

Features

# Help build African Church



Francis Lestho (center) prompted Judy Graper (left), a local travel agent, and Sister Alice Mendon, to travel to the East African nation last February.

family, with whom Father Attundo always, remembers their friend as a lover of dignity and childlike wonder. On the day he died, he was delighted in spending the morning with his children hunting for Easter eggs in the garden.

On one occasion, Marcia Mendola glanced out her garden and caught sight of Father Attundo. He was holding one of her flowers. When questioned, he said the berries inside the flower, known as the lantern, were considered a delicacy in his home.

When he asked him what he would have (to eat) for his last meal back home, she said. "He replied 'a simple meal, like you would have here.'"

Father Attundo learned that he would become bishop of Rochester in June, 1987, and asking for their support. "We always kidded with him that he'd be the next pope, and that we'd all come to Rome for his jubilee," Marcia Mendola recalled. "So when he wrote back and said 'Sorry — that's not what we'd come when you became pope, but we'll be there for your jubilee.'"

Other individuals and families have been in contact with Kenyan priests and bishops and even occasional visits. Nearly eight months after Bishop Kirima returned to St. Catherine's for his jubilee, another such trip this summer to Kenya was made by Sister Cooney and Judy Graper, a



Family of Pittsford, with whom then-Father Longinus Attundo enjoyed many a holiday meal, traveled to Rome when the new bishop becomes the first black pope.

parishioner from St. Catherine's, traveled to Kenya last February where they visited both Bishop Kirima and Father Francis Lestho, who served at St. Catherine's from 1982-84 while studying at St. John Fisher.

Other parishioners have organized fundraisers or sent donations to help support parish and diocesan development projects in Kenya, such as the digging of wells.

Meanwhile, the circle of friendship continues to expand as Kenyan priests become bishops and send new priests to the homes of their old friends for study. Partly as a result of Father David Gramkee's friendship with Bishop Attundo, whom he taught to drive in the snow one wintry day, Father Gramkee has enlisted the two Elmira parishes where he is pastor to support a young Tanzanian priest, Father Filbert Liemo, in earning a master's in business administration at St. John Fisher.

In February, yet another Kenyan priest with connections to both Bishop Kairo and Bishop Ndingi, Father Stephen Mbugua, arrived to begin classes at Fisher.

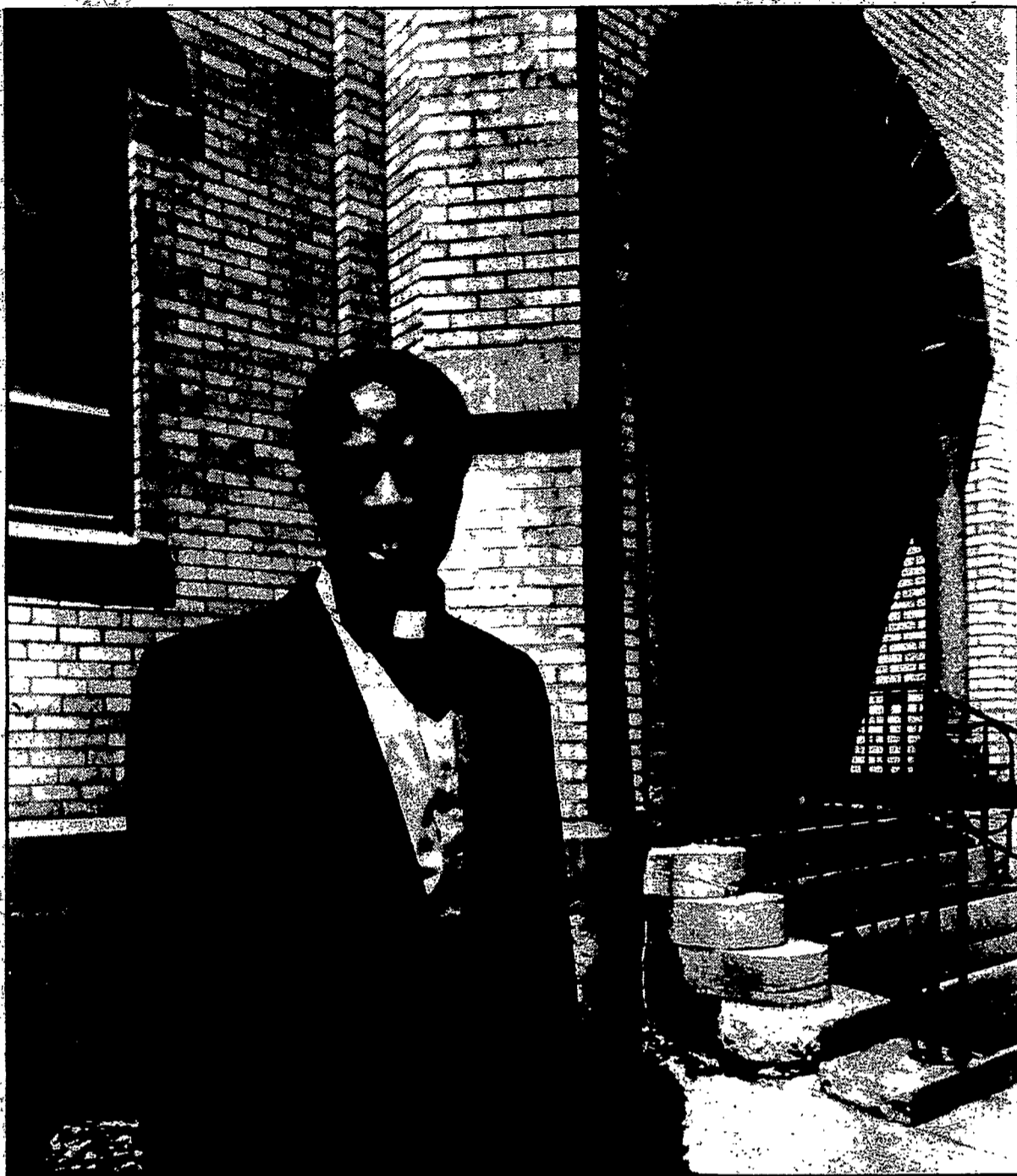
In retrospect, Father Dorsey believes that what began as a simple gesture of hospitality has yielded far greater benefits than those who initiated it could have foreseen. "Marshall McLuhan had a pet theory that in a oral culture, individuals come to know each other more quickly and more in-depth," he said. "My experience with the Kenyan priests verified that theory. They seem to possess some kind of genius at adaptability."

