Don Bosco in Eastern Africa

Kenya | The Sudan | Tanzania | Uganda

a narrative history of the first decade (1980-1989)

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Prologue

Among the church vessels at the Salesian Novitiate at Morogoro, Tanzania, there is a silver chalice. Ancient looking indeed! At the bottom of that chalice is this inscription:

> To
> Rev. James Szaforz, SC.
> Director
> Silver Jubilee
> Salesian School
> Goshen, N.Y.
> March 19th, 1931

The engraved inscription seems to have a story of its own. To a curious mind it raises many questions: how come a member of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart has been the Director of a Salesian School in New York? Was the occasion of the Silver Jubilee his own or that of the school? An online search suggests that the Salesians only bought the property in 1925, and the school was eventually closed in 1985. The online story about a mysterious death at the school also suggests that in 1931 a new chapel was built. We can only guess that someone gifted this chalice to the Director on the feast of St Joseph of that year, and it was his Silver Jubilee. How did it reach Morogoro, anyway? Was it Fr Edward Liptak, a pioneering Salesian missionary in East Africa from America, and once a director of novices himself, who brought it to the novitiate in Moshi which at present is located at Morogoro? Or was it brought by Fr Brian Jerstice of happy memory – also a missionary in Tanzania? Questions are galore!

Salesian communities are full of artefacts – not only in terms of material objects and buildings, but also programmes and initiatives. They have stories to tell. They tell the history of the institutions. If one is attentive, we can hear those stories and recognise the protagonists of these stories. The memories borne by these artefacts, events and the agents of these events not only help us acknowledge with gratitude our past, but also orientate us to plan for our future. Collective memories bring people together. They have wisdom to pass on to us.

In this book, I want to tell stories about the Salesians of Don Bosco and their indefatigable ministry in Eastern Africa, extending across the first decade (1980 to 1990) of their presence. My original plan was to cover four decades of history (1980 to 2020), similar to the *Memoirs of the Oratory* that Don Bosco wrote of the four decades of his own life and ministry (1815 to 1855). With the time available and the heaviness of the task, I have limited the scope of the present volume to the first decade. Presumptuous though it might seem, we want to make our own for this

book, the purpose that Don Bosco states for putting down in writing his own *Memoirs*:

Now, what purpose can this chronicle serve? It will be a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past. It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide. It will give my sons some entertainment to be able to read: about their father's adventures…

Don Bosco reserved his memoirs only for the benefit of his Salesians. We, on the other hand, want our story to be available to any person of good will. It could make an entertaining reading particularly to young Salesians and members of the Salesian family, and to all who are interested in the history of religious institutes in Africa such as the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Gratefully, many of those who arrived as first Salesian missionaries are still alive, and most of them are still ministering within Eastern Africa. Therefore, it was possible to get some first-hand accounts of chronological and episodic details. On the other hand, it is also difficult to write a critical history when the events and the people involved are contemporaneous with the writer. That is why, I venture on a narrative history, and not a scientific objective account.

I attempt to tell stories. I go beyond the mere chronicles of events. I desire to highlight some insights and draw out some wisdom that history can offer us, while being very respectful of individuals and their affiliations. Therefore, the purpose of this book is not to critically evaluate the history of the Salesians in Eastern Africa. I wish to highlight individual contributions to the establishment and the deepening of the Salesian charism in Eastern Africa.

The book has short chapters. There are several texts within boxes that dot the narrative; they capture some interesting information. I have also employed copious amounts of footnotes; these, not only cite the source of the information, but also add more details about people and events, which if included in the main text would tend to discontinue the thread of the narrative.

The Salesian Eastern Africa

What is the geographical extent of the coverage of the stories? Again, I had to make some choices here. The boundaries and the status of the circumscription of the Salesian unit of Eastern Africa have been shifting over the years. The process of the formation and restructuring of the circumscription through this decade itself form part of our story. The geopolitical history of Kenya, Tanzania, the Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda has also been fluid. The first part of most chapters describes the situation of each of the Eastern African nations at the time of the arrival of the Salesians in those countries. However, in speaking about the

geographical delimitations of Salesian Eastern Africa, it is also necessary to consider some geopolitical history.

When the Salesians arrived in Kenya, Tanzania, and the Sudan in 1980, the Republic of Sudan was one country including the territory that in 2011 became South Sudan. Therefore, in this volume of the history of Salesians in Eastern Africa, we speak of one Sudan: The Sudan. Another geopolitical detail relevant to the Salesian history of Eastern Africa is the history of the East African Community. This structure has gone through its own evolution in the past decades. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have enjoyed a long history of co-operation under successive regional integration arrangements and extending their relationship to other countries. In 1967, the East African Community was established under fully independent states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. However, in 1977, following the aggressive leadership of Idi Amin in Uganda and the unrest thereof, the East African Community was unceremoniously dismantled. Therefore, in 1980, when Project Africa was launched, Uganda was not part of East African Community; as such, the community was defunct. This could have been one reason why the geographical territory entrusted to the Salesian Provinces of India to plant and develop the Salesian charism did not include Uganda. Parallel to the Salesian presences started by the Indian provinces, the Salesian province of Piedmont was allowed to start presences in the then Meru Diocese in Kenya at the request of Bishop Silas Njiru. On the other hand, the Salesians from Poland began their ministry in Uganda in early 1989, having spent almost a year learning English in Kenya. From 1993, the political-economic structure of the East African Cooperation was reconstituted. This prompted the Salesians also to consider the consolidation of the various entities to form the unified Province of Eastern Africa in 1994. From 1994 until 2005, the Salesian Province of Eastern Africa (AFE) included four countries: Kenya, the Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. In 2005, the countries constituting AFE were reduced to three countries, with Uganda being reconstituted with Burundi and Rwanda to form the Salesian province of Great Lakes (AGL). In 2011, with South Sudan officially becoming an independent country, AFE still had four countries: Kenya, South Sudan, the Sudan, and Uganda. Meanwhile, already in 2004, Sudan, and later together with South Sudan, came to constitute a Delegation of the AFE province. This volume focuses on the first decade of Salesian presence in the four countries of Kenya, The Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Historiography of AFE

There have been several attempts in the past to write the history of Salesians in Eastern Africa. The first one to attempt a rather systematic history was Brother Robert Dias. His writings were published in the

Salesian Bulletin between 2003 and 2005. Unfortunately, these manuscripts have been lost. However, what could be salvaged from the Salesian Bulletin has been integrated into the present account. Between 2003 and 2004, there was an exercise of Participatory Strategic Planning carried out by the Planning and Development Office (PDO) in Nairobi, and the creation of the first website of the province (www.donbosco.or.ke; www.donbosco.or.tz).[1] For this purpose, I had put together a brief write up on each community existing at that time. This was highly influenced by the write up of Brother Dias. The present narrative includes a sizable integration of material from that version. Fr Gianni Uboldi, currently ministering in Uganda and once a missionary in Kenya, has written an elaborate historical narrative of the Salesian ministry in Uganda. Chapter 8 of this volume is basically borrowed from his writing. Similarly, Fr Jacob Thelakkadan had written a less technical history of Salesian presences in the Sudan. I have also used his writing to corroborate some of my own conclusions.

The souvenir published a few months after the Silver Jubilee of the Province of Eastern Africa in 2005 contained a few pages of the history of the Province. I also had access to a short well-written history, whose author remains unknown. More recently, Fr Dietrich Mwenda attempted to write the history of the Salesians in Eastern Africa as part of his Licentiate in Church History in 2016. However, given the enormity of such a task and the limited scope of the Licentiate thesis, he abandoned that dream. In any case, the data that he gathered has formed a substantial part of this book. Credit should also be given to Fr Sebastian Koladyil, who, out of his own personal commitment to Don Bosco in Eastern Africa, interviewed the Salesian pioneers of Eastern Africa.[2] The narrative analysis of the interviews of the individual Salesians, available in video form, has filled the enormous gaps in documentation and provided the narrative framework for what you now hold in hand, in book form. I also had first-hand reading of many files present in the archives in Nairobi and the chronicles of several communities.

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to this tedious exercise. My particular gratitude goes to Fr Joseph Pulikkal, and especially to Fr Neville Luis, for their time and energy in going through the manuscripts, correcting historical details, adding anecdotes, and proofreading them, and polishing them with appropriate language and punctuation.

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[1] These websites went live on the occasion of the Provincial Chapter 2004, held at Oysterbay, Dar es Salaam.

[2] Fr Sebastian had video-interviewed 25 of the early missionaries to Salesian East Africa, including those who have returned to their country of origin, India, Italy and U.S.A. Fr Dietrich has audio-interviewed 19 Salesians some who were first native Salesians of Eastern Africa. This provided enormous data on human perception and experiences. There were also some who were interviewed by both. This data was useful also to corroborate the information found in chronicles and Provincial visitation reports.

Chapter 1

The Launch of Project Africa

From 1864 onwards, Don Bosco was in correspondence with St Daniel Comboni (1831-1881),[3] pioneer missionary in Africa, and Archbishop Charles Lavigerie (1825-1892),[4] the great apostle of Algeria, concerning possible Salesian initiatives in Africa. Because of his inability to send Salesians immediately to the places suggested by either of them, Don Bosco was content with accepting a few orphans from Africa into the Oratory of Valdocco (BM 9:348-349).[5] In 1875, Don Bosco expressed his dream for Africa in a wish: "What a memorable day that will be, when Salesian missionaries sailing up the river Congo will meet their confreres coming up the Nile and shake hands, praising the Lord [...] I see that already in Africa" (BM XI:409). In 1886, Don Bosco spoke to the Superior Council of his plan to send Salesians to Africa (Cairo). But the plan was not executed immediately.

Don Bosco's dream for Africa began to be gradually realized during the time of Fr Michael Rua in the overall context of the worldwide expansion of the Salesian Society. The very first foundation in the African continent goes back to 1891 when a group of French Salesians arrived in Algeria. In 1894, there was a Salesian foundation in Tunisia, and in 1896, others followed in Egypt and South Africa. Still other foundations were opened in different countries between 1907 and 1975 prior to the launch of Project Africa. Father Pasqual Chavez, then Rector Major, in his letter to the Salesians in 2007, summarises thus, the expansion of the Salesian presences in Africa prior to 1978:[6]

> It must be recognised that between 1891 and 1978, the Salesian charism made slow progress in different African countries. At the death of Don Rua in 1910, there were Salesian foundations in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, South Africa and Mozambique. Fr. Paul Albera sent Salesians to the Belgian Congo. During Fr. Philip Rinaldi's Rectorship the Salesians opened houses in the Canary Islands (1923) and Morocco (1929). Fr. Peter Ricaldone was responsible for their entry into Libya (1939) and Cape Verde

[3] He founded, in 1867 and 1872 respectively, two missionary Institutes of men and of women: the Comboni Missionaries and the Comboni Missionary Sisters (Verona Fathers and Sisters).

[4] In 1868, he founded the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers).

[5] Father Pascal Chavez, the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco from 2002 to 2014, writes in his letter to the Salesians. AGC, no.399 (Oct-Dec 2007).

[6] Father Pascal Chavez. AGC, no.399 (Oct-Dec 2007).

(1946). When Fr. Renato Ziggioti was Rector Major, Salesian foundations were established in Rwanda and Swaziland (1953), Congo Brazzaville (1959), Burundi (1962) and Gabon (1964). Fr. Aloysius Ricceri added two more countries to the Salesian map of Africa, namely Equatorial Guinea (1972) and Ethiopia (1975). Preparations for a Salesian foundation in the Ivory Coast were already begun in 1973 through the presence of a single Salesian.

Meanwhile, Salesians had to withdraw from some of the countries in Africa due to the hostile political climate, for example in Mozambique the Salesians left in 1975 following the establishment of the totalitarian communist regime and returned to it after 20 years,[7] and from Algeria they had to retreat in 1976. In any case, one must admit that there was no concerted effort throughout this decades to reach out to the length and breadth of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Then came the 21st General Chapter (1977-78). Fr Jacques Ntamitalizo from Rwanda was the only autochthonous African present at the General Chapter as the delegate of the Central African Province. He made a moving appeal to the Chapter to consider that the time had come for the Salesian Congregation to do something more for Africa with greater commitment and planning. His simple message made a deep impression on all present. In the six-year period that followed the Chapter, Fr Egidio Vigano formulated the response to the appeal Fr Ntamitalizo, in the form of "Project Africa." More than one hundred years after the Salesian mission in the Americas, and more than seventy years in Asia, Africa was in focus. In launching the Project Africa, Father Vigano spoke of an African Don Bosco. "Don Bosco must be totally and genuinely himself but, on the other hand, he will truly possess the essential traits of African culture".[8] This genial idea was to be a *kairos* not only for the youth and the Church in Africa but for the entire Salesian Congregation, as the following pages will demonstrate.

Fr Bernard Tohill[9] was the General Councillor for the Missions. However, the initiative of Project Africa was entrusted to Fr Harry Rasmussen. After

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[7] During this time, one Salesian brother was allowed to remain back because he was not a priest. Brother António Pedrosa (b.1932) was hired by the regime and salaried to coordinate the educational activities of the college and for 11 consecutive years received the Medal as the best educator and teacher.

[8] Cf. ACS 297 (1980) 3-29.

[9] Bernard Tohill was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 12th August 1919. After his profession in 1937 at Beckford, UK, he opted to go to China/Hongkong as a missionary. He was ordained in 1948. He was Provincial in China and the USA. In 1965 he was elected Regional Councillor of the English Speaking Salesian world that included Ireland, Britain, Southern Africa, USA, Australia and the Asian Provinces. Then, for 13 years (1971- 84), he was General Councillor for the Salesian Missions, a task he performed enthusiastically. He helped set Project Africa in motion after the 21st General Chapter. That 13-year missionary service made him, perhaps, the most travelled Salesian in the history of the Congregation. We don't know how many times he travelled by

completing his term as Provincial in the Western Province of United States (SUO), [10] Fr. Harry Rasmussen coordinated the 'Africa Desk' at the Generalate, under the Missions Sector, from 1980 to 1986. He was tasked with the responsibility of contacting the bishops in Africa who had invited Salesians to their dioceses. He also travelled widely making prior visits of the dioceses before the first groups of Salesians could arrive. Fr Tony D'Souza, the Provincial Superior of Bombay, India, and later Delegate Superior of Eastern Africa, describes Fr Rasmussen as "a very genial and jovial Salesian," and goes on to pay tribute to him, "from him, I learnt much about dealings with Bishops, choices of places for Salesian presences, and organisation of mission communities. I must give him credit for the good start we made in Eastern Africa. In difficult and confusing moments his faith in God and optimistic spirit kept my hopes alive. I remember him with love & esteem."[11]

Box 1
The Inspirer of Project Africa: Fr Jacques NTAMITALIZO, SDB (1942-1995)[12]

Born in Rungu, in the North of Rwanda, on September 14, 1942, he studied at the minor seminary of Rwesero, which was then under the care of the Salesians, then at the "Collège Saint François de Sales" in Lubumbashi where he was able to complete his secondary education. Entering the novitiate in 1964, he made his first vows in 1965. Ordained a priest in Rwaza on August 13, 1972, after a few years of priestly

boat after his first trip by ship to China. However, he kept count of all the times he took a plane of some kind or other. They add up to 1538 trips! Fr Tohill passed away in Hongkong on 21 December 2010 at the age of 91. Cf. http://homepage.tinet.ie/~sdbmedia/salesians/biogs/sdb_biogs_tohill.htm

[10] From the blog of Fr Ivo Coelho, the General Councilor for Formation (2014 to date). http://ivocoelho.blogspot.com/2018/10/fr-harry-rasmussen-sdb-one-of-pioneers.html

[11] Fr Harry Rasmussen, SDB passed away at Bellflower (SUO) on 15 October 2018 at the age of 87.

[12] From the book published by Marcel VERHULST, *L'évolution de la province d'Afrique Centrale entre 1993 et 2005*. Lubumbashi, Ed. Don Bosco 2012, p. 103-105.

work in Salesian houses, he continued his studies at the UPS in Rome, and obtained a Licentiate in Theology (Spirituality Course).

After being appointed master of novices – first in Butare (1979), then in Kansebula (from 1981 to 1984) – he was chosen as the Delegate Superior of Rwanda and Burundi from 1984 to 1990. He combined this function with that of being the director in Kimihurura, where, under his leadership, the Institute experienced great progress. At the time of the war and genocide in Rwanda (in 1994), Fr. Jacques was in the Salesian house of Rango (Butare); in that period, he decided to remain there alone and guard the Salesian house despite the difficult situation in the country. On 10th July 1995, when Fr Jacques travelled to Burundi to visit his family members who were at the refugee camp, he was killed there during the second wave of the genocide.

What follows is an account of his intervention at GC 21. Father Jacques, the only African confrere present at the General Chapter, timidly raised his hand to ask permission to speak without having any illusions that he was going to obtain it, given the large number of requests to speak recorded that day. But the Rector Major, Don Egidio Viganò, whispered in the ear of the moderator for the day, Father Karl Oerder: "Make him speak right away!" Father Jacques stood up and made a brief speech:[13]

"Through my poor words I would like us to hear an ardent and welcoming cry of appeal from so many young people who feel the need to experience the Salesian spirit. The harvest is great and ripe, but the Salesian workers are not enough for the immense and promising apostolate that awaits them. From the time of Don Bosco until today, eminent personalities of the Church, having deep esteem for the Congregation, have not ceased to issue this cry of appeal […]. Speaking of the missions in Africa, Don Bosco said: "This mission is my dream". He could not realize this apostolic dream because of his age. And suddenly, I remembered this other word he had said as a testament to his sons: "What I have not done, you will do". I would like to invite the Congregation, with great respect and simplicity, to consider these words which have filled me with joy and hope […]. With the support of the words of the Rector Major in his general report on the state of the Congregation, it seems to me desirable that in the lines of action […] there be one that engages Salesian missionary action in Africa. I ask the Congregation for this service, in the hope that it will bear good fruit."

There followed a brief silence, after which Don Viganò intervened to emphasize the importance of the request made. This unleashed a great and long applause: the request was considered as an inspiration of the Holy Spirit coming through an African confrere. Subsequently, the *Acts of*

[13] M. VALENTE, *In memoriam. P. Jacques Ntamitalizo, salésien de Don Bosco*, lettre mortuaire, Lubumbashi, 1995.

the 21st General Chapter of the Salesian Society (Rome, 1978, 147) emphatically stipulated the launch of Project Africa:

At the beginning of the second centenary of the Salesian missionary endeavours, remembering the prophetic desire of Don Bosco, that the Salesians undertake to significantly increase their presence in Africa.

Chapter 2
Arrival of the Salesians in Eastern Africa

When Project Africa was launched there were five Salesian provinces in India. These provinces were entrusted with the plan of establishing Salesian presences in three countries of Eastern Africa: Kenya, Tanzania and Sudan. Meanwhile, the Italian Central Province (ICE) took interest in starting Salesian ministry in the then Diocese of Meru in Kenya. These initiatives began in 1980. The task of sending Salesians to Uganda was given to the Polish Provinces, who had already started sending Missionaries to Zambia. They would arrive in Uganda only in 1988.

Largely maintaining a sequence of the chronology of the arrival of the Salesians in these countries, the present chapter describes the logistical issues and the human experiences around the arrival and the launching of the Salesian mission in 1980 in the first three countries: Kenya, Sudan, and Tanzania. The subsequent chapters (Chapters 3 to 6) enumerate in some detail the growth of the Salesian works in individual communities grouped together as per their respective countries among the four: Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Uganda is included here for the sake of maintaining a chronological sequence, even though Uganda would be amalgamated among the trio to form the Salesian Province of Eastern Africa (AFE) only in 1994.

Salesians of Central province (ICE) in Italy in Kenya

It is apt to begin the story of the Salesians in Eastern Africa with a non-Salesian Church leader: Bishop Silas Silvius Njiru (1928-2020). Born in Meru, Eastern Kenya, on 10th October 1928, he was ordained a priest in December 1955. He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Meru in October 1975 and consecrated as a Bishop in January 1976. He became the Bishop of Meru diocese in December 1976, a position he held for 28 years until he retired in 2004.

He was very close to the Consolata Missionaries,[14] given that most parts of the Central Province in Kenya were evangelised by them. And through

[14] It should be noted that Consolata Missionaries were founded by Blessed Joseph Allamano, who was a nephew of St Joseph Cafasso, and an inmate at

them and due to his numerous visits to Turin, Bishop Silas came to know and appreciate the figure of Don Bosco and the charism of the Salesians. So, he was one of the first bishops to request the Rector Major to send Salesians to Eastern Africa, even prior to 1977. And apparently, since the response was not in the affirmative, the story goes that during one of his visits to Turin, the Bishop wrote a letter to Mary Help of Christians herself requesting the arrival of Salesians to his diocese and placed the letter very visibly at the sanctuary of the Basilica at Valdocco, Turin.[15] The letter eventually reached the Salesian Provincial of the Central Province of Italy (ICE), who perhaps felt personally obliged to send Salesians from Turin to the Diocese of Meru in Kenya.[16]

This, of course, coincided with the launch of Project Africa. Father Dario Superina, who was 40 years of age then and was the Rector in one of the communities of Turin, had expressed to his Provincial his desire to be part of the Project Africa. When the right time came, he was given an option to choose between Kisii diocese[17] and Meru diocese. Considering that there were Consolata Missionaries from Turin in Meru diocese, Fr Dario opted to go to Meru. Prior to his departure from Italy, when he went to meet Fr Bernard Tohill in Rome, according to Fr Dario,[18] Fr Tohill said, "You are here, yes! Let us say one 'Hail Mary'. Tomorrow morning you go to buy the ticket." Thus, on 10th January 1980, Fr Dario Superina landed in Nairobi with the aim of meeting Bishop Silas Njeru and of scouting around the Diocese of Meru for the Salesians to start their first mission in Kenya. The Bishop took him around the diocese and showed him four possible places.

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the Oratory of Valdocco with Don Bosco. And the three came from the same parish of Castelnuovo D'Asti, now renamed, Castelnuovo Don Bosco.

[15] This story has not been independently verified, but is consistent with the events taking place around the time of the arrival of the Salesians from Italy in Kenya. I personally heard it from Fr Thomas Panakezham, the Regional Superior of Australasia during the launch of Project Africa.

[16] The land on which the Don Bosco School (Embu) is built is a personal gift of Bishop Silas Njiru to the Salesians from his own inheritance through his family. Even when there were some issues with the land, after the Bishop had retired, he travelled back from Italy to make it easy for the Salesians to regularize the ownership of the property. After his retirement in 2004, Bishop Silas lived with the Cistercian monks at Tre Fontane, Rome, Italy. On 28th April 2020, the holy Bishop succumbed to COVID-19 while living in Turin with the Consolata Missionaries, and went to his final reward, aged 91.

[17] According to the verbal report of Fr Dario Superina, by 1980, Bp. Tiberius Charles Mugendi, who was the Bishop of Kisii from 1969 to 1993, had also invited the Salesians to his diocese.

[18] Video interview with Fr Sebastian Koladyil at Church of St John the Evangelist, Turin.

Based on the first hand report of Fr. Dario, back in Turin, in March 1980, during the Provincial Chapter of ICE, and Fr Mario Colombo being its Provincial superior, it was accepted almost unanimously[19] to take up the parish of Siakago, which was then in the southern part of the diocese of Meru. The Generalate of the Salesians had by then adopted a policy that the new presences of Project Africa would be directly under well-established provinces, for canonical purposes, for the care of personnel, and for catering to the financial implications involved in establishing new presences, even if they were assisted by the Generalate. The ICE province decided to take up Siakago parish which was under the care of the Consolata Missionaries who were willing to hand it over. The Parish compound had already a built-up area with a church, a presbytery, a small school for girls, and a dispensary, the latter two being still under the care of the Consolata Sisters. Father Dario came back in the month of September 1980, and after living with the Consolata Missionaries both in Nairobi and then in Siakago, he readied himself to take up the parish. Finally, the parish was officially handed over to the Salesians on 31st January 1981, in the presence of Bishop Silas and the Provincial Superior from Turin. Later, he was joined by Brother Esteban Burja from Argentina who eventually returned back home after less than two years.

