

ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING LAND

When Msgr. Allgeyer arrived in Nairobi on August 12th 1899, he was accompanied by Br. Blanchard Dillenseger, a farmer by trade. It was quite natural therefore, that they should acquire land for farming.

Wisely, they consulted Ainsworth about the acquisition of land and he advised them that 'they buy as soon as possible, a plot from the Africans, to have it registered with him and to establish a permanent mission' When, one month later, Br. Solanus Zepper arrived, he approved of their choice of site and felt that a permanent mission could indeed be established.

A plot was purchased from Chief Mzundo, and on August 16th, 1899, Br. Blanchard began developing his garden. He planted the first crops which germinated quickly and were ready for transplanting by September 22nd.

Some weeks later on December 26th, they visited Chief Kinyanjui and showed him the plot they had selected for permanent settlement, "and in the evening we go to Mr. Ainsworth to sign the contract. "We pay him five bags of rice."

Early in the new year, the missionaries inspected their plot measured 900 metres in length and 300 in width, i.e. about 28 hectares or 67 acres. Without delay Br. Blanchard started a new garden'.

Subsequently, much more land was acquired, the acquisition of which is inscribed in the journal. A considerable acreage was planted with trees while in a much greater area grew large crops of coffee, their biggest agricultural venture.

GARDENING

It would have been obvious from the beginning that gardening and agriculture would play a substantial part in the work of the missionaries who settled at St. Austin's Mission, because Br. Blanchard Dillensager who accompanied Msgr. Allgeyer to the site was a fanner. Within a very short time he had developed a garden which would provide vegetables for the mission table. Lilac seeds were also sown, "of the type Whitehouse would like to see along the avenues of Nairobi. Their agricultural wisdom was based on that Alsace, and their missionary location was equatorial Africa which had many surprises for the inexperienced farmer/gardener from Europe. Hungry insects and drought could destroy their crops. How they dealt with the former is not made known but, because of the

proximity of the Nairobi River, they were able to irrigate their garden by means of a canal, thus minimising the effects of the drought. Of course, there were times when this same Nairobi River would cause havoc by flooding its banks and sweeping away their crops.

When they catered for their immediate needs and much more land had been acquired, they turned to coffee cultivation on a large scale. Besides, their land must have lacked trees, so they planted trees in their hundreds which would bring beauty to the entire mission. Their agricultural endeavours offered guidance to numerous settlers who cultivated the land, especially those who decided to grow coffee on a large scale and enter the fray of the world coffee market.

They also inspired many local people, some of whom may have worked on their coffee farm thus acquiring the know-how to become growers and sellers of coffee as indeed a great many did. The sections which follow will, it is hoped, develop the theme of agriculture.

AGRICULTURE: The Coffee story

For nearly half a century, 1900 to 1945 St. Austin's Mission was closely associated with the growing and production of coffee. It was, by far, the biggest agricultural involvement of the Fathers of the Mission. In this essay, the 'Rise and fall' of the St. Austin's coffee 'empire' will be discussed.

The first mention of coffee in St. Austin's Journal occurs just fifteen months after the arrival of the missionaries. A consignment of 100 coffee trees was received from Bura Mission - and they were doing nicely.

One year later, November 12th - 13th 1901, the Journal reports; "*We transplant coffee bushes from Bura We now have about 300*". The following year coffee growing became a serious business and the number of trees rose to 800. Besides, they had established a nursery where plants were grown from seed and sold. In Jan - Feb., 1904, they sold 3,500 plants to Lady Delamere and got involved in Agricultural Show business. One of the Mission coffee trees was exhibited and much admired.

However, at the Zanzibar Show in 1905 there was disappointment: their coffee failed to win a prize! But life went on. The Brothers and local men picked coffee

and marked out ground for the plantations of coffee bushes between the Mission and the Boarding School.

There were technical problems too. Coffee needed drying and Br. Martial did not know where to have this done. The Journal does not record how he solved his problem. On a more cheerful note, Mr. Young took photographs of the coffee plantation but his purpose in doing so remains a mystery - as do his pictures!

The year 1906 witnessed a major advance in their coffee business. A message from a Mr. Faure informed them that their coffee machines from France were on their way. Clearly, the Fathers and Brothers were settling down to their work and solving its technical problems. The fact that Brother Martial gathered 80 lbs. of coffee seed, April 27th, was an indication that other plans were afoot; expansion was in his mind.

The coffee machines from France in July; and it is noted that the bill for them, Rs 705, arrived on July 13th. These machines were setup by the Brothers and by mid-July the pulper was set to work. By month's end the peeling machine was functional too.

In August Br. Martial, who was obviously the resident expert, began to roast coffee, put it in bins and present it on the market in Nairobi shops. Fr. Burke was his 'business agent' since he knew everyone living in Nairobi and had begged financial help from them already. His business acquaintances displayed the coffee in their shops - and St. Austin's coffee was on its way. The first shop to sell St. Austin's coffee was that of Mr. D'Souza

Naturally, hitches occurred which demanded attention; and more coffee bushes had to be planted. For Br. Martial and his men it was an ongoing cycle - planting, tending, picking, drying, roasting, pulping, canning, selling. And, besides these normal activities, one had to contend with huntsmen who galloped through freshly planted coffee bushes, drought; disease, and, on occasion, locusts who ate every scrap of vegetation including the foliage of coffee bushes. For Br. Martial and his colleagues February 4th, 1907 must have been a gala day, for on that date they began exporting their product to France.

Towards the end of the year they were harvesting once more. New plantations were added. By November, 1910 they had 15,000 coffee bushes on thirty-three acres of land. To cope with the extra work involved, new machines were purchased. Their nursery was producing thousands of plants. In July, 1911 they had 50,000 seedlings for sale at Rs 6 per box, of one hundred plants.

The coffee market was good. A meeting, attended by Fr. Bernhard, decreed coffee should not be sold at less than 6 annas per lb. It was selling at a fantastic rate. "We cannot keep up with the orders", wrote the Journalist. Coffee exhibited at shows won prizes. At Nakuru Show their green coffee won first prize and roasted coffee was second in its class.

Year after year, they planted more and more bushes - 9,325 in April 1912 and 8,500 in November of that year, 4,500 in 1913 and 6,675 the next year -when they were able to say that their overall total was 52,000 plants. They opened new nurseries in 1915 and sold seedlings at Rs. 5 per 100 plants. They even rented out their machinery to make extra income and their industry thrived, so that in April, 1917 they had 144 acres, producing excellent coffee.

