

# Tanzania, beautiful people, beautiful country

By; Rev. Thomas Vellappallil, MS

Tanzania is a sovereign state in eastern Africa. The countries that border Tanzania are: Kenya and Uganda to the north; Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west; Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique to the south; and the Indian ocean to the east. Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain is in northeastern Tanzania. The capital city is Dodoma and the largest city is Dar es Salaam. The national language is Swahili and the official language is English. Over 100 different languages are spoken in Tanzania making it the most linguistically diverse country in East Africa. It has a population that is estimated close to 67million, composed of several ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Predominant religions are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and traditional beliefs. Tanzania is mountainous and densely forested in the northeast where Kilimanjaro is located. Approximately 68% of Tanzania's 67 million people live below the poverty line. The Tanzanian economy is heavily based on agriculture and farming. The large food crops in Tanzania are corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, bananas, rice and sugar. The large cash crops are cotton, cashew nuts, tobacco, coffee and tea. Only 20 % of Tanzanians have access to electricity and less have access to clean water. Almost 70% of the poor population live in rural areas involved in farming. Lack of agricultural technology, droughts and floods severely endanger the living standards of most of the population and create huge increases in unemployment, hunger, malnutrition, starvation and various diseases. Tanzania is an incredible place by the equator, where the sun will hit you like an open flame. I was lucky I chose



to go in the best time of the year in February when the weather was mild. It is a place where the streets come to life-young men walking with trays of peanuts and candy, cars beeping their horns and weaving through the traffic. It's a place where you can smell the goat being barbecued. Order a portion if you dare – that steak will never taste the same again. It is a place where you see kids run wild in the dirt with muddy knees and shining smiles. It is a place where the women dress wrapped in the brightest fabrics, tailored perfectly to their curves. They have some of the whitest and brightest smiles in the world. It is a place where Swahili is the tongue of the streets. It's a beautiful language. It is a place where the kids are full of laughter and smiles. Life is not rosey but sparkles in their eyes will tell you different. Kids are full of love and spirit. They are taught to respect their families and communities and respect their elders. It is a place where the food is hearty and simple. It is a place where people greet one another by saying “Cristu.” In response they will say “ituminiletu” which means Christ is our hope. They don't stop here but follow with a series of questions and answers as part of their greeting and conversation. They always say “asante”- thank you to show how grateful they are.



The first La Salette mission in Tanzania was established in July 16, 2016, with the arrival of the first 3 missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Fr. Manuel dela Cruz, MS, Fr. Dileesh Porianvelil, MS and Fr. Aldrin H. Cenizal, MS. They were accompanied by the Superior General Fr. Silvano Marisa, MS, Vicar General Fr. Adilson Schio, MS and Fr. Rosanno Soriano, MS, Superior of the Philippine Province. The Our Lady of La Salette Parish- Rutete (parish-designate) is in Bukoba Catholic

Diocese in the Kagera Region of Tanzania. The parish center is situated in the village of Rutete, Bukoba Rural with two outer stations (Kahyoro and Rwizi). The parish is composed of less than 1000 Catholic families or around 5000 Catholics from 15 villages. The parish is pre-dominantly Catholic with other Christian denominations and Islamics composing the other members of the community. The population is mainly dependent on agriculture and livestock farming as a source of income. They grow bananas, coffee, root crops, ground nuts, beans, and vegetables to sell.



At the parish they raise pigs, chickens, rabbits, ducks, goats and cows almost all of which were donated by the parishioners. For the first year the parishioners fetched water from far away to supply water for the missionaries until they were able to make a bore well on the property. The missionaries felt so humbled and connected to them by this service and ever so grateful. They grow bananas, tapioca, coffee, mangoes, beans of all kinds and various vegetables for their own consumption. What they plant and harvest for the basics of their daily life is enough for their needs.



One big difference I observed from other mission countries like Haiti, is that the people here don't starve as much.

### **Holy Thursday**

I was privileged to visit Tanzania from April 3<sup>rd</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> of 2018. It was a blessing to spend Holy Week with them and the people they serve. I was invited to accompany Fr. Dileesh

for the service on Holy Thursday in Rwizi mission chapel which consists of two villages. They were just a handful when we started. People kept coming throughout the service. Finally there was no more room in the small chapel made out of mud walls that seemed to be on the brink of collapsing. They sit on a mud floor with hay spread on it. They always choose 12 men for the washing of the feet. Their collection was about \$10. After communion I was introduced and welcomed to the community. I had brought hundreds of rosaries which I distributed especially to the 12 men they chose to wash feet.

It's a great practice that people wear the rosaries around their necks. People participate in liturgies with great devotion and zeal. After communion, people representing each community and village, stood up to offer gifts for me, their guest. There were sugarcans, bottles of honey, peanuts and eggs. Included in the many gifts was a live chicken. They were extremely happy to receive me with open arms and gave gifts generously from what they have. I



was more than touched by their warm hospitality and welcome. Not a single person missed saying “karibu” which means “welcome”.

### **Good Friday**

I was invited to join at the main mission which consists of 10 villages. There were about 100 people when they started the Stations of the Cross around the Church. Never before I have heard the passion readings sung by every character and a choir. By the time the veneration of the cross began there were at least 400 people in the church. Children gathered around the sanctuary for the entire service. During the veneration of the cross people lined up but genuflected three times before they kissed the cross. There is no doubt that the people are deeply rooted in their faith.



