



# MERRY Christmas



Beloved Friends,

May this Holy Christmas Season and New Year 2026 be filled with the love and mercy of Christ whose birth we celebrate while never forgetting that He was not only born for us but died for us that we might live in eternal happiness that no words can express.

As the year comes to an end it is again time to look back at the joys and sorrows that took place here at St. Peter Parish and Songambele Hospital. For me personally the highlight of the year was an event that I never dreamed would take place. I was blessed to celebrate 65 years of priesthood. I began my work in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) as a Maryknoll Missionary in the Diocese of Shinyanga. In 2008 I was incardinated in to the Diocese of Shinyanga and am now serving as pastor of St. Peter parish and chaplain of Songambele Hospital.

My ordination date is 11 June 1960. Due to conflicts of scheduling in the Diocese we had to celebrate my 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination to the priesthood on Wed. 04 June 2025. Several years ago, we built a large outdoor stage that was used by the President of Tanzania when he came to Nkololo to dedicate the installation of electricity here. Eventually we built a large covered area facing the stage that is big enough for 600 chairs. Ordinarily that is sufficient for meetings etc. but for my 65<sup>th</sup> we needed 3500 more chairs; they were placed in the many tents that were set up to give shade to some of the 5000 adults and children that were present. After the Mass and celebration everyone was invited to eat. The food preparation and serving was almost a miraculous event in itself! We were blessed with the presence of our Bishop and 45 priests. In late May my cousin Mary Shellander accompanied 4 wonderful friends from Wisconsin on an eye-opening African safari with their final destination being Nkololo. Their presence greatly added to the joy of the day. Traveling with them back to Wisconsin was a blessing that I appreciated.

21 August is a day and month that is doubly etched in my mind bringing joy as well as heartbreak sorrow. Joy – 21 August 1903 my mother Carolyn was born. Her birthday was celebrated with an angel food cake for as long as I can remember. Sorrow -21 August 2025- Stefano Mabula Isidory age 62 my Sukuma African brother and one of my dearest beloved friends died at Bugando Referral Hospital in Mwanza, Tanzania following a minor hernia operation. The cause of death will never be known to us. What we know is that following the operation he was taken from the operating theater to ICU with breathing difficulties and never woke up. I received a two-word email (bad news) at about 9 pm as I relaxed before going to bed. I immediately called Paulo Lucas who was in Mwanza. He told me the bad news, news that I feared. Having lost dear Illuminata Dec. 2023, then Bahati Subi 17 April 2025 and now Stefano was almost too much. I called dear friend Nancy. She came right over. We visited and prayed for a couple of hours. What a blessing.

Stefano and I were seldom photographed together. Usually, Stefano was taking the pictures so we were never together. I am grateful to Paulo Lukasi who found two pictures (below) that I have included! I knew Stefano since he was 4 years old back in 1967 when I went to get his parents from the diocesan catechists' school. Some years after he graduated from the diocesan seminary we began working together. He developed into a great leader both at work and in his parish. His ability to remember people and names was amazing. He developed friendships after only one meeting. That blessing served us well when we had to deal with officials, police, politicians etc. He was generous and helpful to hundreds of people. He went with consoling words to more funerals than we will ever know. He attended daily Mass and was a leader in the parish council in Old Maswa. He was loved and respected by 1000's of people. Judging from the chairs set up for his outdoor funeral at Nkololo and the number of people who were served food some 5000 people attended his funeral. They arrived in buses, cars, motorcycles etc. I cannot recall all of the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows we shared. But they were many over such a long period of time.

We have all experienced a death of a loved one that has left a great void in our life that cannot be filled. I am comforted knowing that God rewarded Stefano with the great blessing of having a priest come before his operation. He heard his confession, anointed him with the holy oil of the sick and gave him our greatest gift, food for the final journey, Holy Communion. That is part of my story as we begin a New Year. I felt compelled to share it with you.

I am sure that at some time in our life, just as I have learned, we will be taught an important lesson. That lesson is to never say "I know how you feel". No one has the same inner experience that someone else has. As I grow older, I also receive occasional reminders of what is really important in the journey to our heavenly home. These occasions have made me recall words that a retreat master gave us many years ago. He ended his talk by saying "You are not free until you have no one to forgive". Easier said than done!

God blessed us this year with friends like you who made it possible to achieve many of our goals for 2025. All of us here at Songambele Hospital and St. Peter Parish would also like to share with you our dreams and plans for 2026. An attractive informative brochure with many pictures is being prepared and will be coming to your mailbox in the next few months. Happy reading!

Your blessed help continues to keep us moving forward. I never forget you in my Masses and Prayers. Be assured that you will also be remembered when I pray in our new Eucharistic Adoration chapel (below right) that will be completed by Christmas. Praise the Lord!

Fr. Paul



*As we approach the end of the year, we warmly invite you to consider an end-of-year gift. Thank you for your continued support. Blessings to you and yours.*

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