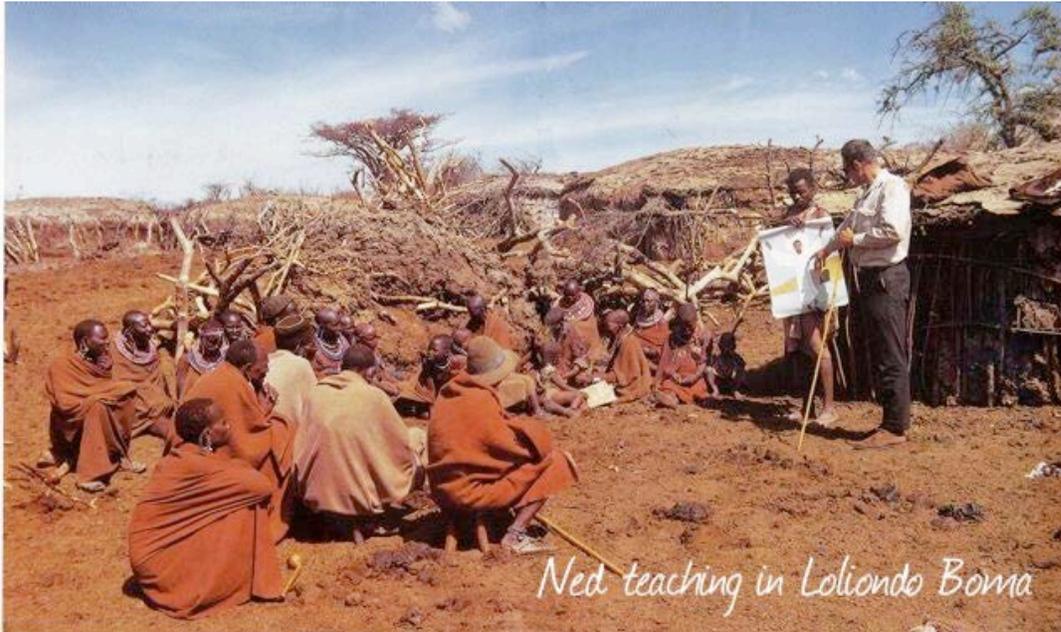
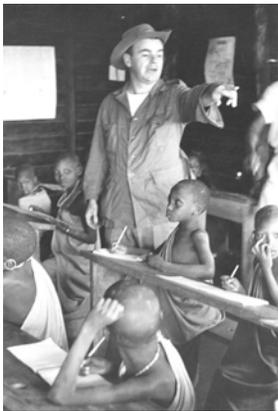


# Olbalbal Mission



## Introduction:



We began our work of evangelization in Maasai country in era of Vatican II and drew our mission thinking from its mission statements. Here in the diocese of Arusha we began direct evangelization of the Maasai people under the leadership of Gene Hillman and Vincent Donovan.

Gene Hillman, based at St. Teresa in Arusha town in the 1950's, traveled, following the Maasai cattle markets to Monduli, to Simanjiro, Ngorongoro, Loliondo and down South to kiteto, Kibaya, Kijungu and beyond. He made friends with the elders of the Maasai building a store of good will between the Maasai and the missionaries that we benefit from even today.

