

The Gambia

History of the District of Africa, 1997 – 2001

Additional information was given by S. Hilaria Hatko, SSND in 2007

For many years the province of Poland was in contact with the Bishop of Zambia. However, through circumstances, the focus of ministry changed to The Gambia.

After participating in the African Assembly in Liberia, 1984, Srs. Mary Margaret Johanning, General Superior, Hilaria Hatko, General Councilor, and Inez Bocklage, missioned to Sierra Leone, visited The Gambia to look for space for a future African Novitiate. At that time an invitation to serve in The Gambia by Bishop Cleary was extended to the Polish Province.

In 1984 Bishop Michael Cleary from The Gambia visited the Generalate during a jubilee program. He ate lunch with S. Hilaria Hatko, General Councilor from Poland, and S. Mary Margaret Johanning, General Superior. At that time S. Beniamina Kogut, from Poland was serving in the Generalate to help improve her English. She joined Bishop Cleary and listened intently and with growing enthusiasm to the conversation. She was later elected Provincial Leader in 1986.

The actual decision to go to The Gambia was made in the autumn of 1989. The first missionaries, S. Irmina Maciejowska and S. Irene Ksiazak, accompanied by S. Hilaria Hatko, Provincial Leader, came to Banjul in January 1990, and on May 24, the two sisters were joined by a third, S. Beniamina. For a few months the sisters lived in Banjul, the capital city. On June 1, 1990, they moved to the mission of the Holy Spirit Fathers at Bwiam.

In December 1991, S. Tomasz Wenta went to The Gambia and in February 1993 the three missionaries were joined by a fourth, S. Tadea Mlynczak. Because of illness, S. Beniamina returned to Poland in September 1993.

On October 24, 1994, S. Irene and S. Tomasz moved to a new mission in Soma. In November they were joined by S. Elzbieta Blok. A new school was being built in Soma, 1994 – 1996.

On August 18, 1995, the Polish sisters were joined by S. Christine Spour at Bwiam and S. Carol Kleba at Soma. They had been forced to leave their mission in Sierra Leone, started by the St. Louis Province, and were invited to The Gambia by the Polish Province and the missionaries serving there.

In 1996, the decision was made at the African Assembly in Rome for The Gambia to remain a missionary extension of Poland for some time.

In 1997, S. Tadea returned to Poland and S. Estera Krol from Poland joined the sisters in the Gambia. In 2000 S. Dawida Krzempek joined The Gambia.

In 2002, S. Ireneia was elected to the Generalate and served in Rome. She was spending her sabbatical year in Poland when she was elected.

2003, S. Estera returned to Poland.

2005 - 2006 The Gambia joined the District of Africa.

At the present time the sisters of Bwiam perform the following ministries:

- promotion of women in three villages
- teachers: in junior secondary school (English and Religion)
- nurse in a clinic, once a week
- conduct a hostel for 40 Christian girls
- train catechists
- responsibility for ministries

In Soma, the sisters are working in the newly opened school: Notre Dame Vocational Training School for seamstresses/tailors. One of the sisters is also involved with the children of the parish.