

Winter 2021

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES mission

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update

S.E Georges VARKEY PUTHYAKULANGARA
Evêque diocèse de Port-Bergé
B.P. : 5
PORT-BERGE
MADAGASCAR



NOMINATION

En vertu du Canon (Can 682§1) « S'il s'agit d'un office ecclésiastique à conférer à un religieux dans un diocèse, c'est l'Evêque diocésain qui nomme le religieux sur présentation du supérieur compétent ou du moins avec son consentement ».

A cet égard, en vertu de mon autorité ordinaire, après avoir entendu l'avis positif du Provincial de la Société du Verbe Divin (SVD), je nomme officiellement le Révérend Père Zdzislaw Kazimierz GRAD (Jacques) Curé de la paroisse Notre Dame du Rosaire dans le district de MANDRITSARA.

Rappelons que le Canon 528 nous explique le devoir du Curé comme il est appelé à participer, sous l'autorité de l'Evêque diocésain, aux fonctions ministérielles du Christ : *Enseigner, Sanctifier, Gouverner.*

Cette nomination prend effet aujourd'hui et jusqu'à preuve du contraire.



† Georges Varkey
20/10/2020
† Mgr Georges VARKEY (M.E.P.)

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EDITORIAL

Divine Word Missionaries have been serving in the vast continent of Africa since 1892.

Our first mission country there was the West African nation of Togo. Five missionaries landed on the shores of Lomé, the capital city, on Aug. 26, 1892. The next day they were teaching children on the street the sign of the cross.

Three days later they started classes for the children. That Sunday 12 of those children attended the first Mass celebrated by Divine Word Missionaries in Africa. *Not bad for just one week in a new continent.*

Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent. Its population as of 2018 was 1.29 billion, about 15% of the world's population. In many African countries more than half the people are younger than 25, a major reason the continent's population is expected to nearly double by 2050.

This makes Africa a particularly fertile area for our missionaries to sow the Word of God. Our efforts, begun more than a century ago, continue to bear fruit. We find more and more people eager to learn of God's message and mercy.

This special issue of our magazine highlights several ministries spread across Africa. In Kenya, a new dispensary provides health care to the poor. In the Congo a team of priests translates and publishes editions of the Bible in local African languages to help spread the Word of God. In Ghana a new Catholic community already boasts 350 members even though it is not yet a fully fledged parish with a church building.

And in Madagascar we find a priest ready to start a new mission in a remote area that has resisted evangelization. It is a classic missionary tale.

Our missionaries happily acknowledge the prayers and support they receive from you, our readers. There is a saying in Africa: "One finger cannot pick up a stone." Together, however, we can move mountains.

Yours in the Divine Word,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bro. Daniel J. Holman SVD".

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:
director@svdmissions.org

**Thank you
for your
prayers & support!**

Divine Word Missionaries serve in 17 African countries, running schools, ministering to refugees, offering the sacraments in parishes and providing for the poor and the hungry. The Divine Word presence in this populous, youthful, war-torn continent focuses on evangelization, education and the promotion of a culture of life and peace.

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Divine Word Missionaries work in over 81 different lands on all continents except Antarctica.