Problems were, of course, encountered Coffee pests existed by the million and had to be dealt with. Thus in 1918, an inspector and an entomologist came visiting. They recommended the shading of coffee trees for all pests. The coffee growers took this with a healthy skepticism.

Everything in the garden was indeed rosy until 1921. For reasons unknown, trade slumped and the quality of coffee deteriorated. Affairs were so bad that the Governor went to England to try to stabilise the economic situation of the Colony. St. Austin's planted even more bushes. 'This month we planted 1,041 'Blue Mountain' coffee bushes imported from Jamaica and donated by the Governor. The Governor's efforts in England paid off and Mr. Gordon, a London coffee merchant, visited Kenya and, more specifically, the installations of St. Austin's. He was very impressed, especially with their cleanliness. By March, 1922 they received very many orders and a good income resulted. By this they had an agent, a Mr. Monctan, who had a keen eye on the market. They wished to send coffee to England where prices were better than those of Nairobi. Their agent, too, was interested in their coffee and offered E83 per ton but they were holding out for E85.

In June 1922 a nasty problem arose. Complaints were voiced about their coffee seeds. Their agent, - a Mr. Simpson this time, "suspected other than purely agronomic motives." They were accused of mixing 'Blue Mountain' and 'French'. So they wrote to Simpson guaranteeing that, from then on their seeds would come from only their best and oldest trees, with no mixing whatsoever and consisting of as many as possible 'bold' and 'round' grains. (Yet, one suspects that perhaps just a little carelessness may have crept in and that the 'Wolf cry might have had a basis in fact. Whatever the true facts of the case, nothing more is recorded in St. Austin's Journal in this matter.

But their troubles were not over. In February, 1923 they published an announcement three days running in the 'Standard' and once in the 'Weekly Standard'. resulted from the attitude of the Coffee Inspector, Mr. Arthur le Poer Trench, who, though previously very friendly and positive towards them, had changed his tune because we once refused to supply him with milk", and now he felt that their 'Blue Mountain" seed was not genuine. Father Bernhard urged him to make his discovery known to the public through the local paper. Since he refused to do so they did it themselves.

The 'Blue Mountain" variety would seem to have been important to St. Austin's Mission. One and a half years after the above altercation, on August 8th, 1924 the visit of two settlers of Turbo Valley, Johnson and Potter is mentioned. They stated quite clearly that 'Blue Mountain" coffee had a better resistance to disease and drought. Obviously, the doubt cast on their coffee and expertise had hit a nerve! Hence their support for the opinions of Johnson and Potter. Thereafter, through 1925 when not a single word was written about coffee matters, life presumably proceeded harmoniously. The same must have been true of 1926, when all we are told is "*We plant coffee.*"

The following year is identically silent on the subject of coffee. There is one comment only "*the fifteen horse power engine of the coffee factory is installed.*" Noris 1928 any more exciting. In January, Prince de Ligne visited and ordered coffee seed for the Kivu Plantations, and in April they planted coffee as part of an experiment. It was called "48 Maragogipe", which was uprooted as undesirable, September, 1932.

From February, 1929 the locust dominated. Time and again clouds of these insects invaded the area, putting the coffee crop in peril of destruction. Their main remedy for this plague was not the standard creosote but prayers "*contra locustas et alia nociva*" were said! '*The coffee harvest is in all swing,*' wrote the journalist December 20th, 1930. Our machinery works well and the "squatters" are more numerous than in previous years' No explanation of the term "squatters" is given. During the year 1931 the locusts were particularly busy from July to December.

"After High Mass we say the *Miserere* and then the *Benedictio Deprecatoria contra locustas.* " But the locusts still came and brought havoc; and continued into the following year. Considering the importance, financially, of the coffee crop, this must have been a depressing time for St. Austin's, and for coffee growers in general.

The other great enemy was drought. In 1934, the coffee crop showed the bad effects of a prolonged rainless period. "Coffee picking is in full swing, but it will probably be poor owing to the drought and the rather dry season last year," said the Journal on November 21st, 1934. Yet they struggled to make the best of things but the Journalist is forced to write: ***"another year has passed. Not very prosperous for the Mission. Owing to a rather general crop failure through drought, and the general depression in trade, now worldwide, did not help matters any. Lets hope for a better coming year."***

By contrast with its predecessor, the year 1935 brought heavy rain. On June 14th, the rain was accompanied by hail, which, however, did not damage the coffee crop badly. The crop was good that season, but alas! the market hit rock bottom. Then in mid-August the locusts reappeared, but by then the coffee season was drawing to a close. On December 3rd the Journal reads: ***"We send off about six tons of our coffee to Nairobi curing works. It is the first we have sent this season and though the coffee looks very good, I don't suppose it will fetch the price we hoped for as the bottom has fallen out of both the local and London markets."***

Yet once again, coffee-life went on and in January 1936, St. Austin's coffee was exhibited at the Agricultural Show, winning two second and two third prizes. Their prize coffee fetched E51 per ton- creditable performance in a depressed market.

Nothing concerning coffee was recorded in 1937. The following year, after heavy rain in May the weather turned dry. There was no rain for months coffee failure threatened. They had invested in a new type of cellophane bags, hoping they would appeal to the market; but the rain did not come. In August both the trees and the coffee looked yellow. Yet, the rain did not fall. Things worsened in September when the locusts paid a visit. In October, whatever coffee survived was picked, - a fair amount but the crop was a failure. Coffee picking was in full swing in November. Fifteen tons only were picked - "a crying shame as prices were never so good for year. Good coffee - E65 per

In 1939, once again the records were blank In January 1940, 'the severe drought which we have now had for one and a half years still persists. No grass, crops a failure, everything dying." The rains came mightily on February 28th. The Nairobi River flooded and did great damage, as nine inches of rain fell in one week. The final note for that year tells a sad tale: ***'Our coffee crop for the fourth year has been a failure; we have had not one big return since 1936, due to drought and disease.'***

In 1941 the crop looked promising, - but, just as our expectations are being built up, the journal goes silent, and coffee is not mentioned again until 1945, when all the coffee between Loreto Road and the Main Road was taken out. It had not given any yield in years. The rest of the coffee shamba was being manured in the hope it would produce a decent crop. On that weak note of hope the Journal ends.

ST. AUSTIN'S MISSION—DURING WORLD WAR 1

June 30th, 1914: "Big news today. Austria declares war on Serbia Britain might do the same at any moment."

In Kenya precautions were taken immediately, to defend the Uganda Railway against a possible attack by the Germans from German East Africa. On Lake Victoria the steamers were no longer allowed to enter German ports. Then the news on August 2nd, was that Germany had declared war on Russia.

