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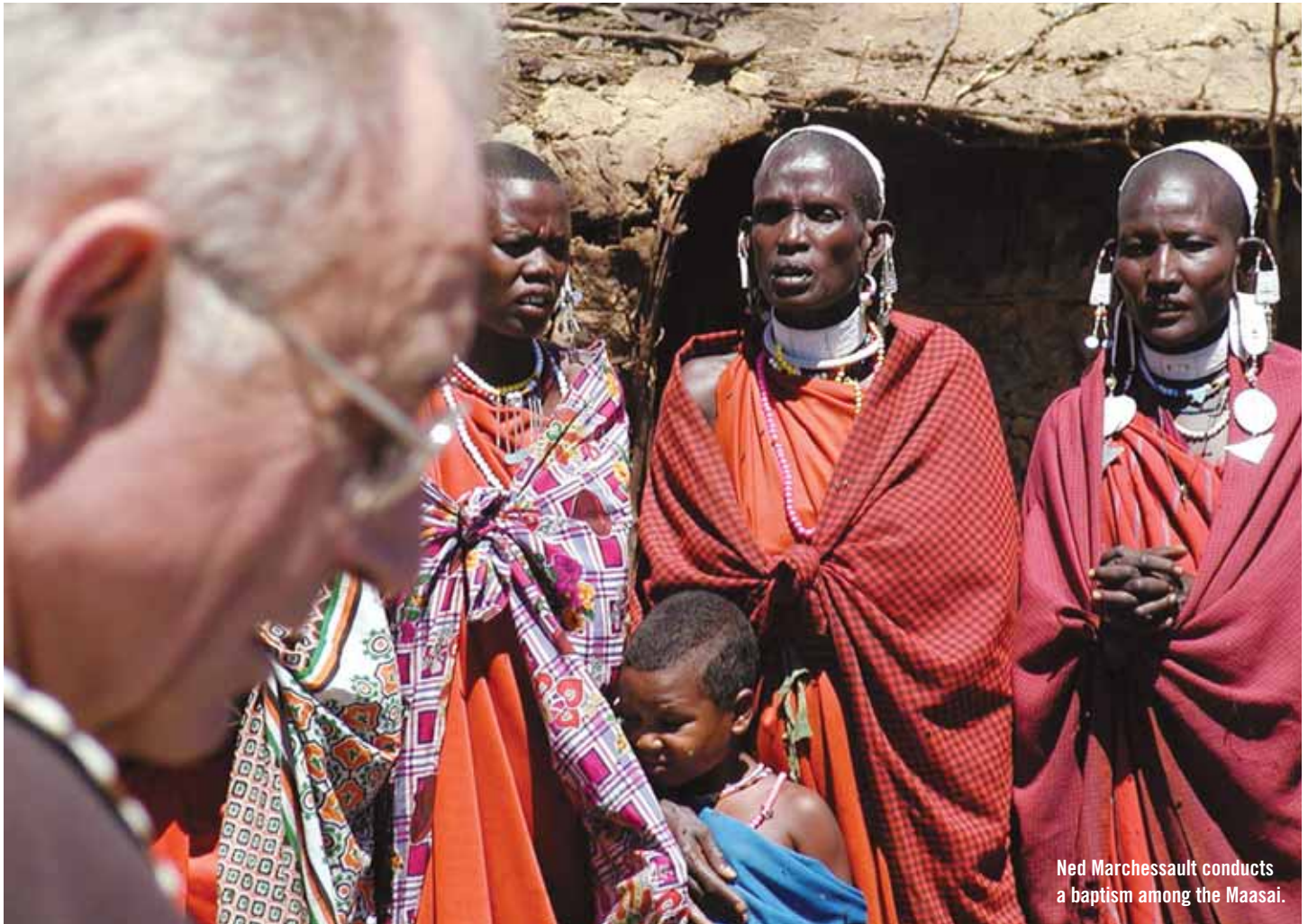
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The growth of a diocese in East Africa



Ned Marchessault conducts a baptism among the Maasai.

