

Vincentian Parish Ministry in the Chad Mission

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Chad

Location

St. Jean Baptiste Parish of Bebalem, created in August 2005, is situated in the southern part of Chad (about 678 km from the capital Nd'jamena) in the north-east of the Diocese of Moundou. Its land mass extends to about 55 km long. The parish is situated in the countryside about 78 km from the city, with 95 percent of its population being peasant farmers. The majority of the population is very poor. The population of the inhabitants in the area is estimated at about 62,777 according to 2011 census, with Catholics (baptised and non-baptised) counting about 13,929. The inhabitants are composed of Catholics, members of Evangelic Church, Moslems, and adherents of African Traditional Religion.

In Chad, the north is predominantly Moslem and the south being predominantly Christian. However, with the desert encroachment in the north towards the south, the engagement in commerce and nomadic cattle rearing, there is steady migration to the south which augments the Moslem population in the south on a daily basis.

History of the Mission in Brief

The Vincentian Mission in Chad began in principle with the contract signed between the Superior General and the Bishop of the Diocese in January, 2011; and confreres were officially welcomed on April 17, 2011 with an inaugural mass in St. Jean Baptiste Parish, presided by the bishop of the diocese. Chad Mission is a Curia Mission in collaboration with COVIAM (Conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar). It is a parish mission. There are three confreres working in the area: Fr. Alexandre Roch from the Province of Madagascar; Frs. Onyekachi Ugwu and Ambrose Umetietie from the Province of Nigeria. We work with the Daughters of Charity from Spain who are located in the heart of the parish, where they have been working for almost 12 years.

The Mission Proper

As a community, we pray the office together, eat together, and have time for recreation and sharing of pastoral experience as well as community meetings. In the parish apostolate, we work with the diocesan

project and implement the resolutions of Parish Assembly, while putting our Vincentian touch on them. Our pastoral work includes engaging in the visitation of the sick and the aged, ministering the appropriate sacraments according to the needs of the people. The last week of every month is dedicated to evangelization in the parish. We go with the faithful for house to house evangelization. Also, we frequently organise workshops for catechists, facilitators of Basic Christian Communities and other pastoral agents. For the catechists, there is a formation for them at least once monthly. We have intensified our pastoral to the young and the vocation apostolate. We have had series of workshops for the parish youth in the course of this pastoral year. A few young men and women who felt having a call have joined in our vocation group. Every month, there is a workshop for this group.

Education is a necessary instrument for the alleviation of poverty. It is evident that the illiteracy level is so alarming. It contributes to the 70 percent poverty level here. And there is no adequate educational system in place. As a result, we have found ourselves in the school apostolate. Although there is inadequacy of teaching materials (such as books, which are rare here and if found are usually very costly), we are not discouraged. We have 7 primary schools in the 37 station churches we run in the parish, but none except one has a building. They are made with branches of trees and grass while used within the academic year. There are no building structures but thatched huts for classrooms. We supervise the schools, and we work with the village and canton heads to see that there are independent lands allotted for the schools. The pupils learn while sitting on little logs of wood. These places we use for schooling are farmlands during rainy season. It is only in the dry season that the academic year can run. In October, 2013 we just began a secondary school running in the same manner of the other 6 primary schools without a school building. We also teach religious instruction in these schools.

We make every effort to carry the Good News to the people, so that through us, they may be drawn closer to Jesus Christ. The parish has no church building. We have just started to install the foundation of our parish church. We do masses under mango trees with a podium as our altar. We move from one station church to another to meet with people, celebrate the sacraments with them, and listen to them. We have 37 station churches within the 77 villages that make up our parish. The station churches are far removed from each other and in some situations, the weather can make the routes become almost impassable. During the rainy season, 15 station churches are cut off from the parish by flooding. A station is attended to by boat, even in dry season, because it is cut off from the rest of the parish by a river. Roads to other areas are heavily sandy, making passage diffi-

cult, even in dry season. Thanks to our *Vincentian Solidarity Office* and “*Kirche In Not*” foundation, we have a vehicle to use, donated in September 2013. There is also a problem with access to water in some areas during dry season, which forces our people in search of water to move like nomads. For this reason, some stations are closed during this period.

Our apostolate to the sick and the aged remains a priority. We visit the sick and aged in their homes, giving them the needed sacraments when necessary. We do also hospital visitations. With our Daughters of Charity in the parish, we engage in accompaniment of the handicapped and mal-nourished children. In the parish, we also have a group for accompaniment of the sick, which is often sent to give formation and instruction in addition to their usual tasks.

During the last pastoral year, 130 infants were baptised, 55 persons received their First Holy Communion, 222 adults were baptised, and 242 Christians were confirmed. We also have more than 2,000 catechumens in their three different stages of the catechumenate

For the PASTORAL YEAR 2013, we were able to have our Parish Assembly in October 2013. At the end of a three day session, we came up with the following resolutions for 2014:

“In the light of the formation received on health in this assembly, the reports from stations, the resolutions of the diocesan assembly of 2013, and the problems observed which are obstacles to human life and our Christian faith, we, participants at the October 2013 parish assembly resolve in this Year:

1. To develop the spirit of initiative and work through the rearing of livestock, making vegetable gardens around our houses, while irrigating them during dry season, and learning small skill or small trade, such as soap making, brick-making, plumbing, etc.;
2. To avoid the mismanagement of the goods of the Church and of the family;
3. To fight against sickness- malaria, diarrhoea, typhoid, cholera, etc – through preventive and curative actions like the use of mosquito treated nets, making of pit toilets, boiling of drinking water, washing hands before and after eating, washing fruits and vegetables before eating them, eating good food, etc.;
4. To form the catechists, facilitators of small Christian communities, members of Christian movements and associations, and families of the sick to accompany the sick, with the option of those who are ill may receive the Sacrament of Anointing;
5. To celebrate solemnly World Day for the Sick on February 11;
6. To understand that being a Christian involves changing bad behaviours and mentalities;

7. To form catechists who teach, and evaluate the methodology used in teaching catechism, the hours and days accorded to it, so as to bring the catechumens to true conversion;
8. To assist organisations in the parish who fight against alcoholism;
9. To reserve a time of prayer in every Sunday Celebration to combat the phenomenon of sorcery, alcoholism, poverty among our people;
10. To appeal to the local authorities to sensitize citizens to respect the common good;
11. And to sensitize our faithful on the need to respect each person and his goods”.

We pray that God gives us his grace in this pastoral year to have the zeal of St. Vincent in order to enable us to make Christ felt by the poor. The parish and the entire country need your prayers so that the cry of the poor may be heard. Please pray for us also.