Salesians from India to Eastern Africa

The Rector Major, Fr Egidio Vigano, visited the provinces of India in 1979. During his visit, he spoke very enthusiastically to the Provincials, then five in number, and their council members about the challenge that he was going to offer to the Indian Provinces, namely, to take up some specific role in Project Africa. The Provincials responded enthusiastically to take up the challenge. The Salesian Provincial Conference of India (SPCI), under the direction of Fr Thomas Panakezham, the Regional Superior for Australasia then, appointed Fr Tony D'Souza, then Provincial of Bombay (INB) to coordinate the initiative.

In May 1979, months before Fr Dario Superina had reached Kenya, Fr Harry Rasmussen and Fr Tony D'Souza made their first missionary journey travelling extensively around Kenya and Tanzania. More specifically, they visited the dioceses in these countries and met the respective Bishops who had requested for Salesian Missionaries. With these Bishops they visited missions such as Korr in Kenya, Dodoma,

[19] With one abstention.

Iringa and Mafinga in Tanzania.[20] Their intention to visit Rumbek in South Sudan was not possible due to visa issues. On return to India, Fr. Tony travelled to all the Provinces of India, presenting to his fellow Provincials the locations that could be the first possible missions for the Salesians from India. The Provincials agreed and 15 confreres were identified to be part of the pioneering team. It was also agreed that the confreres from different Provinces would work together in the missions chosen. After meeting and explaining to the chosen confreres what Fr Tony knew about the locations and the nature of work that awaited them, their target mission was fixed. These were:[21]

From Bombay[22] ***Province***
Fr Crispin D'Souza to Dodoma, Tanzania
Fr Lawrence D'Souza to Rumbek, the Sudan
Fr Antony Fernandes to Mafinga in Tanzania

From Madras[23] ***Province***
Fr Peter Mathew Fernando to Mafinga, Tanzania
Fr John Vellayil to Iringa, Tanzania
Bro. Baron Tyrone to Iringa, Tanzania

From Bangalore Province
Bro. Celestine Nathan[24] to Dodoma, Tanzania
Fr Joseph Pulikkal to Mafinga, Tanzania
Fr Mathew M. Vadacherry to Korr, Kenya
Fr Jacob Kizhakayil to Rumbek, the Sudan

From Calcutta[25] ***Province***
Brother Trophy D'Souza to Dodoma, Tanzania
Fr. Thomas Punchekunnel to Korr, Kenya

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[20] Bp. Mario Mgulunde of Iringa Diocese and Bp. Mathias J. Isuja of Dodoma Diocese were great friends till their dying days. While making an *ad limina* visit, they both thought it best to follow up on their written invitations already sent to the Superiors in Rome, by visiting and emphasizing in person to the Rector Major, their eagerness to have the Salesians to help out in the missions in their respective dioceses.

[21] Helpful for this section was also: Joseph Pulikkal, "Don Bosco in Eastern Africa: From Dream to Reality." Nairobi: *Salesian Bulletin* (02/02/2009).

[22] Bombay was renamed by the state government as 'Mumbai' in 1996.

[23] Madras was renamed by the state government as 'Chennai' in 1996.

[24] Though originally from Chennai city, Bro. Celestine was in Andhra at the time of the creation of the Province of Bangalore in 1979, which then consisted of three states of India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala.

[25] Calcutta was renamed by the state government as 'Kolkata' in 2001.

From Gauhati Province
Fr. George Padinjaraparambil to Korr, Kenya
Fr. James Pulickal to Rumbek, Sudan
Fr. Stephen Chemmalakuzhy to Iringa, Tanzania

Meanwhile, Fr Ernesto De Gaspari, an Italian by birth who had gone out to Australia as a missionary, was interested in joining the Project Africa. He was by then seven years a priest. In conversation with Fr Tohill, he was assigned to the Sudan. In preparation for this, he was sent to Cairo to learn Arabic. He would join the confreres assigned to the Sudan arriving at Juba around 10th December 1980.

(Photo taken at Mumbai, 28th August 1980 – the night before departure)

The arrival of the 2nd Group of Salesians in Kenya

The first pages of the chronicles of the community of Korr, written by Fr Mathew M. Vadacherry, SDB on 6th October 1980, include detailed descriptions of the events surrounding the preparation and execution of the arrival of the Salesians from India in Eastern Africa. I quote here,

almost verbatim, an extract in order to capture the excitement of the first group:

> *Each Province had a send-off function for their own confreres, after which all the 15 Salesians gathered in the Provincial House of Bombay for a "live-in-experience" of about ten days. On the last day, on 28th August 1980, at a solemn function in the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians at Matunga, Bombay, all the fifteen were given missionary crosses by Archbishop Antonio Maria Javierre Ortas, SDB, then Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican, who happened to be in India at that time.[26] In the early hours of 29th August 1980, all fifteen were sent off to Pisana-the Salesian Generalate, Rome by Air India Flight 129 from Bombay. In Pisana, they had an orientation course until 24th September.[27] On 25th September, the Rector Major, Fr. Egidio Vigano gave all of them the missionary crosses once again, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Turin. On the same day, they were sent on pilgrimage to Lourdes, to dedicate their lives of missionary work to our Blessed Mother. They returned to Pisana on the night of 2nd October 1980.[28]*
>
> *All groups, except those for Rumbek, were scheduled to leave Rome on Sunday, 5th October 1980, for Tanzania and Kenya. But on 4th October, news came from Tanzania that those for Tanzania should not leave right away since their Entry Permits were not yet obtained. There was a commotion that night at Pisana. All wanted to get the correct news about this. Fr. Tohill, who had arranged their departure and bought the tickets had been admitted at the hospital on 4th October evening for a Hernia operation, before he could know of this sudden development. So, Fr. Harry Rasmussen phoned to Dar es Salaam and they contacted Dodoma. In short, on Sunday 5th October morning, confirmation came that those for Tanzania should not leave Italy. And so only the three for Korr left on that day for Africa. They left Fiumicino Airport at 10.45pm by Kenyan Airways Flight KQ717. After a short halt at Mombasa, they landed in Nairobi on Monday, 6 October at 9.05am. Since they too did not have Visas or entry permits, or return tickets, they were*

[26] In 1976, Pope Paul VI had made him Archbishop and secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education. He became cardinal deacon in 1988, as well as the librarian and archivist of the Holy Roman Church. In 1992 he was elevated to cardinal priest and prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, positions he kept until 1996. He died in 2007 in Rome.

[27] There were also 12 others from other provinces who joined those from India for the orientation course.

[28] Almost verbatim narrative from the Chronicles of Korr Mission, dated 6th October 1980.

kept at the Airport till the Consolata Fathers from Nairobi who had come to receive them gave in writing to the Immigration Officer that they are hereafter responsible for the three Salesians.

The Consolata Fathers then took them to Flora Hostel (belonging to the Consolata Sisters) where Fr. George Padinjaraparambil and Fr. Thomas Punchekunnel were accommodated. They then took Fr. Mathew Vadacherry to the Methodist Guest House, Oloitokitok Close, Nairobi. This was about 5kms away from Flora Hostel. So, they began to live at the two centres in Nairobi from the very first day of their arrival in this capital.

The Bishop Cavallera of Marsabit,[29] under whom Korr Mission was, had made this arrangement for giving them a chance to learn Swahili. He could not get a place where all the three could stay together! "So here we are in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.... We had with us our simple belongings and $200 that Fr. Tohill had given us (in fact, he had given an envelope to each community leader)."

On 16th October 1980, the two Salesians from Siakago, Fr Dario Superina and Bro Esteban Burja and the three who were assigned to Korr mission, namely, Fr Mathew M. Vadacherry, Fr. George Padinjaraparambil and Fr Thomas Punchekunnel had a cordial meeting. On the next day, Fr Harry Rasmussen, the coordinator of Project Africa at the Generalate, flew into Nairobi from Madagascar. Eventually, Fr Tony D'Souza also landed there from Bombay.

Finally, on Saturday, 1st November 1980, the three Salesians who were assigned to Korr mission together with Fr Harry and Fr Tony reached Korr in the company of Bishop Cavalerra and Fr Peter Morassi, IMC, the Parish Priest of Laisamis. The community chronicles[30] recall, "The whole village of Korr came to receive us. The Bishop said the mass in the existing church. I should say that the church was full with men, women, and children." A meeting with the people followed. And the Bishop declared the establishment of the Parish dedicated to St John Bosco – Don Bosco Korr. After this introduction, they returned to Nairobi visiting Siakago on the way and greeting the Salesians there – being envious of the good accommodation, the greenery, the mangoes in Siakago, and continued with their Swahili lessons back in Nairobi.

[29] The diocese of Marsabit was created in 1964, and its first bishop was Mgr. Carlo Cavallera, IMC (1964 to 1981). He passed away on 22 Sept 1990.

[30] Daily, each Salesian community is expected to write an account of the events of the day. Throughout this work, 'chronicles' refers to this document that is preserved in every institution.

By 17th December 1980, cutting short their six-month Swahili course, the Salesian-trio decided to settle down in Korr. Korr is about 550 kms from Nairobi. Those days, the tarmac road ended in Isiolo. And after Laisamis there was no proper road but only a dusty track that kept changing during the rainy season. The adventures of the first weeks in Korr for the Salesians were marked by, having a cook who knew only to boil water, bath that had to be taken in the open-air after sunset with water they fetched from a pump, the scorching heat during the day, the relentless wind and the fine dust in the makeshift shelters, and the long nights without electricity. All these make an entertaining but empathetic reading for us today. The parish was formally taken up on 24th May 1981. The Salesians from Siakago had travelled to Korr for this event.

Salesians Arrive in Tanzania

The nine Salesians assigned to Tanzania, Fr Peter Fernando, Fr John Vellayil, Fr Crispin D'Souza, Bro. Trophy D'Souza, Fr Tony Fernandes, Fr Joseph Pulikkal, Bro. Tyrone Baron, Bro. Celestine Nathan, and Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy, arrived in the country on 13th October 1980. After a few days of stay in Dar es Salaam, the Dodoma group headed towards their destination to be staying at the Bishop's House in Dodoma. The rest of the group headed towards Mafinga for their first Swahili Course. Bishop Mario Mgulunde (1931-2006)[31] had a great vision for the Salesians and assisted them at every step of the actualisation of the Salesian mission in the diocese since their arrival and until his transfer to Tabora in 1985.

During the months of the Swahili course, they kept up their Salesian practices such as the monthly recollections, commemoration of Mary Help of Christians on 24th of the month and of Don Bosco on the last day, and the Salesian feasts. Meanwhile, they were also doing the groundwork for their ministry in Iringa diocese by visiting and meeting fellow priests and the Diocesan hierarchy. Mgsr Stanislaus Daki, the Vicar General of Iringa Diocese gets mentioned rather often in the chronicles kept by one of the members of the Iringa group, while still being in Mafinga even before the communities were established. The chronicles recall with a sense of achievement how some of them were able to preside at the Eucharist in Swahili for the first time on 15th November, after a month of their arrival in the country.

After helping out in the respective parishes the Bishop assigned them to during Christmas 1980, the community members of Iringa and Mafinga headed towards Kipalapala, in Tabora, about 850 kms from Dar es Salaam,

[31] A native of Kalenga-Iringa himself, Mario Epifanio Abdallah Mgulunde was ordained the Bishop of Iringa in 1970 and remained there until 1985, when he was transferred to Tabora Diocese, Tanzania, where he died in 2006, at the age of 75.

Tanzania, on 10th January 1981, for a more formal and longer Swahili course. Bro. Baron Tyron continued to stay at the Bishop's House of Iringa. Once again, the account of their experience at Kipalapala captures their Salesian identity. On 31st January 1981, the feast of Don Bosco was celebrated solemnly at the language centre and a volleyball match was held between the Salesians and the rest of the community. Unfortunately, the Salesians lost the game. "Failure is the steppingstone to success," notes the chronicler. The three-month long language course ended around the beginning of April 1981, and the Salesians returned to their respective locations of their future mission.

On Palm Sunday, 12th April 1981, the parish of Mafinga was formally entrusted to the Salesians and the pioneers – Frs. Peter Mathew Fernando, Tony Fernandes and Joseph Pulikkal – launched out courageously without being cowed down by the challenges posed by the novelty of language and culture. Fr Peter, the senior most among the trio was the Parish Priest, and the other two in the first years of priesthood were assistant parish priests. Mafinga was the second parish that the Consolata Missionaries handed over to the Salesians in East Africa; the first being Siakago in Kenya. As per their policy, they handed over the parish with all the vehicles and bank accounts that were operated by the Consolatas for the parish.

In Iringa, the Regional headquarters and about 80 kms from Mafinga, Fr John Vellayil, Bro. Baron Tyrone and Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy were given the task of starting a work for the youth of the town of Iringa, this included teaching religion in schools and running an oratory. For a year they were hosted at the Bishop's residence. The Bishop also offered them a Peugeot pick-up 504 to facilitate their movements. Fr Stephen began the work among the youth in the town by carrying out a survey about the number and the needs of the youth in the locality, visiting all the schools. This was also meant to be the groundwork to establish a youth centre and technical school at the location called 'Frelimo', a little out of the Iringa town. The land was offered by the government to the Salesians. There was a cordial relationship between the SDB communities in Mafinga and Iringa, celebrating birthdays, and coming together for monthly recollections and retreats. Fr Tony D'Souza, the Provincial from Bombay, paid the first "canonical visit" to the communities in July 1981. For a few months during the year, Brother Baron went to stay with the *Servi Cordis Immaculati Maria*-SCIM Brothers at Tosamaganga, with the aim of assisting the Teresina Sisters to run the printing press. Months later, the printing press would eventually come under the care of the Salesians at Frelimo.

The building work for the Don Bosco Technical School and Youth Centre began on 24th September 1981 with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. In the same week, Fr Dominic Padinjaraparambil joined the

Mafinga community and Mr John Williams joined the Iringa community.[32] The residence for the Salesians was built by the Diocese and on 24th May 1982, the Salesians moved into their new home and commenced youth centre activities. Finally, the buildings of the workshops were blessed on 24th April 1983. Thus, the school ministry began.

At Dodoma too, a similar story would be played out. The confreres, Fr Crispin D'Souza (Rector), Bro. Trophy D'Souza and Bro. Celestine Nathan arrived in Dodoma after a few days of their landing in Dar es Salaam. For months, they stayed at the Bishop's House. From January to April 1981, they attended the Swahili course at Kipalapala. On their return they continued to stay at the Bishop's house, hosted by Bishop Mathias Joseph Isuja (1929-2016).[33] Even while living at the Bishop's residence, the Salesians were noted for their community life. They were found praying the rosary as a 'community' every evening after supper. There was a genuine bonding among them.

After some months of restless waiting, they acquired the land at Miyuji and the building work progressed beginning with the residence of the Salesians. During the building work, they stayed with the Jesuits for some time. Work began on the school building on November 7, 1981, and as the work progressed in small strides the SDB began some youth activities. They faced many initial difficulties. For one, the land was a low-lying area. In addition, the hydrophobic soil of Dodoma that does not absorb water easily contributed to floods during the rainy season disrupting the progress of the building work. Finally, on 30 October 1982, exactly two years after their arrival the Salesian community was able to move to the new location having made their first intake in the school in September of that year.

Arrival of Salesians in Sudan

On 6th November 1980, the three Salesians who were assigned to the Sudan from Indian missionary expedition, Fr Jacob Kizhakayil (KC), Fr Lawrence D'Souza, and Fr. James Pulickal, arrived in Nairobi from Rome to head towards Rumbek Diocese. They stayed with Fr Marengoni[34] at the

[32] They arrived on 27/09/1981. Both of them came from Calcutta. Mr John William, a printer by profession, was a Salesian Cooperator then, later he would go back to India to become a Salesian and make his First Profession on 24th May 1985. A later chapter in this part of the book covers that story. Fr Dominic would soon move to Mafinga parish where he was known for planting the fruit trees and carrying out tremendous manual work.

[33] Bishop of Dodoma from 1972 to 2005. Fr Candido, a Passionist was the diocesan treasurer who helped the Salesians to buy the land.

[34] Father Giovanni Marengoni (1922-2007) was a Comboni Missionary who founded three Religious Institutes: The Apostles of Jesus, The Evangelising

Apostles of Jesus Seminary, Langata, waiting for their visa to travel to the Sudan. Meanwhile, they were offered some Arabic classes, but the Salesians were rather restless with enthusiasm, anxious to reach their mission land rather than to "waste" time in Nairobi, as evidenced by their letters to Fr Tony D'Souza, the Salesian Provincial of Bombay. Eventually, on 5th December 1980, out of missionary zeal, we might say, Fr Lawrence D'Souza travelled by road from Nairobi to Juba together with a Comboni Brother. A few days later, he was joined by Fr. Jacob Kizhakayil and Fr. James Pulickal in Juba who both travelled by plane. Soon, Fr. Ernesto Di Gaspari flew in from Cairo. They stayed with the diocesan clergy in St. Joseph's parish, Juba. After a month, they were taken by Fr. Peter Dada to his parish in Yei, in the diocese of Rumbek to which they were destined. The group stayed in Yei until 19th January 1981.[35] Fr James proceded alone to Maridi. He found that the Bishop was a bit surprised at his arrival because the accommodation for the Salesians was not yet ready. Fr James himself had to set the beds and clean the rooms. After a few days, the rest of the group joined him. The Bishop of Rumbek, Gabriel Dwatuka Datuka (1922-1990)[36] had his residence in Maridi, about 200 kms from Juba. Being a Zande, perhaps he felt it safer to live among his own people in Maridi rather than in Rumbek.[37] The first SDB Community in Maridi was made up of the four confreres mentioned above. They were entrusted with the pastoral care of Maridi, with Fr. Jacob as the parish priest and superior of the community; Fr Ernesto was the assistant parish priest and following up the church and liturgy; Fr James was in charge of the school in Munguo; and Fr Lawrence was the community bursar and chaplain in the local government schools.

In due course, the Salesians also began to work on a school building in the church compound. Unfortunately, from the perspective of the Salesians there, the Bishop did not accept the way a religious congregation operates. He wanted to have the SDB totally under his authority. He demanded strict and prompt obedience from the Salesians, and often they had to be at his beck and call and do his errands, particularly in looking after his own coffee estate and the school which he claimed to be his own. On the other hand, Salesians wished to spend their time in direct pastoral ministry. Meanwhile, there was also a lot of interference from the family members of the Bishop regarding

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Sisters and the Contemplative Evangelisers. At the time of the arrival, he had founded only the Apostles of Jesus.

[35] There is a confusion of dates emerging from different sources.

[36] Bishop of Rumbek from 1976 to 1982, when he resigned at the age of 60, probably demanded by the Nuncio in Khartoum. He continued to serve in Maridi as the parish priest. And he died in a Cairo hospital on 18th February 1990.

[37] Jacob THELAKKADAN, "Beginning of Salesian Work in the Sudan" (Rome: Salesian Pontifical University, 2004-2005). Unpublished Licentiate work.

administrative tasks. This led to misunderstandings, and the situation began to get sour by the day.

The Salesians themselves, coming from diverse backgrounds and with varying personalities, began to have differences of opinions among themselves – as they wrote individually to the Provincial back in Bombay – some of whom took the side of the Bishop. What emerges from a well preserved record of correspondence between the four confreres with the Provincial[38] during the 15 months that ensued is that apparently Fr Lawrence had some straight forward confrontation with the Bishop, which, Fr Ernesto felt was disrespectful to the Bishop. Fr Ernesto also suffered from insomnia, which, in the words of Fr Jacob, was on account of the fact that the former had expected to be the leader of the community. Meanwhile, Fr James was energetic and passionate about his mission getting involved in some accidents (with a motor-bike) and suffering from strong bouts of malaria. In between, in July 1981, Fr Tony D'Souza did pay a visit to Maridi and worked towards a reconciliation between the Bishop and the community, and tried to foster a better rapport among the confreres themselves. While he returned to India with a reasonable sense of hope, the situation soon got worse in the subsequent months. Fr Jacob himself was often critical, and sometimes cynical about the whole situation that evolved. In a letter written in August 1981, the Provincial Superior gently invited Fr Jacob to live up to the Salesian virtue of optimism! Fr Jacob was also affected by rheumatism and eventually had to travel to Nairobi for treatment in October 1981. The Provincial used this opportunity strategically to ask him not to return to Maridi, making Fr Ernesto in-charge of the community.

The last straw on the camel's back was when the Bishop accused the Salesians of not teaching the right Catholic faith, which might have been based on the report by the unhappy catechist at the parish centre. Finally, in March 1982, exactly after 450 days of the Salesian presence in Maridi, during an ecclesiastical court session held by the Bishop, the Bishop ordered the Salesians to leave his diocese under police escort! It is not clear if the police escort was to ensure the security of the Salesians on their journey back, or to humiliate them! The three were taken by a truck to Juba. The journey was certainly an adventurous one for Fr. Lawrence and Fr. Ernesto. In fact, they were involved in an accident and on arrival in Juba, Fr. Ernesto was admitted to the hospital with a deep head injury. Archbishop Augusto Barone of Juba Diocese then intervened and arranged for the priests to be flown to Wilson Airport, Nairobi. In Nairobi Hospital, Fr. Ernesto was restored to health. Meanwhile, Fr. James Pulickal stayed on in Juba until April 1982, and found his way back to Nairobi by truck via Kampala. This journey was also coloured by some adventure for Fr James as some people wanted to rob his belongings somewhere during the journey.

[38] Cf. folder in the archives of Provincial House, Nairobi.

Thus, the first Salesian presence in the Sudan was closed in a dramatic manner. The irregularity of their expulsion from Rumbek Diocese was eventually dealt with by the Salesian Superiors in Rome with the Holy See. The Bishop himself was requested by the Holy See to resign at the age of 60. It is not clear if his resignation was demanded on account of the way he dealt with the Salesians, or it was also contributed by the growing conflict between him and the local clergy. Perhaps it was both. Word spread around in the Sudan that the Salesians are so powerful even as to remove a Bishop! As for the Salesians, since there were pending invitations from other Bishops in the Sudan, almost immediately they would be reassigned to Tonj and Juba. And this is a story for another chapter.

Box 2
The first Salesian to set foot in Eastern Africa

Close your eyes! Here is a surprise! The first known Salesian to set foot on the soil of Eastern Africa for purposes of ministry, could be said to be Fr John Macguire, SDB (1916-1989)[39] from Britain. John professed as a Salesian at Shrigley-Oxford, UK, at the age of 20. He was ordained a Salesian priest in 1946. He served for almost 20 years as a priest in various roles in the UK. During this period, he joined Cardinal John Heenan (1905-1975) of Westminster, London, in his travelling mission during his summer holidays, that took him to British controlled territories in Africa. Eventually, Cardinal Heenan approached Fr. Provincial for a Chaplain to the University of Kampala (Makerere University), Uganda, and John's name came to the fore. Fr John Macguire spent seven very rewarding years there (possibly from 1966-1973). Eventually, he returned to the UK and served as a chaplain at the University of Reading. He breathed his last in 1989.

[39] J. Walsh, SDB, *Father John Maguire SDB* Obituary, March 1989).