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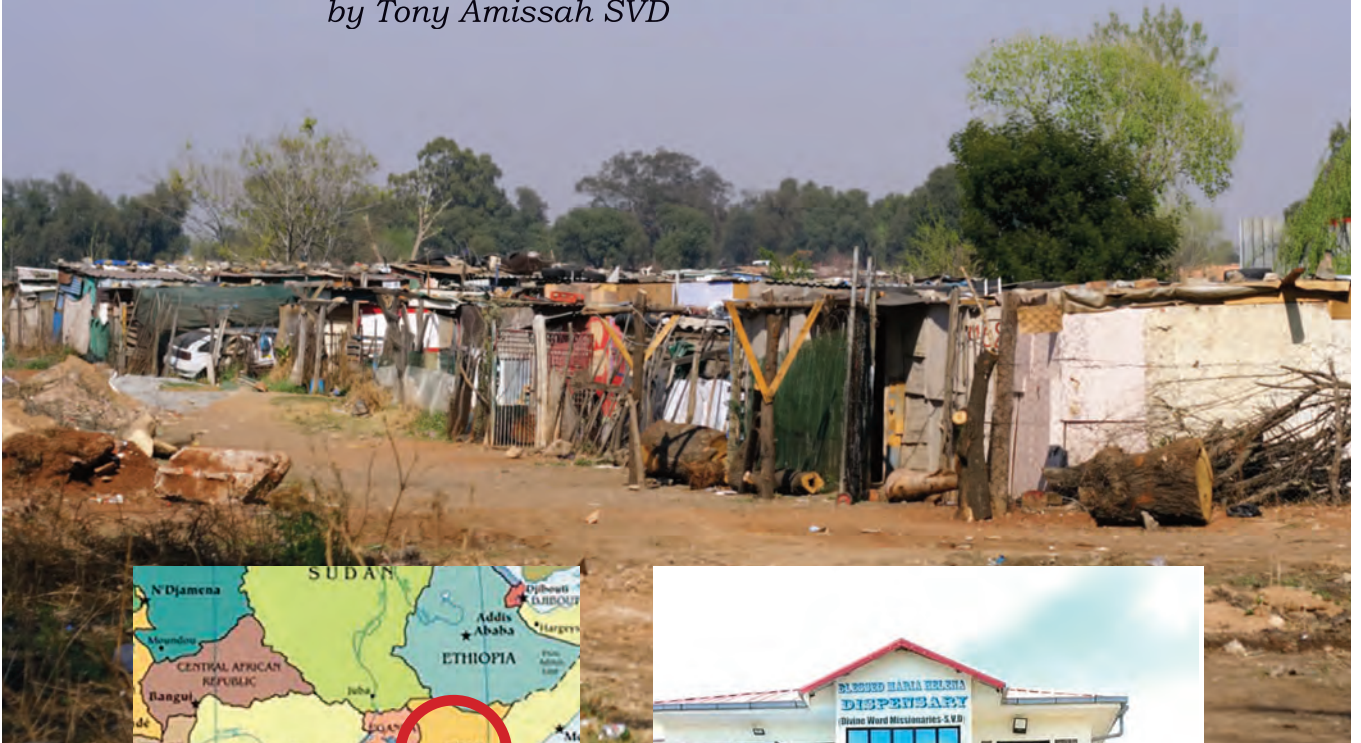
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Answering the call

Bringing health care to the slums outside Nairobi

by Tony Amissah SVD



Soweto, a slum area east of Nairobi





Soweto, a slum area outside of Nairobi, called loudly for a health center where the sick, the aged, the expectant mothers and the children could be treated. Divine Word Missionaries in Kenya heard the call and established the Blessed Maria Helena Dispensary. Now mothers, children and the elderly living in Soweto's total poverty have access to health care.

The dispensary is named for Maria Helena Stollenwerk, who cofounded the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters with St. Arnold Janssen. Youcanyolé, a non-governmental organization from Spain that specializes in medical care, assisted in the construction of the dispensary. St. Augustine, the home of Divine Word Missionaries in Germany, provided funds for the equipment. Work began on the dispensary in 2018, and it opened in 2020.

Soweto is so crowded that the fear of COVID-19 spreading—as well as many other diseases—is very real. An estimated 90,000 people live in Soweto's 1.2 square miles, which is situated east of Nairobi. The slums of Soweto lack basic services. No clean water, only communal water taps. No electricity. No sewage system. *And no hospital.*

Most of the people in Soweto earn a monthly income equivalent to \$120 or less. Soweto is home to a mixture of all the tribes in Kenya, including casual laborers working in local industries as well as unemployed and semi-employed peasants from the rural areas.

Migrants from rural areas settle in Soweto as they search for jobs in the Nairobi area. Soweto also attracts a continuous influx of people from all over eastern Africa, especially Uganda and Tanzania. Some of those staying in Soweto come from war-torn areas such as Somalia and Congo.

Many of the people searching for jobs leave their families “upcountry” and stay alone in the slums of Soweto. They get exposed to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases due to dangerous living. Coupled with this is the advent of COVID-19. There is a

Divine Word Missionaries have worked for nearly 20 years in this area to confront the challenges of its poverty. Establishing a health facility nearer to the people in need is a part of this mission



great fear that these and other diseases will spread in Soweto. The dispensary eases some of the health hazards the people are exposed to.

The majority of Soweto's inhabitants are believers from different Christian denominations. Because they cannot afford medications, many of the people seek spiritual means of healing themselves. Having attributed their illness to spiritual origins, they call upon their pastors to pray for them. Today the dispensary is able to offer them low-cost medical care.

For many years Soweto's people have lived a marginalized existence. Divine Word Missionaries have worked for nearly 20 years in this area to confront the challenges of its poverty. Establishing a health facility nearer to the people in need is a part of this mission. It means patients no longer have to walk long distances for medical care. This is especially beneficial for the older patients and mothers with infants.



Many Soweto inhabitants are so poor they cannot afford to feed their families three square meals a day, let alone pay a medical bill. The dispensary has lessened many of the medical predicaments these people face.

