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South-East India Province



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Special Circular- Mission Malawi Msfs

2018

My dear Confreres

Today is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. The Good News of God’s Love is revealed to Mary, our Mother. She accepted to be the instrument in the hands of God to give birth to the Saviour. As such, this feast signifies that after having received the Good News, we need to be instruments in the hands of God to proclaim the same to others. It is the special moment for our province, as we embark on Mission Malawi Msfs to proclaim the Good News. As such, on this great feast, I am very delighted to present before you this special circular on our new missionary undertaking - Mission Malawi Msfs.

General Information about Malawi and the Diocese of Karonga



The Diocese of Karonga is situated in the Northern Part of Malawi that borders with Tanzania and Zambia. Karonga as a Diocese was created on the 21st of July 2010 from Mzuzu diocese. On the same day Rt. Rev. Martin Anwel Mtumbuka was ordained Bishop of the new Diocese. There are 8 dioceses in Malawi.

The language spoken in this diocese and in Mzuzu diocese is Tumbuka. The rest of country speaks Chichewa.

The Diocese is divided into two deaneries which are subdivided into six parishes namely; St Anne’s Pro Cathedral Parish, St Mary’s Parish, St Steven’s Parish found in Karonga Deanery, and St Mattias Parish, St Michael’s Parish and St Ignatius of

Loyola Parish found in Chitipa Deanery. There is also St Joseph the worker sub-parish, which is also the Cathedral. There 4 sub parishes which are already created and functioning with care taker parish priests.

The Diocese covers the geographical districts of Karonga and Chitipa including northern part of Rumpi. It covers an area of 12,000 square kilometers with a population of 467,000 of whom about 65,000 are Catholics.

The diocese has only 13 priests, out which three are outside the diocese. There is only one missionary priest, a Marianist from Korea, who does not work primarily in the pastoral field. There are no missionary sisters working there, except in a Marianist convent which was established 6 months ago for running a school, where there are two Indian sisters and two from Togo.



The area under this Diocese is the remotest and poorest part of Malawi. The territory is largely hilly and mountainous and also plains on the shore of Lake Malawi. 90 percent of the people are farmers. The south of Malawi is economically and politically powerful. The diocese is situated among the strong Presbyterian Mission. One of the greatest assets is the percentage of children. About 60 percent of the populations is below 30 years and 30 percent are youth and children.

Report of our Meeting with the Bishop of Karonga Diocese in Malawi

The meeting with Bishop Martin of Karonga Diocese in Malawi was held on 3rd March at 5.00 p.m. and on 5th march at 7.00 p.m.

The members present for the meeting were:

Rt. Rev. Martin, Bishop of Karonga Diocese

Monsignor Denis, VG of the Karonga Diocese

Fr. Joseph, the Secretary of the Bishop

Fr. K. Ignacimuthu, the Provincial of the SE India Province

Fr. Johnson Kallidukil, the former Provincial of the EA province

Fr. Daniel Kanikkai Nathan, the Pro. Councillor in charge of Mission

Fr. S. Soosai Raj, the designated pioneer to the Mission Malawi

After the greetings and sharing of pleasantries, the Bishop expressed his wish and the expectation from the Missionaries in his diocese.

Pastoral Situation of Diocese

The diocese of Karonga is relatively new. It was erected in 2010 from the Diocese of Mzuzu. It has only 13 priests. It has 5 parishes and 4 quasi-parishes which do not have resident Parish priests.

The diocese has taken a scientific survey of its faithful. As per the study, 30% of population is children and 60% of the faithful are below 30 years of age. So, the diocese has set its priority on giving catechetical programmes for the children, youth oriented pastoral ministry because they are the future of the church. In this respect, diocese has even launched a F.M. radio station named, TUNRUFYE FM, for its special programmes. Apart from the Catechetical programmes, Education of the youth is a very important dimension of the pastoral work.

Then the Bishop expressed his wish that we take the mission of Livingstonia, which lies about 73kms south of Karonga. Livingstonia, has a long tradition of missionaries because it is here that the Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries established their mission in 1890. It served as a centre for the Presbyterians, who launched from here to Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique and to other parts of Africa. They had established the first mission hospital in 1890 here, and built a school, later converted into a University.



Because of their strong presence, the catholic presence in the whole area was minimal. They were scattered into smaller groups in the heart and the mainland of Presbyterians. The Bishop wants us to be missionaries and to establish the Catholic presence and to provide Catholic education. He has already erected the parish of Livingstonia along with 7 substations, which is waiting for the first missionaries to come.