Joe Herzstein CSSp

The diocese of Arusha was born out of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. It carried the Council's spirit of openness and sensitivity to the culture, tradition and the unique value and importance of each local church within the worldwide Catholic Church.

Its first junior seminary reflected the make-up of the diocese — Meru, Sonjo, Waarusha and Maasai people made their home in Arusha. The seminary programme reflected that make-up and put strong emphasis on respect and acceptance

of each other's culture. The training programme fostered the development of mature young men able to speak out, defend, and protect the needs and rights of the poor.

First evangelization

First evangelization — the preaching of the Gospel to those who had never heard the Christian message — held pride of place. We went to the primary school children, baptizing them one year before they left school. In this way they would have

one full year to practice their faith. However, when they returned to their villages there were no Christian communities in which the faith of these young people could grow. We learned we had to go to all the people in the villages and not just to the school children. Vince Donovan was responsible for making this breakthrough.

We had started with the Old Testament Prophets and worked our way to the central person of Jesus — his life, death and resurrection. After a few years we felt it necessary to simplify our teaching in order to clarify the central place of Jesus in the life of us all. We focused on the New Testament.

Maasai Circle

The Maasai Circle, introduced by Ralph Poirier, became an excellent teaching tool to get across the basic message of Christianity. The circle was divided into five sections. On each of the outside sections or rim is the gospel story, and on the inside sections near the hub is the application. Ned Marchessault put together many Maasai prayers and blessings that are still used on various occasions and in liturgical celebrations.

Here's where we're born, here's where we grow up, here's where we get married, here's where we have our children, here's where we die. This is sacred ground. Don't ask us to come to you. You come to us. — Maasai elder

Ned also saw the necessity of education for Maasai girls in spite of opposition from their fathers who valued early marriage over education. Much of this good work was the result of Gene Hillman's insistence that we be faithful to Vatican II and its emphasis on inculturating the gospel into the lives of different peoples.

The catechetical programme organized by Ed Kelly made it clear that the catechists had a central role in the growth and development of the diocese. The good relationship among catechists, local clergy and Spiritan missionaries became a point of pride and great satisfaction for us all.

Health Care

Many missions and outstations had dispensaries. Herbert Washinger, doctor and priest developed the Wasso Hospital built by Bishop Durning. He had extensive outreach to the Sonjo people, along with Jerry Kohler who spent many happy years evangelizing them. Maryknoll Sisters, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, the Medical Missionaries of Mary, the Gemma Sisters of Dodoma each in turn in different places attended to the medical needs of the people.

Pat Patten's trade school for the handicapped has been giving hope for a successful future to many young people. And his Flying Medical Service, which he started when he came to Tanzania 35 years ago, continues to bring regular health care service to difficult-to-get-to places. Pat is recognized for his careful and sensitive treatment of the sick, his fast response to emergency calls and his ability to plan, organize and raise the necessary funds to keep the Flying Medical Service working.

Local clergy now in charge

In recent years local Spiritans have joined the USA missionaries: Vincent Ole Tendeu, Augustine Tenu, John Baptist Ngobe and Jerome Massawe — all of whom make a positive and lasting impression among the Maasai people. Kindness and goodness last. Leadership is now in the hands of the local clergy and people. It is true joy for any founding missionary group, such as the Spiritans, to be able to say; "I must decrease and you, local church, must increase."

I think we can safely say Arusha is Pope Francis' kind of diocese. We are a church that has come to life out of Vatican II, a church that values simplicity of lifestyle; a place where every tribe, nation and culture can and must feel at home; a place where acceptance and respect of oneself and others is seen as a true gospel value. We are not here to build big buildings nor make big money, but to live, to preach, to inculturate the gospel of Jesus Christ as faithful servants of the poor and of one another. ■



Pat Patten's Flying Medical Service brings health care to remote areas.