Aside from infectious diseases, the dispensary also focuses on the health needs of the impoverished: expectant mothers, infants, children and the elderly. The most common illnesses treated at the dispensary include pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, H. pylori (a bacterial infection of the stomach), amoebiasis (an infection of the digestive tract), hypertension, tonsillitis, typhoid and diabetes.

Divine Word Missionaries continues to answer the call with plans to add hospital beds so that the sickest patients can be admitted. Today the Blessed Maria Helena Dispensary provides a healthier life environment and a healthier future for the people of Soweto. ♦





VERBUM BIBLE DELIVERS THE WORD TO AFRICA

Editor's note: This story was compiled from several articles, emails and releases written by Father Xene Sanchez SVD, along with an interview with Fr. Sanchez conducted by the Catholic Biblical Federation.

SINCE 1982, VERBUM BIBLE HAS MADE THE WORD OF GOD AVAILABLE TO THE PEOPLE OF AFRICA BY TRANSLATING THE BIBLE INTO THEIR LOCAL LANGUAGES.

A Divine Word ministry headquartered in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Verbum Bible recently completed (or has nearly completed) several projects that will make the Bible more readily available to the people of Congo.

In November 2019 the team released the Bible translated into the language Kikongo ya leta, which is spoken by more than 5 million people. Also, printing is almost finished on the Bible translated into Mashi, which is spoken in the area surrounding Bukavu in eastern Congo. Currently being composed are the Bible in Kivira and the New Testament in Kiyaka, two languages spoken in Congo and beyond.

Additionally, a translation of the Bible into Bambara was completed and is now being distributed in Mali despite the armed conflicts there.

With the translation into Kikongo ya leta, a Catholic version of the Bible is now available in all four of Congo's national languages. "Thus in the whole country everybody has access to Lingala, Tshiluba, Swahili and Kikongo," said Father Xene Sanchez SVD, director general of Verbum Bible. "The neighboring countries that share with us these languages can benefit from them, too."



Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

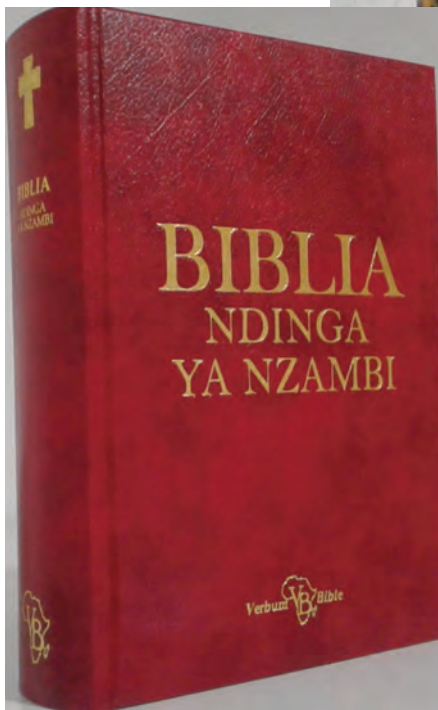


The name of the Bible in Kikongo is *Biblia Ndinga Ya Nazambi*, which means “Bible Word of God.” The project began in 1965 when Father Jean-Marie Widart, a Jesuit, began translating important parts of the Bible with his team at the Centre du Saint-Irénée in the Diocese of Kikwit. In 2004 Verbum Bible published Fr. Widart’s translation of the New Testament and the Psalms.

By 2015, Fr. Widart had translated all the liturgical readings taken from the Old Testament. He generously handed over all his work to Verbum Bible so that a translation of the full Bible could be completed. Monsignor Jose Moko of the Diocese of Idiofa assembled a team to complete the project. The Centre pour l’Apostolat Biblique of the Kenge diocese also joined the venture. Once the text was approved, Verbum Bible did the layout and sent it to the Editorial Verbo Divino in Estella, Spain, for printing.

The team at Verbum Bible believes that making the Bible available in local languages, not just a country’s official languages, is key to evangelizing African people. “To hear the Word of God from the languages they heard and spoke since childhood gives a more profound impact,” Fr. Sanchez said.

Verbum Bible has published 15 complete Bibles and 10 New Testament editions in local languages. Additionally, Verbum Bible distributes French and English translation of the Bible. Both the Jerusalem Bible and a liturgical Bible are available



in French. Work on a Portuguese Bible has recently begun, with Father Mavusi Hippolyte SVD in Angola leading the translation.

Verbum Bible was instituted in 1982 to answer the need for a Catholic version of the Bible in a part of the world where many Protestant translations are available. "The Protestant churches are far advanced in almost all aspects in terms of Bible publication, translation, editing, distribution, financing, organization and networking," Fr. Sanchez said.