He invited us to visit this mission and some of the other parishes of the diocese and we decided to meet again on Monday, 5th March 2018.

Our Visit to Livingstonia

On 5th March 2018, we visited the Livingstonia Mission. We were accompanied by the VG of the Diocese Mon. Denis, Mr. Thomas Nyondo, the special consultant to the Bishop on property, and Fr. Cyprian of St. Ann's Parish, who is currently looking after the pastoral needs of Livingstonia. The Parish Council was waiting there to receive us in spite of the rains and they welcomed us.

It is a place which not only has a lot of prospects for the missionary activity, but also has scenic beauty, beautiful mountains and lush green valleys. It lies about 1300 meter above sea level. The place is cooler than the shore of Lake Malawi.

The Land for the parish church and the presbytery is already bought. It is about 11 acres. The Land is very fertile, has natural fountains, and has plenty of water, electricity and the signal for the mobile coverage is very good. Medical facilities are available.

The parish council and the lay leaders are already formed. It has about 3000 Catholics spread in the main parish and in 7 substations. 2 of substations are in the hills and five are on the shore of Lake Malawi. Two of the substations could be reached only by boat.

We were very warmly received by the parishioners. We visited some of the substations and the diocesan school which is coming in the limits of our parish. We are very much positive about the place and the people and the missionary potential of the place.

The only cause of concern for us is the road facility. The shortest road is not yet tar marked. But there is another road already under construction and is a bit round about. But once it is completed then travelling should not be a problem. The diocese is already planning to get a boat, so that we could reach the substations easily.

The Final Meeting with the Bishop

With these views we met the Bishop again on 5th March, at 7.30. pm for the final meeting. The Provincial Fr. K. Ignaci Muthu summarized his impressions and expressed clearly that he was very positive about opening up the mission there. However, it was informed to him that the decision making process and formalities needs to be completed.

The Bishop was very happy about our visit and our positive reply. He welcomed us to work in collaboration with him and looks forward for an affirmative answer from us. He suggested that till we come-up with the new structures in the new land, the priests could stay in St. Ann's Parish and carry out the construction as well as engage in the pastoral work. Naturally we have to learn the local language, Tumbuka for the liturgy. But day to day functioning could be easily carried out with English. With these positive notes and a delicious meal, the meeting came to an end.

On our return to Morogoro, we had a meeting on 08.03.2018 along with Fr. Johnson Kalludikal and evaluated and assessed the whole visit and shared our opinions and concerns. Bro. Winner also participated.

Our Observations and Assessment:

- After seeing the Pastoral need as well as the scope of missionary activity in the diocese of Karonga and its situation of lack of priests, we strongly felt that we need to help them out and take this mission and thus establish our presence in Malawi in Africa.
- Livingstonia is a unique mission in the whole of Africa. We are called to establish catholic presence and community amidst the Presbyterian mainland. It is like our Patron St. Francis going to Chablais Mission. It is a hill station, which has a pleasant climate and natural beauty.

- People are very cordial and have very high expectation from us. They are very hopeful and eagerly waiting for our arrival. Our focus would be the children, youth and the empowerment of women. The immediate pastoral care would consist of celebrating the sacraments, catechetical programmes for different age groups and guiding the Catechumens, whose number is steadily increasing.
- Eventually, there is a need to establish a school, so that we provide catholic education to the children and youth.
- Yet, our focus is not restricted only to the Karonga Diocese. Our commitment is to Mission Malawi. Therefore we should develop a strong vision and pastoral plan for the entire mission.
- We will have to learn the language Tumbuka which is spoken in northern Malawi, as well as Chichewa which is spoken in central and southern Malawi. However, we found that people are conversant with English.
- We felt that we need to send at least one more senior priest along with other junior priests.

Our Proposals

- The presence of senior confreres will go a long way to stabilize the mission. As such, senior confreres needs to be motivated in this regard.
- Sending brothers for their Regency and theology in Africa is very important aspect of promoting the mission and this vital step would tremendously help in the future.
- The East African Province is rendering a lot of help in this regard. We need to collaborate more with East African Province.
- We need to look for members, who are interested and committed to the mission Malawi.
- Learning the local languages is very important for the effective ministry. So, it is advisable that those who are coming newly could stay with the diocesan priests for 6 months separately to learn the language and culture, before shifting to our community.
- Moving to the community could be planned for the beginning of 2019. Since our concern is Mission Malawi, after some years of establishment, the second community could be established in the south, near to Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi, which also has an Airport.
- A well-planned Financial resources for this mission needs to be worked out.