Suddenly, life around Nairobi became hectic. Prices rose 50 - 60⁰/0. People, including the missionaries, began stockpiling. News reached them that the Germans had invaded France. Prices rose further. Stores, emptied of supplies, closed. The British were in Belgium to protect country. The fleet was on alert. Banks stopped regular payment. Volunteers were mobilised. On August 6th, 1914, it was learned in Nairobi that Britain and Germany were at war. Martial Law was declared in the Protectorate. Germany invaded Holland. On August 7th, the news was that war had indeed, started. Battles were being talked about' From Mombasa came Fr. Lutz to contact the French Consular Agent regarding the military obligations of the community. Mobilization continued apace.

On August 14th, Dr. Erhard, Giriama, was arrested - and freed. Then Fr. Lammer, also of Giriama, was arrested - and freed. On August 19th, Frs. Fouasse, Mitrecy and Pottier had to return to France to join the army. September 2nd, the war is worse. Throughout the missions, personnel were swapped about to try to cope with demands. The 'Koenigsburg', a German ship, damaged the British 'Pegasus' in Zanzibar Port:

Fr. Vettiger, also of Giriama, was arrested on October 2nd, though he was not a German. He was released on October 5th. On November 1st, Fr. Muller was arrested and forbidden to leave Nairobi. On November 23rd, a policeman arrested Frs. Muller and Lammer as prisoners of war. All Germans, even those previously on parole, were arrested again under suspicion of spying. The people of Bura were

suspected of spying - and the Fathers were held responsible. Fr. Bugeau was allowed to visit them provided he spoke English in the guards' presence!

The Bishop, Msgr. Neville, was asked to see General Atkin in Mombasa to point out that the Alsatians were indeed French. He had no success with Atkin. On November 30th the authorities set December the 8th as the day to send the prisoners to India. They left on December 11th, despite all efforts to have them freed.

The Journal entry for March 17th, reads: 'The Bura Mission is wiped out. The third Sister, Mother Genesia, dies. The three Sisters died. Fr. Muller is a prisoner in India Fr Tessier is sick in the French Army. The thirty christians are in Nairobi Prison suspected of spying.' Fr. Soul, a missionary at St. Austin's, returned to France to join the Army. Asad note indeed!

September 8th "a mass meeting in Nairobi to organise the defence of the Protectorate. General registration, with a view to military duty, is ordered. The Government of British East Africa has recently adopted a law making recruitment of Africans, for war transport, compulsory. Some 15,000 per month will be required.

It was a nervous me for the Holy Ghost Fathers then living in Kenya. Some had been imprisoned in India. Others were in doubt as to their safety in Kenya. On January 7th, 1916, a Mr. Madden from the police came asking the names and addresses of five Alsatian and Polish missionaries. Efforts to have them allowed to remain in British East Africa were made.

The names of those who were German citizens were supplied to the authorities; Frs. Muller and Lammer and Br. Othon Weigel - all in India; Br. Emery Kunz at Mangu; Br. Gustave Walter at Nairobi and Br. Josaphat Nowicki (Polish) at St. Austin's. The presumption was that all other Alsatians, non-German nationals, would be safe.

Two South African Generals visited, November 11th, 1916, they were on their way to Transvaal having finished the campaign in German East Africa. The Journalist believed they could have finished their war with the Germans three months earlier but preferred to play cat-and-mouse with them instead.

In April, one hundred and fifteen men, mission employees, were recruited for the *Carrier Corps* – their jobs would be to carry supplies required by soldiers at the

front. By December 31st, 1917, the Journal informs us, the German East African campaign had already killed 150,000 Africans and many others. The Carrier Corps returned in January, 1918. Only two men had been lost. The rest had developed a "*Christian esprit-de-corps*"

By February 20th, 1918, 9,000 Indian soldiers had passed through the old Loreto Convent-turned hospital. And 400 officers had been treated in the Scott Sanitorium.

The Journal entry for October 14th, 1918 reads: "Many historic press cables about possible ceasefire between Germany and the U.S. *"What a humiliation for the Kaiser, after all he has been inflicting on the world!"*

The war was coming to an end, but not before it had disrupted the work of the missionaries in Kenya. Their hard-won gains had been reduced, at least temporarily. Some of their institutions had been undermined - for example, Loreto had become a temporary hospital for the duration and many missions had been left leaderless for an extended period. The missionaries in the Nairobi area had to assume some responsibility for the missions established by the Italian missionaries of Consolata, thus, reducing their own efficiency. But at war's end, things were normalized and endeavor transformed perhaps by suffering endured, continued with renewal vigour.

ST. AUSTIN'S AND EDUCATION.

One of the most important means of evangelization employed by Missionaries in general was education. The founders of St. Austin's Mission were no exception. There is evidence that as early in the history of the Mission as April, 1900, just a few months after their arrival, they had begun to work with local children. On April 1st, 1900, the Journalist wrote: 'One of our children, Tony, falls ill with a pulmonary infection.' Tony's recovery was rapid and he was back in "school" by April 6th. It is unfortunate, that no information is given about these children who remain faceless and nameless. Work on a house for them was begun on June 2nd, which would seem to indicate that the children were boarding at, or near, the mission. But once again, there is no clearcut information given, and indeed, the

building mentioned above may well have been school accommodation rather than living quarters. We just don't know.

The principal subject taught was catechism. "Many children of the area, boys and girls, consistently attend catechism. Some months later we read, "catechism works well - first year at the mission, second at Kinyanjui's, third at Kikurunjo"

It soon became apparent that they were experiencing some success. 'For the first time Kikuyu children attending our school, assist the priest at Mass.' On October 29th, 1902 "about twenty children attend catechism every day."

Soon, it became necessary to establish catechism schools in other centres. One such was at Kibagare, a centre of population not far from St. Austin's. This fact is mentioned in a summary of miscellaneous information covering the months of August, September and October, 1903, when the Journal was not written up daily. At this time, "Fr. Caysac teaches at Kibagare daily. We hope the children of the new school here will perform as well as those at Kibagare. We started catechism classes for adults employed at the Mission. We hope that this nucleus of people will spread the word. In the boarding school work continued - but barely! There were only three pupils, Paddy and Jack Gallagher and Hector Leonard! Later we learn that the Gallagher boys left the school. Only Hector continued. Brave lad!

On September 9th, 1904, two Fathers went to Chief Kinyanjui's boma to choose a site for a school and, in October a survey of Kinyanjui's plot was arranged and paid for. In spite of opposition, a school was built there, since it is recorded, that on January 21st, 1905, Frs. Burke and Demaison visited Kinyanjui's school.

