



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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# ANCIENT PATHS

## THE COMPLETE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE **UGANDA MARTYRS**

*1885 – 1886 and Beyond*

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Uganda Martyrs Day 2026 Theme:

***“Christ Our Peace: Breaking the Walls, Healing the Nation”***

*Ephesians 2:14*

*“For the martyrs gave everything.*

*Our work ensures that what they gave is never forgotten.”*

### **CHAPTER 1 | THE KINGDOM OF BUGANDA — SETTING THE STAGE**

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#### **■ The Most Powerful Kingdom in the Great Lakes Region**

In the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Buganda stood as the most organised, powerful, and politically sophisticated state in the entire Great Lakes region of East Africa. Long before modern Uganda existed as a nation, Buganda was a thriving kingdom with a structured system of governance, a royal court of great influence, and a culture built on loyalty, tradition, and honour. The Kabaka – the King – sat at the very top of this world. His word was law, and his authority was considered absolute and sacred.

The royal palace was located at Mengo Hill in what is today Kampala, and around it grew a court of pages, chiefs, advisors, and servants who formed the sophisticated machinery of royal administration. Young men from noble and common families alike were brought to the court as pages attendants who served the king directly and, in doing so, received an education in governance, military affairs, and the ways of the kingdom. These young pages would become central figures in the story that follows.

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## **Kabaka Muteesa I and the Arrival of Christianity**

The story of the Uganda Martyrs cannot be told without first understanding what happened just before it. It begins not with a crisis, but with an invitation. In 1876, Kabaka Muteesa I, a ruler known for his intelligence and political shrewdness, wrote a remarkable letter to Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, inviting Christian missionaries to come to his kingdom. He had already encountered Muslim traders and Arab influence from the coast, but he sought a counterbalance. He wanted teachers, builders, and missionaries who could strengthen Buganda.

In response, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent the first Protestant missionaries, who arrived in 1877. Not long after, on the evening of 15th February 1879, the White Fathers – a Roman Catholic missionary order – arrived by boat at Bugoma on Bugala Island in the Ssesse Islands on Lake Victoria, having journeyed from the south. Their leader, Father Simeon Lourdel, known affectionately as "Mapeera" by the Baganda, and Brother Amans, spent the night there before continuing to Kigungu on the lake shore near Entebbe on 17th February 1879. From Kigungu, they travelled north toward Munyonyo – the royal lakeside enclosure – and finally reached Kabaka Muteesa I to seek permission to preach and teach.

The missionaries found an eager, if complicated, audience. Muteesa I allowed them to operate, and a small but passionate group of young converts began to emerge – mostly from the royal pages. These young men were drawn not only to the spiritual message but also to the literacy, the books, and the new moral framework that Christianity offered. They were among the brightest and most intellectually curious of their generation.

When Muteesa I died in October 1884, he left behind a delicate balance of religious and political forces. He had managed, through experience and wisdom, to keep Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists from tearing each other apart. His death created a dangerous vacuum. His son, Mwanga II, was about eighteen years old when he ascended to the throne – young, insecure, and surrounded by powerful competing influences. What Muteesa had balanced, Mwanga could not hold.

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## **CHAPTER 2 | KABAKA MWANGA II — THE KING AT THE CENTRE OF THE STORM**

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### **Who Was Mwanga II?**

Danieri Basamula-Ekkere Mwanga II was born in approximately 1868 at Nakawa and was the thirty-first Kabaka of the Buganda Kingdom. He came to the throne at

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a deeply challenging time. Uganda was caught between two great external forces – the advance of British colonial interests from the east and the spread of Arab-Islamic influence from the north and west. Internally, the growth of Christianity was producing a new class of young, educated, religiously motivated officials who challenged the traditional order of the kingdom in ways that the old chiefs and the king himself found deeply threatening.

Mwanga was not simply a villain. Historical accounts reveal a complex young man caught between the demands of absolute kingship, traditional Buganda customs, and the rising tide of change. At times he was curious about Christianity and even friendly toward missionaries. At other times he was volatile, fearful, and capable of extraordinary cruelty. He watched as the young pages – men who should have been completely devoted to his service – began to look to a higher authority than his own.

“*Mwanga precipitated a showdown in May 1886 by ordering converts in his court to choose between their new faith and complete obedience to his orders and kingdom.*

— Watchdog Uganda — Uganda Martyrs Historical Account

### **The Reasons Behind the Persecution**

Historians have identified several interlocking reasons for Mwanga's decision to execute Christians, and it is important to understand all of them together, rather than simplify the story to a single cause.

First, there was a political prophecy. A traditional Buganda belief held that enemies who would one day destroy the kingdom would come from the east. When the Anglican Bishop James Hannington arrived in late 1885 travelling eastward through Busoga to enter Buganda, Mwanga saw him as the embodiment of this prophecy. On 29th October 1885, Mwanga ordered his execution through Chief Luba of Busoga. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, one of the king's most trusted Catholic pages and advisors, publicly and courageously reproached Mwanga for this killing a dangerous act of defiance.

Second, the Christian pages were refusing to participate in traditional religious ceremonies and practices, which included offerings at shrines, certain rituals tied to royal customs, and practices that they regarded as contrary to Christian teaching. This was seen as cultural and religious subversion.

