

# AFRAM ZONE



|            |                         |
|------------|-------------------------|
| <b>ANG</b> | Angola                  |
| <b>BOT</b> | Botswana & South Africa |
| <b>CNG</b> | Dem. Rep. Congo         |
| <b>GHA</b> | Ghana & Liberia         |
| <b>KEN</b> | Kenya & Tanzania        |
| <b>MAD</b> | Madagascar              |
| <b>MOZ</b> | Mozambique              |
| <b>SSD</b> | South Sudan             |
| <b>TCD</b> | Tchad                   |
| <b>TOG</b> | Togo & Benin            |
| <b>ZAM</b> | Zambia & Malawi         |
| <b>ZIM</b> | Zimbabwe                |

In the beginning of 2018, a confrere arrived in Malawi to work with Jesuit Refugee Services.



## OUR RESOURCES AND TRUST IN GOD: AFRAM

### 1. Mother Earth's Africa

Africa is home to 54 countries, members of the African Union. The youngest of the nations is South Sudan, culled out in 2011 from Sudan, which was until then the largest country on the continent in terms of size. Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent. At about 30.3 million square km including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of Earth's total surface area and 20.4% of its total land area. Recent (2016) statistics put the continent's population at 1.22 billion and that represents approximately 15% of the world's population. According to UN estimates, the population of Africa may reach nearly 2.5 billion by 2050 (about 26% of the world's total) and about 4.4 billion by 2100 (about 39% of the world's total). Nigeria is the most populous country with a little more than 190 million people. In many of the African states, more than half the population is under 25 years of age.

Africa is home to the Sahara desert. The Sahara is the largest hot desert and the third largest desert in the world after Antarctica and the Arctic. Its area of 9,200,000 square kilometers is comparable to the area of China or the United States. Mount Kilimanjaro, with its three volcanic cones in Tanzania, is the highest mountain in Africa, and rises approximately 4,900

meters from its base to 5,895 meters above sea level. National parks, habitat for wildlife, can be found in a large majority of African countries, being most numerous in Gabon, Kenya and Tanzania. Some nations also have considerable areas designated as private parks, game reserves, forest reserves, marine reserves, national reserves and natural parks.

### 2. Missionary Context

The Divine Word Missionaries are present in 18 countries, comprising the Africa-Madagascar (AFRAM) Zone. These countries are, in alphabetic order: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All these are sub-Saharan countries. Our German confreres initially, and later the SSPS, sent by our Founder himself, were the first Catholic missionaries to evangelize Togoland, a small German protectorate of those days in West Africa, from August 1892 until World War I. Our missionaries returned to the present-day Togo in 1974. A very similar story unfolded in Mozambique as well. Soon it's going to be 80 years of continued SVD presence in Ghana; in Angola the SVD celebrated 50 years recently, just to take a couple

of examples. Our confreres were evacuated from South Sudan in July 2016 following civil war there, and presently are in Uganda catering pastorally to their folks in the refugee settlements. Felixberto Perez, SVD joined the Jesuit Refugee Services in Malawi in the beginning of 2018, thus bringing an SVD presence in that country for the first time.

Those 18 countries are administratively regrouped currently into six SVD provinces, three regions and three missions – 12 entities in all. SVD personnel statistics for 2018 put the total number of confreres living within the AFRAM Zone at 586. They include 10 bishops, 410 priests, 55 brothers, 10 brothers in temporary vows, 75 scholastics, 26 clerical novices as well as three brother novices. GHA hosts the highest number of confreres presently with 176 of them there, with CNG in second place with 97 confreres. The Society has presently 486 confreres of African origin serving the worldwide mission. These include 8 bishops, 282 priests, 38 brothers, 13 brothers in temporary vows, 109 scholastics, 26 clerical novices as well as three brother novices. Ghana leads the way with 192 confreres originally from there, followed by 107 from Congo.

### 3. Our Missionary Service

The last General Chapter enabled the AFRAM Zone's provinces/regions/missions (PRMs) to focus more clearly on the Congregational Directions (CDs). *Primary Evangelization* and *Family and Youth* have been the two topmost priorities among the CDs for all the 12 PRMs of the

Zone. This is easily understandable in the light of us being the missionaries of the Word, as we are popularly known and appreciated in many of these countries. The family situation is quite precarious in several societies with the number of single-mother households on the increase. The number of young people is high on the demographic ladder – hence, the importance of education at all levels, and the challenges of economic poverty coupled with unemployment. *Promotion of the Culture of Life* and *Reconciliation and Peace Building* too are among the predominant priorities in many of our PRMs here. Ethnic conflicts, civil wars, the influx of internally displaced people and refugees are all realities of the daily order in several places; our efforts in joining hands with other agencies bring some solace to millions of hearts. Consider our ministry with the refugees, for example.

