the groundbreaking ceremony, saying, "The launching and building of the surgical center is a happy and historical event that will ensure the survival and improve the lives of multitudes of children."

The surgical center will be completed in approximately one year and will include two operating rooms, pre- and post-op facilities, and more. When fully operational, the facility will be able to handle up to 200 pediatric surgeries a month, providing yet another critical health service for the children of Mbarara, Uganda.

Archbishop Bakyenga's dream of opening a children's hospital in his archdiocese began transitioning from dream to reality when he visited San Diego and asked San Rafael parishioner Tom Thomas to build the first dedicated children's hospital in Uganda. The archbishop explained that, in Uganda, one child in seven was dying before age 5 from treatable diseases

like malaria, dysentery and respiratory infection. A children's hospital had the potential to save thousands of lives.

Thomas accepted the challenge. In 2007, he assembled a group of volunteers who founded Holy Innocents Children's Hospital Uganda, Inc., and obtained IRS nonprofit status. Mary Lyons, then president of the University of San Diego, donated faculty, students and funding to assess the feasibility of building the hospital. The archdiocese in Uganda donated land.

HICHU, with the majority of its team hailing from San Rafael Parish in Rancho Bernardo, began spreading the story and several organizations and individuals pledged their support.

By mid-2008, HICHU broke ground and, in July 2009, the hospital opened with a 60-bed inpatient facility, outpatient department, lab, pharmacy and administration building. Since then, some 23,000 critically ill children have been treated in the inpatient facility and another 110,000 have been treated as outpatients.

Msgr. Dennis Mikulanis, pastor of San Rafael Parish, has been involved with HICHU since the beginning.

"When we first gathered together to talk about building a children's hospital," he said, "I thought 'What have I gotten myself into? This is never going to fly.' However, the Lord had other plans.

"At first, things were really not going well," he continued, "until we hit on the idea of putting the whole project under the patronage of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. She said she'd spend her heaven doing good on earth and that she'd let fall a shower of roses on anyone who came to her for help. Well, we got a whole rose garden full!

"Once St. Therese was on the job, it took off," he said. "Really, it's quite remarkable! This whole hospital is God's doing and I think, because St. Therese was so ill as an infant that she almost died, she took this hospital on as a



**EPISCOPAL BLESSING:** Archbishop Paul K. Bakyenga is seen blessing the site of the long-awaited surgical center at Holy Innocents Children's Hospital Uganda.

special cause."

San Rafael parishioner Margot Kyd spoke for many HICHU supporters as she explained, "When I heard about the critical need for a children's hospital in Mbarara, Uganda, and Archbishop Bakyenga's request for help, I was so touched. I wanted to be part of bringing life-saving medical treatment to those kids. The hospital has saved countless children since it

opened, and the planned surgery center will bring even greater blessings to the children there."

To learn more about HICHU or make a donation toward equipment for the surgical center, visit [www.HolyInnocentsUganda.com](http://www.HolyInnocentsUganda.com) or [www.facebook.com/holyinnocentsuganda](http://www.facebook.com/holyinnocentsuganda).

*The Southern Cross*

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## Immigrants 'enrich' the Church in America

whether he should preach in Indonesian or English and had opted for "the Irish version of English," a reference to his thick Irish accent.

Citing the words of the poem engraved on a plaque below the Statue of Liberty — "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" — he reflected on the immigrant experience and cultural identity.

In Ireland, he said, the people had a name for those Irish who had immigrated to America: "Yanks." When they came back home to visit, he said, "they looked different, they were foreign, they dressed different, they spoke different in our eyes." But while the Irish no longer saw them as Irish, he said, the Americans continued to see them as Irish immigrants.

"So, where am I going with all this?" Father Casey asked. "First of all, I'm talking about identity. The immigrants who came to this country in the 19th and 20th centuries left their own countries behind ... to seek a new life and a new start in life."

Once in America, many of them suffered a "tremendous loneliness," he said. But they "drew strength from one another," and that strength helped them to "put down new roots" and to prosper in their new homeland.

"The Church in this country would be very impoverished indeed were it not for the immigrants from all these different countries who brought their culture and their faith with them" and incorporated it into the American Church, he said.

Emphasizing that Indonesian Catholics "enrich the Church of this Diocese of San Diego," he told them, "I urge you not to lose touch with your culture. Cultivate it and draw strength from it." He challenged them to "be proud of your heritage ... and grow as Christians in this land of America."

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