

## **Botswana Province (Botswana-Zambia-South Africa)**

Twenty seven years have passed since SVDs first arrived in Botswana. It was in February 1981 the first batch of SVDs landed in Botswana, at the request of the then bishop of Gaborone, Bishop Urban Murphy. Today, the province is three in one, meaning one province in three countries namely Botswana, Zambia and South Africa. Until Zimbabwe became a separate Mission in June 2008, the province was actually spread out in four neighboring countries. This diversity has its own beauty as well as challenges in our missionary endeavors.

### **Some Facts and Figures of our Province**

#### **Botswana**

Botswana was a country with one diocese at that time of the arrival of SVDs in 1981. Most of the catholic population and the missionary works were concentrated in southern part of Botswana near the capital city, Gaborone. Northern part was not fully explored for the mission work. Since our Society is known for our frontier mission work, the bishop had no hesitation in giving us the whole of northern part of the diocese of Gaborone for pastoral care and development.

The Catholic Church has made great progress in the north of Botswana over the years under the pastoral care of our dynamic and hard working missionaries. The seed that was planted in 1981 in the northern part of the diocese of Gaborone grew very steadily and it became a huge tree with many branches in the form of various missions and parishes with four characteristic dimensions of our Society (Bible apostolate, Communication, Mission Animation and Justice and Peace). The steady growth of the catholic church and also the expansion of the SVD missionary activities in northern part of Botswana resulted in getting an SVD Vicariate (Vicariate of Francistown) in the year 1998. Until 1998 there was only one diocese for the whole country. In 1998 the north was created as a Vicariate and the first bishop is Frank Nubuasah SVD.

From 1998, after the creation of a new Vicariate, the provincial administration and the confreres in Botswana have shown their willingness to move out of the established parishes and move in to other frontier missions in the Vicariate where the Gospel has not yet been preached, in keeping with the charism and spirit of our Society. The SVD presence is very much felt now in the diocese of Gaborone as well as in the Vicariate of Francistown.

Botswana district has got over 20 confreres working in different ministries. Our confreres are involved in ministries such as youth, education, Bible, family apostolate, social communication and also in AIDS awareness program. . But majority of them are directly involved in the parish ministries.

## **Zambia**

The SVDs first arrived in Zambia in 1986 at the request of the bishop of Livingstone. Zambia was one of the richest and most industrialized countries in Africa at the time of its independence. However, gross mismanagement and wrong policies have reduced it to one of the poorest on the continent. Corruption, rising food prices, poor value for the currency, poor health care, lack of educational facilities and poor roads and transportation have become great burdens for the people. Our missionaries have faced and still facing many challenges to work in Zambia.

Today there are more than 16 confreres working in Zambia in two dioceses, Livingstone and Lusaka arch-diocese. Zambia is an important country for local vocation for our Society. We have 6 SVD priests from Zambia and most of them are from SVD missions. Most of the seminarians in our formation houses are also from Zambia. So it is a fertile soil for vocation to priesthood and religious life. It is also very significant to note that both formation houses of our province (Postulancy and Philosophy) are in Zambia. Currently there are 5 confreres involved in the formation work. Two of them are also teaching at the major seminary in Lusaka. Besides the parish ministry and formation work, some confreres are very much involved in youth and communication ministry which are very much appreciated by the people at large.

## **Zimbabwe**

SVD District of Zimbabwe was established in 1986. It was the time, when the Diocese of Bulawayo suffered a loss of missionaries due to killings and political violence. The majority of clergy were the Marianhill Missionaries among whom some ten missionaries were killed. Suffering a huge shortage of missionary workforce bishop Henry Karlen CMM invited the SVD and gave them the Plumtree area. It turned to be very fruitful cooperation; now our congregation is the second biggest in the archdiocese.

Zimbabwe was part of Botswana province until June 2008 but now it is an independent Mission but in many areas we work together and come together for retreats and other common SVD functions. The country is in political and economic crisis since 10 years and it is a matter of great concern for all of us. Confreres are facing real challenges of all sorts at this time when the country is in deep trouble.

## **South Africa**

South Africa is the newest district in Botswana Province. It was made a district only in October 2008. It was in 2003 we came to South Africa for mission work. There were only two confreres at that time but today we are eight confreres working in three dioceses. Four confreres are involved in running two Pastoral Centers and the rest are in parish ministry. By the end of the year the district will have 12 confreres all in all. The confreres who are in the parishes are also very much involved in the Biblical Pastoral Formation, Social Communication and AIDS Awareness Programs. Since eight years our confreres were involved in running Lumko Pastoral Institute in Johannesburg. Lumko Institute falls

under Southern African Bishop's Conference. From this year (2009) SVDs are given responsibility of the administration of Lumko and therefore all in all there will be 4 confreres in Lumko from this year.