My Appeal

Mission Malawi Msfs is the Clarian call of the Congregation and the signs of the time. For many years, we have been reflecting upon taking up mission in an African country especially in Malawi in various forums. The time has arrived and now is the time. After our visit and based on the assessment, I as well as those of us who visited are convinced of the Mission Malawi Msfs and also are committed to it. We place before all of you dear confreres, the Mission Malawi Msfs for your serious reflection. We need to collectively commit ourselves for Mission Malawi Msfs. I am very happy to inform that 2 senior confreres have come forward to shoulder the responsibility to launch into Mission Malawi. That apart, there are 5 scholastics starting with Bro. Winner, who have voluntarily opted for Mission Malawi Msfs. There are 4 new priests, who are designated to serve Mission Malawi Msfs.

We have received the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and it is because a lot of Missionaries both our Congregation and from other religious orders came to India spread the Good News. What we have today is borne out their missionary endeavor. If we look into the missionary journey in India, we find plenty of missionaries, who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Gospel. That is how we received the Good News and God continues to bless us.

Having received the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ, we as religious and missionary congregation is duty bound proclaim the Gospel. St. Paul says "*Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel*" (1 Cor 9:16). As such, it is the mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ that we proclaim the Gospel, especially for those who are yearning for the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear confreres, we have made a beginning regarding Mission Malawi Msfs. There are some confreres, who have already opted for this noble mission. However the presence of experienced and senior confreres in Mission Malawi will give certain impetus to our missionary thrust in this part of the world. Following our solemn commitment made to follow Christ more closely and in the footsteps of our Heavenly Patron and our venerable Founder, I earnestly place this appeal before all the confreres to come forward to serve the Mission Malawi Msfs.

Yours Fraternally in Christ,
Rev. Fr. K. Ignacimuthu, Msfs
Provincial Superior

1. VOICE OF REV. FR. S. SOOSAI RAJ

Mission Malawi is a new born child of our province. Indeed I am happy to write my impression as I have been living here in Tanzania for a few months. The first captivating scenario is that everywhere it is very green and the people are innocent and good. They give more importance to the spiritual activities and God takes the first place in the life of the people. They are simple and not very complicated in their approach. Generally, they are hard working. Another encouraging aspect we see is that they give importance to education; children march towards the school in the

early hour of the day carrying bag, water, broom and even firewood. Tanzania as a country is fast growing in all the sectors.

People of Malawi are generally very warm and hospitable. The geographical scenario is that it comprises of valley, hill and plain land. Agriculture is one of the main occupations of the people. As we were going around the place, we were fascinated by the captivating nature. The economical situation of the people is rapidly growing and people work hard to maintain a good living. When we reached Karonga (the diocese where we are going to take up mission), the bishop cordially welcomed us coming up to the car. The priests are quite hospitable and since they are only few, they are kept busy by doing different kind of ministry in the diocese. We see them committed and a homily atmosphere prevails in the diocese.

As a whole, it was an inspiring experience to visit the mission Malawi and there is a lot of opportunity to continue the mission of the Lord in this country.

2. STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART OF BRO. WINNER

Initially I pen down my words thanking all confreres in south east India province for the wishes and prayers for the memorable voyage. On 28.12.2017 the mission team landed in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Frs. Provincial, Kanikkai, the Councilor in-charge of Mission, Soosai Raj and I made a trip to some of the mission stations of east Africa province. On 30.12.2017 I reached ipuli, Tabora region where I began my regency. The school with hostel facility for girls and boys is ranked 67th in the country and ranked no.1 in Tabora Region.

My experience in Africa is quite limited but good natured and satisfying. I am well taken care off by our fathers here. It appears to me that Africa is far off from our prejudices and preconceived ideas. My experience is very positive with regards to Africa. The place of activity, facilities especially the medical care between India and Africa remain to some extent the same. The land is very fertile. Agriculture is their main industry generally combined with cattle raising. I acquire my pastoral experience by going to the substations for the mass along with the fathers. I have witnessed people are very generous and cooperative concerning the church matters. They are very respectful towards the priests and religious.

Although church is very strong in Africa, it faces the sad affair of lack of priests. It stands as an advantage for various denominations and Muslims which is a serious threat and challenge to the church. Evangelization is still in progress. If we are able to work on this particular aspect, there is a possibility of greater success in our ministry.

(Compiled by Fr. D. Kanikkai Nathan, the Councilor for Mission)