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Third, and perhaps most personally for Mwanga, the Christian pages rejected his sexual advances. Mwanga's behaviour in this regard was known at the court, and Charles Lwanga, who led the Christian pages, actively protected the younger boys from the king. This rejection was a profound humiliation for a king accustomed to absolute obedience.

Fourth, the traditional prime minister, Katikkiro Mukasa (not to be confused with the martyr Joseph Mukasa), actively encouraged Mwanga against the Christians, partly to eliminate rivals who threatened his own position.

Fifth, there was a genuine fear among the traditional establishment that Christianity's teaching on the equality of all people before God was eroding the very foundation of Buganda's hierarchical social structure, in which the Kabaka occupied a near-divine position.

### Kabaka Mwanga II

31st Kabaka of Buganda Kingdom

Born c. 1868 | Died 1903

Ascended the throne in 1884 at approximately 18 years of age after the death of his father Kabaka Muteesa I. His decision to execute Christians set in motion one of the most significant martyrdom events in African history. He was later deposed, converted to Christianity, and died in exile in the Seychelles.

**Legacy:** *His reign and choices, however tragic, ultimately planted the seeds of Christian expansion across Uganda and beyond.*

## CHAPTER 2B | THE EARLY MARTYRDOMS — JANUARY 1885

### ◇ The 1882 Departure of Missionaries and the Rise of Mwanga

In 1882, the Catholic missionaries were compelled to leave Buganda temporarily due to sustained opposition from Kabaka Mutesa. However, the situation changed dramatically in 1884, when Mwanga became Kabaka following his father's death. He was only eighteen years old at the time — young, inexperienced, and a considerably less capable statesman than his father. Under his reign, opposition to Christianity intensified sharply. A number of royal pages (bagalagala) had converted to Christianity or were undergoing instruction as catechumens, and the growing influence of Protestant missionaries — including Alexander Mackay and R.P. Ashe — over their converts was deeply resented at court. This rising tension set the stage for Buganda's first Christian martyrdoms.

### ◇ The First Martyrdoms — Mpimerebera Swamp, January 1885



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The first martyrdoms in Buganda occurred in January 1885 — not in 1886, as is sometimes mistakenly assumed. The immediate trigger was a diplomatic incident involving missionary Alexander Mackay. Mackay had been granted permission to take correspondence south of Lake Victoria, but he declined the royal legate escort that Mwanga offered. The Katikkiro (chief minister), Mukasa, seized on this refusal as a grave insult to the Kabaka and persuaded Mwanga that it was an act of deliberate defiance. An edict was promptly issued ordering the arrest of all Baganda who were in the service of foreigners. Mackay's party was intercepted and several people were arrested. The missionaries' intercessions on behalf of the accused were completely ignored.

Three young Protestant converts were condemned to death: Mako Kakumba, aged approximately sixteen; Yusufu Lugalama, aged approximately twelve; and Nua Seruwanga, slightly older than the other two. They were taken to the Mpimerebera Swamp — an official royal place of execution — where they were mutilated and burned to death. Historical accounts record that on the journey to the execution site, the three young men sang the Swahili hymn “Killa siku tuusifu” — meaning “Daily, daily sing the praises” — a remarkable act of faith and composure in the face of death.

Three other individuals — Freddy (Fereferiko) Kizza, Sara Nakima, and her baby — were also arrested but ultimately reprieved. The last two owed their lives to the intervention of Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, who was at that time the head of the Catholic royal pages and one of the most trusted figures at court. His intercession on their behalf was accepted, and they were spared.

### ◇ **Formation of the Protestant Church Council and the Catholic Return (1885)**

As a direct result of these January 1885 martyrdoms, the Protestant community established a formal Church Council. Its founding members included Henry Wright, Duta, Zakariya Kizito Kisingiri, Tomasi Semfuma, Freddy Kizza, and Nua Walukaga — notably, both Freddy Kizza and Nua Walukaga would themselves later be martyred in the great persecution of 1886. Shortly after this, the Christians at court exposed a plot to overthrow Mwanga, and Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe personally warned the Kabaka. In gratitude, Mwanga granted several Christians positions of importance at court.

Because of Mwanga's apparently more favourable attitude toward Christians during this period, the Catholic missionaries — Father Lourdel, Father Girault, and Brother Amman — were permitted to return to Buganda in July 1885. The numbers seeking instruction and baptism grew significantly at both the Catholic and Protestant missions. This brief period of relative tolerance, however, was to be shattered just months later with the murder of Anglican Bishop Hannington in October 1885 — the

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event that would directly precipitate the execution of Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, the first Catholic martyr, on 15th November 1885.

### CHAPTER 3 | THE FIRST BLOOD — JOSEPH MUKASA BALIKUDEMBE

The formal persecutions began on 15th November 1885. On that day, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe became the first martyr. He was twenty-six years old, and he was a man of extraordinary courage and moral clarity.

Joseph Mukasa served as the chief of the royal pages and was one of the most trusted men at court – Muteesa I had considered him for the position of Katikkiro, the prime minister. He was a Catholic convert, deeply devout, and known for his gentleness and fairness. His nickname, "Balikuddembe," meant "a man of peace."

