



BRIEF HISTORY OF DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES

KENYA-TANZANIA PROVINCE

Since 1984

Divine Word Missionaries (Societas Verbi Divini, SVD), Kenya Province was Established by the Generalate in 1984. This was after the generalate accepted the invitation from the then bishop of Meru diocese, the late Bishop Silas Njiru. According to Br. Karl Schaarschmidt, who was among the first Missionaries to arrive in Kenya, was the first missionary to arrive was Fr. Antony Ribello, at the end of November 1984, followed by Fr. Mike Keegan and Br. Karl himself in 1985. Others were the Late Br. Andrew Hotchkiss and Fr. John Muza. The late Fr. Augustine Rodriguez arrived in 1987. Fr. Antony became the first mission superior.

On 11th February 1988, the Archbishop of Nairobi, the late Maurice Cardinal Otunga, assigned Jericho Parish to SVD for the time being while they were preparing to construct the Parish house and the Church in Kayole. Therefore, Fr. Mike was left in Nairobi organizing the purchase of the Gigiri house from the Jesuit fathers, and Fr. Antony and Br. Karl went to Garba-Tula, 350 km northeast of Nairobi, where they also established the mission.

The SVD mission concentrated in the Northern part of Meru in Garba-Tula and Odonyiro. This part would later belong to Isiolo Diocese, divided from Meru Diocese. The Borana people in Garba-Tula were predominantly Muslims, according to Br. Karl, there was not much pastoral work, such as catechism, masses, baptisms, etc. It was thus very difficult for young priests. They established a workshop where they trained young people on various skills, such as making cement and sand bricks, and how to build houses. Those who completed the course were given tools and materials to construct their own houses.

In November 1984, Fr. General H. Heekeren wrote to Fr. Anthony Rebello, “We feel that even though we would be working with two teams in Kenya (Garba-Tula and Nairobi) from the beginning we should develop a sense of SVD community where everyone would be interested in and have an understanding for the work going on in both places.”

On the 1st of February 1985, Garba Tula was officially handed over to the SVD from Fidei Donum Fathers. In October 1985, Fr. Henry Miller, SVD, came to inaugurate Gigiri House, which was bought from the Society of Jesus.

In its letter dated 1986, the generalate stated that the vision of establishing a mission in Kenya was *“to be with the poor but not simply in the form of pastoral work. We expect the Society’s specialized apostolate to be started here as well...”*

In 1992, Bishop Cornelius Korir of Eldoret welcomed the SVD in Eldoret and handed over one small parish in Langas outside the town of Eldoret. Fr. Finnegan and Fr. Dan Anzorge visited and initiated the work on the new mission. The area was a slum with a large population living in poor conditions and with limited resources. Over the years, a lot of development has been realized in the area.

The formation of local missionaries began in 1993 with the first group of the “Come and See” program. The first program was held from 26th April to 1st May 1993 at St. Joseph the Worker Parish Pastoral Centre in Kangemi. The first candidates were Delphin Omamo, Peter Kabaka, Alois Atito, Gerald Khisa Wanyama, John Kihara, Albert Murathe, who dropped out later, and Fr. Thaddeus Momanyi, missionary to Brazil, and Br. Lawrence Kibaara, Br. Michael Wachira, working in Kenya. The input to the candidates was given by Fr. Augustine Rodriguez, Fr. Dan Anzorge, Fr. Adam Waltz, Br. Karl Schaarschmidt, and Fr. Velgilio. On 15th August 1993, the Postulancy programme began at Makadara in Nairobi. The Superior General, Fr. Heinrich Barlage, came from Rome to preside over the inaugural mass.

In 1994, the Second AFRAM Common Formation Center (Commonly known as CFC) for Theology students was inaugurated. The first one has been established in Ghana. Fr. Gerard McCarthy became the first rector and Fr. John Serao the first prefect. During the CFC Silver Jubilee celebration in 2019, Fr. Justus Rottuk, the first Kenyan priest, recalled, *“I was the only Kenyan in my class in the year 1995, and I had to learn much about other nationalities”*.