Somehow, the boarding school continued to function despite the paucity of pupils. A neighbour named Mr. Toast, took all the children for a ride in his donkey cart on June 1st, 1905; If all went together the school population could hardly have been very great!

Mass was celebrated in the school on October 23rd, 1905, perhaps for the first time! Fr. Burke said Mass there again on November 26th. And on November 22nd Mr. Young took some photographs of the school, which have ceased to exist, alas!

The year 1906 began well as more pupils attended the boarding school. A Capt. Lethbridge left his small daughter with them. But the 'surge' did not last. Fr. Bugeau was discouraged on February 3rd, when he found not a single child in

school! But on February 16th a group of African children attended. The Journal reports a similar event on February' 27th. Somehow the school struggled on. It even improved. When the Commissioner and his wife visited, they were quite pleased with the Mission school. (July 11th, 1906)

Since the progress of the school was such a see-saw affair, the Fathers looked farther afield Fr. Bugeau left in 1908 to select and clear a site for a school. Where? We are not told.!

In April he visited nearby villages on horseback to round up his rather undisciplined pupils. The Elders met in December 1908 to discuss the children's attendance at catechism class. Whatever occurred at this meeting bore fruit. School attendance increased substantially. (Journal Dec., 17th 1908)

Evidently the Bishop intended, at this time, to open a school in Nairobi to be managed by Sisters, because a clash occurred between him and the Goan population. It would seem that he had opposed in some way their plan to set up school in the city which would be independent of religious authority. No further details of this project are given. However, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the proposed Sisters' school, many Goans attended despite the earlier opposition.

And, at Kinyanjui's, another 'storm' was brewing. Some Protestant missionaries appeared at the Chiefs boma and a 'war' ensued. This episode has been dealt with already."

Though the early years of educational enterprise seemed to bubble with enthusiasm, as time passed and opposition raised its head, they were forced to make adaptations. In February, 1909 they had little success with catechesis. The Elders were approached again even though Elders might not be such staunch allies if, when the children were attending school, the said Elders had to herd the animals. So school was not so popular! Especially among the Elders! And yet there were some advances.

In March, 1909 a man named Mr. Cooper permitted the teaching of catechism on his property." In April, Fr. Bugeau began building a new school at Kibagare. A graduation ceremony was held at the boarding school; and they had evolved a new approach to their educational efforts. Since, it was felt that 'the Kikuyu are not

eager to attend instruction, and become lax if we do not press them perhaps it is better to leave them in peace for the 'Kusoma' if they are not naturally inclined."

The year 1910 produced a variety of educational experiences. The Fathers encountered parents who either refused or neglected to pay school fees! They did not like that! A newspaper called 'The Leaded' reported that the Governor had urged children to attend Mission schools which was a new development in official policy. The government proposed a plan for Vocational Education. They decided there would be twenty pupils per school. The Holy Ghost Fathers were ignored and got no school, which displeased them thoroughly.

August, 1910 brought a change of pace when they worked on sports grounds for Loreto girls' school. And then, surprise! The Education Authority sent them cheques worth ±325.00 One cheque, worth E75.00 was intended for St. Joseph's European School, - a hitherto unmentioned entity! The cheques were cashed in September and the money banked. It would be used, they decided "for serious social work for Africans." They did not elaborate this plan.

Then in November there was a meeting of the Board of Education to divide equitably the "Sons of Chiefs" schools between Catholics and Protestants. The precise significance of the term "Sons of Chiefs" is not made clear in the Journal. Frs. Loos and Brandsma attended this meeting and, probably as a result, St. Austin's received a grant of Euro 135.00 for technical education between April, 1910 and April, 1911. This was quite encouraging, but then Kinyanjui's decision to obstruct his children's attendance at school kept the Fathers' feet firmly on the ground.

On March 15th, 1912, at the invitation of Dr. Arthur, Fr. Bernhard went to the Scottish Mission at Dagoretti for the inauguration of a new carpentry workshop. On this occasion a plea was made for the co-operation of the different Missions in the field of vocational training; but nothing further is recorded on this subject in the Journal.

From 1913 to 1915, no mention is made of educational matters. However, in 1916, we are told that attendance at catechism was sixty pupils, while at 'Kusoma' there were twelve boys and twenty-two girls. During this month, Fr. Bernhard visited the Consolata Fathers at Limuru because they wished to discuss their catechesis programme with the Holy Ghost Fathers and to obtain catechisms for religious instruction. Possibly as a result of these discussions, four catechetical schools were merged into one, supervised by a principal, Chief Makoma.

The boarding school at St. Austin's had not been mentioned for years, but in 1920 (November, 28th) a new twist in its history is recorded. The Sisters were interested in taking it over. Who the sisters were is not made clear. The school had survived the vicissitudes of the years. Unfortunately, the Journal gives no follow up concerning the proposal of these Sisters. In fact, a considerable time lapse occurs before the next mention of educational affairs.

On April, 4th, 1923, yet a new project is mentioned - the opening of a school at Ngong, where Major Steel discussed the matter with Fr. Bernhard. The latter followed up the Major's proposal and opened a catechetics school in a warehouse. The teacher was Claude Waiganjo from St. John the Baptist Mission. This venture offered a double opportunity. Besides gaining access to Major Steel's estate, that of Karen Blixen would also be accessible.

A school was, in fact, opened on Baroness Blixen's estate on March, 11th, 1926. A Mission to the Masai reserve was also considered. Fr. Bernhard and Br. Solanus went to Ngong to assess the possibility of establishing a Mission in that area. This whole project died when, on January, 7th, 1924, they went to Ngong and returned with the report that "Colonel Bell renewed his promises. It seems that we will be left with promises only. And so ended the Ngong initiative!

A Parliamentary Commission from London visited the Mission on November, 20th, 1924. Msgr. Neville received them. He delivered an address which emphasized the purpose of the Mission and of the Missionaries. He dealt, in a rather patronizing way, with the work of civilizing the Africans; and he expressed criticism of the African system of land tenure. He recommended putting the Africans on reserves under government control. He also read a document, which had originated with the Protestants, which dealt with African grievances. The Journalist adds that the Catholic Mission accepted this document only with reservations. The tone of this part of the Journal is eye-brow raising. Both the Bishop and the commenting Journalist come across as arrogant. They do not use words of service as one might expect. No doubt they meant well, but their attitude is suspect. With hindsight, it is reasonable to find in a speech such as the Bishop's, the seeds which led to the **Mau Mau** war years later. Putting people on reserves has never been a reliable and long-lasting political tactic. It serves only greed and ambition and breeds hatred and conflict.