When Mwanga ordered the killing of Bishop Hannington, Joseph Mukasa was one of the very few people at court with enough moral authority and personal courage to speak up. He publicly reproached the king, saying: "Kabaka, you have done wrong. You have killed a man who came peacefully." He also tried to protect the younger Christian pages from the king's moral misconduct. These were acts of extraordinary bravery for a subject of an absolute monarch.

Mwanga, already suspicious of Joseph Mukasa and prompted by the Katikkiro, used a minor pretext – accusing Joseph of attempting to poison him with medicine – to order his arrest and execution. On the night of 15th November 1885, Joseph was seized, bound, and taken to Nakivubo, a swamp located in what is today the centre of Kampala City. He was beheaded there and his body burned. Eyewitnesses recorded that Mwanga, fearing that Joseph might testify against him before God, ordered a servant killed and his ashes mixed with Joseph's so that he could not be identified.

As he was led away, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe reportedly asked his executioner to pass a message to Father Lourdel, the Catholic missionary: "Tell him that I am dying for my religion. He should remain firm in teaching the Baganda."

#### St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

*Chief of Royal Pages | First  
Catholic Martyr*

c. 1860 — 15 November  
1885

The first to die, and the one whose courage inspired all who followed. A man of peace who chose to speak truth to power even knowing it would cost him his life. He was beheaded and burned at the Nakivubo swamp, Kampala.

**Legacy:** Patron of political leaders. His martyrdom site is commemorated at St. Balikuddembe Mengo Kisenyi Catholic Parish, Old Kampala.



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### CHAPTER 4 | THE GATHERING STORM — MAY 1886

#### Charles Lwanga Takes the Helm

After the execution of Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, Charles Lwanga – a young man of extraordinary character – stepped into the role of leader of the Christian pages. Charles was originally from the traditional religion but had converted to Catholicism. He was physically strong, spiritually bold, and deeply protective of the younger pages under his care.

As the months passed in early 1886, tension in the royal court continued to build. Mwanga grew increasingly paranoid and erratic. The Christian pages continued to study the scriptures, pray, and refuse certain demands they considered immoral. In this atmosphere, Charles Lwanga became not just a leader of the pages but a shield against the king's advances – a role that made his own death increasingly likely.

#### St. Charles Lwanga

Chief of Royal Pages |  
Leader of the Christian  
Community

c. 1865 — 3 June 1886

Charles Lwanga was the central figure of the martyrdom. He took over leadership of the Christian pages after Joseph Mukasa's death. On the night before the mass arrest, he secretly baptized four young catechumens, including 14-year-old Kizito, preparing them for what was coming. He was burned alive separately from the others on June 3, 1886 – slowly, from the feet upward – and he never broke.

**Legacy:** Patron Saint of African Catholic Youth. The Catholic Shrine at Namugongo is dedicated primarily to him.

#### The Evening That Changed Everything — 25th May 1886

The crisis came to a head on the evening of 25th May 1886. The immediate trigger was a young page named Denis Ssebugwawo. On that evening, Mwanga summoned a page named Mwafu for his immoral purposes. Denis Ssebugwawo – who had been teaching the boy Christian doctrine – intervened to protect him. When Mwanga discovered this, he was furious. He personally seized a spear and severely beat Denis Ssebugwawo.

That same night, Charles Lwanga understood clearly that a mass arrest was coming. He gathered the young catechumens – those who had received instruction but not yet been baptised – and in the darkness of the night at Munyonyo, he secretly baptised four of them: Kizito, Mbaga Tuzinde, Gyavira, and Muggaga. He did not know if they would survive the coming days, but he wanted them to die as baptised Christians if they were to die at all. He reportedly told fourteen-year-old



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Kizito, who was frightened: "When the decisive moment arrives, I shall take your hand like this. If we have to die for Jesus, we shall die together, hand in hand."

“ *When the decisive moment arrives, I shall take your hand like this. If we have to die for Jesus, we shall die together, hand in hand.*

— St. Charles Lwanga to the young Kizito, the night before their arrest — 25 May 1886

### The Sentencing at Munyonyo — 26th May 1886

On the morning of 26th May 1886, Kabaka Mwanga summoned his entire court to the royal enclosure at Munyonyo, on the shores of Lake Victoria. In a moment that would echo through history, he separated the Christians from the rest of the court. He asked those who prayed to stand on one side, and those who did not pray to stand beside him.

Fifteen young men and boys stepped to one side. They were between the ages of fourteen and thirty. They knew what it meant. The king looked at them and asked: "Are you Christians?" They answered: "Yes." He asked: "Do you intend to remain Christians?" Again, they answered: "Yes." Mwanga condemned them all to death. He reportedly added: "Kill them all. Let not even one of them escape."

Denis Ssebuggwawo was beheaded that same morning, 26th May 1886, at the shores of Munyonyo. He was sixteen years old. Andrew Kaggwa, the royal bandmaster and one of the most prominent Catholics at court, had his hands chopped off and was then beheaded on the same day at Munyonyo. He was approximately thirty years old.

