



– Fr. Simon, would you share with us a bit about your background: family, childhood, early education etc.?

Fr. Simon – I was the third child born into a family of 9 children, seven boys and two girls in 1970, in the central part of Kenya. My primary education took place in my home village which is predominantly protestant and which sponsored the school I attended. Due to the fact that the Catholic Church was far from my home, I attended Sunday services in the local church. I started attending Mass later as I prepared for my First Holy Communion and later for Confirmation by a woman who volunteered to teach us in her home.

My secondary education took place in a Catholic sponsored school where I had a better opportunity to grow in the faith and to discern my vocation. The call to priesthood had been part of me since I was in primary school where I wanted to move on to a minor seminary. Instead, the school I attended was a parish school run by the Consolata Fathers whose members evangelized almost the whole of Central Kenya from 1902. During these years I felt more and more called to religious life. However my parish priest, as a diocesan, did not support me and directed me the diocesan vocation director and I eventually began my formation as a diocesan seminarian in 1988.

– Where/how did your Assumptionist roots begin? Did anyone in particular have a significant impact on your life at this time?

– While doing some parish pastoral work in my parish as a diocesan seminarian, the desire to join a religious community returned. Supported by my bishop, I applied to different congregations and among the positive responses were the Assumptionists, who were still new to Kenya. Through a friend of mine who was a candidate at that time, I sent my application to

the late Fr. Richard Brunnelle, the vocations director in East Africa. After a lengthy discussion in 1995, I remained in touch for two years and was accepted for residency in 1997, and continued to do one more year of philosophy in order to obtain a degree. In 2007, after ten years, I was ordained to the priesthood. Besides Fr. Richard, I greatly admired Fr. Luc and Fr. Oliver who encouraged and supported me on my journey in the Assumption.

– Would you share some of your later education and formation memories?

– While I had hoped to do further studies after theology, I was asked to do vocation ministry in the region instead. I moved to Arusha (Tanzania) but had to travel to Kenya almost every month for vocation business. While in Arusha I lived with philosophy students and later became the community treasurer. In 2006 I was appointed the regional secretary and found myself wearing three hats.

I have many favorite scripture passages, especially from the epistles of Peter and Paul: 2 Cor 5:13-18, Gal 2:20, Eph 6:10-18, Phil 2:12-15, Phil 3:13-14, Col 2:6-7, Col 3:12-17, 1 Thes 5:8-10, 1 Tim 4:12-13, 1 Pt 2:9-10, 1 Pet 3:8-9, 1 Pt 5:8-9, 2 Pt 3:17-18.

– Where did subsequent community assignments take you?

– In addition to the three hats I mentioned above, I was also secretary of the board of trustees of the Assumptionists in Tanzania. Six months after my ordination I was appointed pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul in Arusha, which was on the verge of collapsing due to serious financial problems but in less than a year we were back on track. After one year there, we were able to split the parish as a new parish was born. I was there for a total of six years. At the same time, I was asked to do some vocation ministry in Rwanda, which meant going there from time to time to meet with candidates and the possibility of recruitment.

In 2012, during my time as a pastor, I was appointed the regional superior of the East African Region of the Assumptionists. In 2014 I moved back to Kenya to work in our postulancy house as the local superior, giving them courses and helping out in the parish. After my term as regional superior, the provincial asked me to come to the States in 2015 to serve at St. Anne/St. Patrick's Parish in Sturbridge, MA, finally arriving there after getting my visa in January, 2016.

– How have you experienced growth in the living out of your Assumptionist charism?

– There are several ways in which I have experienced this growth. First of all is the community spirit which is the foundation of everything we do as Assumptionists. Then, based on my experience as a vocation director and lived out as a formator, I can say that I exercised the doctrinal aspect of our charism through teaching. And during my six years in the parish, I tried to live the social, doctrinal and ecumenical aspects of our charism.

– Would you share any happy memories/stories?

– In 2013, while I was a pastor in Arusha, the archdiocese was celebrating its 50th anniversary. It was agreed that as part of the celebrations, there would be choir competitions among other things. Parishes were to be evaluated in terms of spiritual growth, pastoral care, development plans etc. When all was said and done, including evaluations, our parish emerged as the overall winner, despite the fact that it was neither the largest nor the richest parish in the archdiocese. We had come a very long way from being a parish that the archbishop had been ready to close for three years. This turn of events was a happy moment for me as the pastor and indeed for all of the leaders and parishioners.

– What hobbies or other interests do you have?

– For many years I used to play lawn tennis, badminton, table tennis and other indoor games. Now, during my free time, I enjoy reading, especially newspapers and the bible in preparation for my homilies. I have yet to decide which physical exercise I will do to keep physically fit.

– What is your vision and or hope for the future of the congregation and/or the Church?

– I would like to see the Church grow in terms of membership and commitment to the faith. It is unfortunate that in the Western world, religion is no longer a significant part of the lives of so many people and that vocations have decreased. Our own congregation here in America has

very few members and many of them are elderly, having given so many exceptional years of service to the Church. The future of the congregation here is at stake. This is why our ministry to families is so very important.

– Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to share?

– I would like to share a true story of what happened to me in 2014. On August 28th, we opened a new parish in the western part of the archdiocese of Arusha. As the regional superior of the Assumptionists in East Africa, I had to attend the opening ceremony since the parish was to be given to the Assumptionists. I drove a landcruiser which could hold 9 people. After the long and colorful ceremony, three of us were to return the following day, a catechist from Arusha, an Assumptionist brother and myself. After travelling about two hours, the vehicle slid because of the sand, overturned and rolled. The left side touched the ground first and the vehicle rolled and finally rested on its wheels. It happened so fast and came to a rest. Even without seatbelts fastened, nobody had moved from his seat. We were covered in dust from head to toe. The doors on the left side would not open and most of the windows were shattered, including the left side of the windshield. Thank God that the vehicle landed on its wheels. There we were in the bush, far from any kind of help or communication. Thankfully the engine started and we got back on the road safely but had an overheated radiator that required all our remaining water. We finally arrived in Arusha with only minor injuries and as the Psalmist says In Ps 91, we always live under God's protection.