Why Tanzania?

In a land of incredible beauty and a lack of warring factions as found in several other Africa countries, there is nonetheless, a painful degree of poverty.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Usambara are a congregation of African nuns whose work is caring for the needs of the poorest and most deprived people in the eastern regions of Tanzania. They direct schools for girls, operate clinics, hospitals and preschool programs. Many were educated at Nazareth College, returning to become leaders in their community.

Benedictine Father Damian Milliken, was born in Elmira, NY and has worked in Tanzania for more than 50 years. He is directly involved in the Sisters’ work and formation. Country-wide standardized tests prove the success of their work—the mission schools’ scores are in the top 5% of the nation.

Knowing the Sisters and Fr. Damian and having direct connections to where they live and work can guarantee that any financial assistance will go directly to the causes we choose to support without worry about misuse of funds. The return on our investment is outstanding.
Our Mission

By law, men and women in Tanzania are equal. However, by tradition, women have little status. They give birth, raise the children, cook, clean, carry, build the home, and tend harvest crops.

Fewer than 5% of girls have the opportunity to complete high school; in rural areas, it is considered unnecessary to educate females.

For $1,000 a year, the high schools operated by the Sisters of Usambara offer girls a Catholic education, room, board, uniforms, school supplies and basic health care.

Without assistance, most girls cannot afford to come to the Sisters’ schools. Education is the best predictor of self-determination for these girls.

Through the generosity of St. Joseph’s parishioners and friends, many girls from rural villages are being sponsored who would otherwise not have the chance to be educated.
Building Needs

In order to meet the needs of the current student body and allow room for more girls, new dormitories, classrooms, bathing and toilet facilities are necessary as well as ongoing maintenance of a clean water supply.

Because the schools are located in a rural area, there is little housing available for faculty and their families. Fr. Damian builds modest campus homes for faculty.

Since his last visit here, he has been able to install solar panels on the newest building, which is a combined dormitory and library. It saves thousands of dollars a year in electric costs and provides a more reliable source of electricity.

Since many building materials are created from local resources (mud for bricks, quarried stone, milled trees), many jobs are created for a very poor community.

April Letter from Father Damian

Dear Friends,

It is now Springtime for you in America and for us a classical rainy season has started. We feared that the Lord had forgotten us but the rains have set in, sometimes seemingly with a vengeance. Bridges in the village areas are washed away; streets in the metropolis of Dar es Salaam are turned into raging torrents. Someone seems to have forgotten the function of storm sewers. We now hope for Noah’s promise from the Lord—a big bright rainbow.

Some years ago we decided to put banisters on the stairway of the convent. We had an elderly sister who resisted being resettled downstairs so we put in the hand rails to make her climbing and descending stairways safer and more manageable. However, the Sister in question objected to the stairway addition saying that she did not want to be responsible for expenses to be incurred. She always invoked the Holy Vow of Poverty. As a ruse we told Sister that the father himself said he wanted the railings and they were not exclusively for her use. Now Sister Regis has long gone to the Mother House in retirement and Father Damian has daily access to railings both up and down, countless trips per day, often pausing mid-stairs to catch his breath.

With each new group of students coming to school, we have an introductory course of about six weeks. This is to get the girls accustomed to the school, to the environment, and to get to know one another as well as the teachers. I take the class during the night study time and give special English lessons for an hour and a half. I also drill them on the ethos of the school such as: keeping the School clean, following the school regulations, being good, respecting and loving one another. We all pray together every morning and are reminded how important good behavior is. I also insist that they write down the Rule Number One of Mazinde Juu which is, “Father is always Right” and Number Two is “If Father is wrong, go back to Number One.” This is never questioned or doubted so we live in almost perfect harmony.

I also give a lot of time to drill in points of grammar; For example the sentence “The prisoner runs away.” I require every possible grammatical variation in tenses, singular, plural, etc.

When we have run through all the textual exercises I then give them a brain teaser. I tell the students that I now want them to write a little essay on “Why the Prisoner ran away?” Their imaginations run wild over this topic and the essays are a delight to read. The most remarkable aspect of this exercise was the commonality of their reasons for him “running away”. The first reason given was that he was always innocent and falsely accused by jealous neighbors. Then followed the reason for running away and this was he had to get home to see his wife and take care of his children, particularly to be there so as to be able to pay the school fees for them. That puts paternity into perspective: protector and provider.

My sincere thanks for your faithful support and your loyalty to the cause of bringing light and happiness into the lives of our children. For sure you too will be twice blessed.

Sincerely, Father Damian
Our Heavenly Father Knows Best

When I first came to Tanganyika in 1960, I greatly regretted my limitations in the field of medicine when I saw the extent of physical sickness and maladies that afflicted our people and felt that if I had become a doctor, I would have been able to help alleviate so much pain and suffering. Time and providence dictated otherwise however.

Take for example, our class of 2012 who just completed University and of the 130 of our girls graduating in 2016, thirty two became doctors. Then I reflected on the input from our school into the lives and welfare of people of Tanzania being served by the young women of Mazinde Juu and I see how well the Lord has provided a far greater benefit to thousands more Tanzanians than my personal doctoring could ever have achieved.

Now I have no regrets and want to thank all of you who have stood by me contributing so generously and loyally over the years to this apostolate of Education for African Women.

Father Damian

How You Can Help

- Pray for Fr. Damian, the Sisters, and the students.
- Donate to the annual Mission Collection each summer or at any time. Make checks payable to St. Joseph’s with a memo “Tanzania”.
- Sponsor a student. The cost is $1,000 per year.
- Join the Tanzania Action Team.

Note that all donations are tax-deductible and will be included on your annual church statement.

Contact Us

For more information or to join our team, please contact:

Jack and Mary Skvorak  
(315) 986-1550

Lori Mahar  
(585) 388-7374

tat@sjcpenfield.com

Visit us on the web at:  
www.sjcpenfield.com/tanzania-action-team-1