#### THE EARLY EXECUTIONS AT MUNYONYO — 25-26 May 1886

Denis Ssebuggwawo Wasswa (age 16) — Speared on 25 May; beheaded at Munyonyo on 26 May 1886

Patron of singers, musicians, and choirs

Andrew Kaggwa Kahawa (age ~30) — Hands cut off, then beheaded at Munyonyo, 26 May 1886

A royal bandmaster and zealous Catholic. Patron of teachers, catechists, and families



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Pontian Ngondwe (age ~30) — Speared at Ttabataba (Ttakajjunge) on 26 May, about 1 mile from Munyonyo

Patron of soldiers, police, and militia

### CHAPTER 5 | THE DEATH MARCH — THE JOURNEY TO NAMUGONGO

What followed on 26th May 1886 was one of the most harrowing journeys in African history. The condemned Christians were tightly bound together with ropes, yoked with forked branches around their necks that attached them to posts, and forced to march north from Munyonyo toward Namugongo — the traditional execution ground of the Buganda Kingdom, approximately 13 kilometres to the north.

The march took two full days. The prisoners were guarded by royal soldiers under the command of Mukaajanga, the kingdom's chief executioner — a man who plays a deeply ambiguous role in this story, as historical accounts suggest he sometimes delayed executions hoping the king would change his mind, yet ultimately carried out every order. The prisoners were beaten, deprived of food and water, and some were killed along the route as a warning and as a public spectacle.

Accounts from witnesses and later testimonies collected by Father Lourdel and other missionaries describe the extraordinary composure of the young men. They sang, prayed, and encouraged one another throughout the march. Charles Lwanga, bound at the head of the column, reportedly kept calling back to the younger boys: "Do not be afraid. We shall not die twice. Our friends are already with our Lord; we shall soon be with them."

#### **The Route: From Munyonyo to Namugongo — Execution Stops Along the Way**

The route from Munyonyo to Namugongo passed through several locations, and at each of these places, at least one martyr was killed. These sites have become sacred landmarks in the history of Uganda and of global Christianity.

1

#### **Munyonyo — The Royal Enclosure (Start)**

📍 Munyonyo, Kampala | Lake Victoria Shore

The starting point of everything. Kabaka Mwanga's royal palace stood here. It is here that he separated Christians from non-Christians and condemned them to death on 26 May 1886.



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Denis Ssebuggwawo and Andrew Kaggwa were killed here. Charles Lwanga conducted his secret midnight baptisms here the night before.

2

### Ttabataba / Ttakajjunge — Pontian Ngondwe's Spot

📍 Kyamula, ~1 mile from Munyonyo toward Mengo

As the prisoners left Munyonyo, Mukaajanga the chief executioner drove his spear into Pontian Ngondwe several times at this spot. His corpse was hacked to pieces and scattered in all directions. A traditional belief held that scattering a body prevented the spirit from speaking in the afterlife. The place was later renamed Ttakajjunge.

3

### Nakivubo / Mengo — Athanasius Bazzekuketta's Spot

📍 Old Kampala, Central Kampala

On the morning of 27th May 1886, Athanasius Bazzekuketta voluntarily stepped forward and asked to be killed at the same spot where his leader Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe had been beheaded on 15 November 1885 – at the foot of Mengo Hill. He was twenty years old. He was killed by spear at this spot. He is the patron of those in charge of finance and treasury.

4

### Old Kampala — Mathias Kalemba Mulumba's Passion

📍 Old Kampala Hill, Kampala

Mathias Kalemba Mulumba was not a young page but an older, distinguished chief from Munyonyo area who was picked up during the persecutions. On 27th May, while being marched through Old Kampala toward Namugongo, he reportedly refused to walk further – choosing to demand his execution. What followed was one of the most brutal deaths of any martyr. By Mwanga's order, his hands and then his feet were cut off, strips of flesh were sliced from his back and burnt in front of him, and herbs were applied to his wounds to prevent him from bleeding to death too quickly. He lived in this condition for three full days, praying without ceasing, before dying on 30th May 1886. He was approximately fifty years old.

5

### Gonzaga Gonza's Spot — Kamuli-Lubaawo

📍 En route to Namugongo, outskirts of Kampala

Gonzaga Gonza Nghonzabato was one of the royal servants arrested on 26 May. He was twenty-four years old. He was killed by spear along the route to Namugongo – at a place called Kamuli-Lubaawo. He had been baptised only six months earlier, in November 1885.



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6

### John Mary Muzeeyi's Spot — Mengo-Kisenyi

📍 Mengo-Kisenyi, Kampala

John Mary Muzeeyi, also known as Muzeeyi, was a court official rather than a page. He was known for his deep piety and his support for the missionaries. He was killed at Mengo-Kisenyi during the persecutions.

7

### Noe Mawaggali's Spot — Kiyinda-Mityana

📍 Mityana District, west of Kampala

Noe Mawaggali was not marched to Namugongo. He was held at a different location – Kiyinda in Mityana District – and killed there by soldiers who tied him to a tree and used him for spear-throwing practice. Witnesses described his extraordinary calm during this ordeal. A shrine now marks his martyrdom site in Mityana.

8

### Namugongo — The Final Execution Ground

📍 Namugongo, Wakiso District (~13km from Kampala CBD)

The terminus of the death march. The prisoners arrived here, dragged on their backs in some cases, on 27th May 1886. The place name 'Namugongo' itself derives from the Luganda phrase 'babaleta na mugongo' meaning 'they were brought on their backs.' They were imprisoned here for eight days before the final execution on 3rd June 1886.