"I cannot tell you how much I admired their quickness of perception and their sensitivity," Father Dorsey said. "I believe that things work out because God takes care of it," he said.

Opportunities for higher education in Tanzania are severely limited since the number of the country's colleges and universities has failed to keep pace with the rapid growth in its population. To aid in obtaining higher education for native priests, the Congregation of Christian Brothers, which has long served in Father Liemo's home diocese, sends a Tanzanian priest to study in the United States every two years.

In 1984, the Christian Brothers chose Father Liemo to attend Walsh College, which the congregation operates in Canton, Ohio. By May, 1986, he had completed undergraduate degrees in finance and management. The following December, he finished a master's degree in counseling.

During the summer, the priest continued to study while traveling throughout the United States making mission appeals. By chance, during a summer trip to several Rochester parishes, Father Liemo visited Elmira, where he met Father David Gramkee, pastor of St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia's parishes.



Parishioners at St. Cecilia's and St. John the Baptist Parishes in Elmira were so impressed by Father Filbert Liemo's mission appeal that they agreed to help pay for his education at St. John Fisher College.

## Elmira parishes support priest

Father Filbert Liemo never realized how exhausted he was until he arrived in the United States.

While he was assigned to a church in rural Tanzania, the 28-year-old priest normally rose each morning at 6 a.m. to walk 10 miles or more to one of the parish's seven mission locations. If he hurried through his duties at the mission, he might return home by 10 p.m. — just in time to prepare a meal and sleep a few hours before beginning the next day's routine.

Life in Elmira may not be as demanding as the struggle for subsistence in rural Tanzania, but hardship is a language that the people of the Southern Tier understand. Perhaps that's why a Tanzanian priest's desire for education to help him improve the lot of his people has so thoroughly captured the imagination and generosity of two Elmira parishes.

By the time Father Liemo completes his master's in business administration at St. John Fisher College this spring, members of St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia's parishes in Elmira will have spent more than \$10,000 to support the young priest.

"There is just an amazing amount of money coming in to support him," said Father David Gramkee, pastor of both communities. "I think people realize that by educating him, you are affecting what he's doing for the rest of his life."

Father Liemo credits a power beyond good fortune for bringing him from his home city of Moshe, which is within sight of the southern slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, to the United States for continued study. "I believe that things work out because God takes care of it," he said.

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During their conversation, Father Gramkee asked his advice regarding a plan he'd been considering to adopt a sister parish in Africa. Father Liemo, in turn, sought Father Gramkee's advice. Although he had hoped to continue his studies for one more year, his diocesan bishop had recently died and arrangements for financing his education had gone haywire.

Response to Father Liemo's mission appeal among parishioners at St. John's and St. Cecilia's was so overwhelming that it planted in Father Gramkee's mind the idea of sponsoring the priest's education. Parish council members readily agreed to try the project, and a new envelope was added to parishioners' packets.

In the meantime, the search for a Southern Tier-area college that would suit Father Liemo's needs turned up no prospects. Consequently, he enrolled at St. John Fisher with the understanding that he would live at Our Lady Queen of Peace Rectory in Brighton, but would spend at least one weekend each month in Elmira.

Father Liemo believes that his presence in both parishes has helped create a much-needed understanding of developing nations like Tanzania. While he has observed that Americans and West Europeans are generally well-educated, they also seem to him woefully ignorant of other cultures — African in particular.

"People tend to think of all Africa as the same culture," he explained. "In my diocese alone are 108 different native languages associated with different tribes — each with their own customs and culture."

Father Liemo has also tried to promote awareness that the needs of Third-World nations go beyond dollars. "We need help in starting projects, in building churches. We have a need for people able to administer things, for education and support," he said. "(A lack of administrative skills) is one of the most difficult things we are encountering in developing countries."

Despite the demands of earning a bachelor's and two master's degrees in just over three years, Father Liemo's sojourn in the United States has seemed to him like a near-vacation. Nonetheless, he is anxious to return home. "Life in America is very easy — it's like two different planets," he said. "But nothing could make me stay. I came here for a purpose, and I look at it as being very unjust to come here and not go back to help my people."

While his purpose hasn't changed, Father Liemo admits that his priorities have. "Seeing other cultures expands enormously your scope of thinking," he said. "I am not the same person."

"When I go back, I don't want to have to walk 10 miles a day. There are so many more important things I could have done with that time."