The need for Catholic versions of the Bible is threefold. First, "to understand the Bible more in depth we need explanations, notes, commentaries and introductions," Fr. Sanchez said. "Our Protestant counterparts have very limited commentaries."

Second, many Protestant Bibles do not contain the deuterocanonical books, such as Tobit and Wisdom. Third, the language used in Catholic liturgy doesn't always match the Protestant texts.

Besides Bibles, Verbum Bible also distributes spiritual, theological, catechetical and pastoral materials at affordable prices. In Kinshasa, Fr. Sanchez is assisted by Brother Richard Horowski SVD, who is the vice-director general. Verbum Bible has a branch in Madagascar with Father Krzysztof Pawlukiewicz SVD as local director. ♦

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Fast-growing faith community stuck with broken-down truck

By Jeffrey Westhoff



St. Joseph Parish in Kintampo, Ghana



St. Joseph Parish in Kintampo, Ghana, has grown so quickly a new Divine Word Catholic community has emerged: the Holy Spirit rectorate.

A rectorate is a parish under creation that has a permanent pastor attached, explains Father Mathias Yaadar SVD, the priest in charge of this new rectorate. The Holy Spirit rectorate was created in 2015 by the former pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Father Ignatius Ayivor SVD.

Even though the church building is still under construction, the rectorate is already a thriving community. About 350 people regularly attend Sunday Mass at the main site, with a further 400 attendees at the rectorate's 10 outstations.

Half of these regular churchgoers are children, while another 30 percent are adolescents. This is a young community. Holy Trinity rectorate serves members of the Dabaaba, Frafra, Kassena and Konkomba tribes who have migrated to Kintampo, a city of nearly 50,000, most in search of better jobs.

"In fact, the Christian population here is 80 percent—youthful and vibrant—thus giving signs of a prosperous pastoral adventure for the present and future," Fr. Yaadar said.





But with growth also comes pain. The new rectorate is now demanding more from an old pickup truck that the community has been using since 2004. It originally belonged to and was used by St. Joseph Parish. The truck is no longer reliable. “It is old and tired,” Fr. Yaadar said. “It has broken down several times in the bush far from home and a mechanic.”

With all this use, the truck now breaks down so often that it is at the mechanic’s at least once a week, and that has become a drain on finances. If the truck doesn’t work, missionaries aren’t able to visit the people in the outstations. The farthest one, Benkrom, is about 93 miles from the rectorate. Priests can use a motorcycle to visit the outstations, but this trip is difficult—almost impossible—during the rainy season.

Fr. Yaadar dreams of getting a new truck. He knows it would make it safer for missionaries visiting the growing communities in the far-reaching outstations.

A reliable truck could be used in so many ways such as assuring that our priests can travel and arrive safely to celebrate Mass. A new truck could also haul building materials to the church construction site. Most importantly for the growing community we serve, a new truck would be used as a reliable ambulance,



Fr. Yaadar noted. At the outstations proper medical care is miles away. Often in an emergency our priests have had to use the old truck to transport people to the nearest hospital. This has become more frequent during COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, common emergency runs were snake bites and scorpion stings.

Now with the construction of the new church underway, the rectorate's budget is stretched to the limit. This pushes the dream of purchasing a new truck into the distant future. Fr. Yaadar knows a new truck would be a benefit to evangelization in his congregation. "The people are really hungry for the Word of God and also for the basic information of life and well-being." The 400 attendees at the rectorate's 10 outstations want to hear Fr. Yaadar, but he needs a way to get to his people. ♦

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Father Zdzisław Grad SVD and Father Pius Rego SVD



Mandritsara, Madagascar



MADAGASCAR

Paving the way

‘Demanding’ new mission established in remote northern Madagascar

By Zdzisław Grad SVD

In early 2020, Divine Word Missionaries in Madagascar made the decision to start a mission in the Mandritsara area, located in the diocese of Port-Bergé at the north end of this great island.

Port-Bergé is one of the least evangelized dioceses in Madagascar. The number of Christians here does not exceed 2.4% of the population. Combine that statistic with the climate, the road conditions and the distance, and we get what promises to be a difficult and demanding mission. Our provincial superiors chose me to pave the way.

In autumn 2020 I went on the initial mission reconnaissance to get a handle on the situation and learn the initial needs. I surmised that the first need will be



Divine Word Missionaries officially established the Mandritsara mission on Sunday, Oct. 25.



transportation. Mandritsara is situated in the mountains, away from the main roads. It is a 12-hour drive by off-road vehicle from Port-Bergé.