On 6th January 1996, SVD took over the administration of Our Lady of Rosary Dol Dol mission in Samburu district, Nyeri Diocese from Fidei Donum Fathers. At that time, there were several requests from the local bishops to take up missions in their dioceses. Later, SVD vacated Dol Dol Parish and handed it over to the Contemplative Fathers in 2009.

In 1996, Divine Word Parish in Kayole, Nairobi, and Holy Spirit Parish, Langas, Eldoret, were inaugurated. During that time, there were very few settlements in the Kayole area stretching from Umoja to Ruai. Today, the place is very full of high-rise buildings with new estates emerging every day.

In August 1997, the pre-novitiate formation house in Otiende was inaugurated to facilitate the formation Program in the province. The students studied at the Consolata Institute of Philosophy in Langata until 2020, when the program was moved to Arusha, Tanzania.

On 16th July 1998, St. Joseph Freinademetz Parish Ruai became an independent parish under the care of the SVD. The parish is located near the main Nairobi City sewer. The parish was handed over to the diocesan administration in 2015.

In 1999, SVD Kenya achieved province status, and Fr. Gerard McCarthy became the first provincial superior. Soon after becoming a province, there arose an internal crisis that necessitated

the intervention of the Generalate. The Generalate relegated the province to a Province Delegate until 2008 when it became Province again. On 15th December 1999, the SVD took over Oldonyiro in exchange for the Garba Tula mission upon the request of Bishop Luigi Locati, the then Bishop of the newly established diocese. The Diocese of Isiolo was established in 1995 by the Meru Diocese.

SVD Kenya Province extended its missionary presence across the border to Tanzania upon the request of Archbishop Josephat Louis Lebulu. The first mission was St. Gabriel's Parish in Burka. The parish was later renamed Epiphany Parish. The contract to administer the mission was signed on 14th November 2001. The Archbishop also requested the SVD to take up Simanjiro Parish, 100 Km south of Arusha City. The mission that serves the Maasai Indigenous people was reopened on 8th of September 2002. The mission was established in the early 1960s by the Holy Ghost Fathers. In the early 1980s, the diocesan clergy took over the mission until 1999. The parish was left without a pastor from 1999 until 2002 when SVD took over. The Maasai people are still very conservative about their traditions and customs. Thus, the mission is still considered a frontier mission today. SVD's apostolate has been based on re-evangelization and re-catechizing for the people.

On 13th May 2000, the first Kenyan SVD priest, Fr. Justus Rottuk, was ordained. Soon after the ordination, he joined Fr. Rethinasamy Amaldoss at St. Gabriel Parish in Arusha, Tanzania. Later, he was transferred together with Fr. Peddy Castelino to reopen Simanjiro Parish in 2002.

In August 2000, the Pre-Postulancy Programme was started in Dol Dol mission by Fr. Fr. Leo Fernando and Brother Mike Gichuki. In December 2001, the Programme was transferred from Dol Dol to Isiolo, where SVD acquired a plot and constructed a house. Later, the Program was moved to Nanyuki with Fr. Leo still as the director, assisted by Fr. Fernando Monteiro. In 2004, the program was moved to the Soweto mission, where it has remained until today. Fr. Lawrence Muthee was the first candidate and was joined by Fr. James Mburugu and Fr. Evans Khaemba the following year. Fr. Mervin Noronha was appointed as the director of the program.

In 2002, Sts. Joachim and Anne Parish, Soweto, which was an outstation of DIWOPA parish, Kayole, became an independent parish. The late Fr. Augustine Rodrigues became the first Parish Priest.

In 2006, SVD established Sombetini Parish in Arusha. Fr. Rethinasamy became the first parish priest. The parish was added to the Holy Cross missionaries in 2015. The confreres working there moved to the Olasiti Parish.