The involvement of the Mission in education continued. Even efforts at expansion occurred. On November 12th, 1926, Fr. Bernhard purchased a plot and a house on a hill

in Kilimani. His intention was to provide a day school for European children. Captain Hudson was the seller of the property and his price was {120.00 an acre. They paid him Euro 1,200.00 for three and a half acres and the house. A good bargain no doubt, but, what became of this house and grounds? Once again, we are not told.

Another educational angle receives mention; on December 14th, 1927, - examinations! A teacher of the Government School in Nairobi, Mr. Twells, supervised the examinations for the Cambridge Certificate during the week. The examinations were held at Loreto school.

A distinguished visitor, Msgr. Hinsley, arrived. He had been sent, as Apostolic Visitor, by Propaganda Fide in Rome, to visit and promote Mission schools for the Africans. He was welcomed profusely by a large group of people. Next day he had a private conference with Msgr. Perrachon of Nyeri and Msgr. Balbo (Consolata) also from Nyeri, after which he visited the St. Austin's Mission School for African pupils and Loreto Convent. On November 1st, he went to Kabaa in the mission van and returned the following day having enjoyed both his journey and his visit to the Teacher Training Institute.

From November 5th to 7th, he was a busy man. He first conferred with Msgr. Neville (Zanzibar), Msgr. Perrachon (Nyeri), Msgr. Brandsma (Kisumu) and Msgr. Balbo (Meru). Several of the Fathers attended, both Holy Ghost Frs. (Bernhard, Heffenan, McNamara and Witte), and Consolata (Frs. Gilio and Merlopick).

The Apostolic Visitor visited the Government Technical School at Kabete and Jeanes School. The Acting Director of Education, Mr. Biss, came to explain certain points. It was hoped that the conference would result in a more uniform organization of African Schools and more harmony between Vicariates and Prefectures which would give them more weight in dealings with Government.

The Education Ordinance of 1924 was mentioned and followed by a rather confused and confusing note which reads: "We will ask for a reason, in conformity with the Colonial Office instructions of 1925, which state that the education of Africans, without religion, would be a disaster." What was it they would ask? A reason? A reason for what? No obvious answer to these questions is available except their concern was about the education of Africans which, without religion, would be a disaster. Or were they upset about the Education Ordinance of 1924?

An interesting entry occurs in January, 1929. It is dated January 13th and reads as follows: "We discuss the need for a secondary boys school for Europeans. Funds and personnel are lacking. Msgr. Hinsley proposes to write to Rome to see if matters can be solved." Clearly, Hinsley was interested in this project which dealt with the education of the sons of his fellow-countrymen and women. The school envisaged turned into St. Mary's School, in due course it did provide education for European boys for many years and, more recently it educates many African boys and girls - as well as a considerable number of Hindu and Muslim children.

Other advances were being planned also "Lately, there have been numerous meetings on educational matters between Protestants and Catholics. We want to evolve a common system. In view of the arrival of the new Director of Education, Mr. Scott, February 28th, 1929. On April 10th, 1929, came Hinsley's final intervention; "We have a meeting to discuss a memorandum which we have prepared with Msgr. Hinsley for submission to the 'Education Advisory Board" and in which we stress the right for Catholics to have their own schools," which seems to indicate that Catholic education rights might have been threatened in some way. No statement is made in the Journal about such a threat, but there's no smoke fire and it is hardly likely that the Monsignor and the Holy Ghost Fathers would waste their time drawing up such a document without sufficient reason. On June 23rd, 1930, Msgr. Hinsley left East Africa to continue his mission in West Africa He had achieved some important things during his 'visit, and not only in the line of education. His influence remained after his departure.

At a General Meeting of the Clergy of St. Austin's, "one topic of discussion was a High School for Africans. We have started a provisional one at Kabaa but still do not know if the Government will allow a Catholic High School as it did for Protestants"(July 18th - 19th) This meeting was recommended by Msgr. Hinsley whose visit had galvanized the missionaries into action in matters educational. Hinsley, who had left to continue his work in West Africa, in 1930, returned to Kenya, January 27th, 1931. He had requested a meeting to discuss a report by Mr. Scott, Director of Education which tried to prove that the Africans want schools which are independent from the Missions. An article was drafted for publication in "***The Standard***" which refuted the Director and stated that he had acted against the orders of the Colonial Office. Copies were sent to Mr. Moor, Acting Governor, and Mr. Scott, January 27th, 1931. This document was published by the '***Standard***' and was "***a bombshell.***" On February 19th, the Governor organized a meeting to clarify the question of the annual report of the Director, Mr. Scott, which the Catholics had considered offensive. This meeting remained inconclusive and full of 'misunderstandings.

Educational matters arise once more on February 9th, 1932, when there was "a large celebration for all our African schools in Kikuyu country; it was held at Limuru Many prominent people attended this successful event."

Evidently, their educational efforts were appreciated by the people, whose children were being served. Getting the people to assemble was an intelligent move. With the people on their side the missionaries could not fail. Another 'first' occurred when twelve candidates were presented for elementary school examination. These candidates 'were not brilliant, but it was time to make a start. (November 6th, 1933). A similar event occurred one year later when, on November 6th, forty pupils were entered for the Elementary B examinations.

A change of pace occurred on June 24th, 1935 at Riruta Varied entertainment was offered, much of it based on Kikuyu customs. Fr Mitrecy had capital out of the performance of the children, pointing out the advantages of having good schools" and the short sightedness of those who fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered them by these schools." June 24th 1935.

The Fathers were becoming adept at giving schools and education a 'plug' whenever the opportunity arose. The emphasis on schools at the centres would pay off in the years ahead when a Catholic generation of educated people would lead the Church in its endeavours, local and national.

At this point education seems to have become an unpopular topic of discussion. Coffee and its ups and downs got plenty of mention - as did weather highlighted by descriptions of excessive rain and mighty floods. The beginning of World War I, caused much upset. The German members of the community were interned. Fr. Devenish of St. Mary's School became an Army Chaplain. He was replaced in St. Mary's by Fr. Murren. The Italian Consolata Fathers, with other Italians, were rounded up in the vicariates of Nyeri and Meru. Some Holy Ghost Fathers tried to keep things going in those places which caused understaffing in Holy Ghost Missions.

Nothing further was reported in the Journal about education. The entries were skimpy from 1935 to 1945 when the keeping of a Journal ceased altogether. final entry, covering May 8th and 9th, 1945 reads "declared as holidays" Journalistically, those holidays never ended!