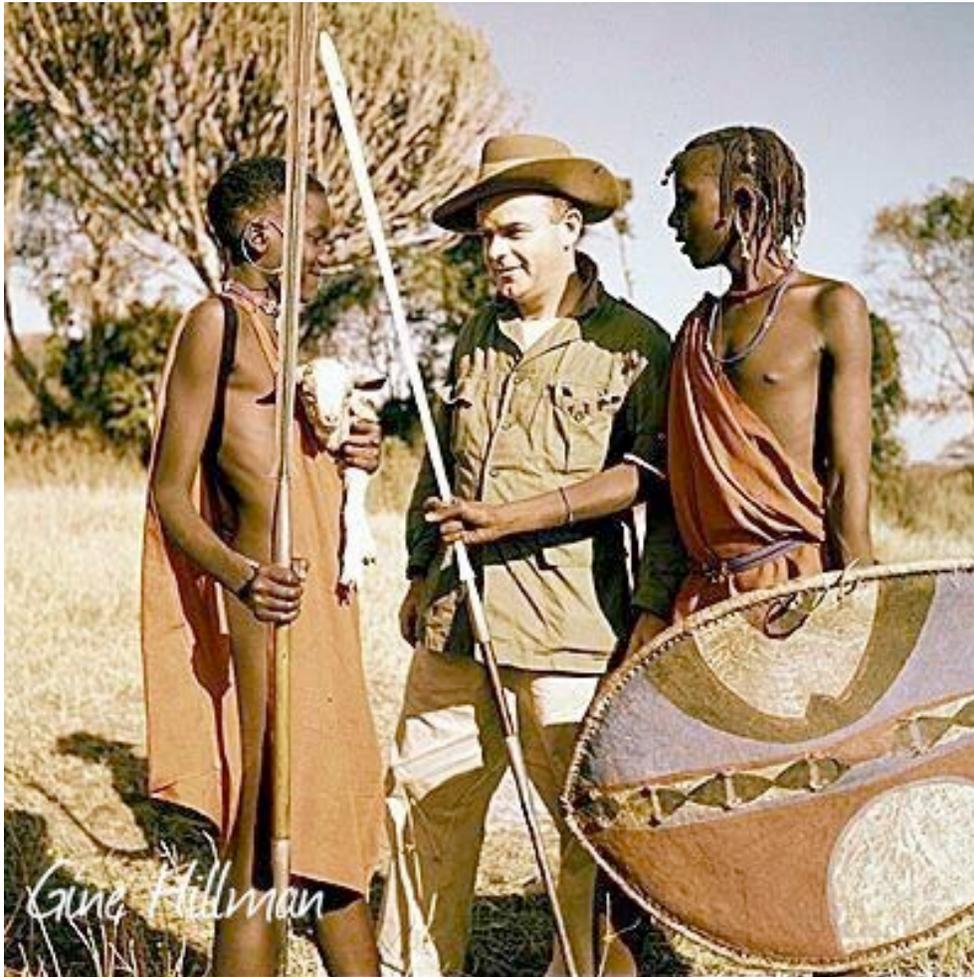
Vince Donovan began direct evangelization of Maasai communities at Loliondo Mission in 1966, pitching his tent in one Maasai community after



another to preach the Gospel. This was a dramatic departure from the way most missionaries did mission up to that time, which was to work mainly with school children.

***The thinking of both Gene Hillman and Vince Donovan was this:***

We come not to transplant a parish from New York or Dar-es-Salaam to some place in Maasai country but to enlsh the Good news of Jesus in this



unique people and in their unique way of living and solving the problems that arise in the environment in which they find themselves. The church we offer the Maasai should fulfill, while at times correcting, their traditional beliefs and practices.

Our aim from the beginning has been for the Maasai to feel at home in the church, that they come to feel it is their church not a foreign transplant. We should remember that even a parish in Arusha might seem to them a strange foreign church. We design our teaching and liturgy that it be an outgrowth and completion of their traditional beliefs and practices. This involves incorporating Maasai religious myths into our teaching, for example those of

the creation and the fall. It means also praying and singing in their language, adopting their religious symbolism and prayer forms.



### **Olbalbal Mission**

was an outstation of my mission at Endulen where I worked from 1966 to 2011. Then Ngorongoro became a parish and Charles Giambone became the pastor. When Joseph Herzstein became pastor of Ngorongoro in the mid 90's Olbalbal became an outstation of Ngorongoro. Brother Francis Sullivan lived at Olbalbal for a time and built housing for a resident catechist. Joe Herzstein and Tomaslav Masec built a room, store and bathroom in preparation for a missionary to take up residence at Olbalbal.

I took up residence at Olbalbal on December 12th 2012. In January of 2014 Arkadiusz Nowak, a SMA missionary joined me at Olbalbal. During the years since we have had 478 baptisms that bring the total number Christians that we serve to about 680.

At present we serve the main mission stations of Olbalbal at Meshili and Ngoile where there is mass every Sunday. In addition, there are seven outstations that we visit each week with with a prayer service and Gospel teaching.

Arkadiusz and I have the project of helping Maasai girls continue their education at the secondary level and in trade schools. At the present time we are helping nine girls and one boy in secondary school and three girls in trade schools. The girls in trade school study tailoring.

Arkadiusz has a project where he looks for funds to help needy children get Orthopedic and other operations that would otherwise not be possible. He works closely with Plaster House that is connected with Salian Hospital. He is helping or has helped 20 children.

We also have a “Tuition School” for the weakest students in our local primary school. We provide remedial classes in English, Kiswahili and Math. This school takes place during the two school leave time of December and June each year. Mwalimu Lenkangu (John) Moses organizes and runs this project. The project is made possible by friends of Arkadiusz in his home country of Poland.

### **Our Team:**

**We are two missionaries at Olbalbal, Fr. Arkadiusz Nowak and myself.** Arkadiusz is an SMA missionary working at Olbalbal for a couple of years to become familiar with the Maasai culture and language. We work with four full time catechists: Matayo OleTajeuo, Yohana Wandai, Yohana Namanjari and Simon Tauta.



Fr. Arkado baptizes a Maasai community.