In 2008, the construction of Divine Word Boys' High School in Katani was completed and inaugurated on 1st of February 2009, by the Bishop of Machakos Diocese, Rt. Rev. Martin Kivuva and the provincial superior Fr. Eusebios Manangbao. Fr. Justus Rottuk became the first School Director.

In 2006, Orkesumet station, which was under Simanjiro parish, became an independent parish under diocesan clergy. In 2010, the SVD took over its administration with Fr. James Mailady as the first Parish Priest.

On 19th September 2011, St. Barnabas Kimumu, a station of Langas parish, became a Parish. SVD was given its administration.

In 2013, St. Joseph the Worker Olasiti Parish was inaugurated. During the inauguration, there was a bomb blast that left three people dead and scores of others injured. This disaster left the faithful devastated but made them even stronger in faith. Later, the parish was made a pilgrimage center for the Archdiocese of Arusha.

On the 8th of May 2016, St. Mary Immaculate Parish, Mihango, which was an outstation of Kayole parish, was inaugurated and given to the SVD. During the same year, St. Peter's Parish in Ruai was handed over to the diocesan clergy.

In 2016, Holy Trinity Morombo station became quasi quasi-parish under the care of SVDs, and Fr. Peddy Castelino and Fr. Hugo Calis started working there while staying in Olasiti.

In 2028, St. Raphael Community in Katani was established after the completion of the residential house. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the house would serve as a temporary novitiate between the years 2021 and 2022.

On the 6th of February 2023, SVD took over the administration of St. Paul's Parish Kabechei in Eldoret Diocese. Fr. Roger Agre Issere became the first parish priest. The parish was established by Benedictine fathers and was left under the care of diocesan clergy before SVD took over.

In 2020, the pre-novitiate house in Otiende was restructured to become student hostels after the program was moved to Arusha. It was renamed after St. Michael, one of the major patron saints of the society.

On January 13, 2022, the first Tanzanian SVD priest, Fr. Pamphil Sambaya, was ordained in Arusha. There have been several seminarians from Tanzania since the early 2000s, but none of them have made it to the final profession or priesthood.

On the 30th of January 2023, Yamumbi Parish was handed back to the Diocese of Eldoret in exchange for the newly established Chepkanga parish, which was inaugurated on the 2nd of September 2023, and Fr. Francisco Gonzalez was installed as the first parish priest.

On 10th December 2023, Simanjiro Parish, which had become very vast, with 34 stations, gave birth to Terrat Mission and was handed over to the diocesan clergy.

In 2024, SVD Kenya-Tanzania province celebrated its Ruby Jubilee. To mark this important historical moment, the first pre-novitiate formation house in Tanzania was inaugurated. The inauguration took place on 6th September 2024 and was presided over by Most Rev. Isaac Amani, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Arusha, and Fr. William Odeke, the Provincial Superior.

On 7th September 2024, the second Tanzanian SVD priest, Fr. Emmanuel Kimario, was ordained at Epiphany parish in Arusha.

Currently, there are 54 confreres from 20 nationalities assigned in the Kenya-Tanzania Province.

There are other missions that were established by SVD and handed over either back to the dioceses or to other religious congregations. These include: Njiro, Kamulu, St. Joseph Ruai, St. Peter's, Ruai, and St. Arnold Komarok parishes, in Nairobi; Yamumbi Parish, and St. George's University Chaplaincy Kapseret in Eldoret; Sombetini and Kisongo parishes in Arusha.

Since the establishment of the Kenya-Tanzania SVD mission, many confreres who worked here have died. However, the first SVD missionary to die in Kenya was Fr. Teodor Grzyska in 2011. The second was Fr. Augustine Rodrigues, who died on the 11th of June 2014. The third was Fr. Tom Layden, the oldest confrere in the province, who died on the 26th of November 2023, at the age of 89 years. Fr. Tom will be remembered for his love for the Word of God. He used to read the entire bible once every two months.