THE APOSTOLIC 'WORK OF ST. AUSTIN'S MISSION.

The prime concern of the missionaries was, in general terms the establishment of the Church, living and active, among the people of Kikuyu land. Towards this end they preached the Word of the Gospel, celebrated the Sacraments and taught Christian Doctrine (Catechism). To provide such services they required buildings, small Chapels at first and in due course larger Churches, as well as "schools", since the education of children was a major factor in their apostolic work.

For some time after their arrival, Mass was offered at a variety of locations and in buildings of different kinds. The first Mass in Nairobi was offered at the railway station; then the Institute was used and the Goan hall. Early in 1901 the first Chapel at St. Austin's was built and the Blessed Sacrament was installed in a Tabernacle constructed by Br. Solanus. A second Chapel followed in Nairobi, 1904. And served during the time when the Nairobi Parish Church was being built i.e. up to August 5th, 1906 when the last Mass was celebrated there. In 1913 work began on St. Austin's Church. was completed and ready for service the small Chapel was either demolished or used for other.

The administration of the Sacraments pre-dated the construction of chapels and Churches. Baptisms of sick and dying people are reported as early as December 22nd, 1899. An outbreak of smallpox provided the occasion. The baptism of a woman named **Maria** is noted on September 1st, 1900, took place the same day. The following year she was Mass, March 19th, 1901. Special occasions e.g. Holy Week, presented problems. In 1901, many attended the Ash Wednesday distribution of Ashes, but during Holy Week they had no place for all the services. At Easter they had confessions and communions in considerable numbers. But sometimes heavy rain prevented the celebration of Mass as on the feast of Pentecost, 1901 when they were prevented from going to Nairobi for Mass.

The teaching of catechism was another service offered by the missionaries. It is first mentioned in the Journal, July 8th, 1901 when it is recorded that there were many children at catechism class. Prior to this, catechism classes for the workmen had already been organized. The continued mention of catechism classes indicated their success.

Ministry to the sick commenced at an early stage in the history of St Austin's. As has been mentioned, the earliest baptisms were performed in the context of a smallpox outbreak nearby; and Fr. Tom Burke gave his attention to sick parishioners on a regular basis during the years of this ministry at St Austin's. The

opening of a mission centre at Kibagare nearby, indicates that they were aware of the need to expand their area of influence; the development of the present parish there began with the building of a chapel/school hut where Mass and other liturgical services could be held.

Some "firsts" are noted: on March 8th, 1905, Ash Wednesday was celebrated and blessed Ashes distributed for the first time. On April 15th, 1906, Vespers were performed — another first. Between May 4th and 6th of the same year the statue of St. Francis Xavier was installed in the Chapel, - the first statue to appear in St. Austin's.

The above activities merely laid the foundations on which they built their ministry. As the years passed the demands grew, new challenges appeared and fresh responses were demanded. The growth in the numbers of their followers forced them to contemplate the opening and developing of annexes which in turn would develop into fully fledged missions. Rapidly their missionary efforts produced much fruit.

EXPANSION

The completion of St. Austin's mission, with its many buildings, did not initiate a period of rest and relaxation for the missionaries. "Their job was not to establish a great complex of structures in which to settle down. Kikuyu land was out there, stretching away into unknown territory which beckoned them on. their first small-scale venture seems to have been in a settlement called Kibagare which was within walking distance of the Mission. There, a school hut was built to cater for their activities.

Like a successful experiment, the Kibagare experience urged them on to even greater achievements. They decided to establish an annex to the Mission. Fr. Bernhard had come to St. Austin's to perform this particular work and a caravan was organized to accompany him and Fr. Hemery in their search for "a suitable annex a few hours walking distance from Simonis". They went as far as the Riara River and visited a man called Lorigi, who was a local chief. They enquired from him whether they could establish the proposed within his territory, which suited their purposes, since it was 'heavily populated as far as 'Kamau' village which, in turn, was situated beyond uninhabited hills." Lorigi was no man's fool however, and was more interested in receiving than giving. They gave him "a splendid blanket" but found it difficult to persuade him to give them a sheep! Hemery returned to the Mission at this point while Bernhard continued exploring Kikuyu land for some time but returned to the Mission after a few days. They claimed that

they had located a suitable site for the proposed annex within the territory of Lorigi and near the Riara River. Subsequently, Bernhard returned to Lorigi's and settled there. Lorigi, obviously an energetic man, got involved in the search for a site. He led Bernhard hither and thither pointing out very remote locations for his proposed mission. Bernhard and his men decided to call a halt to Lorigi's meanderings by establishing a garden, but Lorigi countered by refusing his men permission to work for Bernhard, who promptly returned to the Mission. A few days later he went to Riara again, August 18th, 1902, only to return to Simonis within a week, a disappointed man.

The following October an application for land was lodged at Kiambu the nearby administrative centre. It would seem that this application was not successful, but two brothers started work on a house for Fr. Bernhard at the "*All Saints*" annex. At this point the Journal becomes rather hazy and incomplete. The discussion of the Kiambu annex apparently ends. In December there 1903 is a note which says that their application for land at Kiambu was refused by the authorities. Yet, in May 1905, we are told that Br. Josaphat went to Kiambu and subsequently a flourishing mission was established at Riara. Many years later a mission was also established at kiambu both continue to flourish.

MONSIGNOR-HINSLEY, APOSTOLIC VICAR.

Monsignor Hinsley arrived at St. Austin's on October 30th, 1928. He held a conference with the Bishops next day and visited some schools. What he saw in the schools pleased him. Months later, Msgr. Hinsley and his secretary Fr. Engelbelt Giersbach, returned from Mozambique to confer with Msgr. Pasetto, the new superior of Consolata. At a meeting of Msgr. Hinsley, Msgr. Pasetto and Fr. Bernhard, representing Msgr Neville, the question of Limuru, - the most Important question from the point of view of the Holy Ghost Fathers, - was debated. It was Bernhard's contention that the decrees issued by Propaganda Fide under Perlo's influence had been drawn up under false pretenses. It is not clear from the Journal what these 'false pretenses' were. Hinsley, a Roman diplomat, saw the Limuru problem in a much broader geographical context which would suggest the rearranging of the territories in question in a more rational manner thus avoiding overlapping. His proposal was acceptable to Bernhard and Pasetto.

