



Sisters Frieda Kisaka (left), Christa Kimashi (center) and Domitila Mshahara, members of the Congregation of Our Lady of Usambara, are studying at Nazareth College of Rochester as part of the Tanzanian Sisters Project. Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

## Tanzanian project fosters women's education

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Sisters Domitila Mshahara, Christa Kimashi and Frieda Kisaka — members of the Congregation of Our Lady of Usambara — have gained plenty of firsthand experience with *thelugi* in recent months.

The trio of Nazareth College students had seen little *thelugi* — the Swahili word for snow — in their homeland, Tanzania, except perhaps, when they looked at distant mountain tops.

"I enjoy seeing the snow falling down," Sister Domitila said. "Now, I've come to enjoy the weather."

"Everything is OK, but the weather," Sister Christa countered.

Sister Frieda appreciates the changing seasons.

"I like these four seasons, the different seasons," Sister Frieda said, adding, however, that she did not like the cold. "The rest, I really enjoy."

They are experiencing *thelugi* and cold weather thanks to the efforts of a missionary whose dream snowballed into an international endeavor.

The three Tanzanians are studying at Nazareth as part of the Tanzanian Sisters Project. A joint effort of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, the project's aim is to help train women religious to teach women in Tanzania.

Four women religious — including Sister Domitila — earned bachelor's degrees at the East Avenue college in May, 1991.

Sister Domitila returned in January of this year to begin work on a master's degree in education, and to join Sisters Christa and Frieda — who are pursuing bachelor's degrees in history and religious studies, respectively.

The Tanzanian sisters trained during the program will teach at St. Mary's Secondary School at Lushoto, located in the Tanga region of northeastern Tanzania. The school was formed in 1989 by Father Damien Milliken, OSB.

The Benedictine missionary had served as the chaplain of a two-year domestic science school in north-eastern Tanzania. While there, he saw the need to educate Tanzanian women in more than domestic sciences, so he expanded the school into a four-year

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Sister Domitila Mshahara

academic institution. He built portions of the school by hand — with the help of students, parents, and many of the women religious who teach there.

Father Milliken also had a dream, noted his sister, Sister Kathleen Milliken, RSM.

"His aim is to have all Tanzanian teachers," Sister Milliken said.

However, due to the limited number of university openings in Tanzania, he was forced to turn overseas to find places for the teachers to earn the degrees needed for certification. So he contacted his sister.

Sister Milliken, along with Sister Maura Wilson, SSJ, presented the idea of bringing the teachers here to study to the Intercongregational Council, which helps coordinate efforts between the two congregations.

"They gave us their blessing," Sister Milliken recalled, "but were not able

to give us a great deal of money."

Through scholarships provided by Nazareth College, and by soliciting donations, they were able to bring over the first four Tanzanian Sisters in 1988. They must seek donations on an ongoing basis to help the project to continue.

Sister Domitila noted that the need for trained teachers is growing — despite the fact that idea of educating women seemed radical to some Tanzanians at first.

"I think the custom of women not going to school is traditional," Sister Domitila explained.

But the Tanzanian people have begun to realize that women need to be educated, too, in order for Tanzania to grow, Sister Domitila continued.

The only problem, she said, is that most schools are intended for boys, and thus there are few openings for girls. She noted that St. Mary's is one

of only two schools for girls in Tanzania's northeast region.

Sister Domitila reported that more than 400 students took the entrance examination for the 40 slots in the freshman class at the school this year. Those who did not gain admittance, she said, "did wonderful, but we did not have the facilities for them."

One of Father Milliken's goals is to expand the school beyond its current enrollment of 160. But to do so, more teachers need to be trained. Hence the importance of the program at Nazareth College.

But more than providing academic training, the experience is helping the Tanzanian sisters develop a broader view of the world.

"I'm interested to learn about different cultures from what I know," Sister Christa said.

"By going out and seeing the different ways things are done they can come back and say, 'We don't need to stay the way things were 10 years ago,'" Sister Frieda remarked.

All three sisters acknowledged that they have enjoyed the friendliness of the people they have met. Still, they are looking forward to returning home to help advance the cause of educating women in their homeland.

"The young girls are going to be the mothers of the future," Sister Domitila said. "They will tell their children the importance of education."

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