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## CHAPTER 6 | EIGHT DAYS AT NAMUGONGO — WAITING TO DIE

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The surviving prisoners arrived at Namugongo on 27th May 1886, exhausted, bound, and many severely injured from the march. They were taken to the compound of the chief executioner, Mukaajanga, and held there for eight days. They were tightly bound in forks of wood around their necks, attached to the posts of huts, and guarded continuously.

What happened during those eight days is one of the most remarkable aspects of the martyrs' story. Rather than despair, the records describe a community of prayer. The prisoners prayed together, encouraged one another, recalled scripture, and prepared their hearts for death. Even the executioners and guards were reportedly affected by the composure and joy of their prisoners. One account from a witness

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states that the young men seemed not afraid to die, and this confounded their captors.

Meanwhile, Mukaajanga's men spent those days collecting firewood – bundles of reeds and dry wood – building the pyres that would be used for the execution. The amount of firewood required for burning a large number of people was substantial, and the preparation was deliberate and methodical.

One extraordinary exception occurred during this period. Mbaga Tuzinde was the son of Mukaajanga himself – the chief executioner. His own father tried desperately to persuade him to renounce his faith and save his life. The young man refused. Out of what may have been both pity and shame, Mukaajanga ordered that his son be killed with a blow to the head before being placed on the fire – so that he would not suffer the flames. Mbaga Tuzinde accepted this and died a martyr.

### St. Kizito

*Royal Page — The Youngest Martyr*

c. 1872 — 3 June 1886 (age ~14)

Kizito was the youngest of the martyrs, approximately fourteen years old. He had been baptised by Charles Lwanga just hours before the mass arrest. Initially frightened, he was comforted by Charles Lwanga's promise. At Namugongo, witnesses described him as joyful and composed – even playful – in the face of death.

**Legacy:** *His youth and joy in martyrdom have made him one of the most beloved figures in Ugandan Christian tradition. Patron of youth and children.*

### Mbaga Tuzinde

*Royal Page — Son of the Chief Executioner*

c. 1866 — 3 June 1886

The most poignant figure of the martyrdom. The son of Mukaajanga, the very man who oversaw the executions. His father wept, pleaded, and bargained – and Mbaga refused. He could not be moved. His father, out of mercy, ordered him killed by a blow to the head before the fire. He is remembered as the martyr who gave up not just his life but the protection of a powerful father.

**Legacy:** *His story speaks directly to the UCU 2026 theme: Breaking the Walls, Healing the Nation – even a son of the executioner stood on the side of faith.*

## CHAPTER 7 | 3RD JUNE 1886 — THE DAY THE FIRE WAS LIT

The day arrived on June 3rd, 1886 – the Feast of the Ascension in the Christian calendar, a detail that many later saw as deeply significant. The execution was carried out in accordance with traditional Buganda ceremonial procedure for large-scale royal executions.



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Charles Lwanga was selected first, separately from the others, in keeping with the traditional procedure that required the Guardian of the sacred fire, Ssenkoole, to take one victim apart from the main group and burn him individually as an opening ritual. Ssenkoole led Charles Lwanga approximately fifty yards from the main road. Charles was allowed to arrange his own deathbed of firewood. He was then wrapped tightly in reeds, laid upon the pyre, and the fire was lit – beginning at his feet and burning slowly upward toward his head.

The account of an executioner who later testified describes what they were ordered to do. Charles Lwanga burned slowly. The fire was intentionally kept low to prolong his suffering. Throughout, he did not cry out in pain or plead for mercy. Instead, witnesses recorded that he called out: "Katonda" – meaning "My God" – repeatedly, until he died. His last words, recorded by eyewitnesses, were: "You are burning me, but it is as if you are pouring water over me. The God for whom I am dying will avenge my death."

“ *You are burning me, but it is as if you are pouring water over me. The God for whom I am dying will avenge my death.*

— St. Charles Lwanga — Final words at Namugongo, 3 June 1886

After Charles Lwanga was martyred, the remaining prisoners were brought to the main execution site. The pyres had been prepared with enormous bundles of reeds and dry wood. The prisoners were wrapped in reeds – a practice that was both binding and fuel – laid upon the piles of wood, and the fires were set.

Thirteen Christians died together on that pyre on June 3rd, 1886. Some accounts say the fires burned through the afternoon. Executioners later stated that they had expected to smell burning flesh and hear screams, but instead were confused by what they witnessed: the young men died singing and praying. One executioner later converted to Christianity, reportedly because of what he had seen that day.

The total Catholic martyrs killed between November 1885 and June 3rd, 1886 numbered twenty-two. Protestant (Anglican) martyrs totalled twenty-three. Some Muslim converts were also killed during the same period. Together, the Uganda Martyrs – collectively numbering over forty-five – represent one of the most remarkable acts of collective faithfulness in the history of world Christianity.

