



Catholic bishop decries ritual female genital mutilation

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[Martin Barillas](#)

Bishop Michael Mabuga Msonganzila of Tanzania condemned the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in his region of Africa and asked at the recent synod of Africa bishops at Rome for alternative rituals for girls to mark their passage into womanhood. Presiding over the diocese of Musoma, Bishop Msonganzila said that the practice - which involves severing of portions of girls' genitals or sewing them partially shut - is common in his diocese. Said the Catholic bishop, "Despite campaigns that have been carried out, this cultural practice for so long has been taken to be part of the initiation process to maturity and to a new state of womanhood."

In the current practice, said Msonganzila, the values of the family and clan are explained to the girls, as they are prepared to take on greater responsibilities as wives and mothers, he said. Decrying the painful and septic process, the bishop added, "This is good. However, should that process be done through the butchering of the most sensitive part of one's body?" he asked. "Women are born with certain body parts for good reason, just as men are. If God wanted those parts missing, why did he create them?" the bishop wrote.

Bishop Msonganzila said the bishops of Africa must be serious in examining why the Catholic Church in Africa has had such difficulty convincing people to leave behind harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation. He called for a specific ritual for the occasion offered by the church to its faithful as an alternative initiation rite, one that includes teaching about the value of the human body and about human rights. In other regions of the world, the Catholic Church has adopted local customs into liturgy. For example, Mexican girls celebrate their fifteenth birthday as "Quinceaneras" whereupon they are given a formal blessing in their parish church followed by a lavish party and dance.

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