Msgr Hinsley then went to West Africa and returned, at some stage to Uganda Early in 1931 he returned once more to Kenya He arrived in Mombasa with the titles of Archbishop and Apostolic Delegate to discuss educational matters. The Director of Education in Nairobi, Mr. Scott had publicly made a claim that the Africans wanted schools independent of the missions. An article, refuting the Director, was published in the 'Standard'. Hinsley visited the Consolata Procure in

Nairobi to inform them of Rome's decision. It reiterated the recommendations of June 15th, 1929, returning Limuru to the Vicariate of Zanzibar. Fr. Borello had to draw up a legal transfer to the Holy Ghost Fathers without any payment for fixed assets. During the months that followed Hinsley completed his work in Kenya leaving things ready for the appointment of Msgr. John W. Heffernan as Apostolic vicar Zanzibar.

Msgr. Hinsley had gone to East Africa as an expert in educational matters. During his stay there he accomplished great things in the field of education. But he also had encountered other problems. Helped no doubt by his English nationality and his Roman training he was well suited to the work he had to do in Kenya. He contributed to the development of education for Africans and defended the rights of Catholics to have mission-oriented schools where religion was taught; he was interested also in providing schools for the children of Europeans from the administration and from among the settlers. He left after him the impression that he was a man of diplomatic skills, a promoter of catholic education and one who believed in the advantages accruing from co-operation with others and the value of having meetings. He revealed no inferiority complex in his dealings with officialdom, as the case of Mr. Scott illustrates. It is justifiable to classify his visits to Kenya and his work in that area as a definite success.

THE COMING OF THE IRISH

The first Irish priest to work at St. Austin's Parish and in Nairobi was Fr. Thomas Burke, whose arrival is mentioned in the Journal on November 19th, 1903. At that time he was in Zanzibar but was due to go to Nairobi to take charge of the parish in that city. He was officially appointed superior and bursar - an unusual combination and in a community, and was placed in charge of the entire parish which in those days included Nairobi. Very soon he was begging from door to door, seeking funds for his project in the city, i.e. the building of a Church. This became his major concern during his brief stay at St Austin's Mission. He worked with amazing energy towards his goal in spite of poor health, and in due course the church was built and the parish of Nairobi established. He died on September, 18th, 1907, aged 34 and his burial was the first in St. Austin's cemetery.

When Monsignor Algeyer resigned in April, 1913, Fr. Neville of Paris was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Zanzibar in his stead, which pleased the St Austin's community. One of the reasons for their satisfaction was the fact that he spoke English. World War I began early during his episcopacy, so it was some years before other Irish missionaries were able to travel to Kenya.

The annual Retreat became a community occasion around this and the Journalist recorded the names of those who attended, thus providing us with the identity of several of the Irish priests who St. Austin's. In 1919 the name Foley appears and in

1920 an O'Connor is listed. There is no Irish name on the 1921 list, but in 1922 a Fr. Fogarty was appointed Administrator of the Kilimanjaro Vicariate, a fact included in the St. Austin's Journal. Fr. O'Flynn is mentioned that same year and in 1925 the names Heffernan, O'Connor and O'Flynn appear. In 1926, Heffernan alone is mentioned. The following year includes Heffernan once more as is the case in 1928 when Fr. Finnegan also appear. The number of Irish priests grew to four in 1929, - Monsignor Neville, who was no newcomer, and Frs. Heffeman, MC Namara and Murren. Fr. McGill is included in the 1930 list, and in 1932 it is recorded that Fr. Hefferman was consecrated Apostolic Vicar of Zanzibar, the first Bishop produced by St. Austin's mission. From this point on, priests with Irish names became the rule though some of their French confreres continued working in the Kenyan missions for some years afterwards.

With the establishment of the Irish regime this part of the St Austin's story ends. They went on building on the foundations laid by their French predecessors. As far as one can see the transition was amicable. The French Fathers and Brothers continued their apostolate side by side with their Irish colleagues. No sign of friction appears but the French missionaries who had spent their energy and talents generously for so long must have felt somewhat dejected on seeing the newcomers taking control. Perhaps the French were irritated by the Irish style of mission work; and French insistence on bygone days would inevitably have annoyed the Irish.

ST. AUSTIN'S CEMETERY

A recent visitor to St. Austin's cemetery told me she loved to Stoll there because it brought her peace. Truly this cemetery is a peaceful place, neatly laid out among tall evergreen trees that tower over the graves in their neat rows. The remains of some of St. Austin's earliest missionaries rest there. From what has already been written many of their names are familiar.

Fr. Joseph Litzler,	Aged 74	died May 4 th 1976
Fr. Emil Pottier	Aged 43	died May 5 th 1922
Fr. A. Vogel	Aged 42	died August 30 th 1921
Fr. Charles Lammer	Aged 86	died July 27 th 1968
Fr. Thomas Burke	Aged 34	died September 18 th 1904
Br. Florian Nieveler	Aged 85	died August 18 th 1966
Br. Josaphat Novitski	Aged 82	died January 25 th 1963
Br. Killian Retig	Aged 65	died February 6 th 1933
Br. Theodimir Mathem	Aged 61	died July 20 th 1932
Br. Lucien Kapfer	Aged 36	died February 19 th 1908
Br. Mammertus	Aged 66	died September 19 th 1974
Br. Claver Fernandes	Aged 94	died March 4 th 1974
Br. Martial Meyer	Aged 58	died January 6 th 1932
Br. Sollanus Zipper	Aged 84	died March 18 th 1966

Some of the above were among the pioneer who laid and developed the foundations of St. Austin's Mission. They tilled the land and harvested its fruits. Some of its older buildings were planned and built by them. Their work and prayers helped develop a young church among those who inhabited the surrounding area, a church that has grown and matured prodigiously.

Now, as they lie in this peaceful place, they inspire us to pray, to work in faith and generosity towards the continued growth of the seed they planted many years ago. As we visit their resting place we are moved not only to remember them but to follow in their footsteps in the service of God and His people.

"I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord. Anyone who believes in me, even though he dies, will live; and anyone who lives and believes in me, shall never die. "

Bishop Joseph Shanahan was born in Co. Tipperary in 1871, the son of a poor farm labourer. He joined the Holy Ghost Congregation, was ordained priest in 1900, and two years later was sent to Southern Nigeria, remaining there, first as priest and then as Bishop. until 1932. He founded the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary Congregation and was the inspiration behind the setting up of the Kiltegan Fathers, the Medical Missionaries of Mary, and two Nigerian Sisterhoods.

After his retirement, he was invited to Nairobi by Bishop Heffernan; and was the loved Chaplain of the Carmelite Nuns. He died in Nairobi on Christmas Day, 1943.