**The centers that people gather for services and Teaching.**

**There are two places that we have Sunday Masses:**

Meshili, the home mission and  
Ngoile, eight kilometers to the West



**In six other places we have prayer services with teaching each week:**

Enkipori (Monday)  
Lengoku (Tuesday)  
Ngutut (Wednesday)  
Oltepesi (Thursday)  
Ngolola (Friday)  
Endemua (Saturday)

Another place is Lormunyi high on the mountain behind us, which has a substantial Christian community. We go there less often because the road is mostly impassable. Fr. Arkado makes the trip there on foot. It is a six-hour round trip hike and, when he goes, he stays overnight.

**In addition to these places that Arkado and/or I visit each week with a catechist , we have a number of communities that the catechists visit regularly. These are four:**

Mtakatifu Stefano at Ngoinini  
Mtakatifu Petro at Olkung'u

Mtakatifu Paulo at Madukani  
Mtakatifu Maria at Entepesi

### **Our Approach to the Work:**

We shape our teaching and liturgy so that the *Maasai may experience the church as an outgrowth and completion of their own beliefs and religious practices*. This involves incorporating their religious myths into our teaching. Examples would be their stories of Creation and the fall. We also welcome their language, music and religious symbolism into the liturgy.

*Our aim is for the Maasai to feel at home in the church, fulfilling and at times correcting their traditional religious beliefs and practices.*



Catechist Matayo teaches at a Maasai village.

In a new area we meet with the elders and explain who we are and where we come from. We explain that the Maasai know God from time immemorial. We come to talk to them of this **One God, EnkAi**, whom they know. We ask them if they would agree that we come regularly to speak to them of EnkAi. If they agree and most do, we go to the place each week for a meeting of prayer and teaching/discussion.

### **Format of our meetings:**

- Hymn
- Prayer led by the missionary in the Maasai form
- Hymn
- Teaching by the catechist and/or missionary
- The Apostles Creed
- “Sadaka” that remains in the community for their needs
- Hymn
- Blessing of the sick with prayer and imposition of hands
- Prayer of the Faithful as at Mass
- The “Our Father”
- Closing Prayer led by the missionary and a closing hymn

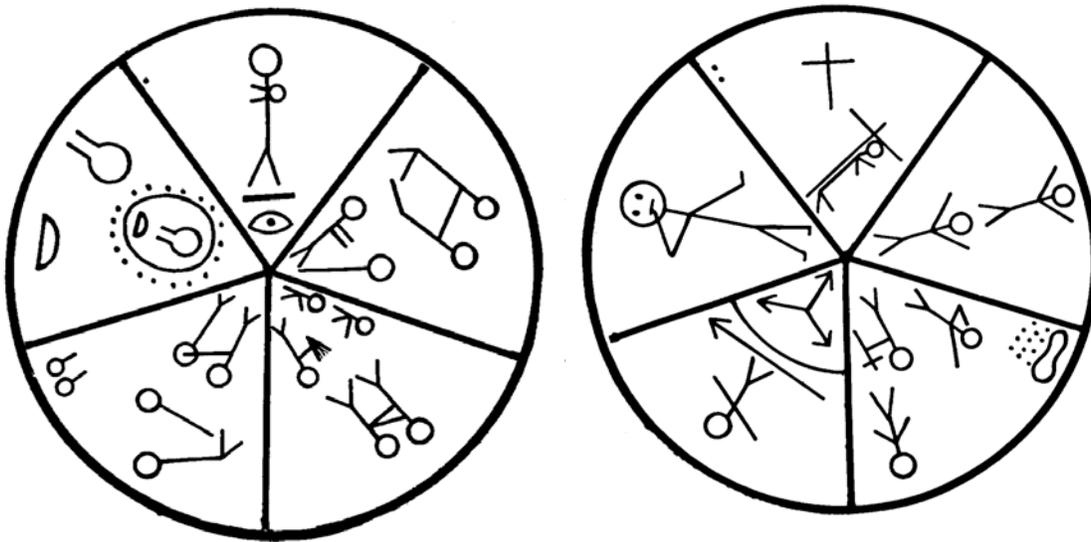
### **First Meetings:**

We emphasize that we do not bring a new or foreign God. We speak of EnkAi, whom the Maasai know and worship. We remind them of the Maasai legend about the beginning of the world that speaks of the origin of both the good and bad things that they experience. Also, we tell the bible story of creation and our first parents. We emphasize that the explanation of origin of sin and evil found in the bible and that of the Maasai legend have the same meaning. Humans not God are responsible for the present situation. This initial teaching is key because the Maasai traditionally believe that God directly causes drought, sickness, death etc..