Chapter 3
Early Salesian Missions in Kenya

Kenya in the 1980s

In 1895, the British established the East Africa Protectorate in Kenya, whose territory kept growing with the British province of Uganda annexed together in 1902, and in 1920, the Colony of Kenya was established. After World War II, it became increasingly difficult for the British to maintain a vast empire and they began to declare independence to many of their former colonies. The independent Republic of Kenya was formed in 1963. It was ruled as a *de facto* one-party state by the Kenya African National Union (KANU), led by Jomo Kenyatta from 1963 to 1978. Kenyatta was succeeded by Daniel Arap Moi. Following a coup attempt in 1982, President Moi began a near-dictatorial rule, changing the constitutions in his favour in 1987. Eventually, after the end of the Cold War, the Western countries became aware of the infringement of human rights in Kenya, and President Moi was forced to adopt a multi-party "democracy" in 1991, with elections in 1992. The situation in which the Salesians arrived was this of the 1980s.

What was the socio-economic situation like? After the coup attempt of 1982, ethnic sentiments began to surface more noticeably across Kenya. This was fuelled by a greater awareness of the ethnic biases around land reallocation in the years following independence, accompanied by land-grabbing carried out by some influential ethnic leaders, and the lop-sided narrative about the coup itself. These tensions culminated in violent ethnic clashes of 1991. These tensions have resurfaced every now and then especially around the election period. The Salesians' missionary entry points in Kenya were in the rural areas which were not hotspots of politics. However, Siakago was in the heartland of the Embu people who were powerbrokers of the Moi era of the 1980's. As for the northern parts of Kenya, such as Marsabit (administratively, this was part of the Eastern Province until 2010) where Korr was also located, were largely considered insignificant, and hence isolated by the Centre, and neglected by Nairobi. Hence, these regions where pastoral communities lived lacked infrastructure and access to social amenities, and thus experienced famine almost every dry season.[40] This chapter will explore also how the

[40] Amartya Sen won the Nobel Prize in 1998 for demonstrating that there is no correlation between drought and famine in his publication in 1981. Cf. Amartya K. SEN, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Salesians, finding themselves in these socio-economic situations, responded to the needs of the people.

As regards the situation of Christianity, and the Catholic Church in particular, the first known Europeans arrived in Kenya towards the end of the 15th century. In 1498, Vasco da Gama entered into treaty with the Muslim ruler of Malindi, about 100 kms from Mombasa on the Kenyan coast. This paved the way for the subsequent arrival of the Portuguese along the coast of Eastern Africa. By 1506, the first group of about 40 people were baptised in Kilwa in Tanzania, in the current day geography. The 16th century witnessed some attempts in evangelisation along the coastal regions between Mombasa and Zanzibar, but this was also marked by violent encounters between the Portuguese Christians and the Muslim rulers. In effect, these conflicts were counter-witness to Christian ideals.[41] In any case, by 1624, there seems to have been four established places of Catholic worship in Mombasa, including an Augustinian monastery. However, it was only in the 19th century, from 1844, that serious evangelization began to take place in the interior of the Kenya mainland with the arrival of the Anglican missionaries. The Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) arrived in Mombasa in 1889 and began to evangelize the environs of Mombasa, and began to move to the interior parts of Kenya especially among the Kamba people. They established St Austins Mission in Nairobi in 1891. The Spiritans are credited with bringing coffee to Kenya and Tanzania! Eventually, the Consolata Missionaries arrived in June 1902 and began their evangelization among the Kikuyu people in the Central Province, beginning in Kiambu. The Mill Hill Missionaries evangelized parts of Kisumu among the Luo people beginning from 1903, and slowly spread among the Luhya and Kisii territories. Other missionary societies followed. These missionaries were also accompanied by numerous groups of religious women. The Catholic Church began to flourish. In 1957, Bp Maurice Otunga became the first African auxiliary bishop of Kisumu. He was moved to Nairobi Archdiocese in 1971, and became a Cardinal in 1973. By the time Pope John Paul II visited Kenya in 1980, the Catholic population in the country was estimated to be around 3 million, among a total population of 16.42 million, spread across 24 ecclesiastical units which included archdioceses, dioceses, vicariates, and prefectures.

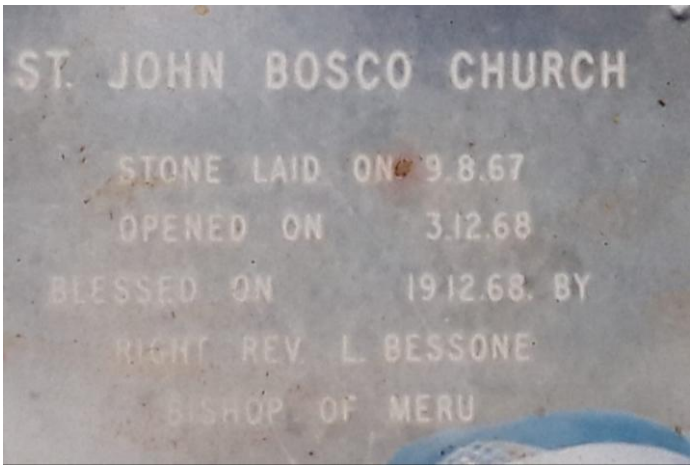
Siakago Mission

As narrated in the previous chapter, the first mission in Kenya, taken up by the confreres coming from the Italian Central Province (ICE), was the parish in Siakago, in Mbeere-land, which was under the care of the

[41] Cf. Stephen Mbugua NGARI, History of Catholic Church in Kenya: Past and Present. Paper presentation to ICCM, Nairobi, 2016.

Consolata missionaries. Initially, Fr Dario stayed and worked with them in the parish of Siakago. And on the Solemnity of Don Bosco in 1981, the Salesian Community was constituted and the presence was formally initiated. As said earlier, he was joined by Brother Esteban Burja from Argentina. We have already described in some detail the early works in Siakago.[42]

When the parish church of Siakago was first built in 1948, it was dedicated to St Francis Xavier. However, the Salesians changed the patron saint to St John Bosco. Strangely enough, out of their enthusiastic affection for Don Bosco, they even changed the original plaque to ensure this change.[43]



The second group of Salesians from Turin with an aim of providing an enforcement for the Salesian presence in Kenya consisted of three Salesians: Fr Vincenzo Donati,[44] Fr Felice Molino[45], and Fr Mario Rombustellini. While Frs Vincenzo and Mario went to Malta for a few months to learn English, Fr Felice busied himself learning more practical skills like motor vehicle mechanics, back in Italy. The three arrived in

[42] Since the parish was handed back to the Diocese in 2003, information on the Salesian contributions to the parish from 1980 to 2003 has not been easy to be retrieved. We hope in subsequent editions this information can be supplemented.

[43] Thanks for Mr Anastasio Kiura Nyaga for his contribution to this brief sectoin.

[44] Born on 12th March 1928, professed as a Salesian on 16th September 1944, and got ordained on 8th December 1954. After being dispatched to Japan in 1950, Vincenzo went to Korea in 1962 and worked at Gwangju Salesian High School for 19 years. He was loved unreservedly by his teenage friends. After earning respect for his benevolent character and austere, honest attitude, he suddenly decided to join the group going out to Kenya in 1981, at the age of 53.

[45] Born on 22nd May 1947, professed on 16th August 1966, and ordained on 17th September 1977. Worked in a parish for three years, and in 1980 opted to join the Project Africa.

Kenya on 11th December 1981. They joined Fr Dario in helping out the mission in Siakago. We have already described in some detail the early works in Siakago. Fr Dario remained as the parish priest until 1990. He fostered vocations in the parish, by encouraging the adolescents to belong to 'vocation groups'.

Development of Don Bosco Mission in Korr and Marsabit

The three confreres who arrived in Kenya from India via Rome on 6th October 1980, were assigned to the frontier mission of Korr, in the heart of the Kaisut desert. The Indian missionary team comprising Fr Mathew Vadassery, Fr George Padinjareparambil and Fr Thomas Punchekunnel, spent a few months at the Flora Hostel in Nairobi and were initiated in the new cultural and linguistic realities they were to face in their new mission. Eventually, on 24th May 1981, the Salesians took up residence in this fledgling mission.

Prior to the arrival of the Salesians, a *Fidei Donum* missionary from Italy, by the name of Fr Redento Tignonsini, was the first to establish a mission in what was known later as Korr.[46] Fr Redento arrived in Kenya in 1968 having been ordained a priest in Brescia, Italy. He was about thirty years old when he arrived. Having worked for some years in several places including Baragoi, Sololo on the border of Kenya and Ethiopia, he arrived at Korr in 1972. Initially he stayed at a manyatta,[47] and gradually he found a place for himself and established his camp in a place that is now called Geyyo Bathiri (literally, Priest's Trees). As he found water there, people started to live around his camp. In 1973, Fr Redento started a small dispensary. The following year, he constructed water pans and wells. Seeing the necessity of making roads he bought a bulldozer and a grader, and with the help of paid workers, roads were made from Korr to Halisurwa, Laisamis, Illaut, Kargi and Ngurnit. The year 1975 saw the construction of two windmills, one at Goborre and another in Korr centre. For hygiene purposes he made a few pit latrines around his camp. Resting places were also made for visitors.

[46] These details are from the 50th Anniversary of Korr Souvenir.

[47] Among pastoralist communities of Eastern Africa, a "manyatta" is a group of huts forming a unit within a common fence, usually belonging to a single clan. As such, clans are exogamous. Clans make up a tribe, which are generally endogamous.

In the same year, he started to buy goats, cows and camels and distributed them among the catechists and some poor people. Free food distribution was already ongoing, having been started in 1972. By 1975, more than 40 catechists were appointed, and these catechists were to carry food to each manyatta and distribute it to the people. The nursery school, which he started, had some 20 children. Fr Redento had a great respect for the Rendille nomadic way of life and the indigenous spiritual values of their culture.

The work of evangelization started when Fr Redento was staying in manyatta Ong'eli. In his work he was helped by Mr. Digir Turoga[48] who accompanied Fr Redento in his village tours. The first baptism took place in 1975. A small prayer house was constructed in 1973, and in 1975 it was made a bit larger. This was the 'church' that the Salesians found when they arrived, and it remained as the parish church until 1986.

In 1976, Fr Redento returned to Italy,[49] and Korr became part of Laisamis parish. Fr Peter Moruzzi and Fr Giuliani of the Consolata missionaries would come for usual mission activities, especially the administration of sacraments, celebrations of masses, and human promotion activities. They were not resident there. Therefore, when the Salesians arrived, while the major works established by Fr Redento was visible, the Korr Mission itself was largely neglected. The previous chapter of this book enumerated the Salesians' early days in Korr and the taking up of the parish formally on 24th May 1980. Soon the Salesians got busy starting various educative and evangelisation projects. In September 1981, they started the Don Bosco Nursery school with two teachers. December 21st, 1981, was a happy day for the missionaries as the new Bishop Rt Rev Ambrose Ravasi baptised 171 catechumens at the old church. And within a month, on 3rd January 1982, Ngurnit Nursery School was started. Soon, there were some changes in the composition of the Salesian community, with the arrival of Fr John Premoli.

In order to assist the Salesians with their work among women, in 1983, they invited the Nirmala Dhasigal Sisters,[50] a diocesan Congregation of Trichur Archdiocese, Kerala, India, who joined the Salesians. They took care of the women-folk and the girls, instructing them in the Christian faith. They also began health programmes for the people in the vast mission area. The first group of sisters who arrived on 19th April 1983 were: Srs Leela (Superior), Sr Lucy, Sr Annie, and Sr Teresa.[51]

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[48] Cf. Lloyd TIMBERLAKE, *Only One Earth*. London: Routledge, 1987.

[49] Fr. Redento died on 16th May 2021 in Italy.

[50] The Society of Nirmala Dhasi Sisters (SNDS) was started in the year 1971 in the Diocese of Trichur, Mar Joseph Kundukulam, the then Bishop of the Diocese, being its Founder, and Rev. Msgr. Joseph Vilangadan, its Co-Founder.

[51] On 31st March 2019, sadly the Nirmala Dhasi Sisters left Don Bosco Korr Parish for another assignment after having been in Korr for 36 years.

Catholic Technical School, Marsabit

Soon there was another offer from the Diocese of Marsabit to the Salesians, who were happy that there was a possibility for a second Salesian presence in the diocese of Marsabit: a technical school. The school was started by the Consolata missionaries in 1968. It was closed down for lack of personnel to run it in 1976. Since 1977, when it was reopened, it was being managed by three young Swiss volunteers commissioned by the Bethlehem Society.[52] It was a residential school preparing the students for the trade exams. Admissions were offered to students who completed grade seven, and were selected and sent by the various missions of the diocese of Marsabit. The diocese of Marsabit was financing the institution. The students' fees was Khs.250/- per term.

On 24th November 1982, Bishop Ambrose Ravasi, IMC, handed over the Catholic Technical School at Marsabit to the Salesians. Fr George Padinjaraparambil (PD George) was the coordinator of the Salesian presence; together with Fr Mathias D'Cunha and Bro Cherian Palathunkal they were the first to be assigned there. On 2nd Feb 1983, at the liturgical celebration of the Feast of Don Bosco the official agreement was signed.

When the Salesians took up the school, it had 71 boys doing two-year courses in carpentry, motor mechanics, and masonry leading to Grade III exams. The Salesians had to carry out a lot of maintenance work to bring the school back on its feet. This included cleaning up, repairing parts of the building, and construction of a new water tank and washrooms. The Salesians were also quick to note that staff records were missing, and their statutory deductions had not been remitted for several years. The Salesians also had to look for funds to take care of the operational costs, partly supported by the diocese. At the first Board Meeting held on 4th May 1983, it was observed, "From information that could be gathered from the parishes, the boys have so far, a positive reaction to the school under the new management's administration and have even commented that it is 'like a family'." [53] What a tribute to the Salesian spirit!

Later in August 1983, Fr PD George was moved back to Korr as the Parish Priest, and Fr Mathias took over as the one in-charge at the Marsabit school. Two young Salesians, clerics V.J. Mathew and Loyola Castellino also joined the community. As the humdrum of school life set in, the relationship among the confreres was marked by ebbs and tides.[54] Again at the Board Meeting of January 1984, the bishop expressed satisfaction

[52] Cf. Annual Report, dt. August 1984.

[53] Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 4th May 1983. Cf. SDB Archives in Nairobi.

[54] Letter from Fr Mathias D'Cunha to Fr Tony D'Souza.

at the way the school was being run. In the middle of the same year, the young Salesian Loyola left for theological studies back to India. In June 1984, Fr Jacob Thelekkadan joined the community and took up the task of boarding director and bursar. Three aspirants, Nicholas Nyaga Kiringa, Joseph K. Nyagah, and Simon Njeru Kathuri were accommodated with the Salesians from January 1983 to June 1984. These first group of aspirants from Kenya were basically recruited by the Salesians in Siakago. They left for Mafinga seminary in August 1984 to join the Tanzanian aspirants.

Despite all this, in a neatly typed annual report of the community in 1984[55], the Salesian members felt that "the future of this work for us Salesians here is not very certain!!!" The report itself mentions two problems – which seemed not very grave at that time. One, Fr Matthias D'Cuhna, not being a qualified person in M.V. Mechanics, while being in-charge of the department could not attract customers who would come to service their vehicles. Secondly, since 1984, the Muslim boys complained of being compelled to attend church services, a practice that was in place since 1983. And so, they were allowed not to attend the church liturgy, but could go to their mosque for their weekly worship.

Again on 13th June 1985, the community members wrote to the Delegation Superior, "After having completed a little over two years of stay here at the Catholic Technical School, Marsabit-Kenya, we have made an evaluation. We find that it is not advisable to continue with the existing agreement. We therefore propose that we should not renew the agreement."[56] What was the problem with the existing agreement? A hind-sight examination of the communication between the diocese of Marsabit and the Salesians suggests that there were some subtle issues that could not be resolved amicably:

Firstly, when the Salesians took up the parish of Korr also in the diocese of Marsabit, it was under the leadership of Bishop Carlo Maria Cavellera, IMC (bishop from 1964), who resigned from office on 19th June 1981, at the age of 72. He had proposed to the Salesians the possibility of taking up the Catholic Technical School. The new bishop, Ambrose Ravasi resumed the conversation with the Salesian superior about the school. Fr Tony D'Souza, however, had some minor problems in communication with the new bishop.

Secondly, the Salesians were not comfortable about the role of the Board in relation to the school, partly due to the fact that the Indian Salesians were not familiar with such a structure to which they had to report. According to the contract between the diocese and the Salesians, the diocese had the ownership of the school but the management was

[55] The exact date of this report could not be established.

[56] Letter signed by three Salesians addressed to Fr Tony D'Souza, the Delegate for Salesian Eastern Africa, dt. 13th June 1985.

entrusted to the Salesians. This was not easily understood by the members of the community.

Finally, on 10th September 1983, the Bishop appointed the Diocesan Development Coordinator, Fr Leonel, as a member of the Board. The bishop was aware that this could create interference, therefore, he suggested that Fr Leonel be only an invitee to the Board. All this accrued to a situation where the Salesians decided that the contract due for renewal in January 1985 would be acceptable only on the condition that the diocese "should provide complete management responsibility to the Salesian Society."[57]

Since the diocese was not relenting, despite the good atmosphere that existed at the school, Fr Tony D'souza offered a one-year notice to the bishop on 2nd January 1985, expressing the intention of the Salesians not to renew the contract, without listing the reasons, but only referring to previous discussions. The Bishop in his reply to the notice, dated 26th January 1985, expressed shock of this "abrupt decision," and he pointed out that no alternatives were suggested by the Salesians. On the part of the Salesians there was no going back on that decision.[58] Thus, sadly on 14th November 1985, the school was handed back to the Diocese.

Salesian School in Embu

[57] Canonical Visitation Report dated 21st October 1984. What they meant was, 'complete ownership'. There is a lot of confusion between how 'complete management' was understood by both the parties. For the Bishop, this meant that the Diocese still had the ownership, but for the Salesians it meant ownership.

[58] In a letter dated 25th January 2002, Bishop Ravasi while writing to the Salesians to take back the school, notes: "It was I who welcomed them to Marsabit, signing the first "Agreement" with them for the period of 3 years. But unfortunately, towards the end of this first three years period, we were sorrowfully told that they would not renew their "Contract", unless the Diocese of Marsabit would agree to give them not only the responsibility of the management of the School, but the whole school, which would have become a Salesian Institution. We were surprised at that time of their decision, since we were very happy with their performance and of the results achieved. We asked them why. No other reasons, or complaints were ever given to us for their decision. The only reason that we were given was that it was the first time in their history that they were having the responsibility of the management of a school, which was not of their own."

At that time, my Consultors and most of the Diocesan Priests advised me to let the Salesians go and so they went. The decision was based on the fact that the Technical School was then the only Private School owned by the Diocese."

As the Salesians continued to minister at Siakago, it was keenly felt that the Salesians should have a presence of their own to implant the charism of Don Bosco. And the Divine Providence offered the means through the kind intervention of the then Bishop of Meru, Rt Rev. Silas Njiru. He gifted the Salesians with six acres of land belonging to his family, outside the Embu town on the road to Kirititi.

After a short break back in Italy in March 1983, Fr. Felice Molino was entrusted with the inevitable task of clearing the bush in the six-acre land. Going into the unknown, he camped in a small wooden hut with no facilities for running water or electricity. He came to discover that the land had no title deed, or perhaps the paper was misplaced. Not even the survey map of the place could be traced in Nairobi. Eventually, with persistent follow-up, building permit was obtained. In May 1983, with the support of Fr Oerder who was responsible for the Bonn Don Bosco Mission in Germany, the bush was cleared and the building work began right in earnest. It is interesting to note that Fr Tony D'Souza, then Delegate of the Salesians (from Indian provinces) in Eastern Africa, was kept informed of the developments in Embu by the Mission Procures.[59]

On 24th May 1984, another group of Salesians arrived from Turin. These included Bro Umberto, Bro Alfonso Morcelli, and Fr Luigi Abbate. While the Brothers helped Fr Felice in following up the work in Embu, Fr Abbate helped at Siakago. The construction work now gained speed and by 25th February 1985, the first group of boys who finished primary school arrived to start their class 8.[60] Fr Vincenzo Donati was the first Rector. In the subsequent years, more Salesians arrived from Italy. Bro Giorgio Conte and Cleric Gianni Rolandi came out to Embu for their years of practical training in 1985. Father Pierbattisti Sergio[61] arrived in Embu on 16th February 1987.

How did the boys of Embu respond to the Salesian charism? Fr Sergio, with his inimitable sense of analysis observes,[62] "The first thing that impressed me about the boys was that they were *too* eager to study. They always carried books in their hand – during the recreation, during games, and at night." This implied that they were not initially very eagerly warming up to the Salesian opportunities for music, games, and

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[59] Cf. Letter from Peter Karl Oerder of Bonn Missionsprokur to Fr Tony D'souza, dated 27th January 1984.

[60]The Kenyan government introduced the 8-4-4 system in 1985. Therefore, Don Bosco would take the first batch of Form I students in 1986. Probably, there were still class 8 students.

[61] Fr Sergio worked in Embu (1987-1991), later in Nairobi following up the students of philosophy for two years (1991-1993), then went back to Embu as Rector, and returned to Italy on 17th February 1997, after 10 years of intense ministry in Kenya.

[62] Interview conducted by Fr Sebastian Kol, in Italy, in 2008.

the development of other talents. Secondly, again in the words of Fr Sergio, "the boys easily organised strikes, and wanted to throw stones", even for reasons, that were perceived by the Salesians as being silly. Even when Fr Vincenzo was in-charge of the school, one day the students refused to go to the refectory to eat. Fr Vincenzo called them group by group to the dining room, listened to them, and then they ate, group by group. Unfortunately, by the time the Form IV students came to the dining room, there was no more food left. According to Fr Sergio, strikes were a communal expression of grievance, lacking the ability to see other possible expressions. Perhaps, it was also part of the culture of many schools in Kenya by then. The Salesians in their matchless style managed to get the boys on their side and succeeded gradually to realise the mission of Salesian holistic education.

The Mission at Makuyu

In the year 1986, Rt Rev Peter Kairo, the then Bishop of Murang'a invited the Salesians of Don Bosco into his diocese. Two places were proposed, that of Karaba Parish which was already established as a parish, and the out-station of Makuyu, which was in a developing area with many schools around, and thus offering a virgin soil for planting the Salesian charism. In 1987, the Salesians chose Makuyu and began to make pastoral interventions. Mr Cruz D'Souza, a Goan Catholic, who was an accountant at Kakuzi Plantations had facilitated the diocese to acquire this land from Kakuzi that would later become a Salesian property.[63] Initially, "Fr Felice Molino often commuted from Embu, a distance of over 80 kms of bumpy ride and spent most of the weekends with the people of Makuyu. He spent some time in Kitito parish to be nearer to Makuyu. During this time, he made contact with the several of the Small Christian Communities that were at that time part of Saba Saba Parish."[64] Finally, on 31st January 1988, when the Salesian world was celebrating the Centenary of the Death of Don Bosco, two Salesians, Fr Felice Molino and Fr Luigi Abbate, built a little residence at Makuyu.

Within a year of their coming, a giant step was made. On 1st January 1989, Don Bosco Parish was officially erected carving out territory from Saba Saba Parish. In the same year, the Salesian community was canonically established. Right from the start, Fr Felice felt the importance of involving the Salesian Sisters in the mission, just as Fr Dario had done

[63] Mr D'Souza became a close friend of the Salesians. Unfortunately, he died in a car accident returning from the Thiba project that the Salesians had initiated.

[64] Don Bosco Makuyu, 10 Years Anniversary Celebration Booklet, 31st January 1988.

in Siakago. Sr Rosa Farina was the pioneer; she visited Makuyu in 1989 on weekends from Nairobi where she was stationed. In 1991, the FMA presence was made a regular community with four sisters: Sr Ligia Aristostabella, Sr Rosa Farina, Sr Assunta Colossi, and Sr Susan Fernandes.

