

THE AFRICA REPORT

DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS? – YES, THEY DO

Father Barthelemy Bazemo, M.Afr.
Provincial of the Americas and President of the Missionaries of Africa, Inc.



Christmas celebration at St. Joseph's Parish, Howick, in the Archdiocese of Durban, South Africa.

If you're listening to the radio this Christmas, you might hear the 1984 charity single *Do They Know It's Christmas?* The song, created to raise funds for famine relief in Ethiopia, was a star-studded effort that raced up the pop charts. Yet over the years, it has faced rightful criticism for its portrayal of Africa. With lines like "Well tonight thank God it's them instead of you" and "There won't be snow in Africa this Christmas time," the lyrics suggest a simplistic and often misguided view of the continent—a place of despair where Christmas is unheard of. But the reality is far different.

Ethiopia, the country whose struggle inspired the song, is home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Christianity in Ethiopia dates back to the 4th century, and today, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, alongside other Christian communities, plays a central role in the lives of millions. Christmas, known as Gena, is derived from a Geez word meaning the "finding of

something long-awaited." This reflects the visit of the Magi, who traveled to find the King of Kings. In the Tigray State, people dress as shepherds and go door to door, singing *Tihabkin*, meaning "May Mary give you what you are looking for, just as we have found Christ in Bethlehem." Yes, Ethiopians certainly do know it's Christmas—and have known for centuries.

This disconnect between the song's message and the reality of Christmas in Africa isn't limited to Ethiopia. Across the continent, Christian communities celebrate Christmas with deep-rooted traditions that reflect both their faith and the rich cultural diversity of Africa.

In East Africa, Christmas is a major event, both religiously and culturally. During my time serving in Kenya and Tanzania, I witnessed how Christmas became a time for family reunions that celebrate both family bonds and the gift of faith. The birth of Jesus is a significant moment that Tanzanians and Kenyans take seriously—a time to strengthen family ties in the image of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Many also remember the hospitality shown to the Holy Family when they fled to Egypt, reflecting the deep connection between the Christmas story and Africa.

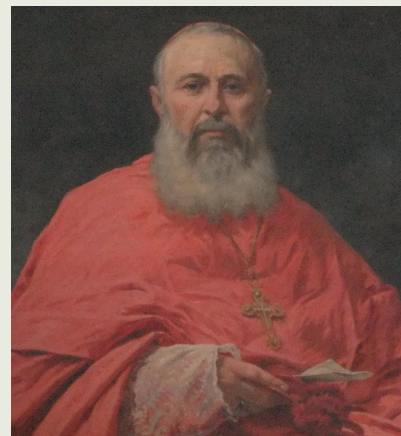


As we've seen, the message of Christmas resonates deeply across Africa, from the ancient traditions of Ethiopia to the vibrant celebrations in East Africa and beyond. These stories remind us that, yes, they do know it's Christmas. Through your support and dedication to the Missionaries of Africa and our partners, the message of Christ continues to inspire hope and faith across the continent.

As we celebrate this season, your continued support of the Missionaries of Africa helps keep the message of Christ alive in communities across Africa. Whether through prayer, donations, or sharing our mission with others, you are making a difference. Thank you for being part of this journey and for spreading the true spirit of Christmas.

CELEBRATING THE BICENTENNIAL OF CHARLES LAVIGERIE

Throughout the coming year, we will be preparing to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Lavigerie (1825–1892). Lavigerie, remembered as the founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) and the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (White Sisters), was a champion for the people of Africa. As Archbishop of Algiers, he led efforts against slavery and played a significant role in shaping the Church’s mission in the interior of Africa. Later, Pope Leo XIII appointed him Archbishop of Carthage, Primate of Africa, and a Cardinal.



As we mark this milestone, we invite you to reflect on the strides made by the Church in Africa and join us in celebrating Lavigerie’s enduring legacy of social justice.

Portrait of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie by Léon Bonnat, 1888, on display at the National Museum of the Château de Versailles, France.

SUDAN STRUGGLES WITH FAMINE AND DISPLACEMENT



A displaced Sudanese mother carries her child in South Sudan. Millions have been displaced due to ongoing violence and famine in Sudan.

Conditions in Sudan are worsening as millions, facing starvation, are being forced to flee their homes. Global organizations are warning of famine across the country, as fighting between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has intensified over the past year, leading to severe shortages of food and water.

According to the U.N. migration agency, over 10 million people have been displaced since the conflict worsened in spring 2023, with more than two million seeking safety in neighboring countries. The Missionaries of Africa, who have worked with local communities in the region for several years, are actively assisting refugees in Uganda and South Sudan.

Pope Francis has asked for prayers for the Sudanese: “I invite everyone to pray for Sudan, where the war that has lasted over a year has yet to find a peaceful solution. May weapons be silenced.” The Pope also called on international leaders and Sudanese authorities to help Sudan and its displaced people, adding, “May Sudanese refugees find welcome and protection in neighboring countries.”

EJISU, GHANA

DRINKABLE WATER FOR SEMINARIANS

The Missionaries of Africa seminarians at St. Martin of Tours Formation House in Ejisu, Ghana, are now enjoying a reliable source of drinkable water thanks to a new well completed over the summer. The original well was failing and could no longer support the increasing number of seminarians in the house.