### **Holy Saturday**

After breakfast we visited a few sick people in their homes. It took us through rough roads with rocks and mud holes and sometimes thick grass to the point of not recognizing where the road was leading us. More than anointing of the sick they prefer to receive communion as often as they can. Upon arrival in a home they will bring out a mat to lay on the floor in the living room where they receive you. You are out of luck if you are looking for chairs to sit on. The whole family wants you to pray together for God’s healing for their sick. In one home the sick person offered me coffee beans as a sign of warm welcome. Our missionaries do this on a regular basis as they drive to each village and spend the whole day visiting sometimes as many as 15 to 20 sick people. There are times they have to leave the vehicle or the motor cycle on the road and walk miles and miles to their homes due to bad road conditions. I said to myself what a beautiful ministry these missionaries do for the people and nothing stops them from doing it even in the midst of challenges and difficulties. They found a true home far away from their home countries. The difference is that they do this with great joy with no hesitation to smell like the sheep in doing so. For the Holy Vigil, I joined Fr. Aldrin at their second mission in Kahyoro, which



consists of three villages. The church was overflowing with people who walked miles in the evening to come to the top of the hill where the church is located. I was amazed at the active participation of each one and the joy of being together in the church for the solemn celebration.

### **Easter Sunday**

Easter Sunday Mass was 3 hours. The choir joined the priests just outside the sacristy in a procession with singing and dancing, clapping hands and howling. The whole church sang with them until we reached the sanctuary to start the mass. Around 200 children sat around the altar and quite actively participated in the prayers and singing.

### **Easter Monday**

On Easter Monday they had a full church with standing room only. The deacon Revocatus Mwemezi is assigned to our parish for his deaconate ministry and preached a homily that lasted for at least 20 minutes. It was never boring for people as he engaged them throughout the homily and used this moment to teach and catechize them.



Funeral: Witnessing a funeral service was quite a unique experience. The dead body was placed in a tent just outside right in front of the house. . Before that the body is kept inside the house. A group of people came from outside beating on their chests, mourning and crying over the dead. The priest says the introductory prayers together with the family inside the house and then they bring out the body to place it in the tent in front to begin the Mass. They take up two collections one for the church and the second

one for the priest to celebrate masses for the dead. There would be at least 10 people that would stand in front of the altar holding the collection bags where the people will bring up their contribution and place it in one of the bags while the choir kept singing. When offering their contributions they would offer them with both hands which is a sign that they offer them wholeheartedly to



God. At the end of the Mass they take the body to bury it in their own backyard as burying the dead in the cemetery is rare. Everyone stays until the entire service is done and the body is fully buried. They plant plants around it and a cross is placed in place of a tombstone. Then there are three days of prayers conducted with most people in the village present. It is certainly a village event where everyone comes to show their support for the family and offer prayers for the dead.

Please allow me to introduce our three pioneer missionaries to Tanzania. I was humbled by seeing their enthusiasm, energy and commitment to the people they serve. Manuel Dela Cruz, MS, born June 10, 1957, 16th of 17 children, professed vows 1 May 1986, ordained April 21, 1990. He served in parishes in the Philippines and Hawaii, as formator for novices and postulants and also as a provincial superior. He writes, "I volunteered to go to Tanzania because I wanted to experience the privilege Jesus described when he said: 'Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did it for me.' Life in the missions is not easy. There is a new culture and language, inadequate basic needs, poor facilities, and dusty roads. But the people are exceptionally loving and friendly. It is my desire to assist them so that they may experience freedom from poverty and hunger. I know that we can make a difference in the lives of our least fortunate brothers and sisters in Africa. I thanked God for the many supporters who continue to pray and assist us in ministering to the people of God in Tanzania." Fr. Manny serves as superior and pastor.



Rev. Dileesh Porianvelil, MS was born to the late Joseph and Leyamma on November 7, 1983.



After he graduated from his pre-degree course at the age of 18, he joined the seminary in 2001. Then he finished his Philosophy at Suvidya College in Bangalore and after spending a year in the postulancy program and another in the novitiate formation, he professed his First Vows on May 1, 2008. After his Theological studies in St. Francis College in Andhra Pradesh, he was ordained to the priesthood on January 15, 2013.

Fr. Dileesh says, “The desire to become a priest and a missionary was in my mind from my childhood onwards and I started first step by joining the La Salette seminary in Mysore, India. The inspiration to become a missionary came from some of the biblical movies, the stories of early Christians and saints. All the challenges of my life I took as gift from God.” After the ordination as a young and vibrant priest, he served as associate pastor at Assumption Forane church in northern Kerala for one year and later as procurator and assistant vocation director from 2014 to 2016.



When the decision was made by the Superior General and his council in Rome to start a new mission in Tanzania, they were looking for volunteers from the Philippines and India to be the pioneers. Rev. Dileesh without any hesitation decided to join Frs. Manny de la Cruz and Aldrin from the Philippines and they arrived together in Rutete, in the catholic diocese of Bukoba, Tanzania on July 16, 2016. Rev. Dileesh serves as treasurer.

I am Fr. Aldrin Hernandez Cenizal, MS, the first born of the three sons of Apolonio and Erlinda Cenizal. My two brothers, Deney and Denald, are already married. We are a family of rice farmers in Amaya, Tanza, Cavite, Philippines. I was born on February 20, 1980. At the age of 28, in June 2008, I joined the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette- Philippine Province as aspirant after finishing a college degree and working for 7 years in a publishing company. I had my first profession of vows on May 1, 2011, and on the same day of 2015 I had my perpetual profession. I was ordained as priest on April 29, 2016. Less than 3 months after my ordination, I was sent to Tanzania as my first mission assignment to start the new MS community together with 2 other missionaries from the Philippines and India. I am assigned as associate pastor and secretary of the community. At present, we are on our second year here at Our Lady of La Salette Parish-Rutete, Bukoba Catholic Diocese, Tanzania.