Most of our confreres, though, are working at the parish-based pastoral care of the faithful. Small Christian Communities are the platform from which they build up their Christian life. There is a concerted effort to bring to light the SVD profile, underlining the importance of the Characteristic Dimensions of the SVD charism, in our ministry in the parishes. The Bishops seem to appreciate the collaboration the SVDs, partnering with them in the integral growth and development of the local churches, working hand in hand with other religious congregations/missionaries as well. Working with other Christian denominations and other religious groups too becomes part of the mission, especially thanks to the parish ministry.

The Arnoldus Family is taking its roots in several of our PRMs, with the SSpS having their presence in 10 of the above-mentioned 18 countries; generally we work hand in hand with them, be it in our parishes, schools and/or the health sector. At the zonal level too, there is participation in the continental assemblies of leadership and/or the area of formation between brothers and sisters. The only SSpSAP community in Africa is in the heart of Lome city in Togo. The sisters recently joyfully celebrated 20 years of their existence in Africa, together with the SVDs and the SSpS there.

In most of our PRMs, efforts are being pursued to initiate *SVD Friends*, our lay partners in mission. Eagerly our mission secretaries share with them the Arnold Janssen spiritual heritage, as they guide them in their missionary efforts with us. Such a missionary collaboration with lay partners seems to be the way ahead, and we are looking forward with hope for an increased association with our lay partners in mission animation.

#### 4. Our Intercultural Religious Life and Mission

In all the 12 PRMs, our communities are richly diverse, international and intercultural. In the face of ethnic tensions and strife, it is a welcome challenge for us to live this reality of our communal life. It can even be safely said that the leaders of the local Churches look up to us SVD missionaries to be true witnesses of the Gospel vision of our Catholic Christian life – more so, our faithful and people of goodwill appreciate our struggles to live in intercultural commu-

nities, thus giving them moral leadership and inspiration. It is not always easy, truth be told, to pursue this challenge in our local or district communities. Leadership seminars as well as workshops on intercultural living and mission have accompanied our confreres in the recent past as ongoing formation, enabling us to face these challenges. Thus the efforts that our confreres consciously make to live meaningful intercultural mission are always something to be lauded within the African socio-political and cultural milieu.

All the five ad-intra CDs are priorities in our PRMs for renewal and sustainability of life and mission. There seems to be a steady flow of interest amongst young people to priestly and consecrated life in most of the sub-Saharan countries (although Botswana and South Africa are apparent exceptions for the SVD as of now). We are grateful to our confreres, especially those entrusted with vocation promotion, for accompanying the young people in their discernment process. TCD is the latest of our missions to have begun a formation program in 2017 for young postulants. Within the zone, the novitiate houses we have are open to receiving our postulants for the common novitiate formation. Plans are afoot to begin yet another English-language common novitiate house for the zone in ZAM in July 2018. Our students normally do their theology studies in the three Common Formation Centers (CFCs) within the Zone – although some are offered the opportunity to do their theological formation in other zones as well. We equally welcome scholastics from other zones to study

theology and/or to have pastoral experience or OTP within our CFCs and/or PRMs. Several of our students also opt for the OTP program, enriching themselves from such a cultural and missionary exchange, and eventually being even assigned to those provinces outside the continent after their final profession.

Financial self-reliance remains our greatest challenge in the zone. As much as our PRMs would like to become self-reliant in money matters, we are still dependent financially to a great extent on the rest of the Society and people of goodwill to carry on our missionary work. This is true especially of our initial formation programs. Confreres working in some city parishes as well as the *SVD Friends* are now gaining ground in

trying their best to generate funds especially for training our young confreres as future missionaries. At the local level, our confreres try their best in making the best use of the local resources to contribute to managing the annual budgets. There is still a long way to go before we can say: “Ah! Now we can manage these things on our own!” We are hopeful that the Lord blesses our efforts in this area, and for the rest we trust in God’s providential care.

It is our earnest hope that the process we are engaged in as we prepare for the forthcoming General Chapter in 2018 is bringing us the grace of the light of the Spirit to be rooted in the Word – and thus enable us to continually commit ourselves to God’s mission here within the AFRAM Zone.

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