

Provincial Desk February 2024 Provincial Desk

SHARING MY STORY: GARSEN SPIRITAN MISSION IN TANA RIVER COUNTY



Fr Respicious Kweyamba, CSSp.

Garsen is a small town located in Tana River County. It is actually on the West bank of Tana River whose capital is Hola. It lies along the Malindi Garissa road, approximately 115 kms North of Malindi. Tana River is a semi-arid region that constantly experiences drought. Since Garsen town is within the floodplains of River Tana, the area sometimes experiences floods when it rains heavily in the highlands. Furthermore, the area is always prone to attacks from militant groups.

Garsen town is mainly comprised of three ethnic groups, that is, the Pokomo who are indigenous to the area, the Orma and Somali. The Pokomo are farmers whereas the Orma and Somali are pastoralists and business people. Islam is the predominant religion followed by Christianity. It goes without saying that Muslims constitute the vast majority of the population. In this sense, Garsen is indeed the terrain of interreligious dialogue.

Spiritans took up Garsen mission in 2017 under the leadership of Fr John Mbinda CSSp., (now Bishop of Lodwar) then Provincial Superior of Kenya Province. The very first parish priest was Fr John Kamangara who worked at the parish for one year, from 2017 to 2018. He was followed by Fr Vincent Elima Makokha who served as the parish priest from 2019 to 2021 assisted by Fr Stephen Owaya. I moved into the parish in February 2021 up to now.

The Parish has only one outstation. I am presently alone, a PME student with whom I lived, has just left for studies. The approximate number of active Christians ranges between 120 to 140 people, mainly from the

Pokomo community. The Parish has 10 Small Christian Communities (SCC) each with about 10 to 15 families each.



Makeshift settlements of the displaced victims of Tana river floods

The region is covered by the evergreen *mathenge* (*prosopis juliflora*) trees which have an enormous capacity to survive the severe and scorching sun. They serve villagers in different ways: for the much-needed shade, construction of small mud houses, fire wood etc.

Islam is not just a religion but also a predominant culture. The dress code is taken as an external expression of Islam, ladies are clad in famous hijab and colourful *deras* (knee-long loose gowns). Men are seen with those oxygenated *kanzu* and skirts-like attires which are convenient for the hot weather. Women are expected to be totally submissive to their husbands. It is interesting to note that despite being of the same region, the Orma do not at all intermarry with the Pokomo. The main reason is that the Pokomo are Bantus with “hard hair” (*nywele ngumu*) whereas the Orma are cushites with “soft curly hair.” This reason may appear banal but it is significant according to their standards and sense of identity.

The lack of portable water is a huge problem. You will meet many old and young women on the roads either to or from water sources. They have a rather curious way of transporting the 20-litre yellow plastic containers, never by shoulders nor on heads, instead they use their feet to roll them like a ball.

Interreligious dialogue of life is our way by choice. Our social pastoral outreach is for all, for example, aid-relief to the victims of floods as seen in the picture above and health care. Overall, we lead a peaceful coexistence with the majority of our Muslim neighbours without compromising our Christian values. We are in good terms with the local civil authorities who appreciate our modest contribution in the life of people.

Notwithstanding the challenges, we remain optimistic, determined, focused and committed to our Spiritan life and mission. Above all, we are confident because we believe in God of the new beginning who makes the impossible possible by His providence. Confreres, welcome to Garsen!

Fr Respicious Kweyamba

SPIRITAN MONTH 2024

It is our Province's turn within the UCEAF to organize the Spiritan Month for 16 candidates who will be preparing themselves for the final vows this year. Fr Adolf Msoka has been appointed to accompany them. He will reach out to some of us for specific requests. We are asked to collaborate and support him to make this exercise prayerful and successful. Apropos, specific dates, places and events will be mentioned in the next issue of PD.

APPOINTMENT

The Provincial Superior, with the consent of his Council appointed:

- Fr Aquiline Mrema, Monduli Juu Spiritan community, with effect from 01 March, 2024.

SAVE THE DATES

Training

Provincial Development and Planning Office in conjunction with Central Development Office (Rome) will organize a Workshop on Project writing and Project management;

Arrival-22 April

Departure-28 April

Place: Provincialate, Tengeru

N.B. There will be further information communicated about the content of the workshop.

Annual Retreat (Cf. SRL 96 & 96.1):



1st group: 22-28 June

2nd group: 29 June 5 July

3rd group: 3 August 9 August

Remarks about the annual retreat: We are all reminded that faithfulness to the Rule of Life doesn't provide for multiple choice option hence the obligation to conform to what is stipulated. We have enough time to organize our calendars so as to avail ourselves for this important spiritual exercise and ongoing formation. **Please don't organize other private activities which will interfere with these dates.**

VACATION

-  Fr Anno Massawe
-  Fr Barnabas Kilewu

Welcome back home and enjoy your stay with family, relatives and friends.

DECROLOGY

Gallus	Marandu	26 March 2017
Joseph	Kahema	14 March 1999
Josaphat	Kilawila	23 March 2021

BEREAVEMENT

We extend our prayerful sympathies to:

Fr. Paul Yaga-(Father) Yaga Wannom Francis, 15 February 2024

Fr. Festo Urasa (Mother) Conjesta Ferdinand Urassa, 28 February 2024

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace.

BIRTHDAYS

MARCH		
John	ASSEY	03
James	MCHAMUMGU	12
Evod	SHAO	13
Rogasian	MSAMI	14
Casimir	NIAKI	14
Octavian	MASAO	19
Evarist	SHAYO	21
Mathias	NG'OJA	22
Beatus	BABU	26

PRAYERS

Fr Adam Bago is well and in convalescence at Kerege Spiritan community. Fr Nolasco Mushi is in Dar es Salaam attending clinic. Fr Nicetas Kyara still in India for treatment. We can't thank enough Fr Flavian Komba who has been accompanying him. Let us continue to pray for them and all who support us in the care of our sick Confreres.

Fraternally,



Florentine Mallya, CSSp.
Provincial Superior