### Complete Martyrdom Timeline — 1885 to 1887



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15 Nov 1885	<b>Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe Beheaded — Nakivubo, Kampala</b>
First Catholic martyr. Executed for reproaching Mwanga over Bishop Hannington's killing and protecting the Christian pages. Age 26.	
31 Jan 1885	<b>First Three Executions — Yusufu Rugarama, Makko Kakumba, Nuwa Sserwanga</b>
Mwanga's first executions of Christian converts — one year after taking the throne.	
25 May 1886	<b>Denis Ssebuggwawo Beaten and Condemned</b>
The immediate trigger. Denis interceded to protect a young page from the king's advances. Mwanga flew into rage.	
Night 25 May	<b>Charles Lwanga's Secret Baptisms at Munyonyo</b>
Charles baptises Kizito, Mbagwa, Gyavira, and Muggaga by night, preparing them for what was coming.	
26 May 1886	<b>Mass Arrest and Sentencing at Munyonyo</b>
Mwanga separates Christians from court. Denis Ssebuggwawo beheaded; Andrew Kagga's hands cut off, then beheaded; Pontian Ngondwe speared at Ttakajjunge.	
27 May 1886	<b>Prisoners Arrive at Namugongo — 8 Days Before Execution</b>
After a two-day march. Athanasius Bazzekuketta killed at Mengo Hill. Gonzaga Gonza speared en route.	
27-30 May	<b>Mathias Kalemba Mulumba Dies — Old Kampala</b>
His limbs cut off over three days. Died 30 May, praying without ceasing for his executioners.	
3 June 1886	<b>THE GREAT FIRE — Namugongo</b>
Charles Lwanga burned separately first. Thirteen others burned alive together on the pyre. Also martyred: Noe Mawaggali (Mityana), Anatoli Kirigwajjo.	
1887	<b>Final Persecutions</b>
Continued killings of Christian converts through 1887 before the political situation began to shift.	
18 Oct 1964	<b>Canonisation by Pope Paul VI — Rome</b>



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1977

The 22 Catholic Uganda Martyrs are raised to sainthood before a crowd of 100,000 in St. Peter's Square, Rome.

### Anglican Martyrs Formally Commemorated

The Church of Uganda formally commemorates the 23 Anglican martyrs, whose shrine is at Namugongo.

## CHAPTER. 8

### THE TWENTY-THREE ANGLICAN MARTYRS – A Complete Record

The twenty-three Anglican (Protestant) Uganda Martyrs are commemorated alongside the Catholic twenty-two. They were pages and court officials who had received the Gospel through the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Many were baptised only months before they died. Their witness is equally extraordinary: they were young Baganda men who heard the Gospel and chose to die for it rather than renounce it. The Anglican Uganda Martyrs Shrine at Namugongo – built at the actual execution site – is dedicated to their memory.

#	Name	Age	Date & Place	How Martyred / Notes
1	Kakumba Makko (Mark Kakumba)	18	31 Jan 1885   Munyonyo	Burned alive. One of the first three executed by Mwanga. Royal page. First Anglican martyr.
2	Yusufu Rugarama (Joseph Rugarama)	18	31 Jan 1885   Munyonyo	Burned alive. One of the first three. Royal page.
3	Nuwa Sserwanga (Noah Sserwanga)	18	31 Jan 1885   Munyonyo	Burned alive. One of the first three. Royal page.
4	Mubi Azaalwa (Robert Muubi)	25	26 May 1886   Munyonyo area	Speared/killed at Munyonyo. His monument stands at Munyonyo Shrine alongside Catholic martyrs.
5	Seruwanga Ddungu	20	26-27 May 1886   En route	Killed during the death march from Munyonyo. Royal page.
6	Kifamuunya (Frederick Kifa)	20	26-27 May 1886   En route	Killed during the death march.
7	Wasswa Ngondwe	22	26-27 May 1886   En route	Killed during the death march. Not to be confused with Catholic Pontian Ngondwe.
8	Mukaaajanga Senkole	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned on the pyre at Namugongo with the main group.



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#	Name	Age	Date & Place	How Martyred / Notes
9	Lugalama Mukasa	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
10	Kizito (Anglican)	16	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. A different Kizito from the Catholic martyr. Royal page.
11	Buuzabaliawo Ssebuta	22	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned on the pyre.
12	Bwabe Kaamuswaga	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
13	Nsubuga Kaggwa	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
14	Munyangabyangu Wasswa	22	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
15	Muwanga Sekajja	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
16	Ssebuggwawo Tibenderana	22	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal servant.
17	Kaddu Sebwaato	25	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
18	Musoke Kirwawanvu	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
19	Nkwalanga Kitto	18	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. One of the younger pages.
20	Lugudde Nsubuga	22	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
21	Sseguya Kabuzi	20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
22	Sserunkuuma Bruno (Anglican)	25	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. A soldier and royal official.
23	Omulamuzi Wampamba	30	1886-1887   Kampala region	Killed in the extended persecutions. Court official and early CMS convert.