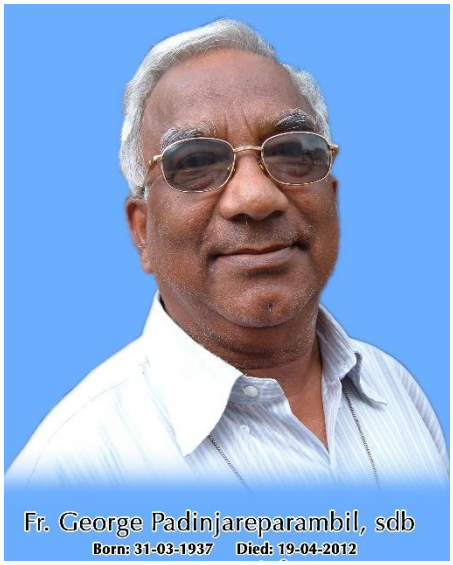
Soon, with the funding from the German Catholic Funding agency, Misereor, the construction of the Technical Training Centre. Eventually, Father Felice founded the "*Associazione Amici OK Onlus*" back in Italy to facilitate fund raising for the development of the Salesian mission in Kenya. In 1989, the Salesian Novitiate was constructed, attached to the Makuyu community. In 1990, Makuyu was happy to welcome the first batch of six novices with Fr. Benjamin Listello as their Director. With the tireless work of the Salesians and the FMA Sisters, and the consistent development of the infrastructure, the Salesian mission began to flourish. The number of prayer houses went up from eight in 1989 to 13 in 1995. We reserve the achievements of the school and the parish to another chapter in the subsequent volume that will fit well into the Salesian works in Eastern Africa in the second decade of their mission (1991 to 2000).

Box 3
JESUS BE MY SHIELD

A Poem by Fr George Padinjaraparambil, *one of the Salesian pioneers in Eastern Africa. Together with the physical valour and energy he had, he was a great English teacher and penned many poems. Here we sample one of his poems that brings out his closeness to mother earth and to Brother Jesus!*

When howling storms blow at will,
Driving monstrous waves with their wide-open jaws,
Everything on their way ready to swallow,
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

When unimpeded sweeps the whistling wind,
Widely sways the majestic palms,
Unsure what their fate shall be,
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.



When lightning flashes in the darkened sky,
And shoots its flaming arrows across the vault,
Turning thousand lights but a dull dying star,
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

When our mother earth groans and shivers,
And the tall towers that pierce the blue
Come tumbling down in a cloud of dust,
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

I'm but a mutely speck in a tiny little bark,
Rocked by the roaring, rolling, frothing billows,
Driven hither and thither by the whimsy wind,
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

I shake like a reed in the swift running stream,
My weak knees knock o'rwhelmed by some crippling fear
Lest I should lose all my hope in thee,
Merciful Jesus, my shield thou be.

Chapter 4
The First Presences in Nairobi, Kenya

Nairobi City in the 1980s

The Nairobi of the 1980s, where the Salesians found themselves was very similar to that of Turin of 1840s, where Don Bosco found himself in. Demographically, during the 1980s, Nairobi's population grew rapidly due to urbanization and rural-to-urban migration. The city attracted people from various provinces of the country seeking better economic opportunities, employment, and improved living standards. For instance, at the time of independence in 1964, the population of Nairobi was 382,000; but by the end of 1990, the population was 1,380,000, marked by an annual increase of 5 to 6%.[65]

Housing was proving to be a problem. The City Council and the National Housing Corporation (NHC) invested on high-rise flats such as Madaraka Estate, which was one of the first such residential blocks for the middle-income groups in the early 1970s. However, the low-income groups settled down in slums, or as they were euphemistically referred to by the government, 'informal settlements'. These were sometimes built up in dumping grounds or on public land, grabbed by tycoon-god-fathers, and often they had groups of the same ethnic communities living together. Nairobi's social fabric was a reflection of the nation's diversity. Industries were cropping up in the outskirts of the city, where the residents of informal settlements worked. Not all were skilled in technical trades. This offered a fertile ground for Salesian ministry.

The Kenyan economy, like many other African countries during this period, faced challenges related to fluctuating global commodity prices and international debt. However, Nairobi's economy still demonstrated resilience and growth, particularly in the informal sector, which played a significant role in providing livelihoods for many residents. The city was emerging not only as an economic hub for Kenya, but it was the logistical hub for Eastern Africa, with many international organisations investing in their headquarters there. And the leaders of the Salesian Project Africa saw an opportunity here.

Nairobi had several educational institutions, including universities, colleges, and schools. The city's education system was relatively well-developed compared to other parts of the country, with access to both public and private educational opportunities. The disparities in educational

[65] The population would double in the following decade (1990-2000) crossing the 2 million mark, and this would more than double by 2020, touching 5 million, at least going by official statistics.

quality existed, with better-funded schools and universities offering superior facilities and resources. In the 1980s, there was a wide divide between the urban and rural population in Kenya. The City in the Sun, as Nairobi was known, with its National Park within easy reach from the city and the exotic hotels all over the country, attracted a good flow of tourists. Also, prostitution and drugs were rampant in the city. Victims of these vices were young people.

Nairobi was also a melting pot of various religious beliefs. The majority of Nairobi dwellers were Christians, and the Muslim population was less than 10%. There were also many African instituted churches, which also had their ethnic bias such as the Akorino of the Kikuyus, the Legio Maria among the Luos, and the African Israel Church Nineveh which attracted largely Luo and Luhya communities. Religious institutions of the mainline churches played an important role in shaping the city's social and cultural landscape, especially in providing quality education.

Politically, in the 1980s, Kenya was under the leadership of President Daniel arap Moi, who had assumed power after the death of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta in 1978. Following the coup attempt in 1982, President Moi would rule Kenya as a *de facto* dictator. The country was under a one-party system, which restricted political pluralism, leading to some limitations on freedom of expression and political dissent. The government's policies and actions had significant implications for Nairobi, as the capital city and the seat of political power. Nairobi faced challenges in infrastructure development during the 1980s. While there were efforts to improve roads, public transportation, and basic services, the rapid population growth often outpaced these developments. Access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity was uneven and irregular across different areas of the city.

The Archdiocese of Nairobi was erected in 1953. In the early 1980s, the Archdiocese had a Catholic population of 250,000 faithful. It was organised into three Deaneries. Following the directives of Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA, established in 1961), youth groups were coming up in the parishes of the Archdiocese, and the parishes were getting organised into Small Christian Communities. Nairobi would host the 43rd Eucharistic Congress in 1985, and Pope John Paul II visited the country for the closing of the Congress. In such a significant city, it was important for the Salesians to establish their presence not only providing logistical services for Salesian Kenya, but for Project Africa. Most of all, the economic and demographic situation of Nairobi, especially of the youth therein, provided an opportunity and a challenge for the Salesian charism.

Mary Help of Christians Arrives at Upperhill, Nairobi

When the Salesians arrived in Eastern Africa in 1980, they had no place of their own in Nairobi. They were using the Flora Hostel, run by the Consolata Sisters, and the Apostles of Jesus House, or the residence of the Jesuits as their transit points. It was with the help of Fr. Toselli, a Consolata Missionary and Fr Toppo,[66] a Jesuit, the Salesians found a plot of land in Upperhill area in 1981. On the 17th of October 1981, a small group celebrated the Holy Eucharist in a small out-house that was existing on the recently bought property. There was a small school still being run in one of the other buildings by the original tenants. By November of the same year, the Salesians were introduced for the first time by Fr Toselli, to His Eminence, the late Maurice Cardinal Otunga, Archbishop of Nairobi. Ever since that visit, the Cardinal remained a good friend and benefactor of the Salesians (see Box 4 below).

The Salesians who formed the first small community at Upperhill, set themselves to develop the place and make it fit to be the headquarters for the East African Delegation.[67] Those who pioneered the community were Fr Thomas Punchekunnel and Brother Cherian Joseph Palathumkal, who got involved in the refurbishment of the house, commuting all the way from Marsabit,.[68] Father Jacob Puthenveetil would join the community later in 1981. The Feast of Mary Help of Christians was celebrated for the first time in Nairobi on 24th May 1982 in a tent with over 500 people. Since the event was advertised in *Don Bosco's Madonna*, a large number of members of the Goan community that lived in Nairobi turned up for the celebration.[69] The place began to develop in leaps and bounds. Fr Tony D'Souza joined the community as the Delegate of the Salesian Presences in Eastern Africa in May 1982, and Brother Robert

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[66] Fr Tony D'Souza writes to him on 18th June 1981 requesting for accommodation for two days on his way to Sudan, and requesting him to look for a plot for the Salesians. The assistance of Fr Toselli and Fr Toppo is acknowledged by Fr Punchekunnel in his letter to Fr Tony, dated 28th October 1981 after they moved to the new plot.

[67] Fr Tony D'Souza, who, as the Provincial of Bombay (1976-1982) was coordinating the Salesian communities established by the Indian Provinces, finished his term as the Provincial of Bombay on 31st January 1982. From August 1982 until 8th December 1985, he acted as the full-time coordinator of the Salesian works in Eastern Africa.

[68] It is interesting to note that even amidst a lot of work in looking after the house, Fr Punchekunnel took up teaching Moral Science, 20 hours weekly, at Msongari Loreto School, for a salary of Ksh.3000/- Meanwhile, Fr Jacob took up teaching in a school in Thika for a larger salary. Brother Cherian would eventually move to Boys Town.

[69] The Goans had a special devotion to Don Bosco and Dominic Savio because of their connection to Bombay. Several of them were subscribers of *Don Bosco's Madonna* (a magazine from Matunga, Bombay) and were benefactors of Fr Aurelio Maschio in Bombay. The Goans had also introduced the *Don Bosco' Madonna* among some Kenyan middle-class settlers of Nairobi.

Dias also was assigned here in August 1982 as the Secretary of the Delegation. A newly built Marian Chapel was blessed by Cardinal Otunga on 24th May 1985. The Rector Major, Rev. Fr. Vigano who visited the Salesians in Eastern Africa in 1985 was very keen to have a Marian Shrine in Nairobi. In March 1989, Maurice Cardinal Otunga granted the future Marian Shrine recognition and permission, in accordance with Can 611#3. It was on 24th January 1993 that the ground-breaking and the laying of the foundation stone would take place. On 24th July 1994, the monumental Shrine to Mary Help of Christians was completed with her emblazing statue crowning its edifice. Rev. Fr. Vigano, himself was present for the solemn blessing and consecration of the Shrine. This will be described in details in a future volume covering the second decade of Salesian presence in Eastern Africa.

Don Bosco Boys Town, an Innovative Start

Fr. Sean McFerran, an Irish Salesian had ministered in India for several years (1936-1972).[70] He was known for his innovative and courageous approach in ministering with and for the youth. Since 1972, he was back in Ireland serving in various Salesian works there. In January 1983, he had just turned sixty-five and was on his way to South Africa to take up some new work there, since the Salesian works in South Africa were largely managed by the English and Irish Salesians. On the way, he decided to make a stopover for a few days in Nairobi to greet the Indian Salesians.[71] By then, after the establishment of the Salesian house in Upperhill, Cardinal Maurice Otunga had invited the Salesians to start a technical training institute in the city. The presence of Fr. Sean prompted Fr. Tony D'Souza to invite him to start the technical school project in Nairobi. It was too good an invitation to refuse. Fr McFerran decided to stay.

Once the decision was made, he did not waste time. He started to read about Kenya and its young people, started making a study on the needs of the place and its people. He wanted to know which will be the best way he could help the needy young people of Nairobi. While doing the feasibility study of the area, he not only consulted social workers and priests engaged in similar work in Nairobi, but also visited existing projects such as the Undugu Society, SOS Children's Village, Edelvale

[70] Fr Sean McFerran was born in Ireland on 13th January 1918. He was sent to India as a missionary in 1936 as a novice, and got ordained in 1946. He worked in India until 1972, in various projects always exhibiting a high level of passion and ingenuity in responding to the precise needs of the locality.

[71] Most of the details about Fr McFerran have been adapted from Joseph Jeyaraj, The Sporting Padre: Life and Ministry of the Irish Missionary Rev. Fr Sean McFerran, SDB. Chennai: Don Bosco Wisdom Town, 2011.

Trust, and Starehe Boys. He also paid visits to the slums at Mathare, Kariobangi, Dandora and Ruaraka and saw the situation of poverty and that of the youth. It was Fr. Thomas Punchekunnel, who was in Upperhill then, who drove him to many of these places. Their findings and the models of different SOS centres in the United States helped them to come up with the idea of a "Boys Town"[72] in Nairobi. At the end of the study, he made this remark. "It is a truly sad reflection that not only Don Bosco Boys' Town, but many more projects would be necessary to solve Nairobi's problems."

Under the inspiration of Fr Sean, the Salesians devised the idea of a 'Town' because it would be made of homes for those boys who are abandoned or displaced by the society. The first priority was to offer a safe and secure roof over their heads. This roof, according to Fr. Sean would be the 'homes' inside a boys' town, where joy, freedom and love, the natural qualities of youth would be envisaged everywhere. Adult care and supervision were to be offered but without being ostentatious. They spelt out the objectives of the Boys Town as follows:

1. To give to and instil in the poor youth of the slums a sense of self-awareness and a better sense of self-respect as also a better self-image of themselves.
2. To create and build in them a better vision of life, a greater social awareness and a better sense of citizenship and responsibility through 'Town' training.
3. To give them an appropriate informal and, when possible, also a formal education, which will progressively guide them into more purposeful living.
4. To provide them with various vocational opportunities which will eventually build in them a better self-image. This will help them to realize that they too can and must be of service to others, if they are to develop properly and fulfil a useful role in life.

Fr. Sean McFerran was eager to start this Boys' Town in one of the slum areas of the city. A large plot of land which he envisioned was not easy to find in the city slums. In June 1983, Cardinal Michael Otunga magnanimously handed over to the Salesians a 10-acre plot of land at Karen area, that had been "donated by the late Mrs. Dorothea Muriel Hale[73] to the Archdiocese" together with the "necessary permission to

[72] The original Boys Town was started by Fr Edward J. Flanagan, another Irish Catholic Priest, in Nebraska in United States of America in 1921, though he had started an orphanage in 1917.

[73] Dorothea Muriel Hillman Hale was born in 1896 possibly in South Africa; she was married to Hillman-Hale in her second marriage. She ran a diary farm called, "Park Grange" on a piece of land that she had bought from Karen Blixen herself (of Out of Africa fame). Having uprooted the coffee plantation, Dorothea entered into a partnership with one James Laidlaw-Richardson to run the farm. Apparently, the farm ran into a loss, and the partnership collapsed in 1941.

establish a Trade School on this plot."[74] Since Karen was an affluent area, Fr. Sean and Fr Tony D'Souza, the superior, were not very enthusiastic. They were concerned about the cost of the land, cost of living, and the witness value. The Cardinal, who had taken them to the plot, cleared their conscience as he said,

> *"The land will cost you nothing, because it belongs to the Archdiocese, and I am going to donate it to you at no cost. Besides, to have the poor youth live next to rich people, and being educated and well-formed by the missionaries, can be a witness in itself. Who knows, the rich will be moved by your compassion and will assist you for the upkeep of the youth."*[75]

Salesians felt encouraged and began to plan for a residential school where boys from far away slums and deprived rural areas could stay and be trained without having to commute daily.

Bro. Joseph Cherian, who moved from Marsabit, was the first person who was appointed to assist in this new project. Brother Cherian could very well be acclaimed as a co-founder of Boys Town.[76] Three volunteers from Ireland, Gerard Fitzpatrick, Paddy Parkes and Thomas Fox also joined them. A master plan was developed for the infrastructure and the building-blocks were realised in phases. The chapel would be the last to be completed in 1994. Fr Sean McFerran did fundraising for the building work. In a letter to his friends in September 1984, he writes with his characteristic humour, "I have been offered £25,500 by our own congregation for our house. So, I only need £87,500 more for the first phase – it is not much when you say it quickly (ha ha ha). But the Lord will send it in good time."

Fr. Sean's innovations knew no bounds. He was a wellspring of ideas in those days while creating the structure of Boys' Town. To supplement the Boys' Town, he thought of a sub-project that would go hand in hand with the main one. And he called it the Don Bosco Satellite Project. By the

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She gifted the land to the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, and continued to live in Karen, until her death in 1981. Cf. https://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=18199.

[74] Letter dated 14th June 1983 by the Cardinal to Fr Tony D'Souza.

[75] From the testimony (dated 1st January 2010) provided by Fr Tony D'Souza to Fr Bellagamba, during the canonisation enquiries of Servant of God Maurice Cardinal Otunga.

[76] Brother Cherian worked tirelessly as a pioneer of Boys Town until 1992, when he fell very ill due to his diabetic and hypertension conditions. He retired to India for treatment. Sadly, one of his legs had to be amputated. After much suffering, Brother Cherian went to his heavenly reward. Brother Cherian will be remembered for his professionalism and high quality production that he passed on to many of his pupils and production workers. (please add date of his death)

early 1990's these Satellites numbered six: Kibera, Dagoretti Corner, Kiserian, Mukuru, Ongata-Rongai, and Ting'ang'a-Kiambu.[77] While Fr Sean envisioned the project, it was Brother Cherian who implemented it in detail. Brother Cherian focused on quality training of the boys, while strategically developing the production units towards self-sufficiency. His products were of high quality.

Fr Sean wooed other Indians, whom he had known in India to come to work in Africa. Among them were Brother Sigamony, who landed in Nairobi in September 1984, it was Fr. Sean who welcomed him at the airport. But he was disappointed that Br Siga was assigned quite immediately to Tanzania. By April 1987, major sections in Boys Town were fully established and the Satellite Centres were functioning well. However, some misunderstanding among the community members and Fr Sean, that resulted from a brochure that he had produced, and the breach of loyalty of his lay collaborators saddened Fr Sean, and disheartened he returned to Ireland in 1987. He was nearly 70 years of age. Once in Ireland, he continued to raise funds for the project. For the rest of the 1980s, the leadership in Boys Town was taken over by Fr Tony D'Souza himself, having been relieved of his responsibility as the Delegate of Eastern Africa in 1985.[78]

Don Bosco *Utume: Theology Students' Community*

Very soon in the history of Salesian Eastern Africa, young clerics or scholastics – those who are preparing for priesthood – started joining the Salesian missions for what is called, the practical training, which consists of at least two years of Salesian pastoral ministry. The first ones to arrive for this purpose in Tanzania were Cl. Neville Luis and Cl. Michael Karikunnel. They arrived in Mafinga parish in August 1982. Again in 1983, two more arrived for practical training in Tanzania: Cl. Charles Savariappan and Cl. Jose Moonjely; in the same year in Kenya there landed Cl. Loyola Castellino and Cl V.J Matthew. The numbers began to increase in the subsequent years. On the Italian side, Cl. Gianni Rolandi and Br Giorgio Conte were the first to arrive in Embu for practical training in 1985. After two years of practical training, if they were candidates for priesthood, these scholastics had to go for theology in their final lap of preparation towards priestly ordination. There were also others who were opting for Project Africa after having completed their practical training in India, and by then they would have made their final profession.

[77] They were all handed over to local Catholic parishes to run in 2006.

[78] Fr Tony left Boys Town to rejoin his Province of origin, Bombay in 1991, when Fr I.Raj took up as the Rector of Boys Town. I.Raj left the Salesians in 1996, to start his own TVET projects in several cities of Southern Africa. Cf. https://youngafrica.org/en/

Therefore, Salesians in East Africa had to device some arrangements for the theological formation these young men.

Initially, in 1984, Cls. Neville and Michael were sent to Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, India, for theology, given that no conducive formative community was found to care for them in the English-speaking Africa. In August 1985, however, the two students of theology (Cl. Jose Moonjely and Cl. Charles Savariappan), began attending classes at Hekima College of the Jesuits in Nairobi. They were residing at the Delegation House in Upper Hill, Nairobi, with Fr Thomas Thayil as the one in charge of them. He had just joined Eastern Africa after having completed his term as the first provincial superior of Bangalore province in India.

Around this time, on 7th December 1984, the Religious Superiors' Association of Kenya (RSAK; now the Religious Superiors' Conference of Kenya – RSCK) established a committee to explore the feasibility of collaborating in a single project for the academic formation of their theology students. In April 1985, as a result of the committee's findings, a group of Major Superiors decided to establish a combined institution, to be known as Tangaza College - Theological Centre for Religious (TCR). The founding congregations were: Benedictine Fathers, Camillians, Consolata Missionaries, Congregation of the Holy Cross, Passionist Fathers, and Holy Ghost Fathers. In May 1986, before the first academic year began, the Salesians of Don Bosco also decided to join this cooperative venture.

In August 1986, Tangaza College opened with the first batch ever. Meanwhile, Fr Thayil had been appointed as the Delegate for Eastern Africa (AFE), and Fr Luciano Odorico became the first Rector of the Salesian community[79] that would then take the name of *Don Bosco Utume*.[80] The students of theology then were Cls Jose and Charles, who continued to study with the Jesuits at Hekima College, and Cls George Kocholickal, Santey Kizhakkinedath, Edwin Baracho, and John Vigilius Fernando of AFE and Brs Peter Gozdalski and Joseph Skovron from the Salesian Circumscription of Zambia, who studied at Tangaza College. The first administrator was Fr Jacob Puthenveetil. The community lived in the small houses which were within the compound of Upper Hill. The students and Fr Luciano, by then a lecturer at Tangaza College, commuted daily to and fro Tangaza College.

In August 1987, eleven more students joined the community. For the first time among them were two from the ICE Province of Turin (Cls Luca Maschio and Gianni Rolandi). During the Academic Year 1987-1988 the community chose for itself the name "*Utume*". The community had now become large with 19 students and 2 Staff. This posed a very serious problem for space and accommodation. In this light, the superiors started

[79] Fr Luciano Appointed as Rector of Nairobi House on 12th December 1986.

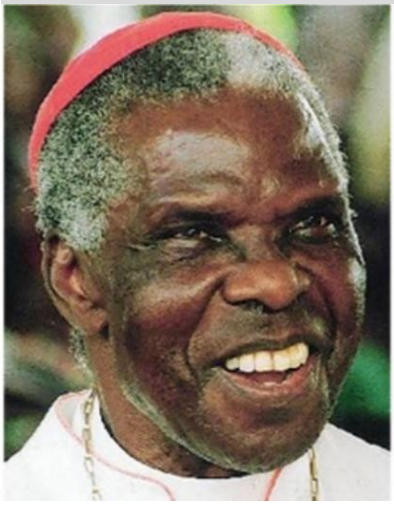
[80] This section draws largely from a report written by Fr Gianni Rolandi.

looking for the possibility of shifting to a new place, nearer to the College. Therefore, the property along Dagoretti Road was bought from the Daughters of St Paul, who were moving from there to their centre at the River-Side Drive closer to the Cathedral where they had their bookshop. The property had some existing buildings including rooms, dining hall, and two halls that were their printing press and book-store. The sisters hurriedly left the house, making way for the Salesians to move in, while the sisters themselves stayed in the little houses at Upper Hill while waiting for their new house to be completed.

In August 1988, together with the novelty brought in by the new batch of students and Fr Wilfred D'Souza as the new administrator, the community moved to Karen, Dagoretti Road. The community members now were 26. Meanwhile, a new block of 20 rooms was being constructed. The following year, more members joined in, including some more staff: Fr George Kottiri (as Liturgical Animator and professor) and Fr Richard Sajdak (waiting for his Entry Permit to Sudan) joined the Staff, with a total of 30 members in the community.

