

**T**he Paramount Chief of Sirigu, in the Upper East Region, Naba Atogumdeya Roland Akwara III, has called for the intensive planting of trees to arrest desertification and environmental degradation affecting most parts of Northern Ghana.

The chief made the call in an address after a Memorial and Thanksgiving Mass at the Martyrs of Uganda Catholic Church in Sirigu by the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese for the late Rev. Fr. Francis Meddens, of The Netherlands, who served in the Diocese for many years.

The Most Rev. Alfred Agenta, Bishop of the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese, presided over the Mass, concelebrated by 10 Priests of the Diocese. In attendance were six Chiefs, a cross-section of the Religious and lay faithful of the Diocese that covers both the Upper East and North East Regions of Ghana, relatives and friends of Fr. Meddens, from The Netherlands and

## Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese Remembers Fr. Meddens



*Rev. Fr. Wim Miltenburg, a Dean of one of the Deaneries of the Dioceses of Roermond preaching during the burial Mass of Fr. Meddens on November 16, 2019. In the foreground is the coffin made of straw.*

photographs. For many years he worked passionately, day and night with passion, in sweat and tears. He also brought his Ghanaian family here, took them to parties and to the annual Ghana reunion. He rarely came alone, his African family members were always and everywhere welcomed, like his family, for whom he did everything," she said.

She added that Fr. Meddens taught them many African customs, and that whatever he did was in his own words: "For us in Africa."

Fr. Francis Meddens was born on May 20, 1927 at

School before moving on to the Sirigu Parish in the seventies to do pastoral work.

One of the Houses of the Sirigu Integrated Senior High School has been named after Fr. Meddens.

Fr Meddens passed away aged 92, on November 11, 2019 at the St Elizabeth Home for the Aged in Haelen, The Netherlands. He asked for a simple funeral and was buried in a cheap, wicker braided coffin (straw coffin), which he had acquired and kept in a house of one of his nieces, Mrs. Ineke Grooten, for five years prior to his death.

The Thanksgiving Mass



*Mr. Rex Asanga reading the tribute of Madam Franneke Meddens during the Mass at Sirigu.*



*Friends of Fr. Meddens from Ghana and Europe at the Thanksgiving Mass at Sirigu.*

Belgium.

Naba Kwara III recalled that Fr. Meddens contributed immensely in the planting of trees, soil erosion and many other projects for the people of Sirigu, Nabango, Kandiga and the other neighbouring villages. He said that but for the contribution of Fr. Meddens, environmental degradation in the area would be worse than it is today.

"If Fr. Meddens, who was a non-Ghanaian cared for our environment, why can't we the people who are beneficiaries not do same?" he queried.

The chief recounted what his late Father (also a chief) told him about Fr. Meddens, then a Parish Priest in Sirigu, about his care for the poor and his protection of the environment. He described him as "...a Priest who truly applied the culture and traditions of the local people in his priestly ministry."

Rev. Monsignor Camilo K. Sarko, Parish Priest of St. Peter Claver Parish in Binduri and a former student of Fr. Meddens in a homily paid tribute to Fr.

Meddens as a man with a heart big enough to share whatever he had with very many people.

"He was a teacher, a pastor, a development worker in several areas including the planting of trees in many villages and schools; Fighting against soil erosion; construction of wells and dams; building of schools to fight against ignorance and provide knowledge and empower the youth; agricultural activities for better yields and provide food for the hungry in deprived communities; School-feeding programmes in the Diocese for poor children; and the Learning of the local culture and tradition for better and a holistic evangelisation."

He exhorted the people of the Diocese to emulate the good works of Fr. Meddens. "Do not mourn because Fr. Meddens is gone, rejoice that he came" he added.

In an emotional tribute, Fr. Meddens' niece, Madam Franneke Meddens, described Fr. Meddens as one who was

more African than European.

"He loved Africa, particularly Ghana. Frans took care of Ghanaian people, he planted trees, built dams and dug wells, made films and

Nuhnem in The Netherlands.

He was ordained Priest on April 4, 1954 and left for Ghana in 1964. He first taught Religious Studies at the Notre Dame Minor Seminary & Secondary

and the traditional drumming and dancing programme was organised by a Committee co-chaired by Rev. Monsignor Sarko and Madam Melanie Kasise, a retired educationist.



*Traditional Drumming and Dancing after the Mass at Sirigu.*