Below is the list of Regional and Provincial Superiors since the beginning of the SVD Kenya – Tanzania Province.

1. Fr. Anthony Rebello 1984-1987
2. Fr. Lawrence Finnegan 1987-1990
3. Fr. Brendan O'Reilly 1990-1996
4. Fr. Thomas Leyden 1996-1999
5. Fr. Gerard McCarthy 1999-2001
6. Fr. Gerhard Lesch 2001-2002
7. Fr. James Mailady 2002-2005
8. Fr. John Serrao 2005 - 2008
9. Fr. Eusebio Manangbau 2008 - 2014
10. Fr. Albert Fuchs 2014 - 2017
11. Fr. Anthony Amissah 2017 - 2023
12. Fr. William Odeke 2023...

Our communities, Seminaries, and Institutions in the Districts.

1. SVD Provincial House – Gigiri, Nairobi (1885)
2. Common Formation Center – Langata, Nairobi (1994)
3. St. Michael's Hostels – Otiende, Nairobi (1997/2022)
4. Propaedeutic House – Soweto, Nairobi (2005)
5. DIWOPA Parish – Kayole, Nairobi (1986)
6. Sts. Joachim and Ann Parish – Soweto, Nairobi (2002)
7. Mary Immaculate Parish – Mihango, Nairobi (2016)
8. St. Raphael House – Katani, Nairobi (2017)
9. Divine Word Boys Secondary School – Katani, Nairobi (2008)
10. St. Raphael Clinic – Mihang'o, Nairobi
11. Bl. Maria Helena Dispensary – Soweto, Nairobi
12. Holy Spirit Kimumu Parish – Langas, Eldoret (1992)
13. St. Barnabas Parish – Kimumu, Eldoret (2011)
14. St. Joseph Parish – Tchepekanga, Eldoret (2023)
15. St. Paul Parish – Kabechei, Eldoret (2023)

16. Salve Hostel – Langas, Nairobi
17. St. Joseph Freinademetz Seminary – Njiro, Arusha (2024)
18. Epiphany Parish – Burka, Arusha (1960/2000)
19. St. Joseph Parish – Olasiti, Arusha (2013)
20. Holy Trinity Parish Elect – Morombo, Arusha (2015)
21. Good Shepherd Parish – Simanjoro, Arusha (1960/2002)
22. St. Augustine Parish – Orkesumet, Arusha (2006/2010)

Kenya-Tanzanian Confreres and their dates of Ordination/Final Vows

1. Fr. Justus Rottuk (2000)
2. Fr. Pascal Kinoti (2001)
3. Br. Lawrence Kibaara (2002)
4. Br. Michael Gichuki (2002)
5. Fr. Thadeus Momanyi (2004)
6. Fr. Francis Wangamati (2006)
7. Fr. Moses Mwaniki (2006 X)
8. Fr. William Owire (2007)
9. Fr. Boniface Mbithi (2010)
10. Fr. Daniel Otieno (2011)
11. Fr. Geoffrey Kamau (2013)
12. Fr. Manasses Kuria (2014 X)
13. Fr. James Mburugu (2015)
14. Fr. Lawrence Muthee (2016)
15. Fr. Ronald Aming'a (2016)
16. Fr. Evans Khaemba (2017)
17. Fr. Alex Owino (2018)
18. Fr. Antony Muchui (2020)
19. Br. Bernard Othiambo (2021)
20. Nicholas Mwangi (2021)
21. Yophesius Ogachi (2021)
22. Fr. Pamphil Sambaya (2022)
23. Wicliff Ogega (2023)
24. Bernard Obuya (2023)
25. Fr. George Katuka (2024)
26. Fr. Benedict Musyoki (2024)
27. Fr. Emmanuel Kimario (2024)
28. Dec. Dominic Kimathi ()
29. Dec. Boniface Motika ()
30. Dec. Januarius Kaeke ()
31. Dec. Stephen Basasa ()
32. Dec. Raphael Macha ()