### About the Anglican Uganda Martyrs

- The 23 Anglican martyrs are commemorated by the Church of Uganda and the wider Anglican Communion worldwide
- Their shrine – the Uganda Martyrs Anglican Shrine, Namugongo – is built directly on the original execution ground of June 3, 1886
- The Ndazabazadde sacred tree, the healing spring, and the actual site where the martyrs burned are all within the Anglican Shrine
- Anglican and Catholic martyrs died together, on the same ground, for the same faith – making Namugongo a powerful symbol of Christian unity across Africa



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- The Church of Uganda formally commemorated the 23 Anglican martyrs in 1977

### CHAPTER 8 | THE TWENTY-TWO CATHOLIC MARTYRS — A COMPLETE RECORD

The following is a complete record of each of the twenty-two Catholic Uganda Martyrs, in the order in which they died or were martyred, with their age, method of death, patronage, and the specific location of their martyrdom. This section serves as the core scholarly reference for the documentary archive.

#	Name	Age	Date & Place	How Martyred / Patronage
1	Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe	26	15 Nov 1885   Nakivubo, Kampala	Beheaded and burned. First Catholic martyr. Patron of political leaders.
2	Denis Ssebuggwawo Wasswa	16	25-26 May 1886   Munyonyo	Speared/beheaded. Patron of singers, musicians, choirs.
3	Andrew Kaggwa Kahawa	~30	26 May 1886   Munyonyo	Hands cut off, beheaded. Royal bandmaster. Patron of teachers and catechists.
4	Pontian Ngondwe	~30	26 May 1886   Ttakajjunge	Speared at Ttabataba, corpse hacked. Patron of soldiers and police.
5	Athanasius Bazzekuketta Kizza	20	27 May 1886   Mengo Hill	Speared. Head of treasury. Patron of finance officials.
6	Gonzaga Gonza Nghonzabato	24	27 May 1886   Kamuli-Lubaawo	Speared en route to Namugongo.
7	John Mary Muzeeyi	~40	27 May 1886   Mengo-Kisenyi	Killed at Mengo-Kisenyi. Court official.
8	Noe Mawaggali	~30	31 May 1886   Kiyinda, Mityana	Tied to tree and used for spear practice. Patron of sculptors and weavers.
9	Mathias Kalembe Mulumba	~50	30 May 1886   Old Kampala	Limbs cut off over 3 days. Died praying. Patron of judges and lawyers.



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#	Name	Age	Date & Place	How Martyred / Patronage
10	Charles Lwanga	~21	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned alive (separately, feet-to-head). Patron of African Catholic Youth.
11	Kizito	~14	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Youngest martyr. Burned on the pyre. Patron of children and youth.
12	Mbaga Tuzinde	~17	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Son of executioner Mukaajanga. Killed with blow to head before fire.
13	Achilleus Kewanuka	17	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Page of the king.
14	Adolphus Ludigo-Mukasa	24	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
15	Ambrose Kibuuka Katekamu	18	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned on the pyre.
16	Anatoli Kirigwajjo	~20	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page.
17	Bruno Sserunkuuma	~30	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Soldier. Patron of those in military service.
18	Gyavira Musoke	~17	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Baptised by Charles Lwanga the night before arrest.
19	James Buzabaliawo	~25	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal official.
20	Luke Banabakintu	~30	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal soldier and official.
21	Mugagga Lubowa	~17	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Baptised by Charles Lwanga the night before.
22	Mukasa Kiriwawanvu	~25	3 June 1886   Namugongo	Burned. Royal page. Patron of the family.

### NOTE ON ANGLICAN MARTYRS

Twenty-three Anglican (Protestant) Uganda Martyrs are commemorated alongside the Catholic twenty-two.



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They include pages and court officials who followed the Protestant teaching of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

The Anglican Uganda Martyrs Shrine at Namugongo – built at the actual execution site – is dedicated to their memory.


Both Catholic and Anglican martyrs suffered together, a fact that makes Namugongo a powerful symbol of Christian unity.

Anglican Martyr Mubi Azaalwa's monument stands at Munyonyo alongside the Catholic martyrs' monuments.

### CHAPTER 9 | NAMUGONGO TODAY — THE SACRED SITES AND THEIR MEANING

Today, Namugongo is one of the most visited religious pilgrimage sites on the African continent. Every year, millions of Christians – predominantly from Uganda but increasingly from across East Africa and the world – make the journey to Namugongo on June 3rd. Many walk barefoot for days, covering hundreds of kilometers, in conscious imitation of the martyrs' final journey.

#### A The Anglican Uganda Martyrs Shrine

 Namugongo, Wakiso District

A

This is the original and actual site of the execution. The Anglican shrine was built on the very ground where the martyrs were burned alive. It contains the sacred Ndazabazadde tree – the fig tree that stood at the execution site in 1886 and is believed to have miraculous healing properties. The shrine also contains a healing spring and a small museum with sculptures depicting the martyrdom.

#### B The Uganda Martyrs Catholic Basilica


 Namugongo, Wakiso District

B

The magnificent Basilica of the Uganda Martyrs was consecrated in 1975. Its architectural design is inspired by the traditional Buganda royal hut – a large, circular structure with a thatched-style roof, built to honour the martyrs with a form drawn from their own culture. Built partly through contributions from Catholics worldwide, it seats thousands and is the site of the massive open-air Mass on June 3rd. A Martyrs' Lake was dug beside the basilica, representing the swamp where executioners washed their weapons after the killings.