In March 1990, Fr Luciano Odorico, who was the delegate of the Eastern Africa Vice Province to the General Chapter (GC23), was elected as the General Councillor for the Missions. In August 1990, the Utume community opened the year with a new Rector, Fr Edward Liptak. He was also made the Vice Provincial of AFE. Fr George Chalissery joined the community as Vice Rector and Dean; he would soon become its Administrator. Community members were now 35, all crammed into the small dining. But there was a lot of fun and vibrancy, marked by initiatives in ministry which would become part of the mission of the province. This part of the story will be explored in the second part of the history.

Box 4
Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga:
A Gracious Benefactor of the Salesians



Maurice Otunga was born in Western Kenya in January 1923 to a chief who followed the African Traditional Religion, and whose household had 70 people that included his children and their mothers. While in school, Maurice Michael Otunga converted to the Catholic faith and was baptised. Later he joined the seminary and was ordained a priest in 1950 after his theological studies in Rome. In 1956, at the age of 33, he was ordained the Auxiliary Bishop of Kisumu. Later he was appointed as the Bishop of Kisii in 1960, then to the Kenya Military in 1964, and as the Coadjutor Bishop of Nairobi in 1969. In 1971, he became the Archbishop of Nairobi and was elevated to be a Cardinal in 1973. He had attended the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and participated in the two conclaves of 1978.

The Salesians officially met the Cardinal in his office in November 1981. Since then, from the perception of the Salesians, the Cardinal was not only generous to the Salesians but appreciated their presence in the Archdiocese immensely. This was very explicit not only in the free donation of the 10-acre land in Karen in 1983, and later in 1995, the donation of the 13-acre land in Kuwinda for the project of the youth at risk, but also his caring and cordial relationship with the Salesians. Early 1982, Fr Thomas Punchekunnel writes to Fr Tony D'Souza, then back in Bombay, about how one day the Cardinal drove into the Salesian residence at Upperhill and very casually joined the confrere at tea time and with characteristic fatherliness wished to ascertain how they were getting on their new place.

Further, in his testimony (dated 1st January 2010) to Fr Bellagamba, during the canonisation enquiries of Servant of God Maurice Cardinal Otunga, Fr Tony D'Souza, the former Salesian Delegate of Eastern Africa narrates a very touching incident,

Don Bosco Boys Town opened its doors to adolescent youth, mostly drop-outs. A two-year course in eight different trades prepared the students for Government certified exams. This success story was suddenly interrupted when two disgruntled instructors, not satisfied with their salaries, sent a letter of complaints to the Government Ministry of Labour. The ministry issued a summons to us. Being still new in Kenya, and unfamiliar with the rules of the country, I was uneasy and sought the advice of Cardinal Otunga. He listened attentively, and then said to me: "Do not be afraid, Father, go to the office of the Labour Department, explain your

employment policy, match your salary scale with that of the other similar institutions, and all will be fine. Should you need my help, please stop by after the meeting at my office". On the scheduled day, another Salesian and I went to the Ministry of Labour. As we entered the main door, we were surprised to see the Cardinal in the atrium. We greeted him, and I asked him in jest, if he too had a case with the Ministry. "No", he said, "you have a case and I am here to help you". I said to him: "But people may think that you have a case with the Labour Minister, and tomorrow you may be in the newspapers, and the headlines may read, "The Cardinal in Labour". "That will be interesting", he said with a soft smile. When the Cardinal accompanied us into the relevant office, the Chief Labour Officer looked a bit abashed. He stood up and greeted the Cardinal saying: "Your eminence, we did not summon you". "But you have summoned my sons," said the Cardinal pointing to us. Assured that our problems would be solved, the Cardinal left the office. The case was presented, salaries were compared, and conditions of work as well. At the end, the gentleman said: "Do not worry father, I will write to the instructors and invite them to keep the deal they have signed, because it is the best". Later, when I thanked the Cardinal for his presence which was the best help in the resolution of the case, the Cardinal said with utter simplicity: "A little red on top of the head, at times goes a long way."

Moreover, he always obliged willingly whenever he was invited to the Salesian functions. In 1985, when the Rector Major, Rev. Fr Egidio Vigano came to visit the Salesian presences in Eastern Africa, the Cardinal himself came to Boys Town to greet him at the blessing of Boys Town. This was repeated in July 1994, at the blessing of the Shrine. The Cardinal was a true shepherd, and at the same time very prudent and strategic. The Salesians of Don Bosco will always remember him with warmth and gratitude for his benevolence towards us even up to a point of it being considered a fault by many. After his retirement in 1997, he lived at the Home for the Elderly in Kasarani, Nairobi, where he went to his eternal reward on 6th September 2003. His mortal remains rest in the grounds of the Resurrection Garden in suburban Nairobi to this day. We pray that soon he may be elevated to the honour of sanctity, as the process for his canonization has been introduced.

Chapter 5

Further Opportunities and Challenges in the Sudan in the 1980s

Sudan in 1980s

Sudan gained its independence on 1st January 1956. Before independence, Sudan was under joint British-Egyptian administration known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, which lasted from 1899 until 1956. Ismail al-Azhari became the country's first Prime Minister. However, political instability characterized the early years of independence, with frequent changes in leadership and multiple coups. In 1958, General Ibrahim Abboud seized power in a military coup and ruled until 1964 when he was ousted following mass protests. In 1972, after a long period of civil war between the north and south, the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed, granting Southern Sudan regional autonomy and ending the first Sudanese civil war. General Jaafar Nimeiry abolished the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1983, leading to the eruption of the second Sudanese civil war, which lasted until 2005.

In the 1980s, Sudan had a population of approximately 18 to 20 million people. The population was relatively young, with a large percentage of the population being below the age of 30. Sudan was a highly diverse country with more than 500 ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups included the Arab population in the northern region and various indigenous African ethnic groups in the south, such as the Dinka, Nuer, Fur, Beja, and others. Arabic was the dominant language spoken in the Sudan, and it served as the official language. There were also numerous regional languages used by different ethnic groups across the country.

Islam was the predominant religion in Sudan during the 1980s. The majority of the population identified as Muslim, with Islam shaping various aspects of daily life, culture, and societal norms. However, there were also Christian and indigenous religious communities, particularly in the southern regions. These groups were not comfortable with the imposition of Arabic and Islam on the whole country. The level of urbanization in Sudan was relatively low compared to today. A significant portion of the population lived in rural areas and engaged in agriculture and pastoralism as their primary livelihoods. Urban areas were less developed and less densely populated compared to later years.

Missions in Tonj and Juba

As narrated earlier, the Salesians left Maridi in a dramatic fashion, in March 1982, after their initial attempt to establish a Salesian presence came to naught. Archbishop Augusto Barone of the Archdiocese of Juba who had intervened and arranged for Fr Lawrence and Fr Ernesto to be flown to Nairobi and to receive the much-needed emergency treatment for the injuries that they suffered on the way to Juba, later invited the Salesians to his own diocese. So, the Salesians who were assigned to Sudan returned after a short break in their home countries. In March 1983, there were two groups of Salesians working in Juba and Tonj, the latter in the Apostolic Vicariate of Rumbek.

Two brothers, Gabriel Fernandes and Francis Chinnappa were sent to Juba. The Archbishop entrusted the Salesians with the well-equipped printing press which was established by the Comboni missionaries, especially through the hard work and sacrifice of Bro. Augusto Bazzanella. Besides the press, they soon started a weekend oratory and an apostolate at the juvenile prison.[81]

Fr. Ernesto de Gaspari and Fr. James Pulickal reached Tonj. Tonj was part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Rumbek. By then, the Salesians could return to Rumbek Vicariate, since by July 1982, Bishop Gabriel Dwatuka Wagi had resigned, and Archbishop Agostino Baroni MCCJ was appointed as the Apostolic Vicar of Rumbek, after he retired as the Archbishop of Khartoum in October 1981, at the canonical age of 75 and was instrumental in inviting them back.[82]

Tonj was a small village by then at the heart of the Dinka land, about 3-hours journey from Rumbek (120 kms). Comboni Missionaries ran a mission in Tonj prior to 1964, when they were expelled by the government. They had left three brick buildings, which, when the Salesians arrived, almost twenty years later, had no doors and windows. There was a small, dilapidated church, not far from river Jur, dedicated to The Sacred Heart of Jesus. For 20 years, the mission had been managed by a catechist by name of Edward Jalab, who was revered by the people. He had kept the record of baptisms that he had administered. But people had had no access to other sacraments.

The two Salesians began their ministry in earnest and full of zeal. Besides getting the building ready for habitation, they had to learn the new language to be able to preside at the Eucharist and to preach. Fr. James, a wizard at spoken languages had conquered Zande and Dinka! The parish had ten substations. Besides the normal parish activities, the two

[81] Information is meagre on their presence since there was no established Salesian community in Juba, and since their stay was short-lived (1983-1986).

[82] He ceased to be the Apostolic Vicar of Rumbek in Feb 1983 when the Second South Sudanese Liberation war led by the SPLA broke out. Archbishop Baroni was succeeded by Fr. Giuseppe Pellerino MCCJ (1983-1990) but could not operate from within the Diocese until Fr. Mazzolari became Apostolic Administrator in 1991 and was consecrated Bishop in January 1999.

Salesians carried out catechism programme in the primary, the technical and secondary schools. Afternoons were dedicated to oratory activities.

The Salesian Sisters arrived in Tonj on 23 September 1983. They landed in Wau and Father Ernesto went to receive them. They were six sisters: Mary George, Teresa Manakayallat, Miriam Kallathipullat, Josephine Pereira, Celestina Phawa and Barbara Porter. They joined the Salesians in as much as they could in the oratory, and followed up the preparation of the Catechists, under the charge of Sr Celestina. Sr. Miriam, a trained nurse was soon in her "clinic", which was nothing but a medicine box under a large tree. She also visited the sick and cared for them in their homes. Sr. Barbara taught English in the local schools. Sr Josephine was the home-maker following up the kitchen. However, the mornings were dedicated by the sisters to learning Arabic and Dinka. There was much cordiality between the SDBs and the FMAs. Archbishop Agostino Baroni, Vicar Apostolic of Rumbek often came to Tonj to enjoy the Salesian hospitality.

The Hostage Situation

All was well until 1983, when the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed under the leadership of John Garang grouping together different units of soldiers who had organised a series of mutinies in the Sudanese army. They began to fight a guerrilla type of war against the Arab-Muslim domination of the Sudan government, with an aim of establishing a secular Sudanese state. Their military activities began to gain momentum. By 28th October 1984, an emergency plan was issued by the church authorities in Juba, which stated that the Salesian sisters from Tonj should move to Wau or Juba before the end of 1984. And the Salesians should do the same by February 1985.

While some sisters left, the Salesians and some sisters stayed on. In the middle of 1985, the SPLA wanted to take control of the Tonj air strip. Tonj mission was on the way to the airstrip. The conflict was now moving closer home. Following the recommendation of Mgr. Giuseppe Pellerino, Apostolic Vicar of Rumbek, the FMA sisters had to be evacuated immediately. Fr. Ernesto took the sisters who had stayed back in Tonj to Wau where they were accommodated in a few rooms in the local sisters' compound. Eventually, Fr Ernesto himself was persuaded by Fr Tony D'Souza in Nairobi to stay on in Wau. However, Fr Ernest went up and down between Wau and Tonj whenever it was secure to do so. There was an occasion when Fr Godfrey D'Souza who had just arrived in the Sudan went to persuade Fr James also to quit. But James stuck on in Tonj. Several letters and messages were sent by Fr Tony D'Souza and eventually by Fr Thomas Thayil who had by then taken over as the new Delegate Superior of Eastern Africa in December 1985. Fr James wrote

frequent letters to his superiors and sent them through people who walked to Wau.[83] In the letters he kept repeating one major idea:[84]

> *Father, do not worry about James. We have gone through this and worse situations. And nothing unpleasant has happened to us. Nay, everything that happened only goes to prove that God wants us to be here, and we must stay.*
>
> *It is so difficult to get a mission started and I feel we made a mistake in pulling out from Maridi that has retarded our work in Sudan somewhat. … probably we failed in a crucial testing by the Lord. He has given us another centre, Tonj – neither of our choice nor of our making. He gave it to us; we must keep it.*

Finally, Fr James would become of the target of the SPLA. Again, in the words of Fr James, this is how the hostage situation took place:[85]

> *On November 7th, 1986, the SPLA came to take me hostage. The boys said nobody would touch me, but John Garang, the commander, said I was the only foreigner in that war zone, and that they should get me. The SPLA surrounded our house and said that they wanted to talk to me, but I refused to come out because it was a war zone and it was not safe to go out at night. They insisted that I come out, but I refused. They said, "If you don't come we shoot." I said, "For a man of God, to live or die it is the same. If you shoot, I am not going to come out." The official in charge came and asked me: "Father, please come out." I said, "No, you can come in." I opened the door, and they caught my hand and pulled me out; about ten of them surrounded me. I held on to the door until I couldn't hold on anymore. They kicked me and slapped me, and my specs fell off. They dragged me out of the compound. It was eleven o'clock at night.[86] They wanted me to run with them because the army was behind them. We ran into the bush and reached the camp by 3 am. I only had the clothes that I slept in, and I had to run barefoot. In the morning my feet were swollen. Then they said to me they had to continue, but my feet were swollen and I couldn't. "Give me some old shoes, a pair of pants, and a shirt at least," I*

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[83] The archives in Nairobi have a good collection of these letters. Cf. Maridi 405 days file.

[84] Letter written by Fr James Pullickal on 23rd March 1986 to Fr Thomas Thayil.

[85] Fr James' Interview with Fr Sebastian Koladyil, published in the *Salesian Bulletin*, Nairobi, 2nd Quarter, 2023.

[86] Together with Fr James, they also took Michael Amos Obol who was staying with him. Obol later professed as a Salesian but discontinued before his perpetual vows.

asked. They had taken everything from the house, and nobody knew where everything had disappeared to.[87]

On the third day of captivity, we were lying under the tree, my feet still swollen, and I couldn't walk. They said we had to walk before the army caught up with us. Then they brought an old pair of shoes, an old pair of pants and a shirt and we began to walk. On the first day, we must have walked 10 km, and then we kept on going for 27 days until we reached the river Nile, which is around 500 km away. We crossed the Nile and continued walking again, trekking around 1500 km. Of course, the first days were tough, and I badly needed a wash, a shave, food, and a change of clothes. In the first month, my mind was full of thoughts about the food, I was always hungry. When you are hungry, you can't even pray. I was hungry and upset. I said, "God is crazy; people are crazy." I couldn't take it anymore. I spoke to Jesus, "I left everything for you Jesus; why do you treat me like this?" I was angry with God, angry with SPLA, angry with the situation, and unwilling to accept this misery of lack of food, clothes, or a place to rest. And so, this deprivation of having nothing made me feel ashamed of myself.

I was depressed but kept holding on to Jesus, as a last resort for the first 50 days; the 50th day was the Eve of Christmas. There were around 2000 SPLA men, who were trying to choke the army barracks. We were rather close to them. There was little food for the 2000 men. We remained for a month there. There was no place to wash our clothes; it was very depressing to stay with those soldiers. It was the Eve of Christmas; I felt the Lord questioning me. "Why are you so rebellious?" And he gave me his example. "See, I did nothing. They crucified me. They did everything they wanted to me. I accepted. Why do you not accept it?" I was still rebellious and couldn't take it. I turned to the opposite side and slept. The next day, another thought on the same issue came to me. It was as if Mother Mary was telling her son that every girl when she is nearing delivery, would like to have her relatives near. I had to go to a strange land where I was without a home. "Why do you not accept it?" That was the first day I finally accepted the reality. I said, "Ok, I take it. So, if you are a missionary, why don't you accept it all? Why do you put limits?"

Father James accepted the situation, and after an ordeal of 16 months, God brought him back to the Salesian community safe and sound. Read the last section of the chapter for the rest of the story.

[87] After a few days, Fr Ernesto went to collect some of the sacred articles from the church and also the parish documents such as the registry of baptism and other sacraments, and took them to Wau. There were other articles that were brought by the people to Wau and the Bishop apparently 'bought' them back from the people at a small cost.

Salesians in Khartoum, the heart of the Muslim Sudan

Since the beginning of the SPLA activities in the south of Sudan in 1983, more and more people from the south sought refuge in the capital, Khartoum. Prior to this, Khartoum had but a sprinkling of Catholics. The surge of refugees to Khartoum augmented the number of the Catholics in that city. So, in 1986, at the request of Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Khartoum, it was decided that the Salesians open a new presence in Khartoum. Fr Dominic Padinjareparambil pioneered the move to Khartoum and he was joined by Fr Jacob Thelekkaden.

The Archbishop requested the Salesians to run the St. Joseph Technical School situated in the city of Khartoum. This school had been run by the Comboni Missionaries and had been partially closed due to lack of personnel. Initially, Fr. Dominic helped Fr. Igino Benini MCCJ as the assistant parish priest while Fr. Jacob started exploring the possibilities of starting the welding and general mechanic sections of the technical school. In June 1988, due to the insecurity, the confreres from Juba, Brothers Gabriel Fernandez and Francis Chinnappan were also asked to move to Khartoum and strengthen the St. Joseph Technical School. The printing press was also soon given to the care of the Salesian Community. The two Brothers put all their might and ability to make the printing press more viable. A large amount of capital had to be invested to upgrade the teaching facilities of the workshops and to improve production. The result was a utilitarian set-up, new workshops with useful courses in welding, general mechanics, masonry, carpentry and printing technology. In no time student-registration went up from merely 50 in 1988 to 1000 by 1990, working in two shifts: morning and noon. Moreover, free transport and tuition were provided, besides a good breakfast and a colourful overall for each student. One can imagine how the Divine Providence provided for the running of St. Joseph Technical School.

Even as the Salesians marvellously transformed the technical school, their attention was directed to the pastoral care of the Catholics in the area, and the parish of St Joseph began to take shape. In March 1989, the St. Joseph Parish too was entrusted entirely to the Salesians, and Fr. Dominic was appointed the first Parish Priest. Fr. Jacob was appointed the Superior of the Salesian community.

The Salesian Mission in Wau

In 1986, when the religious were asked to leave the rebel controlled areas, Fr Ernesto De Gaspari went to Wau. The bishop of the Diocese of

Wau, Mgr. Joseph Bilal Nyekindi (1944-1996)[88] had advised Fr. Ernest De Gaspari to remain in the town of Wau. After agreeing with Fr Thomas Thayil back in Nairobi, the Bishop entrusted to the Salesians the John Paul II Intermediate School. Soon Fr. Riszard Saidak (a priest from Poland) joined Fr. Ernesto in Wau. To him was entrusted the old printing press belonging to the diocese which had by now become practically non-functional. After a few months, Fr. Riszard was also entrusted with the responsibility of being the director of the minor seminary in Wau.

The Salesian sisters began a kindergarten and a primary school, and eventually also a dispensary. Fr. Ernesto, with the help of the Bishop and some local people transformed three dilapidated workshop into classrooms and an office. Thus began a technical school.

Wau was always under the control of Khartoum government, and never taken over by the SPLA. However, communication with the outside world was difficult, and after 1987, traveling out of Wau had to be through Khartoum. Sometimes, if one went out of the country, travelling back to Wau was not easy. Often it took at least two to three months of waiting in Khartoum to be able to travel to Wau. Therefore, the Salesian pioneers there lived in near isolation, and had to make their own decisions.

The Rescue of Fr James from the SPLA[89]

By the beginning of 1988, Fr Tony Fernandes was in Upperhill. He was entrusted with the task of driving across the Sudanese border from Kenya to pick up Fr James Pulickal as news had reached the Salesian headquarters in Nairobi that he was finally released by the SPLA. Here is the first-hand account from Fr Tony about the rescue operation:

After the community at the Provincial House was informed through a radio call from Wau, South Sudan, that Fr. James Pulickal and Michael Obol (who was a junior seminarian) were taken by the SPLA, the task of seeking details of their capture and subsequent release, began. Diplomacy was the key factor as to why the process to rescue them took close to 18 months so as not to compromise key persons who were assisting to trace their whereabouts.

I began by trying to first contact the JRS (Jesuit Relief Services) as there was news that one of their priests had also been taken by the rebels. I also sought the services of the International Red Cross who advised that I proceed with caution. I made several visits to the Nunciature in Nairobi, and they were also instrumental in getting assistance from the Nunciature in Ethiopia. I managed, through personal contacts, to visit an office

[88] Bishop of Wau from 1980 to 1995.

[89] A narrative written by Fr Tony Fernandes for Salesian Bulletin of Nairobi, August 2023.

(location withheld) whose backrooms were in constant touch with the SPLA. I was assured each time that he was 'safe.'

The key factor to expedite the rescue process was a letter written by James's mother that contained a personal plea for his release. So, one afternoon, around the 25th February 1988, unexpectedly, I received a message informing the Salesians that Fr. James was free to go, but we would have to fetch him from a location we would be led to. I quickly got the ball rolling by getting an official clearance from the Kenyan authorities to cross the Kenyan border in the North leading to Narus, which was in South Sudan, near Lokichogio.

That same afternoon, Red Cross International, who had a camp in Loki, assured us they would host us while we waited for clearance to enter Sudan. This rescue operation had so many elements of risks and unknowns that I had to inform my mother that I was not coerced into taking this responsibility. Later that afternoon, Tony Carvalho, whom many knew to be a handyman at Upper Hill, had the Land Rover all loaded up with two sponge mattresses and our personal bags. There was no time to lose, as the captors could easily change their minds if they did not perceive a sense of urgency on our part.

The first stage of this hazardous journey saw us stop for the night in Kitale, and, after an early morning Mass and breakfast, provided by the sisters, we proceeded to Loki via Lodwar. On arrival at the Red Cross camp, the officials offered us hospitality and briefed us about the plan to cross the border. It was a waiting game and there was no fixed time or date when we would have a definite word as to when we could start.

Eventually, after three days, we were told that we could proceed. The officials at the Red Cross camp loaded the back of the Land Rover with a two-hundred-litre drum of fuel. We were made to understand that the rebels would meet us after we had travelled into Sudan at Narus. The young, fully armed soldiers whom we met, got into the back seat of the Land Rover and advised us that we should follow their instructions and that we would be interrogated by their men at the check posts. At every check post, another batch of young soldiers exchanged places with the ones we came with and directed us to the next one. In this way, we reached a town called Kapoeta, where we waited for quite a while, to get a clearance to move.

From here, we were told to proceed in the direction of the Ethiopian border. All along this route, a senior member of the soldiers would now and then caution us to get off the road as the way ahead was mined and, after having driven off the road for several kilometres, to get back onto the road. We were only hoping the guy would remember all the places where the land mines were laid, as we witnessed several vehicles destroyed after being blown up. We could not travel fast, and that took its toll on us because of the extreme heat. We were forced to request an hour's halt when we saw a tree with some shade. The sponge mattresses

were helpful in taking a short nap, although the flies kept buzzing around our faces.

How far we still had to travel was anyone's guess. The soldiers were strictly ordered not to speak to us about arrival times. The silence of uncertainty and hope finally brought us to the banks of a river, and we were guided to a spot where we were assured that it was safe to cross. After engaging the vehicle into four-wheel drive, we crossed the river, with the driver's foot firmly on the accelerator. The sturdy and firm Land Rover ploughed its way through the fast-moving water that had reached a level, in the middle of the river, just above the wheels. This was most frightening, as we could easily have been grounded without help.

From this point onwards, it got dark, and due to the nature of the narrow road, we brushed against the bushes several times. We arrived at the 'secret camp' perfectly camouflaged beneath the trees. Some women were ordered to serve us tea, which was poured into tall beer glasses soaked in one inch of sugar, which we gratefully accepted together with two beds that were strung with coir ropes that at least helped to support our mattresses. These were placed under the open sky that was lit by the moon. Sheer tiredness would not even allow us to get a peaceful sleep, as we were hounded by mosquitoes looking for the sustenance of a different blood group, and our ears kept alert to the eerie sounds of lions roaring in the far distance.

