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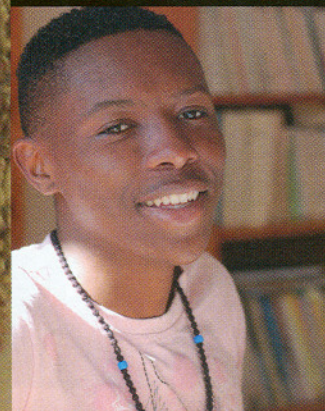


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BUILDING

the East African Church One Brick at a Time

To see the bright smile of Fr. Athanasios Karanja is to see the joy of a man who has found his calling; but to look into his eyes is to see the wisdom earned by his life's epic journey and complete trust in Christ.

Born in 1953 to Orthodox parents in Kenya, Fr. Athanasios was just a child during the turbulent years that followed the Mau Mau rebellion. Fueled by anti-colonial sentiments the uprising became one of the catalysts that led to Kenyan independence in 1963 from colonial rule. In his youth, he learned the construction trade and farming in a country that was very different from the one his parents had known. He was astute, faithful, and proved to be a gifted builder as he worked on land that his family owned. As a young man he married and started a family with his wife Jane.

In 1982, the Markarios III Theological Seminary opened in Nairobi. Fr. Athanasios was working as a contractor at the time and already had children. Feeling a deep desire to help spread Orthodoxy in East Africa, Fr. Athanasios left his job and enrolled at the seminary. Being among the first to complete his studies at the school, he was ordained to the priesthood

In 2007, an OCMC Mission Team traveled to Kenya to build a house of worship for the Turkana people in Lodwar. Fr. Athanasios oversaw the project which saw Kenyan workers and North American volunteers construct the first Orthodox Church in the far north of the country.

almost immediately after graduation.

Archbishop Anastasios, who was the Orthodox Church's presiding hierarch in Kenya at the time, had a tremendous vision for Church growth in East Africa. To this end, Fr. Athanasios' gifts in construction could not be ignored. He worked with several OCMC missionaries and oversaw the many building projects that were undertaken by the metropolis. One of these projects involved the first ever OCMC Mission Team in 1987.

For many years, a host of Kenyan churches, clinics, and schools would be built under the careful guidance of Fr. Athanasios. By the late

1990s he, Papadia Jane, and their five children had purchased land in Nakuru. In 1999, however, tragedy struck when Papadia Jane suddenly passed away. Fr. Athanasios had to choose between leaving the priesthood to re-marry or abandon the rigorous travels of his construction work for the metropolis to care for his young children.

True to his lifelong calling to witness for Christ, Fr. Athanasios decided to remain a priest. He committed himself to a life of celibacy and became responsible for the pastoral care of two Orthodox communities in Kenya. With help from his family, Fr. Athanasios raised his children providing for them in every way possible and making sure they received a good education.

As his children began entering adulthood, divine providence would again shine on Fr. Athanasios Karanja. Under the current Archbishop of Kenya, His Eminence Makarios, Fr. Athanasios has been asked to head the construction of more projects for the Church in East Africa. In September 2007, another OCMC Mission Team was slated to assist the people in Lodwar build a permanent church. Fr. Athanasios oversaw the project. St. John the Baptist, as the church would be named, would mark the far northern frontier of Orthodoxy's spread through Kenya.

A SAMP recipient since 1999, Fr. Athanasios Karanja has sought to sanctify the talents that God has given him by offering them to the Church. With each of life's turns he has remained dedicated to serving Christ. He entered seminary with the desire to share Christ through the richness of Orthodoxy with East Africa. Through his loving obedience he has been instrumental in building dozens of churches and ministry facilities that have impacted the lives of thousands all over the region.

The support of indigenous clergy is vital to establishing vibrant Eucharist communities throughout the world. OCMC's SAMP program currently supports 319 priests like Fr. Athanasios. Each of these men offers a living Christian witness in his own unique way. More priests participate in the program every year and the contributions of Orthodox Christians in North America make it possible for these clergymen to dedicate their lives to the work of ministry.

Fr. Athanasios Karanja instructs two members of OCMC's first Mission Team sent to help build an Orthodox Church for the people of Lobere, Kenya in 1987. Fr. Athanasios has been involved in the construction of churches, clinics and schools throughout the metropolis.