MEMORIES OF OLDS-AUSTIN'S

A wonderful meeting of the Wazee, (i.e. the elderly people who had worked and prayed at St. Austin's Mission many years ago), took place on January 20th, 1999. This group of men and women, who were themselves very much part of the history of St. Austin's Mission, shared generously and eagerly, their memories of bygone years.

Pride of place went, unchallenged, to Mrs. Monica Waithira. She was born in Muran'ga ninety-eight years ago, which made her by far the senior member of the group. "The clarity with which she recalled the past was amazing. She seemed to take great delight in discussing the affairs of the St Austin's of almost a century ago. Those who heard her story were privileged indeed. She informed her listeners that her husband was brought up by the priests of that time who had helped him to find a wife, i.e. Monica herself. They were married in August 1924. Her husband was the headmaster of the little mission School and also the Organist at Church services. Christine Wangari at seventy-five years was a 'youngster' by comparison

with Monica! She too showed a great ability to recall her early years. She was baptised, received her First Holy Communion and Confirmation at St. Austin's Church, but was married at Gicarani.

There was a fine group of elderly men present also - all prepared to share their experiences. Among them were:

- Raymond Mwangi Waweru, born and baptised in 1936.
- John Njuguna Munyeti, born in 1929
- John Kangari Gikonya, born May 5, at Riruta
- Samuel Karura Gitonga born Feb. 11, 1938, baptised the same year
- Frederick Kuru Waweru, also born Feb. 11, 1938, baptised the same year
- Daniel Kimani Waweru, born 1942 and baptised 1946
- J. Kangethe Waweru born and baptised 1958
- Raphael C. Karanja, baptised June 1929.

These men could recall quite vividly their Elementary School days. Schools at Gitanga and Kianda (St. Austin's), were mentioned with pride. They had treasured memories of work in the coffee plantations - picking berries, a tedious job! The coffee crop was very fruitful, they said and Brs. Solanus and Josaphat supervised the work. In those days they were paid one cent per container of berries! Payment was in rations not money. Tokens were used to keep tally. Not everyone was happy with the wages, but, they added, a hard worker could accumulate sufficient tokens to make his pay worthwhile. As they talked about their work, - and their pay! - one could detect a certain sense of achievement in the glint of amusing recollection in their eyes and the smiles on their faces.

Italian prisoners - of- war also received mention. The skills and hard work of those men from Italy were much admired. It was unanimously agreed that they had done a lot of work around the Mission and showed great skill at building and electrical jobs. One got the feeling some of the men being interviewed had acquired a considerable expertise themselves and were grateful for the opportunity. In fact, they had good memories of their working days at the Mission and they shared their experiences with a certain satisfaction. It was as if their recollections were a very significant part of the Centenary celebrations. And rightly so! They had indeed contributed splendidly.

Of the priests of the mission, Fr. Mitrecy, who walked prodigiously, and Fr. Bugeau, came in for special mention. They were giants among men! It was with a feeling of regret that we parted company. They deserved more time and more chat. The names of these women and men will live on in St. Austin's memory and, who knows? Perhaps their great memories may yet be 'mined' for an even deeper look into the past.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

In recognition of its rich heritage, St. Austin's Parish marked a significant milestone in **Pentecost of 2014**, when it celebrated the centenary of its historic church building. Completed and officially blessed in October 1914, the stone church stood as a symbol of faith and endurance for a full century. The centenary celebrations (1914 – 2014) formed part of a broader commemoration, as the parish itself marked 115 years since its founding in 1899. During this period, officials from the National Museums of Kenya visited the parish and identified key structures of historical and cultural importance. Among those recognized were the church itself, the Parish Fathers' House, commonly known as the White House and the Parish Pastoral Centre, all of which were considered for designation as monumental heritage sites.

125 YEARS CELEBRATIONS - WHAT HAPPENED

In 2024, the parish marked a remarkable milestone as it celebrated 125 years of faith and service. This historic jubilee, commemorating the period from 1899 to 2024, was not only a celebration of longevity but also a profound moment of reflection on the parish's enduring spiritual legacy. The celebrations culminated on December 8, 2024, with a solemn Eucharistic celebration that brought together the faithful, clergy, and distinguished guests. The Mass was led by Archbishop Philip Anyolo, alongside Bishop John Mbinda of the Diocese of Lodwar, and was graced by the presence of the Superior General of the Spiritans, Fr. Alain Mayama, C.S.Sp. This central celebration, held under the theme "125 Years of Faith," stood as a powerful testament to the parish's journey through generations.

The jubilee year itself was marked by a series of deeply meaningful activities that connected the present-day community with its rich missionary roots. Among the most significant was the Bura Pilgrimage held from August 15 to 17, 2024. (https://youtu.be/PVfiUor_5KI?si=_EijJSZ3HypkowUL)

This pilgrimage offered parishioners an opportunity to retrace the path of the early missionaries, fostering a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices and commitment that shaped the foundation of St. Austin's. It was both a spiritual renewal and a rediscovery of identity, linking the past with the present in a tangible way. Parishioners in their hundreds joined the 80 pilgrims who travelled to Bura at the

Nairobi central Railway station and walked all the way to the parish as a reminder of the route our founders took.

In September 2024, the parish further documented its journey through a visual documentary and gallery showcase produced by Kennedy Ochieng Ratolo, the Communications Coordinator (https://youtu.be/hUclnV-oAg4?si=JeZu1Ao-82acA_z0). The documentary captured the history, growth, and impact of the parish while preserving voices, memories, and key moments of the jubilee celebrations. It now serves as an important archival piece, ensuring that the story of St. Austin's continues to inspire future generations.

Throughout the jubilee year, various sacraments were celebrated including a Mass Wedding, reinforcing the spiritual life of the parish and drawing the faithful into deeper communion. These liturgical moments highlighted the central role of the Church in nurturing faith and community across generations.

As part of the closing of the 125th anniversary celebrations, the parish launched a Prayer Garden, envisioned as a serene sanctuary for both pilgrims and parishioners. This sacred space symbolizes continuity, offering a place for reflection, prayer, and spiritual encounter for years to come.

The 125-year celebrations of St. Austin's Parish Msongari were therefore not merely ceremonial, but a profound expression of gratitude, identity, and mission. They honored the legacy of the early missionaries, celebrated the growth of a vibrant Christian community, and reaffirmed the parish's role as a cornerstone of Catholic faith in inland Kenya. As the parish looks to the future, it carries forward a rich heritage rooted in faith, resilience, and service, continuing to inspire generations to come.