A well project involves more than just drilling a borehole. This project included sinking a new borehole, installing a pump and plumbing, and setting up two 8,500-liter plastic tanks along with a concrete stand for the tanks.

Father Bonaventure B. Gubazire, M. Afr, rector of the formation house, shares, “This project has greatly enhanced the well-being of our staff and students. The availability of water will also allow us to start and develop a vegetable garden. Additionally, the project has benefited our neighbors who struggle with the high costs of municipal water. We are deeply grateful for your generosity.”



Success: Hitting Water at St. Martin of Tours Formation House, Ejisu, Ghana.

KADIOLO, MALI

NEW WATER TANK BRINGS CLEANER WATER

Father Landry Busagara, M.Afr., expresses his deep gratitude for the generous support that made it possible to redesign the cistern water system at the community house in Kadiolo, southern Mali. The new system, which features a gravity-fed water supply powered by a 20-foot-high tower, was completed in August. Father Busagara shares, “The water tower was essential for our health and the good functioning of the Parish. It is now installed and already benefiting the community.”

Kadiolo is one of four missions in southern Mali being served by the Missionaries of Africa. The installation of this new water tower is one of the many ways donors support the Missionaries of Africa, who have continuously served in Mali since 1894.

The new water tank on its 20-foot tower in Kadiolo, Mali.



ATAKPAMÉ, TOGO

KINDERGARTNERS FILLING NEW CLASSROOMS



Kindergarteners playing outside their new classrooms at Sacred Heart Institute.

The newest students at Sacred Heart Institute in Atakpamé, Togo, are now being educated in the school’s latest addition: brand-new classrooms. Last fall, Principal Sister Rita Amedimele requested support to construct these classrooms, as the school has seen a 25% increase in enrollment in recent years. This growth is largely due to families relocating to the safer southern region of Togo to distance themselves from unrest occurring in neighboring countries.

Thanks to the positive response to last year’s appeal for school support, Sister Rita and the school community successfully completed the construction of the new classrooms. Now, the kindergarteners, who were previously taught in hallways or outdoors, have proper

classrooms. With the new addition, each class in the school now enjoys under 30 students per room, providing a better learning environment.

TWO NEW CARDINALS FROM AFRICA

Pope Francis has announced a consistory on December 8, 2024, for the creation of 21 new Cardinals from around the globe. Among them are two distinguished African prelates: Archbishop Ignace Bessi Dogbo of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and Archbishop Jean-Paul Vesco, O.P., of Algiers, Algeria. Archbishop Vesco becomes the fourth Cardinal in Algeria’s history, following in the footsteps of the first, Archbishop Charles Cardinal Lavigerie, the founder of the Missionaries of Africa in 1868.

Their elevation highlights the growing influence of the African Church in global Catholicism. With these appointments, Africa will now have 19 Cardinals eligible to vote in a papal conclave. Additionally, 10 other African Cardinals have passed the age of 80 and are no longer eligible to vote.

THE LIFELINE OF CLEAN WATER



Christopher Anderson
Director of Development

Growing up in New York's Hudson Valley, I vividly remember the well at our house being about 165 feet deep. In New York, we measured wells by feet, not yards or meters. Shaped by childhood memory, I'm often surprised by the depth of wells we now help fund across Africa—many reaching twice or three times as deep.

Thanks to your support, the Missionaries of Africa in the USA support several types of water projects across the continent. Some are borehole systems, which involve drilling deep wells, installing casings, and using pumps and piping to bring clean water to the surface. Others are cistern systems, which collect rainwater from rooftops through gutters and pipes into large storage tanks. In some cases, communities rely on both systems to ensure an adequate supply of water, as both rainfall and underground water availability can be limited in certain regions.

We empower local communities to make choices because they understand the needs of their communities best. By supporting their efforts, we help people access a precious resource that is vital for life.

You are a vital part of this mission. Your ongoing support makes all the difference. Thank you.

WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION . . .

- Join our Friends of Hope monthly giving plan.
- Make a Memorial Gift in memory of a loved one.
- Celebrate a birthday, wedding or anniversary with a donation to our works in Africa.
- Donations of stock, securities, bonds or annuities provide the same benefit as a cash gift.
- Life Insurance: consider naming the Missionaries of Africa as a beneficiary.
- Bequests: an estate gift to support the ongoing work of the Missionaries of Africa.

Charitable IRA Transfers

Donors age 70 1/2 or older can transfer a contribution each year directly from a traditional IRA account. This may satisfy a portion or all of the annual required minimum distribution (RMD) and serve as a qualified charitable distribution for your IRA, which can decrease your tax burden even if you are no longer itemizing deductions.

How to make a Charitable Gift?

Donors should contact their IRA bank or broker/administrator to request an IRA distribution transfer to the Missionaries of Africa. Instruct your administrator to issue a check to:

Society of Missionaries of Africa, Inc.
Development Office
1622 21st Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-1003

** Always consult your tax preparer for your state regulations.*

For more information, call us at: 877-523-4662

or visit: www.missionariesofafrica.org or email: info@missionariesofafrica.org

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**The Africa Report is published four times a year by the
Missionaries of Africa | 1622 21st Street NW | Washington, DC 20009-1003 | 202-232-5995**

Volume 2024 16 #4 | © Copyright Society of Missionaries of Africa, Inc.