

The Back Story of Cooking Up a Convent

Meet the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa

Editor's note: The Jan. 8, 2015 edition of The Catholic Times published the article "Cooking up a Convent" that spelled out how St. John the Baptist Parish in Marshfield connected with Sister Sabina Kabuga from Mwanza, Tanzania. The parish conducted a fundraiser and produced a cookbook to raise more funds. This article is an update to the Marshfield-Tanzania connection.

By SANDRA "SAM" STEINER

MARSHFIELD — On a frigid February morning in 2014, a group of St. John's parishioners gathered for a presentation on the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa (SOLQA), Tanzania; and a Skype introduction to Sister Sabina Kabuga. Father Martin had expressed a plan for the parish to consider a foreign missionary effort and Tanzania seemed like a possibility. But the parish needed to decide if this opportunity was a good fit.

The Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa has 350 religious sisters and 60 women in formation. The mother house is located in Southwestern Tanzania in the Diocese of Sumbawanga, where transportation and communication systems are generally very poor and unreliable.

Water is primarily drawn with a hand pump from wells. Electricity is sporadic at best. The local economy is based on agriculture and small locally owned businesses. The average income per capita in 2013 in Tanzania was \$1,731.

The SOLQA evangelize through teaching (pre-K through university), health care, social services and pastoral care to promote human development and the Catholic faith.

For example, the sisters founded St. Theresa Girls' Secondary School, which is a boarding school for girls from the remote area around Sumbawanga. They also operate the St. Martin de Porres Orphanage Center, which serves the area's orphaned children up to age six; most of whom have lost their parents to malaria or AIDS.

Before moving to Marshfield, Sandra "SAM" and Robert Steiner met Sister Sabina in Portland, Ore., where she was staying for three months after completing her Masters degree in geography at SUNY-Binghamton, at



Photo by Sandra "SAM" Steiner

Sister Sabina Kabuga of the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa (SOLQA), is all smiles as she poses with the Robert and Sandra "SAM" Steiner family. The Steiner's assisted Sister Sabina while living in Oregon, and continued with the support of St. John the Baptist Parish after moving to Wisconsin.



Photo by Sister Sabina Kabuga

Sister Sabina is in front of the under-construction-convent that will allow the members of the order to live in decent quarters instead of having to use an empty room with a bucket of water and a cup to take a shower; and cook over charcoal.



Photo by Sister Sabina Kabuga

The construction of the walls and the framing of the roof was a major milestone in the building of a new convent. The convent could not have been built without the assistance of the parishioners of St. John the Baptist Parish in Marshfield who donated \$41,000 to date.

Binghamton, N.Y.

In their Portland parish, the Steiner's had laid the groundwork to find support for the sisters' small order in this very remote part of Tanzania. When they moved to Marshfield in Summer 2013, they thought "How can we help the sisters now? We have to start all over again!"

During her visit to Marshfield in July 2014, Sister Sabina won the hearts of St. John the Baptist Parish with her joyous smile and devotion to Christ. She spoke of the great hardship that she and her colleague Sister Eddy endured in their two-room hut, as they forged a new presence for the SOLQA in Northern Tanzania in the Diocese of Mwanza, where they each have a teaching load of 300-500 students at St. Augustine University.

Their "shower" consists of a hole in a cement floor and a bucket of water with a cup!

The sisters cook over a charcoal stove inside the hut. The windows are not secure and mosquitoes are everywhere. By taking out a loan for

the equivalent of \$5,000 the sisters bought land in hopes of building a convent, at a cost of \$99,000. A convent would provide Sister Sabina and Sister Eddy with decent living conditions and allow more sisters to live in community to teach, study and spread the Gospel through their apostolic work.

Most of the sisters joined the order as teenagers and have completed their own studies at St. Theresa School.

The convent in Northern Tanzania would enable many more sisters to continue their studies at the local university and broaden their evangelization through care for orphans and social services.

Sister Sabina showed members of St. John's her detailed architectural plans and budget for the convent. For \$99,000, an eight-bedroom convent with a kitchen, meeting room and chapel can be built. The archbishop of Mwanza

welcomes the sisters to the area, but has no building funds available. The sisters have only recently reached outside of Tanzania for benefactors.



Photo by Sandra "SAM" Steiner

Sister Sabina Kabuga of the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa, Tanzania poses with Father Samuel Martin during the St. John the Baptist Tractor Pull last summer.

After Sister Sabina's presentation to the Marshfield community, donations flooded in. By mid-September 2014, a check was sent to the sisters for \$15,000. Sister Sabina wrote, "It is just incredible ... thank you so much ... our dreams are coming into reality."

They went right to work and started building the walls for the convent.

An additional \$16,500 was sent to the Sisters in February of this year. The walls have been finished and the roof has been framed.

Recently, Sister Sabina announced that the name of the new convent will be Divine Mercy Convent. "This is because we started earli-

er to pray several novenas to the Divine Mercy to ask the Lord's intervention and help for building the convent. ... No wonder your compassionate support is out of Divine Mercy," Sister Sabina said on announcing the name of the convent.

In less than eight months, a total of \$41,000 has been raised and sent to the sisters' building fund; \$57,000 is needed to complete the building. The support continues to flow and donations are welcome. Please send donation to the office of St. John the Baptist Parish, 201 W. Blodgett St. Marshfield, WI 54449 or call 715-384-9565. Updates will be provided on a periodic basis in *The Catholic Times*.