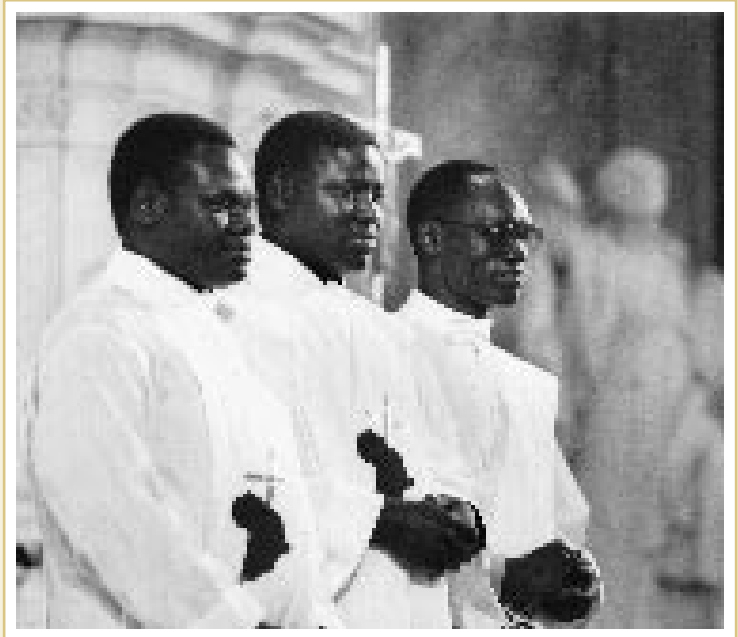


The Chicago and East African provinces came together in a special way on June 10 when Gaspar Sunhwa, Protas Opondo, and Aquiline Tarimo were ordained to the priesthood in Chicago. Because there are only a handful of theology centers in Africa offering advanced degrees, all three men are studying in the United States. The Chicago Province, by agreement with the East African Province, has sponsored them during their time in the U.S.

When they are finished with their studies, they will return to their homeland to minister to their own people.



EAST AFRICA Comes to Chicago

Fr. Gaspar Sunhwa, 38, is a native of Ndala, Tanzania. The first meeting he ever had with a Jesuit left quite an impression.

“When I was a young boy, I saw a priest who was not like the others,” Fr. Sunhwa recalls. “He was efficient, reliable, and punctual. I remember asking, ‘Who is he?’ He was not a diocesan priest, and up until that time I did not know there were priests who weren’t diocesan. He gave me a life of St. Ignatius and asked me if I was interested in joining the Jesuits. He encouraged me to do well in the rest of my studies and then enter.”

He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1987 and says that at first, his friends and family didn’t quite understand what he was doing. “You have to look at it from the African perspective,” Fr. Sunhwa says. “Young men get married and bring new life into the world—that’s their role. Then I come up with another kind of life.

“After I had been a Jesuit for a while, my father said to me, ‘If this is the will of God for you, then I give you all my blessings.’”

Fr. Sunhwa is currently at the Jesuit School

of Theology in Berkeley, California, where he is completing an advanced theology degree. He hopes to return to Africa and work either at the East African Province's proposed social concern center or to teach in a minor seminary there.

He looks forward to taking on his new role as a priest in his homeland, but he is a little nervous. "There is a big difference between the Church here in the United States and the Church in Africa. Here, the Church is well organized. Other things are done by the lay people, not necessarily the priests. People are much more educated, and a priest is able to enter a certain discipline.

"In Africa, a priest knows everything. When people have problems, any problems, they go to a priest. I really have to look at the knowledge I am acquiring and find out how best to use it at home."

Protas Opondo, 35, comes from Mahondo Village in Butere, Kenya. One of ten children, he says he never saw his father happier than when he told him he was thinking of becoming a priest.

"He told me stories about how he had considered becoming a priest," Fr. Opondo says. "It was almost natural that I become a Jesuit, because my parents, who weren't very rich, always had other children around, ones who weren't as fortunate as we were. My parents were always doing things for other people and we always shared whatever we had. It made sense that I would join a congregation that had the same ideas."

Fr. Opondo is currently studying for master's degrees in pastoral ministry and social work at Boston College. He says he was shocked when he came to the United States and saw there were homeless people here. "You have this picture of America where everyone is rich," he says. "There was also a lot of graffiti, which I associate with poverty. However, there is also a bigger middle class which is different from Africa where there is a small, rich minority and a big majority of poor people."

As for his future, Fr. Opondo is leaving himself open to the will of his superiors in Africa. "I'd like to work with street kids or

refugees," he says. "Of course, I'll do whatever my superior wants of me. I like the Jesuit idea of 'responsible freedom'—your life is in your hands, yet you have to do with it what the Lord wills."

Fr. Aquiline Tarimo, 37, was born in Moshi, Tanzania, one of six children, five of whom are male. "My family is happy I am a priest," he says. "We are Catholics and according to our culture, it was good that I became a priest since I am not the first born."

He became a Jesuit after reading about St. Ignatius Loyola. "I had a habit of reading books about the lives of the saints, and when I made the Spiritual Exercises, I knew that I wanted to be a Jesuit one day," Fr. Tarimo says.

He is currently studying for an advanced theology degree at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. After graduating there, he will go to Boston College to begin doctoral studies in ethics.

"I wanted to study ethics here in the United States because it's different than the ethics taught in Africa—here they are more open to new experiences," Fr. Tarimo says.

Like Fr. Opondo, he was surprised at the homeless people he encountered in the United States. "We always have the idea that the U.S. is so rich," he says. "It's interesting to see how the government here deals with their social problems. I've seen many countries, and I've learned that each society is different."

When he returns to Africa, Fr. Tarimo would like to work with some of the millions of refugees on the continent of Africa. Before coming here, he worked with displaced persons from Ethiopia and the Sudan. "I am also interested in working to start the province's center of social concern," he says.

He looks forward to going home to share his priesthood with his fellow Africans. Fr. Tarimo says, "Priesthood will enable me to celebrate mass and administer the sacraments, as I have wanted to do."



The East Africa Province includes the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and the Sudan.