At the first sight of dawn, we both rushed down to the nearby river and freshened ourselves for the day's proceedings, only to be met by the same women who approached us with basins filled with warm water. When we informed them that we had done the necessary, they were not amused, and in broken English, they told us that the river was infested with crocodiles and we were lucky to return safely. I knew the prayers of the faithful in Upper Hill who were keeping vigil, were being answered.

After waiting anxiously while sitting on the beds, a semblance of a formal meeting was taking shape. [This was 10 full days after we set out from Nairobi]. A large table and two sets of sofas were placed under the full force of the scorching sun, and we were invited to sit on one while some officials sat on the other. We were duly informed that the leader, John Garang, had other engagements and had delegated another senior officer who immediately proceeded to read out from a file, all they had done to keep James 'safe and healthy.' After a nod from this officer, Fr. James was brought to the place where we were sitting. After recognising that it was he, I ran to the vehicle and got him my spare shirt. I cannot describe the scene at this moment. My concern at this time was that the SPLA, hand over to us Michael Obol as well. In no way would I leave without him despite their informing me that he would be of no use to us. When he was finally brought, I realised he was suffering from acute jaundice as his eyes and fingernails were yellow, but he had a great smile.

After signing a document indicating that we received both Fr. James and Michael in "good health," and demanding that we be given the passport of Fr James, which was returned to us as if it lay buried in the damp soil, we got into our vehicle together with the soldier-escorts. Not for one moment did we look back from that point onwards, until we got to Lokichogio [on 10th March 1988]. Just before reaching the Kenyan border, the exhaust pipe gave way, and it started to emit sounds like gunshots. This forced a group of young soldiers, before reaching a check post, to fire in the air to stop us from going any further. Peering through the window of the Land Rover, they recognised Fr. James, and after greetings in Dinka, we moved on safely.

Mary Help of Christians was there![90]

[90] On 17th March 1988, Fr James was on his way to see his mum in India and for a well-deserved home-leave.

Chapter 6

Salesians in Tanzania – Part 1
The Three Salesian Communities in Mafinga

The Situation of Tanzania in the 1980s

The British allowed Tanganyika to have an internal self-government on 1st May 1961, and this was followed by independence on 9th December 1961. On 26th April 1964, Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The country was renamed the United Republic of Tanzania on 29th October of that year. Since Zanzibar is largely a Muslim territory, the Salesians showed no interest in this group of islands. They focused solely on mainland Tanzania. Already in 1967, in his Arusha Declaration, Mwalimu Nyerere, the first President and the Father of the Nation of Tanzania had declared an African version of socialism in what was termed as '*Ujamaa'*. By the time the Salesians arrived in Tanzania, *Ujamaa* was held as the policy of government. Only in 1985, would Mwalimu Nyerere resign and pave the way for a different style of governance. The country's economy was staggering. Nyerere recognized the need for economic reform and embraced elements of market-oriented policies, but the process was slow and faced resistance from some party members and traditional socialists.

Tanzania's population in the 1980s was growing steadily, with estimates putting it at around 20-25 million people. The country's population was predominantly young, rural, with agriculture being the primary occupation for a large portion of the population. Life expectancy was relatively low, and access to healthcare and education was limited, particularly in rural areas. The government emphasized Swahili as the national language to foster a sense of unity among the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The national schools and the Military Service (*Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa – JKT*) worked as platforms for mixing up youth from ethnic communities that contributed to national cohesion.

With regard to the religious situation of Tanzania in the 1980s, the demography of religious affiliation could be summarised as follows: 30% of the population was Catholic, 30% belonged to other Christian denominations, 30% were Muslims, and about 10% followed traditional African religions.[91]

The history of the Catholic church in Tanzania was marked by the arrival of the Portuguese Augustinian missionaries, who arrived in Zanzibar in 1499 with Vasco Da Gama. They, however, did not last long because of

[91] The population following the traditional African religions has been reducing since the 1980s, in favour of all the other three major religious groups.

the Arab Muslim opposition and their mission came to an end in 1698 because of the Oman-Arab Conquest of Zanzibar. The successful evangelization of the Catholic Church in Tanzania was launched in the 19th century carried out by three religious congregations namely the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans), Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), and the Benedictine Monks.

The Holy Ghost Fathers arrived in Zanzibar and crossed over to Bagamoyo in 1863 led by Fr Antoine Horner. They also helped in the rural settlements of the freed slaves bought off or rescued from Arab slave traders by the British marines at sea. From among these freed slaves catechists were also trained, who accompanied the missionaries northwards up to the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The Missionaries of Africa, led by Fr. Livinhac, arrived in 1878, focusing on two major areas of Tanganyika, one started around the shores of Lake Victoria having reached Uganda from the Kenyan side who worked in Kagera region, and the other focused on the regions around Lake Tanganyika. In 1887, the Benedictine monks of Saint Ottilien arrived in Dar es Salaam, and they moved southward towards the Ruvuma River bordering Mozambique. They established two monasteries in Peramiho and Ndanda which became hubs for modern civilization and development in the South of Tanzania. They also established Catholic communities along the way from Bagamoyo to Ruvuma, some of these especially in Iringa and Mbeya were taken over by the Consolata missionaries after World War I. Other congregations followed: the missionary endeavours of Capuchins in Dar es Salaam, and that of Passionists in Dodoma region are noteworthy. More missionaries arrived after World War II which were the Salvatorians, Rosminians and Maryknollers.

Meanwhile, the number of local clergy began to increase leading towards a demand for more seminaries. The Jesuits also arrived, who basically became teachers in diocesan seminaries. Diocesan congregations came to be founded increasingly. By 1980, the Catholic hierarchy was well-established. Cardinal Laureen Rugambwa (1912-1997)[92], the first African Cardinal, was the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam.

In the first decade of Salesian presence in Tanzania, seven communities were initiated. For the sake of easy reading, the Salesian history of the 1980s in Tanzania has been divided into two chapters in this book. The chapter focuses on the three communities in Mafinga area of Iringa diocese. The next chapter narrates the history around four other communities in Tanzania: Iringa, Dodoma Technical School, Dar es Salaam, and Dodoma Seminary.

[92] He was a bishop from 1952 to 1992: of the diocese of Rutabo/Bukoba until 1968, and then the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam until 1992. He was made a cardinal by Pope John XXIII in the consistory of 28th March 1960.

The Parish of Our Lady of Assumption in Mafinga

The first mission entrusted to the Salesians in Tanzania was the parish of Mafinga. As narrated in an earlier chapter, on Palm Sunday, 11th April 1981, the parish was entrusted to the Salesians and our pioneers – Frs. Peter Fernando, Tony Fernandes and Joseph Pulikkal – launched out courageously without being awed by the challenges posed by the novelty of language and culture. For a second time, we were entrusted with a Parish in Eastern Africa that had earlier been taken care of by the Consolata Missionaries, the other being Siakago in Kenya.

The Consolata missionaries planted the church around the Southern Highlands of Tanzania after the first Missionaries viz. the Benedictines, who were basically Germans were greatly weakened after the First World War (1919). A parish of Mafinga was created in 1953, with its mission centre at Makalala about 10 kms from present day Mafinga Town. Mafinga had been previously called John's Corner. Situated along the Dar es Salaam-Zambia trunk road, about 600kms from Dar es Salaam, the newly formed township was marked by the sudden increase of population due to the *Ujamaa* policy of consolidating sporadic hamlets into Ujamaa villages or settlements. Mafinga soon became the centre of administration of Mufindi District in Iringa Region. By 1969, a chapel was built by the Consolata missionaries at John's Corner, as an outstation of the Makalala Parish. In 1980, the parish itself was shifted to Mafinga, with Mary Assumed into Heaven as the patroness. The first buildings of the mission, which included the priests' residence and sisters' convent were blessed on 20th June 1980.

So, the infrastructure was all new and the Consolata Missionaries, taking care of the Parish, had made great sacrifices and worked hard to finance and prepare the site. It was not easy for them to accept the request of the Bishop to relinquish their newly built and furnished Parish complex. The Consolata Missionaries, who have a common origin as the Salesians from Castelnuovo Don Bosco, graciously welcomed the three Salesians to Mafinga. The handing over of the parish from the Consolata missionaries to the Salesians was extraordinarily smooth. Credit goes to the then Regional Superior of the Consolata Missionaries, Fr Lumeti, the parish priest Fr Aldo, and the assistant parish priest, Fr Alessandro Nava. Bishop Mario A. Mgulunde presided over the farewell to the Consolatas and the welcoming of the Salesians on 12th April 1981. Fr Nava spent a whole month living with the Salesians in the community of Mafinga parish introducing them to the people and the ministry.

The Salesians took charge of the parish with Fr Peter Mathew Fernando[93] as Parish Priest; Fr Tony Fernandes as Assistant Parish Priest, Director of

[93] Fr Peter Mathew Fernando, originally from the Madras Province in India, was among the first group of Salesians who reached East Africa. His brother, Fr Paul Bosco Fernando was also a Salesian back in Chennai. Fr Peter Mathew was the first Salesian parish priest of Mafinga and served from 12th April 1981 to 13th

the Youth Centre and as teacher at Mafinga Diocesan Seminary; and Fr Joseph Pulikkal as Assistant Parish Priest, entrusted also with the animation and teaching at the Catechetical Training Centre, Makalala, which was still at its beginning stages.

In April 1981 also, Fr Dominic Padinjareparambil and the Co-operator, John Williams,[94] joined the Salesians working in Tanzania. Fr Dominic joined the community of Mafinga Parish, while Mr John was posted to Iringa. Fr Dominic was a hard-worker and a great carer of land and its produce.[95] The House Chronicles of Mafinga Parish has several entries related to Fr Dominic and his trees.[96] By then the Superiors had thought of sending Fr Joseph Pulikkal for higher studies in Catechetics to the UPS in Rome, Italy to better equip him for his role as the future full-time Director of the Catechetical Training Centre, Makalala. A year later, Fr Tony Fernandes was transferred to take up the pioneering role of the Salesian presence at the Diocesan Youth Centre situated at Upanga, Dar es salaam.

Cl. Michael Karikunnel[97] and Cl. Neville Luis arrived in Mafinga on 14th August 1982; they were the first set of Practical Trainees to arrive from India to East Africa and both were assigned to Mafinga. Cl. Michael took care of the small number of boys as aspirants who began to stay at the

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May 1985, when he rather abruptly decided to leave for India on "health grounds" –the Salesians in Mafinga present then regretted that they could not have given him a worthy farewell.

[94] At the end of three years' stay with the Salesians, John Williams opted to join the Salesian Congregation and entered the novitiate in May 1984 in Siliguri, West Bengal, India. Read more about him in a later chapter.

[95] He is the younger brother of Fr George Padinjaraparambil who was among the pioneering missionaries. George arrived in Kenya in 1980 and was assigned to the community of Korr. Their brother Johnny is also Salesian in the Province of New Delhi in India. Their brother's son, Jose Padinjaraparambil, also a Salesian, arrived in Tanzania as a Practical Trainee in 1985. The Padinjaraparambil brothers in East Africa (Fr PD George and PD Dominic) were hard workers, excelling in setting up needed infrastructure for the mission; they had a special affection for fruit trees. The fruit trees in Mafinga were planted by Fr PD Dominic; the trees in Moshi (1992-1993), Didia-Shinyanga (1993-1994), and Morogoro (2008-2009) by his elder brother, PD George.

[96] On 3rd April 1983: "Fr Dominic rushes to Njombe – apple saplings are in danger of drying up (which were apparently already drying up in Mafinga)… he hopes to bring back an expert! And on 4th April: Fr Dominic returns in the late evening. Tatizo! with the car of course & the expert. Will he resurrect the plants?

[97] Michael Karikunnel arrived in Mafinga in 1982; he did his 2nd year of practical training at Dodoma, then went back to India for theology (1984-1988). After ordination in 1988, he ministered at CTC Makalala (1988-1992), after which he went to Ghana. Since then he has been in West Africa until 2022, when a new assignment brought him to Nairobi.

parish, while learning English (Pre-form) preparing them to be admitted as students at the Diocesan Minor Seminary situated at Makalala B, present day Changarawe, Mafinga. He also taught English at the Diocesan Seminary. Bro Neville taught Science subjects at the Diocesan Seminary and accompanied the youth frequenting the fledgling daily and festive oratory at the Parish Centre. Also in August 1982, Fr Edward Liptak, the only Salesian to join the East Africa jurisdiction from the Eastern United States Province (SUE), arrived in Tanzania. He was to pioneer the setting up of our apostolic school at Mafinga. He too lent a hand in teaching English at the Diocesan Minor Seminary while taking time off to attend Kiswahili language courses conducted at Kipalapala, Tabora.

By the end of 1983, as it emerges from a report written for the Assembly of Confreres in East Africa, Mafinga parish had 11 outstations, with a Catholic population of 10,000 souls, among a general population of about 50,000. The area of the parish had a secondary school, a trade school, and 21 primary schools. There were 12 Small Christian Communities[98] (each unit having an executive committee of 5 members). The Salesian community consisted of Fr Peter Mathew Fernando (as Parish Priest), Fr Edward Liptak (Assistant Parish Priest, in-charge of Salesian aspirants housed at the parish, and teaching at Mafinga Diocesan Seminary), Fr Dominic Padinjaraparambil (Assistant Parish Priest, Administrator, and on the staff of Makalala Catechetical Centre), Cl. Michael Karikunnel (Assistant of the aspirants), and Cl. Neville Luis (Assistant and teaching at Mafinga Diocesan Seminary). They were taking care of 12 aspirants. A daily oratory attracted about 20 youth and children, and the numbers went up to 100 on Sundays. There were several cultural events such as singing and dance competitions. Besides an annual Don Bosco Tournament of Football and Netball was held around the feast of Don Bosco. The dispensary catered to about 30 to 50 out-patients daily. A mobile unit served the villages as well. There was a farm, with 8 acres of land under cultivation, and cattle (35 in number), goats (15), chickens (200) and pigs (7). Some Salesians assisted in teaching at the Catechetical Training Centre. The Salesians in the Parish were assisted by the Teresina Sisters, 11 catechists and 12 religion teachers, and the *Baraza la Walei* (the Parish Lay council with its aim of lay apostolate and spear heading self-reliance policies. At the parish level, the leadership was drawn from the Small Christian Communities).

The early years of the Salesian presences in the 1980s in Tanzania were marked by very challenging times, due to the inopportune economy of the country itself. Most provisions had to be used carefully with utmost caution. For fuel, one had to "rush" from Mafinga to Iringa (a distance of 80 kilometres).[99] One particular event provides a telling example of the

[98] It appears that by 1983, they were not referred to as such.

[99] These expressions frequently appear in the chronicles.

harsh situation of those days, as captured in the chronicles of Mafinga Parish:

On 15th August 1983: "President Nyerere arrives at Mafinga. We too have a welcome guest. The Regional Commissioner stays with us during his stay at Mafinga, [by] name: Mr Kabonge. The Fathers received the President at the Area Commissioner's residence… shook hands with President Nyerere. What a privilege! (These days the mini-generators are giving us light at night. What luck!)

On 16th August 1983: "President Nyerere leaves our humble town… We heard that he remarked that too much cement was used for our buildings at the mission,[100] especially in these hard times for the country. Now that can be explained… can't it?"

To contrast this harsh situation, there was great enthusiasm in the Salesian congregation at large, and the Indian provinces in particular, pertaining to the new Salesian presences in Eastern Africa. In December 1983, the five Indian Provincials visited Tanzania on their way to Italy for the General Chapter (GC22): Fathers Chrys Saldhana (INB), John Peter Sathyaraj (INM), Thomas Thayil (INK), Mathew Pulingathil (ING), and Joseph Kizhekekara (INC). The Rector Major himself, Fr Egidio Vigano would visit Eastern Africa in 1985, and Mafinga on 3rd May 1985, accompanied by Fr Chrys Saldhana, the Provincial of Bombay (INB), and the Delegate of Salesian East Africa, Fr Tony D'Souza. Father Luke van Looy, the superior for missions, visited Mafinga on 8th September 1985.

Don Bosco Seminary in Mafinga

The pioneers were quick to start seeking for local vocations and proceeded to set up a Junior Seminary at the Mafinga parish. Already in 1982, the idea of taking some boys as aspirants was being steadily realized. Two boys were identified and invited to a come-and-see course by mid-1982 while living in an out-house and attending English tuitions as well as conferences on vocational topics. A new building structure at the parish itself was put up in the parish compound under the supervision of Fr Dominic PD. On 28th May 1983, during the external celebration of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians in Tanzania opened the 'aspirantate' premises officially, though the first group of boys had arrived on 15th January that year. The first year was a to be a pre-form, during which time the boys would be coached in English and other relevant subjects. By the middle of 1983, Fr Edward Liptak was made the coordinator for the three major sectors (Parish, Aspirantate, and Catechetical Training Centre) in Mafinga, each of these sectors had

[100] The reference is to the Don Bosco Seminary buildings that were coming up by then.

someone else responsible. Cl. Michael Karikunnel was transferred to Dodoma, and two other clerics, Charles Savariappan and Jose Moonjely were the new arrivals for Practical Training.

At the end of 1983, five boys were chosen to be admitted to Form I studies in Mafinga Diocesan Seminary. Meanwhile, it was decided that from 1984, the Salesians would also have a handful of post-Form IV students as aspirants pursuing their A-Level studies at the diocesan seminary. Eventually, some boys from Kenya also joined this group. The number of boys began to increase, vocation camps began to be held annually, even at different locations. These camps were usually well-prepared and executed by many Salesians. They included typical Salesian activities such as treasure hunts, camp-fires, and quiz competitions.

A new property for the Don Bosco Seminary was given by the Office of Land, adjacent to the parish land, on 12th March 1984. The grounds were cleared in the subsequent months with the help of workers and of the aspirants and "pre-seminarians" staying at the parish compound. The building plans for the new Don Bosco Seminary arrived on 6th July 1984, but "the inaccurate and mistakenly drawn plan makes the [Salesians] go nuts. We have decided to correct it ourselves rather than redoing it."[101]

Eventually the building works in the new plot started, supervised by Fr Edward Liptak. He was also the first Rector of the Seminary. In the Don Bosco Seminary, within the next few years, the school set up playgrounds, vegetable gardens, fields for maize plantation. From its humble beginnings, the junior seminary grew steadily and developed into a full-fledged Apostolic School, the Don Bosco Seminary of Mafinga. The first group of students who had begun their studies in the Parish completed their Form IV in 1985. By the beginning of 1987, the following were part of the community of Mafinga Seminary: Fr Edward Liptak (Rector), Fr Joseph Maliekkal, Fr Sebastian Mattapally, Bro. Mathew Aayila, and Cl. Jose Padinjaraparambil (2nd year), Thomas Kunnumchira (KC) and George Tharanyil (TJ), and the classes were fully being offered at the new premises.

Mafinga Seminary had had a history of being led by a very gifted team of Salesians. From its inception, the Seminary has been known for quality education and Christian formation. The results of Form IV students have been making waves. By the early 1990s, in the National Examination, the Don Bosco Seminary stood as the third best school in the country (in 1994 and 1995 consecutively).

Catechetical Training Centre in Makalala

[101] Chronicles of Mafinga Parish, dated 6th July 1984.

As said earlier, Mafinga Mission had been first established in 1953, in a location in Makalala. In the year 1952, the vast property was donated by the Tanzanian government to the church for pastoral and humanitarian services to the people of that area and its surroundings. Fr. Negro, a Consolata Missionary was entrusted with the work of developing the mission. Eventually, this Mission complex had a large, very well-built church completed in 1964, with residential buildings which included the presbytery of the priests and the convent of the Consolata sisters, a dispensary, a primary school with a small boarding, and a carpentry. All of these departments were situated on a large stretch of land, measuring about 1600 acres. On account of the movement of the people, necessitated by the *Ujamaa* policy of the government of Tanzania, in 1980, the parish itself had to move to the current location near John's Corner adjacent to the international highway. In the location of the old mission in Makalala was born the early form of Catechetical Training Centre.

By initiating this centre, to be run by the Teresina Sisters and the SCIM Brothers, two local congregations of the Diocese of Iringa, Bishop Mario Mgulunde desired to put into practice, '*Catechesi Tradendae'* (published in 1979), in which Pope John Paul II said:

> *I am anxious to give thanks in the church's name to all of you, lay teachers of catechesis in the parishes, the men and still more the numerous women throughout the world, who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generations. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal, and it is an ancient form of the lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people do not receive suitable religious training in the home. How many of us have received from people like you our preparation for the Sacraments of Penance, or for first Communion and Confirmation* (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 66).

In 1981, the Salesians of Don Bosco were invited to run the centre, on behalf of the Diocese, in collaboration with the local congregations of SCIM Brothers[102] and that of the Teresina Sisters, who were already there as teachers and a Sister as in-charge of the candidates. Initially, there was no Salesian presence as such at Makalala. The Salesians staying in the Parish coordinated the ministry. Father Joseph Pulikkal (Fr PL) was put in-charge of the programme. After a year of commuting from the parish to the Catechists Training Centre, Fr Joseph left for Rome on 7th August 1982 for studies in Catechetics at the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS), the first one to be sent for studies abroad from Eastern Africa. Meanwhile, Fr Dominic Padinjaraparambil followed up the CTC. In 1984, some renovation work was carried out creating a dormitory for men. After

[102] The SCIM Brothers withdrew from Makalala in 2002.

his return from Rome, in 1985, Fr Joseph set up the Centre more systematically.

When the training programme started in 1980, the Centre was offering a three-months course, then it went on to offer a six-months course, later this developed into a one-year programme. Eventually it evolved into a two year course of training. In the 1980s, Catechetical Training Centre (CTC) was the only centre of this kind in the Diocese of Iringa for the training of lay catechists with the catholic population of 450,000. In this vast Diocese, there are 33 parishes with around 350 outstations and a population of around 1,987,678. There are also catechists from few of the other dioceses of Tanzania, as well as candidates of few religious congregations.

In the visitation book of the community of Makalala, in its very first entry, Father Juan Vecchi at the end of the Extraordinary Visitation on 9th April 1992 remarks, "This Catechetical Centre is already full of interesting achievements: the two-year course for catechetics, their subsequent placement, assistance given by them to parishes, has its contributions to the diocese for a better evangelization. It is a work that qualifies for our presence in Tanzania…"

Father Vecchi goes on to add something that gets repeated by visitators to the community of CTC Makalala in the subsequent years: that the Salesians should not shy from giving "to our collaborators and to the students, our Salesian approach of the Oratorian Spirit as a good suggestion. Let us make every effort to transmit the Salesian approach especially in dealing with the youth so that our students who graduate from this institute and return to their respective parishes as catechists become bearers of Don Bosco's love for the youth."[103] (Fr Vecchi in 1992, and Fr Thayil in 1993)

Early years in Tanzania – Iringa region – were marked by close collaboration with the diocesan clergy, Consolota Missionaries, and other congregations. In Mafinga, the Teresina sisters were close collaborators at the Parish as well as in Makalala. They were part of the community. One Bro Timothy Mponzi, of the SCIM Brothers, gets mentioned in the Chronicles of the Mafinga Parish as if he was part of the Salesian community. He also oversaw the constructions of the buildings of the Don Bosco Seminary in Mafinga, and the Chapels of many an out-station, and other needed renovations.

[103] Quote from Visitation Report to Makalala by Father Thayil on 13th November 1993. He also draws attention to the Report by Fr Juan Vecchi on 9th April 1992. Also a Report by Fr Valentine de Pablo on 23rd August 2003 and others.