Although a highway does go to Mandritsara (in fact, it ends there), the condition of this road is very bad: potholes and sand, rivers and mud. You can drive it in the dry season, but in the rainy season I can see we will be cut off from the world.

To reach the faithful far away in the bush, where the car cannot travel, you need a good and strong two-wheeled vehicle to avoid getting stuck in mud or sand. The Mandritsara region is a real “motor-bike land.” Most of the inhabitants use them as a normal means of transport.

GETTING TO KNOW THE LAND

On Oct. 22, we journeyed with the provincial superiors and the vicar general of the diocese to this new rugged mission land. Divine Word Missionaries officially established this mission on Sunday, Oct. 25, and I was put in charge. Father Pius Rego SVD and I are creating a new community here.

The first days and weeks taught us that this was not the Madagascar we were used to. The climate here is very demanding, extremely hot and dry. It does not rain for almost nine months of the year.

Added to this is the difficulty of communicating with people. The bush people speak a completely different dialect from the official Malagasy

Fr. Pius and I are creating a new community here.





language. Even though I have been working in Madagascar for almost 30 years, I have to relearn the language.

As we begin to enter this new environment, our first goal is to get to know the local people. Personally, I don't have much difficulty with meeting new people. The missionary attitude of "going out first" to people has become my acquired nature over the years. Soon we will venture out into the bush to make our first contact with people who live in the surrounding villages.

PEOPLE AND PRAYER

The tribe that lives here is resistant to evangelization. For the last 100 years many missionary organizations have ministered here. Despite the many years and persistence, the percentage of Christians remains very low.

Here we face a typically missionary challenge, but as Divine Word Missionaries it is directly within our line of charism. Divine Word Missionaries go to mission preaching the Gospel and touching the lives of others by living our lives as followers of Jesus. Our charism is put into action by interacting respectfully with people from other cultures and traditions.

A prayer to the Holy Spirit is just the thing to start this mission! The prayer will help us, as it has helped us in our other missions and outposts in Madagascar. I trust very much that the Holy Spirit will help us to feel a time of grace, a time






of the New Pentecost. Without the breath of the Holy Spirit, our effort will be just a fruitless human tumult.

The Holy Spirit will be our “helper,” our advocate for comfort, protection, counsel and guidance. I am also counting on you our readers as “helpers” for prayers to the Holy Spirit. I also assure you of my personal gratitude and the prayers of all our new Christians in the distant mission of Mandritsara.

I am now standing at the beginning of the road. I face the challenge of developing this new mission. We are starting with nothing, not even a main base. This means building a church, a formation facility and a mission house. As I say it, this work seems beyond our capabilities, overwhelming. But as *I say it*, I entrust it all to Our Lady of the Rosary, the namesake of our new, soon-to-be-built church.

For now, I renew my request for your prayers to bring people from the Mandritsara region closer to the time and grace of God’s kingdom. ♦

MADAGASCAR



Say a prayer to the Holy Spirit for the people of Madagascar

Embolden Us to Share Your Gospel Prayer

Holy Spirit, we thank You for the riches we have inherited as God's children. We thank You that by Your grace and mighty power, we have been given the privilege of serving You and spreading the good news of the endless treasures of knowing You. We ask that you make us worthy vessels for Your service. Through Your power, embolden us and guide our words as we share Your Gospel with the world.

Amen.

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Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo



Who knew...mail carrier and chauffeur?

By Jacques Gabia SVD

Last year I was appointed provincial secretary and superior delegate of the Congo Province, my home province. I had no idea these functions would require me to be constantly on the move for many reasons. And indeed I have been on the move since taking the positions.



As provincial secretary, I work at the office here at the provincial house in Kinshasa. But because Congo's post office is not reliable, I am also acting as mail carrier. I deliver letters—sometimes sensitive and delicate letters—to and from my confreres across the province.

Unfortunately, in this area of Kinshasa the only economical means of transportation available are motorcycles. I do not have my own motorcycle; I must hire motorcycles and ride as a passenger. This can be a risky when delivering important documents. A motorcycle can save time but there can be such dangers as hazardous road conditions and inclement weather. Often I forsake the motorcycle and walk long distances to deliver the mail.

As superior delegate, I am responsible for all confreres working and living in the province. It is my job to pick up confreres at the airport and pay visits to their family members when they are sick or have difficulties. As you can imagine, picking up travelers at the airport—with bags or luggage—is impractical on a motorcycle. Add in the rain and it may be impossible.

We are looking to buy a second- or even a third-hand car that I can use for my necessary travels as an appointed mail carrier and chauffeur. Until then I will continue to get by with hired motorcycles and my feet. ♦

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