

# The Ugandan Catholic Medical Bureau and the Catholic Church's Impact on Health Care in Uganda



Sister Maria Hornung, pharmacist, on medical safari in a Ugandan Village in 1964.



## Tyler Nebes

### Introduction

Uganda is a nation that is 39% Catholic. 41% of Ugandans are also living in poverty. The Catholic Church teaches to care for the sick and for the impoverished. Therefore, one can assume that in Uganda the Church plays an important role in the healthcare of its citizens. I wanted to inquire about the role Ugandan Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB) and the Catholic Church plays in the healthcare of Ugandans.

### What is the UCMB?

The Ugandan Catholic Medical Bureau is the health office of the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda. It is responsible to carry out day to day operations of the Catholic Church's efforts to provide medical care for the people of Uganda. Its focus mirrors the focus of the Roman Catholic Church by providing stable health care institutions to the people of Uganda. The UCMB focus is to "Work towards a healthy and reconciled life for all individuals, their families and their communities."



Photo of UCMB Health Commission

### History

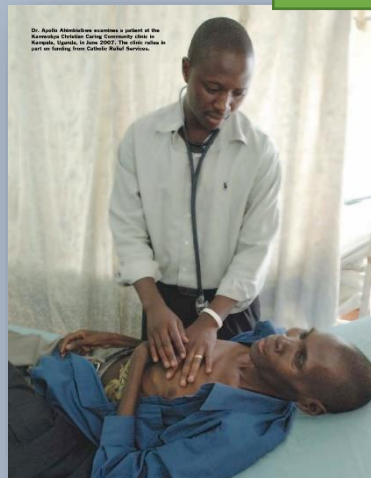
The history of healthcare in Uganda is deeply rooted with Catholicism. The Church's clergy when first coming to Uganda made efforts towards developing a system of medical care for the people of Uganda. "The Church focused on development of regional hospital centers instead of spread-out facilities in order to provide higher quality and more services to the poor." Through these efforts the Church cemented its crucial role in the health care of Ugandans, currently operating 25% of hospitals in Uganda. The nuns of the Church were key in the administration and daily activities of the hospitals and proved to be a powerful force in organizing and providing healthcare to Ugandans.

Photo of a priest providing religious services to patients at a UCMB hospital.



Kamwokya Christian Caring Community

The Kamwokya Christian Caring Community (KCCC) was formed by the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa. These communities help to increase fellowship in the communities and consist of people who are dedicated to helping care for one another. The communities were helpful during the HIV outbreak in Africa in caring for the community members. The UCMB helped found this community based on the idea of asking themselves "What would Jesus do?" When faced with the social stigma of people with AIDS, the community realized that they should help those who had no family and were rejected by society. "The community treated up to 6,289 people with the disease." This active community shows how the UCMB, and Catholicism plays an important role in the healthcare of the poor in Uganda. The UCMB helps to fund and organize community organizations, such as the KCCC, on top of its hospital efforts to improve the access and quality of care for the people of Uganda.



Dr. Apollo Ababekoko examines a patient at the Kamwokya Christian Caring Community (KCCC) in Kampala, Uganda, in June 2007. The photo refers to part of the article from Catholic Relief Services.

### Lack of Supplies and Equipment

My research found that the UCMB operates many hospital facilities in Uganda. One example of a UCMB operated hospital is Amuru which provides medical care for its patients. One patient, Mary, "who has asthma and requires medication and therapy which is not available at the Amuru hospital, is taken to a nearby hospital for care after the hospital tries to ease her suffering the night before she is transferred." This is an example of how many Catholic run hospitals in Uganda are often under supplied yet work tirelessly to ease the suffering of those who it serves. They practice their Christian fellowship by caring and easing the suffering of others despite the lack of medicine or equipment.

### Conclusion

Based on my research we can see that the Catholic Church plays a key role in the healthcare of all Ugandans. Through following the Churches teachings, the clergy of the Church and the general population form communities and organizations that are dedicated to the care of others. This tradition of care motivated by Catholic teachings is shown through the historical role that the Church played in the beginning when hospitals and other medical facilities were being formed in Uganda. Uganda can be used as an example of how Christian teachings and the Catholic Church makes an impact on the healthcare of all people in the global South and is a driving motivation behind the daily lives of many people in the Global South.

### Funding

The UCMB attempts to lobby the government to gain increased funding for the Medical centers it operates. The report shows how the UCMB relies on a large portion of its funding from USAID and the Roman Catholic Church. The UCMB's medical report outlines its goals to lobby the Ugandan government to get increased funding for its activities and outlines the many community stakeholders it serves. This report clearly shows the important role the UCMB has in providing medical care for Ugandans with many different ailments. It also shows the difficulties the UCMB faces as many of the grants it relies on does not allow the funding of salaries. Therefore, it makes it hard to acquire funds to pay medical staff.

Photo of a UCMB sponsored mentorship program



### The Church's Role in Fighting HIV/AIDS

One example of the Church and Catholic Community's role in the health care of Uganda is the important impact it has had on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "The Church encouraged education to prevent spread of HIV. It stressed the ABCs. Abstinence, be faithful, and a Christ centered life." After the Church got involved in education about HIV, it helped slow the spread of HIV when compared to other neighboring African nations. It also formed community groups to care for and provide comfort to people suffering from HIV. This is also important because at the time there was a strong social stigma regarding HIV/AIDS in Africa. This shows how through the Church's message of fellowship and compassion for the sick it can make a difference in the healthcare of Africans.

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