Box 5
Karibuni Course: Preparation for Missionaries from India

The first *Karibuni Course* was held in then Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1981, when the Salesians from different provinces who expressed interest in Project Africa, gathered in Mumbai for a course of introduction to the African culture and missions. Fr Tony D'Souza, the Provincial of Bombay province took the initiative to organise this course. The team of facilitators included some African seminarians who were in Pune for their studies, a SVD priest who was an expert on missiology, and a representative from the Mission Sector at the Generalate.

The second such course was held from 21st March to 3rd April 1982 in Pune. Its aim was very comprehensive and well-thought-out as it emerges from the invitation sent to the Salesian Provincials of India, in a letter by Fr Tony D'Souza dated 6th January 1982. He says,

"Karibuni Tena" is our second Orientation Programme for SALESIANS (Fathers, Brothers, Cooperators) intending to volunteer for the African Missions.

Here's an opportunity:
To try your tongue – at Swahili
To feed your mind – on African cult and culture
To test your attitude – with native myths and beliefs
To encounter – the growing Church in Africa
To discern – your missionary call.

Every year, the *Karibuni* course was held until 1984, with an aim of creating missionary enthusiasm among confreres in India. It was open to anyone who showed some desire for the missions, and not everyone who participated in the course actually opted to minister in East Africa.

In his report to the Salesian Provincial Conference of India (SPCI), dated 30th March to 1st April, 1984, Fr Tony D'Souza, the then Delegate for Eastern Africa, reports that "*Karibuni* Courses have been held in the last four years with a view to recruit and prepare missionaries for Africa. In future, this course may not be necessary as the Provincials themselves will regularly recruit and make available a missionary each year. Besides, in Africa there are preparation courses for missionaries destined to Kenya and Tanzania which our missionaries may attend before they begin their apostolate."

Chapter 7

Salesians in Tanzania – Part 2
Four More Communities in Tanzania

Salesians in Iringa Town

Iringa is one of the 31 regions of Tanzania today; in 1980, when the Salesians arrived in Tanzania, it had 25 regions. Iringa is situated in the Central Highland of Tanzania along the main road from Dar-es-Salaam to Mbeya. Iringa town is the headquarters of the region, situated at 506 kms from Dar es Salaam. Mafinga – the subject of the previous chapter – is part of Iringa region. In the first section of this chapter, we focus on the Salesian Youth Centre and Technical Training Institute, which also will include a pastoral ministry in an outstation not far from Iringa Town.

In the 1980s,[104] Iringa town which was located up the hills had a population of 114,000 people. The population growth was estimated to be at 9.2%, due to a high level of migration of rural population to the fast-developing town area. As of 1985, the region of Iringa had 667 primary schools (class I to VII), with a total enrolment of 213,453 students. The completion rate at class VII was at 87.8%. The region had 17 post-secondary technical training centres, and 20 secondary schools. The secondary institutions were not sufficient to intake all the class VII leavers numbering around 25,000 to 27,000 boys and girls; these schools could take only about 10,000 students. Definitely, Salesian intervention was much needed.

As previously narrated, Fr John Vellayil, Bro. Baron Tyrone and Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy were assigned to start the Salesian presence in Iringa. They arrived in Iringa in October 1980, but in the first part of year 1981, they went for language courses. On their return, for almost a year, they were hosted at the bishop's residence. During this time, Fr Stephen began to work among the youth in the town by carrying out a survey about the number and the needs of the youth in the locality visiting all the schools. Fr John was following up on the requisition of the land and the building work that was to commence to establish a youth centre and technical school at the location called 'Frelimo', a little out of the Iringa town. The land, about 10 acres in area, was offered by the government to the Salesians. Brother Baron went to stay with the *Servi Cordi Immaculati Mariae-SCIM* Brothers at Tosamaganga, with the aim of assisting the Teresina Sisters to run the printing press. The building work for the Don Bosco Technical School and youth centre began on 24th September 1981

[104] As found in a project proposal written by Fr Stephen Chemmakuzhy for submission to Comide-Belgian Salesian NGO for funding, dated 17 June 1988.

with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. The residence for the Salesians was built by the Diocese, and on 24th May 1982, the Salesians moved into their new home and commenced youth centre activities. Almost a year later, the buildings of the workshops were blessed on 24th April 1983. The printing press that was running at Tosa Maganga was shifted to the Don Bosco premises also in 1983.

The local government was appreciative of the initiatives of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In January 1986, when the Salesians requested the Regional Education Officer of Iringa, permission to start a Pre-School Course, the Officer advised that they should "accelerate the registration of the [whole] school so that you don't have to ask for permission for courses you intend to conduct at the centre." In addition, the Officer referred to a previous communication that envisaged that the printing and tailoring courses would commence in July 1986. The Officer further encouraged the Salesians to start a teachers' training institute since there is a shortage of teachers in the region.[105]

Of course, Salesians could not solve all the problems. As promised, the training programme in the technical school officially opened in 1986, with tailoring, carpentry, with the press.[106] The Salesian community was canonically erected on 24th June 1986, with a daily oratory, parish activity and Technical School. Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy became its first Rector. Meanwhile, Fr John Vellayil had been moved to Dodoma. By July 1985, Bro John William joined the community as a professed member, having completed his novitiate in Siliguri, West Bengal, India. Brother Baron, one of the pioneers, showed very fragile health right from 1981. He was often admitted in the hospital. He had issues with food even when he was staying with the SCIM brothers at Tosamaganga in the first half of 1981. He apparently suffered from peptic ulcers.

Right from the start of the Salesian presence in Iringa, in 1981, the Salesians began to minister at the outstation of Mkwawa. In the early days, even though sacraments were administered at the outstation, the records were kept at the Consolata Parish of Mshindo. From 1985, with the oral understanding of the Bishop Mario Mgulunde and the parish priest, the Salesians were permitted to maintain their own records, and even to issue civil certificates for marriage. Eventually, the outstation had its own Pastoral Council, while its leaders attended the meeting also at the parish. Such was the extent of pastoral freedom that was offered to the Salesians in Iringa. The Salesians, who felt well accepted in the diocese, took advantage of this situation and showed deep commitment in exercising pastoral charity.

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[105] Letter dated 31/01/1986.

[106] Later, other trades were added: Masonary (1991), Electricals (1993), and Welding (2003).

Box 6
Bishop Mario Mgulunde

Mario Epifanio Abdallah Mgulunde was born in 1931, in Kalenga, not far from Tosamaganga in Iringa. He was ordained a priest on April 8, 1962. Pope Paul VI appointed him as the Bishop of Iringa, and he was consecrated on February 15, 1970. From 1976 to 1982, Bishop Mario Mgulunde was the chairman of the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference. On March 9, 1985, Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Tabora. He passed away on 14 March 2006 in Tabora.

Bishop Mario was a great benefactor and admirer of the Salesian charism. He was the first Bishop to invite the Salesians to his diocese in Tanzania, and no wonder six Salesians were sent to his diocese in 1980 to start two communities. He spoke highly of the Salesian work in his diocese to other bishops of Tanzania, which attracted many invitations to the Salesians across Tanzania. Sadly, the Salesians were not able to honour all of them. Already before he moved to Tabora (between 1980 and 1985), he facilitated the founding of four Salesian presences in Iringa Diocese. The enormous amount of communication that went on between the Salesian superiors, especially with Fr Tony D'Souza and later with Fr Thomas Thayil, and the Bishop shows the "intimate" relationship that existed that often went beyond the formal letters.

The Salesians also facilitated the formation and studies of some of the diocesan clergy (such as Frs Masika and Jeremiah Mhume) and the SCIM brothers (such as Bro Raphael and Bro Christopher) back in India. The Salesians also facilitated the arrival of some of the other religious from India such as the Montfort Brothers to the Diocese of Iringa.

Salesians in Dodoma

Dodoma was the designated national capital of Tanzania since 1974. The relocation of the national capital from Dar es-Salaam to Dodoma was scheduled to be completed by 1990. The process of shifting was slow to come by because of lack of infrastructure, which was not easy to develop since the foreign missions in Dar es Salaam blocked possible funding to develop the infrastructure because they were not very enthused by the decision to shift the capital. Dodoma is about 480 km west of Dar es

Salaam, situated at an elevation of 3,720 feet (1,135 m) in a sparsely populated agricultural region. By the end of 1970s, the population within Dodoma urban and suburban areas was estimated to be 70,000.

The land was semi-arid, and agriculture which was being carried out was not in large scale. More and more vineyards began to crop-up around Dodoma town area thanks to the initiatives of European missionaries. The town was also a market centre for products from near-by areas such as Kondoa and Singida; the products included peanuts (groundnuts), castor beans, sunflower seeds, gum, corn (maize), rice, wheat, coffee, tea, tobacco, and sorghum. Most of Dodoma's inhabitants were of the Gogo, Sanawe, Rangi, and Burungi peoples. The few industries that were being developed processed wood and furniture, beverages, food products, milled rice and flour, soap, and oil.

As of 31st December 1979, the Catholic Diocese of Dodoma consisted of four political districts (Dodoma Urban, Dodoma Rural, Kondoa, and Mpwapwa) extending an area of 41,311 sq. kms, and comprising a population of 973,335 people, out of which Catholics were 142,625 (14.6%). The diocesan clergy numbered 22, who together with religious priests served in 24 parishes. The diocese had a sizable number of missionaries, who totalled almost 100 including 49 priests. The Diocesan Sisters of St Gemma had 205 members. Health condition of the people was very poor, with high prevalence of acquired blindness and leprosy; the diocese ran 17 medical facilities.

As said in an earlier chapter, three Salesians, Fr Crispin D'Souza (Superior), Bro. Trophy D'Souza and Bro. Celestine Nathan arrived in Dodoma in October 1980. For months, they used the Bishop's House as their base. Fr Crispin had six months of Swahili course, while the Brothers had a shorter one. Even on their return after the language courses, nothing specific had emerged about the location that would become the Salesian community. They went on to stay at the Bishop's House, and later they shifted to a house which was owned by the Jesuits. The Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr Hector Almeida was very helpful to the Salesians.[107]

By the time of the Provincial Visitation of 4th to 6th August 1981, Fr Tony D'Souza was able to report that the Salesians had been offered by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), through the Diocese, a land of about 13 acres in size, which was located 7 kms from the town.[108] The land had some people living in it, and the CDA was in the process of

[107] The Salesians and the Jesuits signed an agreement on 31st May 1981, for the use of the Jesuit house by the Salesians at Miuji (4th Mile, Arusha Road, Dodoma) for a period of one-year, from 17th July 1981 to 16th July 1982. Jesuits were very generous to the Salesians who had to pay only for the water and electricity, they could use all the furniture etc..

[108] The land was allocated by the CDF on 12 March 1981.

relocating them. Brother Trophy had already developed a project plan, which was used for fund-raising from abroad. The survey of the land took longer than expected. Meanwhile, Brother Celestine went to Tabora for a two-month course in motor vehicle mechanics. Work on the building at Miuji could begin only by 7th November 1981, and as the work progressed in small strides the Salesians began some youth activities.

After nearly a year of building work, marked by many challenges, and exactly two years after their arrival in Dodoma, on 30 October 1982, the Salesian community was able to move to the new location, having made their first intake in September. In due course, the construction work began on the workshops. In February 1983, the Tanzanian Catholic Magazine *Kiongozi* reported that the school had to be temporarily closed due to floods. As for the Salesian community, since Bro Trophy moved to Dar es Salaam in the middle of 1982, and eventually Fr Crispin himself moved out, Fr John Vellayil was brought to Dodoma in 1983. Meanwhile, young Salesians also started arriving for practical training. Cls. Hubert Pinto and Albert Saminedi were the first group to arrive in 1984. The community was canonically erected on 4th April 1986, with Fr John Vellayil as its first Rector (1986 to 1990).

As for the students at the institute, at the end of 1983, eight students completed the training in metal fitting. In 1984, the school launched the carpentry training, the following year welding trade was also started. In 1991, four new trades were introduced: fitter-welder, motor vehicle mechanics, carpentry and fitter-turner. By the end of the decade, Don Bosco Technical Institute at Dodoma-Miuji was a full-fledged institution.

The Don Bosco Youth Centre – Upanga, Dar Es Salaam

Dar-es-salaam is a seaport facing the Indian Ocean. The name of this town signifies "gate way to peace", it is the commercial capital of Tanzania buzzing with activities, with youth from all over the country seeking admission in schools and university colleges, and above all on the lookout for employment. In 1980, the population was about a million, with a growth rate of 6%. By the end of the decade, the population hit 1.5 million, with a slight slower growth rate. Even though Dodoma was declared the capital of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam was by far the largest city in Tanzania acting as a slow-growing centre for commercial activities, with most international corporates and the embassies finding a base here. Dar es Salaam had a rural cultural life with a friendly, and rather laid-back, atmosphere, and not comparable to other vibrant cities of the African continent such as Nairobi or Lagos. The informal economy played a crucial role in Dar es Salaam, with many residents, especially the 'Asians' engaged in small-scale trades and services. Infrastructure development was a challenge, particularly in transportation and energy sectors. Limited infrastructure hindered economic growth.

The people of different ethnic backgrounds socialised together. The percentage of Muslim population in Dar es Salaam was higher than the rest of the mainland, however, there was a great sense of religious cohesion. The Catholic population was young and fast growing due to migration of the rural population into the city.

In 1981, when His Eminence Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa[109] came to know of the arrival of the Salesians in Tanzania, he was eager to have the Salesians of Don Bosco in his Archdiocese. Towards the end of April 1981, when Fr John Vellayil went down from Iringa to Dar es Salaam to collect their unaccompanied luggage from India, in an unarranged encounter with the Cardinal, His Eminence expressed his desire to invite the Salesians to place their "Youth Charism" at the service of the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam. At the suggestion of Fr Vellayil, the Cardinal followed this conversation almost immediately with the letter to the Provincial in Bombay, offering a formal invitation to the Salesians.[110] The Salesians found this a god-sent and responded very quickly to the request, since there was a need to have a procure house in the commercial capital of the country in order to coordinate the Salesian works in Tanzania.

In February 1982, Fr Tony D'Souza, the then Provincial of Bombay Province and Superior of the Indian Salesians in Eastern Africa, requested Bro. Trophy D'Souza to study further possibilities of making the Don Bosco Youth Centre from an idea to a visible reality. On 6th June 1982, Bro. Trophy arrived in Dar es Salaam from Dodoma. After a brief feasibility study and consultations with other priests and religious involved in similar service programmes, the Catholic Youth Centre at Upanga was handed over to the Salesians in August 1982. Fr. Tony Fernandes, was the one in charge, Br. Gabriel Fernandez, a newcomer, and Bro. Trophy himself formed the first Salesian community at Upanga. An official inauguration was held on 30th October 1982. The Salesians at the Youth Centre were entrusted with the youth and catechetical ministry in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam. And the contract between the Archdiocese and Society of the Salesians of Don Bosco reads that "The Catholic Youth Centre is entrusted to the Salesians for as long as they wish or are able

[109] Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa was the first African cardinal. He was born on August 9, 1912, in Bukongo, Tanganyika (now part of Tanzania), ordained a priest in 1943, and was appointed the Bishop of Rutabo (later Bukoba), Tanzania, in 1953. Cardinal Rugambwa was appointed as a cardinal by Pope John XXIII in January 1960. In 1968, he was appointed the Archbishop Dar es Salaam, where he ministered until his retirement in 1992. And he passed away on December 8, 1997. He played a significant role in promoting the Church in Africa and participated in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), where he contributed to discussions on issues related to the African Church and its role within the global Catholic community.

[110] Cf. Chronicles of Don Bosco Iringa, dt. 27/04/1981.

to. In the event of their pulling out, the land and building will revert to the Archdiocese."

With their characteristic vitality, the Salesians started to build up facilities for youth ministry. The space was limited and sporting facilities were lacking. And the times were hard too. In those days, Tanzania was facing an economic crisis; as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere himself had remarked after his visit to Mafinga, building materials were hard to come by; but the early Salesian pioneers did not lose heart. A large multi-purpose hall was built. It would serve as a theatre, hall for marriage functions, and other social gatherings. As an indoor stadium, the hall had facilities for basketball, volleyball, netball and badminton. Soon, the Salesians were asked to coordinate the Catholic Religious Education (CRE)[111] programme for secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam; this was done by bringing together lay-catechists and other religious who were offered a small stipend by the Archdiocese. The team was to be coordinated and animated by the Salesians. Eventually, the Salesians began to coordinate also the Young Christian Students (YCS) Movement in all the schools.

In addition to these regular formalised ministries, the Centre was a place of meeting for the young people to develop their talents and skills and to grow intellectually, morally and spiritually. In the early years of 1980s, the youth from the Goan community of Dar es Salaam began to make use of the facilities. In the later part of 1980s, ethnic background of the youth using the facilities began to change. An annual youth fest that was held with a lot of fanfare began to attract youth from every background. Eventually, the basketball team(s) at the centre attracted a lot of media coverage.

To the Salesians themselves, Don Bosco Upanga also served as a Procure House till the year 2000. It was a guest house for Salesians coming from up-country for purposes of meeting, shopping, to process government permits, and as a transit hub for travelling abroad. As the former Youth Centre building did not have sufficient space to accommodate the increasing number of guests, a two-storied block was built with better facilities for accommodation, a dining hall and a small chapel for daily Eucharist and liturgical prayer. More importantly, the Novena to Mary Help of Christians began to be held every Saturday; this was very well attended especially by the members of the Goan community. All in all,

[111] Unlike Kenya, where CRE was part of the national curriculum and examinable at the end of grade 8 in the 8-4-4 system. In Tanzania, the school was required to allot some time weekly for religious instruction, and it was the responsibility of the respective religious leaders of the location to coordinate the delivery of the instructions. In most dioceses in Tanzania, it was the duty of the Parish Priest to arrange for the Catholic religious instruction in the schools of his parish. However, in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam it was very efficiently coordinated at the diocesan level.

Don Bosco Upanga proved to be a flourishing Youth Centre with the charism of St. John Bosco.[112]

The assistance offered by lay people, especially the members of the Goan community at Dar es Salaam to the Salesians in the first decade need to be noted. Mr Xavier and his family gets mentioned very frequently in the chronicles of almost all communities of Tanzania in the 1980s. They relayed messages; they hosted Salesians at their home; they purchased provisions and spare parts for them.

These years in Tanzania were also marked by many adventures on the road. With bad roads across Tanzania in the 1980s, accidents and breakdowns were very common even among the Salesian drivers. The Railway Bus, the means of public transport those days in Tanzania, was notorious for its lack of schedule and breakdowns. There were occasions when it overturned with some Salesians inside! But God was good to us! The indefatigable commitment of the Salesians themselves coupled by the financial support of generous donations from Salesian Mission procures across the globe, made the first decade of the Salesian work in Tanzania nothing short of a miracle. Mary did it all!

Salesian Seminary (Pre-novitiate) in Dodoma

As it was narrated in the context of the Don Bosco Seminary in Mafinga, in the previous chapter, by 1984, the Salesians began to recruit some post-Form IV students in Tanzania, as aspirants. They were pursuing their A-Level studies at the diocesan seminary in Mafinga. And from 1988, the secondary school O-level students who had joined the Mafinga Don Bosco Seminary were also expected to finish their studies and would be ready to begin their A-level studies (Form V and VI). There were also some students who were desiring to join the Salesians after their Form VI. Then they were the young men from Kenya who had finished the Kenya Secondary School Certificate (KCSE) who needed more Salesian background before they could be considered for the Salesian formation. There was definitely a need for another seminary at a higher level to cater to these groups.

For this purpose, the Salesians themselves acquired a property just adjacent to the Don Bosco Technical School in Dodoma. On this property, fully owned by the Salesians, Dodoma Salesian Seminary was built in 1987 for A-level and possibly a diploma level college education. When it did open, besides the young men who were interested in a Salesian vocation, student-seminarians from other congregations also began to

[112] Peter Paul Lalmalsamwa became the Rector of Don Bosco Upanga community in December 1989, and remained there until 1994.

join, among them were the Passionists, Precious Blood, and Diocesan Seminarians.

The first batch of students for Form V was admitted in July 1989. The seminary had 28 students, of whom 19 were for the Salesians and 9 were for non-Salesian candidates. The public celebration of the official inauguration of the A-Level Seminary was held on 2nd December 1989. The function was graced by Bishop Matthias Isuja of the diocese of Dodoma, and the Honourable A.H. Mayagilla, Minister of Education. Right from the beginning, the Salesians applied for permission to offer a Diploma in Education and thus to run the 'Seminary' as a Teacher Training College.[113] The permission to run a Salesian Seminary-Teacher Training College was granted on 12th February 1990. Fr Edward Liptak was at the forefront of all these developments.

In due course, the Seminary doors were opened to other students: among them were also candidates of women religious congregations as also other boys and girls who came to the seminary only for studies. Both the higher secondary and Teachers Training College have had excellent results over the years, thus becoming a premier and prestigious institution in Tanzania.

The Salesian community of Dodoma Seminary was canonically erected by the Rector Major as a Pre-novitiate house under the patronage of Dominic Savio on 6th December 1989, and Fr Edward Liptak was its first Rector. He would be moved to Don Bosco Utume in 1990, and following this Fr Godfrey D'Souza became the Rector. Fr Neville Luis continued to function as the Dean of Studies, and Bro Robert Dias was the administrator of the house.

Box 7
Don Bosco was waiting for Salesians in Tanzania!

When the Salesians arrived in Iringa, Tanzania, they were happily surprised to see a statue of Don Bosco in one of the way-side chapels on the dusty road to the church in Tosa Maganga, off the main road from Iringa to Mafinga. How did Don Bosco arrive there before the Salesians did?

Francesco Alessandro Cagliero was born at Castelnuovo D'Asti in 1875. Castelnuovo Don Bosco, as it is referred to now, was the native parish of St Joseph Cafasso, St John Bosco, Blessed Joseph Allamano – a nephew of Cafasso and the founder of the Consolata Missionaries, and John Cagliero who was one of the first Salesians, and later a Cardinal in Argentina, of whom Francesco might have been a relative. The family of

[113] The official application was made on 19th October 1989.

Dominic Savio has also lived for some years at Murialdo, which was a chapel of the parish of Castelnuovo.

Francesco Cagliero was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Turin in 1899. Later, in 1903, he joined the Consolata Missionaries. Eventually, he was assigned to Tanzania. He served as the Apostolic Prefect for Iringa with the seat in Tosa Maganga from 1922 until his death in 1935. It is he who brought the statue to Iringa.

In 1999, the Salesians at the community of Iringa requested the Bishop for the statue and placed it at a more prominent place. Now 'Don Bosco' who had preceded the Salesians stands at the entrance of the Don Bosco Technical and Vocational Training Institute in Iringa interceding for all those who enter the institution.

We owe much to the Consolata Missionaries who provided a safe landing for the early missionaries in Kenya and Tanzania!

Chapter 8

Sowing the Salesian Charism in Uganda[114]

Uganda in the 1980s

Uganda gained independence from Britain on 9 October 1962, and a year later became a Republic. Milton Obote was elected as the first executive Prime Minister, with the Buganda Kabaka (King) Edward Muteesa II as the ceremonial president. In 1966, following a power struggle between the Obote-led government and King Muteesa, Obote suspended the constitution and removed the ceremonial president and vice-president. In 1967, a new constitution proclaimed Uganda a Republic and abolished the traditional kingdoms. Obote was declared the president. On 25th January 1971, following a military coup, Obote was deposed from power and General Idi Amin seized control of the country. For the next eight years, Amin ruled Uganda as a ruthless dictator with the support of the military, exercising irrational cruelty. In 1979, following the war between Uganda and Tanzania, Idi Amin was ousted.