C

#### C The Ndazabazadde Sacred Tree

 Anglican Shrine, Namugongo



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The Ndazabazadde fig tree is believed to be the descendant of the tree that stood at the execution site in 1886. Pilgrims and believers come to touch its bark, tie prayer cloths, and seek healing. It is one of the most photographed trees in Uganda and a powerful symbol of life emerging from death.

D

### The Martyrs' Healing Spring

📍 Anglican Shrine, Namugongo

A natural spring near the Anglican shrine is regarded as a source of healing water. Pilgrims collect it in bottles and containers, believing it to carry spiritual blessing. The spring was there in 1886 and is one of the oldest physical connections to the original site.

E

### The Namugongo Museum

📍 Catholic Shrine complex, Namugongo

A museum at the Catholic shrine complex tells the full story of the martyrs through sculptures, paintings, and historical displays. It includes reproductions of the route from Munyonyo to Namugongo, the story of each individual martyr, and accounts of the colonial-era context. Essential for any documentary project.

## CHAPTER 10 | LEGACY — FROM THE FIRE TO THE GLOBAL STAGE

The immediate effect of the executions was perhaps not what Mwanga intended. Rather than crushing Christianity, the martyrdom of these young men became a powerful catalyst for its growth. The news of their deaths spread quickly through missionary networks to Europe, generating both grief and a surge of missionary commitment to Uganda. Within months, new missionaries arrived and the young Church grew rather than shrank.

Politically, the executions alarmed the British, contributing eventually to the formal colonisation of Uganda. Mwanga was overthrown in 1888, fought his way back to the throne, and ultimately converted to Christianity himself. He was baptised as a Protestant. He died in exile in the Seychelles in 1903, having signed away his kingdom to the British Empire — a tragic end for the man who had believed he was protecting Buganda's independence by killing its most faithful young men.

The Catholic Church began a formal process to recognise the martyrs as saints. In 1920, Pope Benedict XV beatified the twenty-two Catholic martyrs. Then, on 18th



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October 1964, Pope Paul VI canonised them in St. Peter's Square in Rome before a congregation of over 100,000 people – the first canonisation ever held outdoors. The Uganda Martyrs became the first Africans south of the Sahara to be raised to sainthood by the Catholic Church, and they remain the largest group of saints ever canonised at one time.

On 1st-2nd August 1969, Pope Paul VI himself made a pilgrimage to Namugongo – the first ever visit by a sitting Pope to sub-Saharan Africa. He celebrated Mass at the shrine, and his visit transformed Namugongo into a site of global spiritual significance. Today, Namugongo receives over three million pilgrims each year, making it one of the largest annual pilgrimages on the African continent.

### THE MARTYRS IN GLOBAL HISTORY — KEY MILESTONES

- 15 November 1885 – First execution (Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe)
- 3 June 1886 – The Great Execution at Namugongo (22 Catholics burned)
- 6 June 1920 – Pope Benedict XV BEATIFIES the 22 Catholic martyrs
- 18 October 1964 – Pope Paul VI CANONISES the 22 (first outdoor canonisation in history)
- 1-2 August 1969 – Pope Paul VI VISITS Namugongo (first papal visit to sub-Saharan Africa)
- 1975 – Catholic Basilica of the Uganda Martyrs consecrated at Namugongo
- 1977 – Anglican martyrs formally commemorated; Anglican Shrine established
- 2014 – Uganda celebrates 50 years of canonisation; Munyonyo Minor Basilica dedicated
- 27 November 2015 – Pope Francis VISITS Munyonyo Shrine during first African Apostolic Visit
- 3 June 2026 – Uganda Martyrs Day Celebrations, led by Uganda Christian University (UCU)

## CHAPTER 11 | CHRIST OUR PEACE — THE MARTYRS AND UGANDA TODAY

The theme chosen by Uganda Christian University for the 2026 Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations – "Christ Our Peace: Breaking the Walls, Healing the Nation" from Ephesians 2:14 – speaks directly to both the past and the present.

In 1886, the walls that existed were the walls between faith and tradition, between the new converts and the old establishment, between obedience to God and obedience to a king. The martyrs broke through those walls not with weapons or words but with extraordinary, willing sacrifice. They showed that faith can be more powerful than fear, and that the blood of those who die for justice and truth does not silence the truth – it amplifies it.

In 2026, Uganda faces a different set of walls: the barriers of youth unemployment, economic inequality, social fragmentation, and the emotional wounds carried by a generation that has grown up in the shadow of historical trauma.



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The martyrs speak to each of these. Charles Lwanga's courage to protect the vulnerable speaks to justice. Kizito's joyful composure in the face of death speaks to emotional healing. Mbagwa Tuzinde's choice to honour conscience over the comfort of his father's protection speaks to the integrity that builds nations.

UCU's commitment to documenting this history – preserving it in libraries, broadcasting it to the world, and making it accessible to every generation – is itself an act of keeping these walls broken. Because when people know where they come from, when they understand what was given for them, the healing of a nation becomes possible.

“*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

— Ephesians 2:14 — Uganda Martyrs Day 2026 Theme Scripture

### Primary Sources and References

This documentation draws on the following primary and secondary sources, all of which are recommended for inclusion in the UCU Libraries archive for scholarly access:

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*“For the martyrs gave everything. Our work ensures that what they gave is never forgotten.”*

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