### **The Role of Mission Animators in the growth and expansion of our missions in Botswana Province**

Looking at the fast growth of the church in general and SVD Missions in particular in all these four countries (Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa) during the past 25 years, I can confidently say that each confrere has contributed in fostering mission awareness in our missions and also in the dioceses where we work. Otherwise our missionary work would never have been so successful. The pioneering missionaries laid good foundation and the confreres who followed them continued their spirit of hard work and commitment. In this sense each confrere is a mission animator and I feel this spirit should continue if we have to bear witness to the Word to the world.

As you can see from the facts and figures in this presentation that our province is still very new and I feel happy to say that most of the pioneering missionaries are still there and very much active in their pastoral work. Some of the confreres who came late have gone back to their countries of origin but the pioneers are still there and it encourages the younger confreres to learn lessons from them. In our province we are about 50 confreres and in Zimbabwe there are about 15 confreres. Majority of us are in our 40's or below 40 years of age. Those who crossed 60 years of age are not many. The growth and expansion of our missions was possible only because the confreres were willing to face challenges in the frontier missions.

### **Challenges**

Since we had 4 countries in our province the most difficult challenges we faced and still facing is the coordination of various mission activities by mission animators and mission secretaries. It's a tough job really. Each country is very unique with various languages. The distance from one country to another is too much. Crossing the country is becoming more and more difficult and the visas are very expensive. It is also not easy to get visas to certain countries in our province. So it is very difficult to organize anything together as a province. It is also difficult to visit our missions in other country due to all the reasons I mentioned above. So mission secretaries in the past found it difficult to coordinate mission activities, mission awareness program for the confreres and for the missions etc

It is a fact that coordination is the biggest problem we face in our province because our province is in three countries. But each district is doing its best to come together as a district frequently and many things are discussed there. Each confrere somehow becomes mission animator in his own parish, mission and pastoral centers. In most of the SVD parishes and missions the four characteristic dimensions of our Society is very much seen and the people and the bishops feel it very much.

In each district (country) of our province there are some who are specialized in Bible and Communication but the problem again is the coordination. We are finding difficult to pool all the resources together in various apostolate and come out with some concrete project which could benefit the province and the church as a whole. This is a major challenge for us in the years to come.

## Plans for the Future

### **Ongoing Formation for the confreres**

Ongoing formation is one of the most important aspects of our mission. It is easy to say that we are busy preaching, teaching, and doing this and that in our missions but it is very important for us to take time to receive. How can I give if I don't have anything? So considering all these factors we have decided as a province to have some ongoing formation classes and courses and short renewal courses for the confreres in the province organized by the Mission Secretary in this year and the years to come.

As I mentioned above that because of the nature of the vastness of our province it is going to be difficult to do anything in this venture but I feel that the confreres are going to make some sacrifice and give time for themselves to attend this course. We have planned this ongoing formation in three stages. The first stage is for confreres who are five and below years of priesthood and final vows for brothers. And the second group is for middle aged confreres and the third group is for senior and veteran missionaries.

### **Forming an SVD Lay Association**

In our province we are working in 7 dioceses in three countries. Divine Word Missionaries are well known in the areas and the dioceses where we work. Our missionaries are doing their best in their missions, parishes, seminaries and other institutions where we work. We are in contact with many active lay people who support the church through their resources and hard work. In this context I feel that our ministries can be enhanced by the support of an SVD lay Associates. In some provinces it is working very well.

So I feel as a Mission Secretary of Botswana Province I am thinking of forming an SVD lay associate group. It is something new our province and therefore it could take time to materialize it but it is my vision for the future. Eventually this lay group can be also our local benefactors who can support the missionaries especially the formation of our seminarians.

### **SVD &SSpS joint venture**

In each district of our province there are Holy Spirit sisters as well. We would like to plan something together as one Arnoldus Family in the area of mission awareness and evangelization. It may be difficult to coordinate anything as a province in this joint venture but as a district we like to work together in the areas where we can work together

and have frequent meetings, workshops, recollections and sharing of our work together. This will have a witness value to the people we serve in the missions.

### **Internet communication**

In this age of internet communication we can communicate and reach out to brothers and sisters much faster than we can think of. We can also share with others the news which we gather from our own sources. The former Mission Secretary of our province has been good in this internet communication. He has been sending each confrere in the province by email some important church news and other relevant news of the society etc. It is a big help for those who don't spend too much time on internet to gather news. We become connected to each other in this way of communication.

I am very new in this position as the mission secretary of Botswana province. I do not have much to report of what I have done so far but what I can report to you is some of the future plans we have lined up for the months to come.

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