Between 1979 and 1986 were the years of the so-called Ugandan Bush-War, which was in effect a civil war. The civil war lasted more than five years and the battle ground was the area around Luwero (then called the Luwero Triangle), a territory still virgin and covered by forests and affording rebels much hiding places. The area was over-run by Government troops and rebels, one looking for the other and hiding from each other: the local population was heavily victimized by both troops, with looting, violence, rape and abduction. Schools, parishes and public institutions were abandoned due to the insecurity.

In 1986, Yoweri K. Museveni took power after defeating the Government of Milton Obote. After the victory, the country gradually returned to normalcy. So also the Church, which was headed by Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga, Archbishop of Kampala, began to think of expansion given the favourable tranquillity that reigned. The Cardinal made a request to Fr. Vigano to send Salesians to Uganda. His rationale was clear: the Parishes needed to be re-energised after the disruption caused by the civil war.

The Catholic Church in Uganda boasted a long and glorious history. In 1886, the 22 Uganda Martyrs watered with their own blood the seed of Christianity which had just been sown a few years earlier (in 1879) with the arrival of the Missionaries of Africa from Tanzania. In 1986, the Catholic were 40% of the population of Uganda, with even a higher percentage in Buganda region (Kampala, Masaka, Mityana, Luwero,

[114] This chapter is largely an adoption of an unpublished manuscript by Fr Gianbattista Uboldi.

Lugazi Districts). The dioceses already had a number of local priests. And local congregations too accounted for many a vocation.

The Salesians in Uganda

The prospect of sending the Salesians to Uganda attracted the attention of the Rector Major of the Salesians who saw in Uganda a fertile ground for the Salesian charism at this opportune time and a possibility to benefit from flourishing vocations in Uganda. In line with the method of Project Africa, the task of sending Salesians to Uganda was given to the Polish Provinces, who had already started sending Missionaries to Zambia. Poland was still behind the Berlin Wall and under the Communist Regime, but vocations were flourishing and they could easily respond to the appeal of Fr Vigano. Fr Dziedziel, special Visitator for Eastern Europe, came to Uganda to meet Cardinal Nsubuga and assess his proposals. In 1987, Fr Dziedziel landed at Entebbe airport and after a meeting with the Cardinal at Rubaga (Cardinal's Residence and Cathedral), he was taken to three Parishes by the Chancellor, Fr. Cyprian Kizito Lwanga.[115]

They visited Ggaba Parish in Kampala, Ndeba Parish on Kampala-Masaka road and Namaliga-Bombo, about 35 kms from Kampala. The choice of Fr Dziedziel fell on Ggaba Parish, which was close to the Capital, in a favourable position near the Lake and close to St Mary National Seminary, offering opportunities for a possible formation house and attending theological studies. After sharing his views with the Cardinal, Fr. Dziedziel received the message that the final choice of the Cardinal was for Namaliga.

By then Namaliga was a sub-parish of Nandeere Parish and it was serving the catholic community in Bombo. Namaliga, in fact, is a part of Bombo Town. Namaliga was in the Luwero Triangle, the epicentre of civil war and so the people and structures were greatly affected. Poverty and desolation were widespread. Luwero was an area of the Archdiocese of Kampala which had not yet received much attention and was rather abandoned, both spiritually and materially. Bombo had - and still has - the largest Barracks of the Country. It was built by Idi Amin and had a contingent of 20,000 soldiers with their wives and children. These soldiers were mostly from Northern Uganda, since both Milton Obote and Idi Amin were from the North and filled the army with people "faithful" to them. Many of them settled in Bombo, bought land and constructed houses. Majority of them were Muslim - as Amin was a Muslim. Cardinal Nsububa

[115] Who, in 1996, became the first Bishop of Kasana-Luwero Diocese, where Bombo community was located.

saw this as a mission territory, and hence wanted the Salesians to settle there.

The old church in Bombo was built with contributions of the Indian Goan community living in Bombo Town. They were businesspeople running retail and tailoring shops. Years prior to the civil war, people who wanted a nice suit in Uganda had to come to Bombo for it! The Goans kept their Catholic faith religiously being proud of their heritage attributed to St Francis Xavier. This original community was also enriched by the native population, who were together being served by the Missionaries of Africa coming regularly from Nandeere. In 1975, the small old church was replaced by a larger one and a house with offices was built near the church, to allow the priests to spend time with the local community. But during the war the entire town lay in ruins and people fled the town, and many Goans migrated elsewhere out of Uganda. When Fr Dziedziel visited Bombo-Namaliga, he found a church with the tiled roof caving in dangerously and the rectory had no doors and windows, infested with rats and bats and a good shelter for goats. Definitely, not an inviting site for the first Salesian community. However, the Cardinal did not budge and wanted the Salesians to take up this challenge. By September 1987, the four Salesians destined for Uganda were enlisted in Poland from different Provinces. They were: Fr. Bernard Popowski, Fr. Henry Juszczyk, Fr. Thomaz Grzegorzewski and Fr. Richard Joswiak. Fr. Henry was the senior most and was put in charge of the group. They had to learn English and so went to Nairobi for several months in 1988, residing in Upper Hill and attending a regular course in English. That was the year of the centenary celebrations of the death of our father Don Bosco. In early 1989, the four pioneers stepped on Ugandan soil and arrived at Namaliga.[116]

Following an established practice of the Archdiocese of Kampala, Missionaries had to go to live in a parish with other local priests to learn the local language, Luganda. Yet there was need to prepare the house for the community at Namaliga. So, Fr. Henry and Fr Thomas remained at Bombo to work at the Salesian house, while Fr Bernard and Fr Richard went to Nyenga and Naggalama Parishes respectively to learn Luganda. On the 8th December 1989, the community came together to take over the newly established parish at Namaliga. Fr. Bernard, who learned Luganda well, took over as Parish Priest and Fr. Henry as the Rector. Fr. Thomas was administrator and Fr Richard, the youngest, in charge of youth work. The renovation of the church sapped the first energies of the group: they changed the whole roof, repainted the walls, and shifted the entrance from the side to the centre. For this work Propaganda Fide and the Salesian Congregation came to their rescue.

[116] When arriving at Entebbe airport nobody was there waiting for them. Soldiers harassed them, checking all their luggage. Stranded and not knowing what to do, they were finally rescued by a Polish Jesuit who took them to his residence in Kampala.

They also placed a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians in a prominent place. They wanted the new Parish to be named after Mary Help of Christians, but the church was previously dedicated to the Ugandan Martyrs, a devotion dear to all Ugandans. This issue led to noisy arguments between Fr Bernard and some of the church leaders and it was taken to the Cardinal for a resolution: Mary Help of Christians or the Ugandan Martyrs? The Cardinal, with fine African Diplomacy, declared that the Church should be dedicated to Mary, Queen of the Martyrs. And this is the title even to this day! Pastoral work was a full time activity for our four pioneers, since the parish had 12 sub-stations. They were beginning practically from scratch and new infrastructures were required to replace the ones built with mud. The youth at Bombo started flocking to the Salesian campus. They found a friendly atmosphere: friendship and active young Salesians who could speak Luganda! The Youth movement flourished and football teams sprouted to the delight of the locals who were mercifully emerging from a land ravaged by war.

After the renovation of the church, the Salesians decided to develop the youth work by adding a technical vocational training centre: the first carpentry shop came up in 1990. Fr Richard with the help of Fr Tadeuz Rozmus (later provincial of Krakow) welcomed the first group of students attending the school. The construction of the full Centre took off the following year and was sponsored by the Procure of Bonn. The complex was completed in 1993: it had four sections – carpentry, masonry, welding/plumbing and tailoring. By then the Salesians working in Uganda were reinforced with the arrival of Fr. Waldemar Janatowski and Fr. Jan Marciniak. Thus, the Salesian charism was planted in Uganda; a simple presence marked by the challenges of a post-war situation.

Chapter 9

The First Salesians for and from Eastern Africa

Following the example of Don Bosco himself, and putting into practice his advice to the missionaries, the Salesian pioneers in Eastern Africa began to promote Salesian vocations almost immediately after their arrival. Embu in Kenya and Mafinga in Tanzania became secondary schools with the scope of forming young boys who could be inspired and accompanied to join the Salesian life. In providing an account of the first decade of Salesian ministry in Eastern Africa, it is only apt to dedicate some attention to the first men who formally professed for the Salesian circumscription of Eastern Africa.

The first to profess for the Salesians in East Africa was Brother John Williams. John was born in 1941 in Kotagiri, not far from the Salesian House on that hill-station. In 1969, he completed his training in printing in the Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts (SIGA), which was then located at Basin Bridge, Madras. In the same year he moved to Calcutta to work in the Catholic Press (COP) that was run by the Salesians. In Calcutta, he became a Salesian Co-operator. When, in 1980, Project Africa was launched, John showed interest in going to work in Africa as a lay volunteer. In 1983, John arrived in Iringa to help out in the press as a missionary Salesian co-operator. Very soon he expressed his desire to become a Salesian so as to participate fully in the life and mission of the Salesian community. He began his novitiate in May 1984 in Siliguri (Salesian Province of Calcutta), and made his First Profession as a Salesian Brother on May 24, 1985 at the age of 44. He thus became the first Salesian to profess specifically for the Salesian Eastern Africa, which was then a delegation of the Salesian province of Bombay-India.[117]

A few years later, a similar story would unfold, of someone even older than John Williams becoming a Salesian. Tony Lucrasio Pinto was born in Nairobi in 1936, to parents of Goan descent. Tony began his primary

[117] Soon after his profession he returned to Iringa, and after some years of service he returned to Kalyani, Calcutta for the Brothers' Formation Programme. On his return to East Africa, he served as administrator in Moshi (1993-1994), also as administrator in Mafinga (1994-1995), and returned to Iringa where he looked after the printing press. In June 1997, a few days before his birthday, Johnny suffered a stroke on account of a blockage of the artery. Following this, despite prolonged treatment, he lost his speech for the rest of his life and had limited movement. He lived in this condition at the Provincial House, Upperhill (1997-2004), at the Procure House, Dar es Salaam (2004-2008), and at Utume, Nairobi (2008-2010). Johnny went to his eternal reward on the afternoon of 1 September 2010, in Nairobi, Kenya. At his death, he had been a Salesian for 25 years, half of it spent in silent ministry of presence and prayer. His mortal remains are interred at the Salesian cemetery at Don Bosco Utume, Nairobi.

education in 1942 in the Catholic Parochial Primary School (Holy Family Basilica), Nairobi and went on to complete his secondary education in 1955 at St. Teresa's School, Eastleigh. Two years later even as he studied at the Survey of Kenya Technical School, he was offered a job with Nairobi City Council, as a Junior Survey Assistant in the planning department. As he worked with the City Council, Tony Pinto's contribution to the development of Football in Kenya is commendable. In 1963, he was instrumental in founding the Kenya National Football League, and became its first Vice-Chairman. In 1971, he was privileged to accompany the Kenya National Football Team, the Harambee Stars, as the Team Manager on its tour of Europe.

His first vocation as a young adult was to married life; in 1970, he got married to Eulalia Victoria Da Costa. After 13 years of married life, in 1983, Eulalia died of cancer leaving no child. When the Salesians arrived at Upperhill, Nairobi in 1982, they found Tony Pinto, to be a faithful devotee of Mary Help of Christians. He was regular at the Saturday novena services. He was also instrumental in assisting the Salesians in the building work at Upper Hill, facilitating the necessary permissions from the City Council. As Tony Pinto nurtured a close bond with the Salesians during the time following the death of his wife, soon he expressed his desire for consecrated life. Resigning his job at the Nairobi City Council in 1986, he began his novitiate in Nashik, India, and professed on 24th May 1987.[118]

The Salesians in Embu and Siakago were even more enthusiastic about promoting vocations. In the beginning some of the boys recruited by the Salesians in Embu were sent to Mafinga, however, this did not work out best as desired.[119] In 1986, there were four 'pre-novices' who were expected to go to India for their novitiate. But it was not possible to

[118] Soon after his profession, he went for his post-novitiate formation in Kalyani, Kolkota. On his return to Nairobi, he served as the Administrator of the Upperhill community. After a short stint of service in Don Bosco Boys Town, he was reappointed to the Provincial House. He made his final profession in 1991. Having further discerned his vocation to serve as a Salesian priest, he was admitted. So in 1995, he was sent to Beda College, Rome for his studies in philosophy and theology, at the age of 66. He was ordained on 14th August 1999 at the Shrine of Mary of Help of Christians, Upperhill. After ordination, he served in Nzaikoni Parish until 2002, when he died of a massive heart attack. His mortal remains are interred at the Salesian cemetery at Don Bosco Utume, Nairobi.

[119] In January 1983, three aspirants recruited by the Salesians in Siakago were sent to Marsabit: Nicholas Nyaga Kiringa, Joseph K. Nyagah, and Simon Njeru Kathuri. They left for Mafinga seminary in August 1984 to join the Tanzanian aspirants.

obtain visas to go to India for religious reasons. In the confusion and delay, the four discontinued.

The first autochthonous Kenyan Salesian was Simon Asira Lipuku. Born in Eshisiru, Kakamega on 27th January 1966. He reached Embu in March 1986 soon after his KCSE (Kenya Certificate of School Education), showing interest in a Salesian vocation, being guided by a Mill-Hill Brother. He began his 'special' novitiate in 1987, in Embu, under the guidance of the veteran novice master, Fr Benjamin Listello, who had been the Director of Novices in Italy, for 28 years. This novitiate was 'special' for at least two reasons: one, this was the first Salesian novitiate in Eastern Africa, and two, Simon was the only novice. He professed on 24th May 1988, and began his philosophical studies in a specially constituted 'philosophicum' also in Embu (1988-1989). To make up a quorum, four other aspirants also joined the newly professed Cleric Simon, among whom was Samuel Mwangi. After his practical training in Makuyu and Embu (1990-1992), Simon began his theology studies at Tangaza College being part of the Utume Community. Together with Benoit Nzie, from Cameroun, Simon became one of the first African Salesians to be at Don Bosco Utume.

Father Simon Asira Lipuku was ordained a priest on 30th March 1996. Following his ordination, he served as Assistant Parish Priest at Nzaikoni (1996-1998), at the Novitiate (1999-2000) and at the Post-novitiate (2000-2001) in Moshi, as YCS in-charge in Upanga, Dar es Salaam (2001-2003); as Administrator at Boys Town, Nairobi (2003-2006). In July 2006, he became the Rector of Don Bosco Embu and at the same time became a member of the Provincial Council. From 2011, he was appointed the Vice Provincial of Eastern Africa, while also filling in as the Rector of Don Bosco Utume for sometime (2015-2017). On 5th August 2017, Father Simon Asira was installed as the Provincial of Eastern Africa (AFE). Thus, he also became the first autochthonous Salesian Provincial of AFE.

On the Tanzanian side, the first Salesian to profess was Adolf Mihanjo. He joined the Salesian aspirantate in Mafinga after his A-level studies (Form VI) in 1987. He went to the novitiate in Manila in Philippines in 1989, where he made his first profession on 22nd April 1990. After finishing his post-novitiate and philosophy studies at the baccalaureate level, he continued to do his licentiate in philosophy at Aquinas Pontifical University in Manila. He returned to Tanzania in 1994 to carry out his practical training. During this time, he left the congregation.[120]

Placido Labila is the first Tanzanian who has persevered in the Salesian life up to this day. Labila was born on 26th April 1964. After spending five years with the Salesians in Mafinga, during which he also studied at the diocesan Mafinga Seminary, he began his novitiate in Makuyu, Kenya, in

[120] Later he went back to complete his doctorate in the Philippines and taught at the Jordan University in Morogoro, and at the Unit of Philosophy at the University of Dar es Salaam.

1990. Having completed his novitiate under Fr Benjamin Listello, he made his first profession on 31st January 1991, together with five others of whom Samuel Mwangi and Isaac Maina from Kenya are the only surviving Salesians. The group of six who professed in 1991 did their philosophy at the Consolata Seminary, Langata, Nairobi, staying at Upper Hill; between 1993 and 1994, the philosophy students lived together with the theology students at Don Bosco Utume, when the work on the Shrine was in progress at Upper Hill. Placido Labila was ordained a priest on 2nd June 2000 in the under-construction Parish Church of Mafinga.

At the novitiate in Moshi, the two who were the first to make their profession for the Salesian Province of Eastern Africa were Njagi Erastus[121] from Kenya and Mkwawe Ladislaus from Tanzania. They professed on 15th August 1993.

Michael Obol who was taken a hostage with Fr James Pulickal in South Sudan, was released together with him in 1988. He spent the next years in Embu completing some technical training. He entered the novitiate in Moshi in 1993. He was the first Sudanese to make his profession in the Salesian Congregation on 18th August 1994. However, he discontinued during his practical training. Again, in the subsequent years, several young men of South Sudanese origin recruited from the Sudan, even amidst the civil war, joined the novitiate in Moshi, Tanzania. James Lual is the first surviving Salesian of Sudanese origin, who made his first profession in 1999, and was ordained in 2008.

The first Salesian to make profession for Eastern Africa from Uganda was Thomas Oloya, who made his first profession on 15th August 1999, after his novitiate in Moshi, Fr Brian Jerstice from the British province being his Director of Novices. Brother Thomas Oloya went to do his post-novitiate at Moshi (1999-2002), and practical training at Bombo-Namaliga (2002-2004). He studied theology residing at Don Bosco Utume (2004-2008). In 2008, he was ordained a priest. By then, Uganda had become part of the Great Lakes Province (AGL), and no more part of Eastern Africa (AFE). He still serves as a priest in Uganda.

[121] A very enthusiastic young Salesian. He was sent to India to pursue a degree in Geography in Pune, came back to do his practical training in Embu, went on to do his theology and was ordained in 2003. He, however, applied for laicization in 2009 as a young priest.

Epilogue

Canonical Status of the Salesian Presences in Eastern Africa

Initially, at the start of Salesian works in Kenya, Sudan, and Tanzania, from 1980, the works that were started by the provinces of India were juridically seen as the extension of the works of Bombay Province. Fr Tony D'Souza was the provincial superior of Bombay Province and he coordinated the communities in East Africa, and frequently visited them. He was a great leader with a vision for the future, with excellent negotiation skills in his dialogue with the local ordinaries; he always had a the future of the congregation in his heart and mind. He kept in touch with the confreres through his frequent correspondences, and presented meticulously reports to the Salesian Provincials Conference of India (SPCI) at their annual meeting.

In 1982, the Delegation of Eastern Africa was created subject to the Province of Bombay, with Fr. Tony D'Souza as the Delegate, and Fr Chris Saldanha as the Provincial Superior. On 8th December 1985, Fr Thomas Thayil was announced to be new Delegate by Fr Chris Saldanha, after his 33-day visit to the Delegation.

As recorded in the minutes of the General Assembly of Confreres of East Africa Delegation held on 3rd August 1988, at Don Bosco Upper Hill, Nairobi, chaired by Fr Luc Van Looy, the Councillor General for Missions, it was envisaged that "Salesian communities in Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia to form the future Province of East Africa. This would come into being after the next General Chapter scheduled to take place in 1990." However, this would not be realised for unrecorded reasons. Meanwhile, the Italian Salesians in Kenya continued to be under the jurisdiction of the Italian Central Province (Italy Piedmont e Valle d'Aosta) with the seat in Turin (ICE), and the Salesians from Poland who had started the works in Uganda in 1989, were under the jurisdiction of Krakow Province.

On 24 June 1988, on the Feast of John the Baptist, the official Decree of the erection of the Vice Province of St John Bosco (Eastern Africa) was issued. The Vice Province consisted of the presences initiated in Kenya, Sudan, and Tanzania by the Salesian provinces of India. And Rev. Fr Thomas Thayil was appointed as the new Superior for this Juridical Entity established by the Rector Major and his Council. Father Thayil continued as the Superior until 1994. It was in 1994, the three group of Salesians, those from Italy, India and Poland were brought together into a single Salesian circumscription made up of the communities in Kenya, the Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. The next volume of the history will delve into this process in some detail.

A Tribute to the Tireless Energy of the Pioneers

As evidenced by the narrative of the preceeding pages, the Salesian pioneers in Eastern Africa worked tirelessly to implant the Salesian Charism on this soil. Thanks to their unswerving commitment, within a span of 10 years, there were already 19 centres, spread across four countries:[122]

Siakago Mission
Don Bosco Mission, Korr
Don Bosco Secondary Technical School, Embu
Don Bosco TVET Centre and Parish, Makuyu
Don Bosco, Upper Hill, Nairobi
Don Bosco Boys Town TVET, Karen, Nairobi
Don Bosco Utume, Nairobi
Mafinga Parish, Mafinga
Catechists Training Centre, Makalala, Mafinga
Don Bosco Seminary, Mafinga
Don Bosco TVET and Youth Centre, Iringa
Don Bosco TVET, Dodoma
Don Bosco Seminary, Dodoma
Don Bosco Youth Centre, Upanga, Dar es Salaam
Tonj Mission
Wau Don Bosco Mission
St Joseph TVET Centre, Khartoum
Kalakala Church, Khartoum
Bombo-Namaliga Parish and TVET Centre, Uganda

This great achievement was a result of their life of faith lived out in daily commitment to hard work, keeping alive the pastoral charity of Don Bosco in reaching out to poor and abandoned youth. They trusted in the Divine Providence and the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. "Mary did it all," they kept repeating.

Many individuals and organisations supported them in their endeavors. Their home provinces had a vision and motivated a stream of Salesian confreres to respond generously to the missionary call. There were benefactors who offered the Salesians generous financial support. We have already mentioned the Goan Community in Kenya and Tanzania. Then there were large organisations that funded the dreams of the Salesians: Missio Aachen, Misereor, Don Bosco Mission in Bonn, Don Bosco Mission in Turin, Manos Unidas, Comide-Belgium, Don Bosco Mission-New Rochelle, Fr Aurelio Maschio in Bombay, just to name a few.

All these efforts made it possible for Fr Luc van Looy, the then General Councillor of Missions to present a six-year evaluation report, in the

[122] Not counting three that had to be closed due to various reasons.

presence of Fr Thomas Panakezham, Regional for Australiasia, to the Salesian Provincial Superiors of India at their annual meeting of 1986:[123]

> By the time Project Africa was launched, Salesians were present in 10 countries. By the end of 1985, "In Africa we are in 29 countries of which 19 saw Salesians for the first time in the last 6 years. We have now 500 Salesians working in Africa. Communities are being formed; buildings are coming up. How to make our Salesians more Salesians? Here is where the dynamics of the Congregation is seen. The first stage - implanting ourselves in Africa - was done well. We enter now the second stage, a more difficult one: How to run our works the salesian way, still counting with the active support the provinces are offering in the early days, even if provincials have been changed. How to make these new places, truly Salesian. We have gathered experience we are learning from our mistakes."[124]

Fr Luc van Looy concluded his report with optimism, that form our own conclusion to this volume:

> "Africa is opening the eyes of the Congregation. With its typical oratorian style of humility, cordiality and dialogue, its readiness to take the first step, Africa teaches us how to be Salesians. Africa is helping us to rediscover Don Bosco. Africa gives us the tremendous gift of Salesianity."

P.S.

Please feel free to contribute to or correct details in the above narrative by writing to selvamsdb@gmail.com. All submissions will be considered for inclusion in the subsequent editions based on reasonable evidence.

[123] SPCI minutes of 13-15 January 1986.

[124] By 1986, there were four novitiates, of which three were opened in 1985.

This is the story of a group of pioneering disciples of Don Bosco.

It is the story of how their indefatigable faith in God and the ardent love for Mary made their commitment to the poor and abandoned youth in Eastern Africa a reality.

It is the story of how within ten years the Salesian Charism was implanted in this part of the world, that attracted other young men to join their noble cause.

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The Late **MRS. DOROTHY M. HALE**
The kind donor of this property on which is built,
DON BOSCO BOYS' TOWN