### **Next 20 or 25 Meetings:**

We teach the circle bible of Fr. Ralph Poirier. Spiritan Father Ralph Poirier composed the circle bible at Kijungu mission during the years of 1971 to 1974. I was luck to be working with Ralph at that time. After teach numerous stories from the old and new testaments there was always confusion as to which events and stories were the most important, which ones were fundamental to the Good News brought by Jesus. Ralph chose ten events and parables that embraced the basic Good News of Jesus. These ten “touchstones” of the message would be the basic teaching that our further teaching builds on and refers back to. Thus the Good News of Jesus will come across for what it really is, basically straight forward and uncomplicated, a message that the most ordinary illiterate person can grasp and share with his or her friends. At the same time, it is a message capable of unlimited deepening and expansion.

## Overview of the Circle Bible:



### Coming and the fundamental teaching of Jesus:

- 1) The Incarnation: Jesus coming to us as the light of the world.
- 2) The raising of Lazarus: Jesus offers life to those who respond to Him in faith and trust.
- 3) The Prodigal Son: God is our loving and forgiving father.
- 4) The Good Samaritan: The one law of love

### The Pascal Events:

- 5) The Eucharist: The church is established in the Eucharist, His community draws life and unity from the Eucharist and proclaims Christ in the Eucharist.
- 6) Death: The Cross: He died for us. We too must carry our cross as He did.
- 7) Resurrection: He rose from the dead and gave His promise to raise those who would remain faithful.

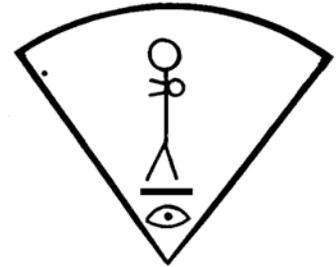
### The final teaching and events leading into the founding of the church.

- 8) Teaching on Prayer:
  - To our Loving Father
  - in thanksgiving
  - for our needs but always "Your will be done."
  - in Jesus name we pray
- 9) Missionary sending and Ascension: The Ascension and Sending of His followers into the world to spread His Word.

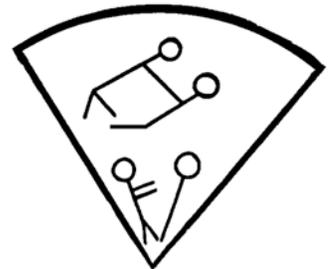
10) The sending of the Holy Spirit to form the “mystical body” to implement the Good News in Word and deed establishing the church till He returns in Glory.

**Brief Explanation of Ralph’s Circle Bible:**

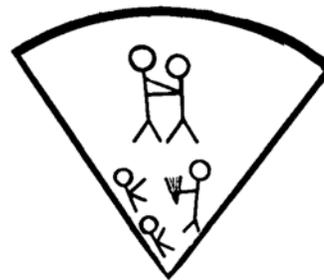
1. Jesus born sent son to restore relationship with God after man was disobedient. Story of Mary and birth. Black line indicates darkness, the many things we don’t know about God. The eye. Let us open our eyes as Jesus brings us light. Do you want to know more about God, what He is really like and what he wants of you?



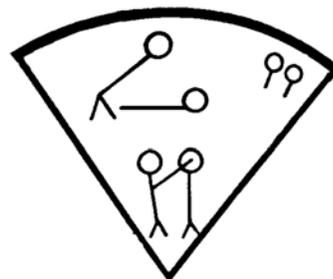
2. Jesus grew up - heard his friend was sick...Just think 4 days rotting. Jesus stretches out hands to us offering life. Let us stretch out our hands to him in faith and trust.



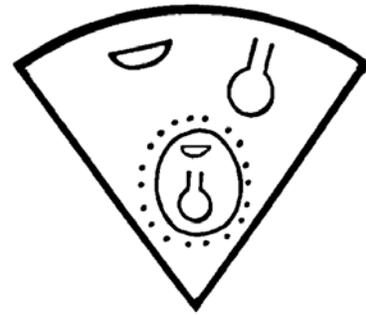
3. What God is like? - listen. Prodigal Son. God like the loving father. If we forgive each other, God, our loving father, will forgive us. If want “light” and “life” must forgive each other.



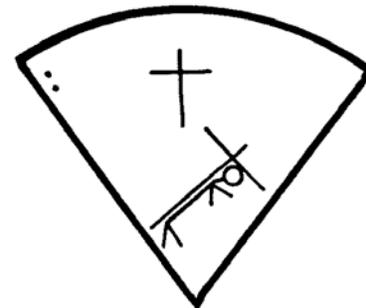
4. The one law of love. What you must do to receive life like Lazarus? Good Samaritan. Do like the enemy did. Two people below, one beating the other. Love all even enemies if you want life like Lazarus. This is how you will be recognized as my followers.



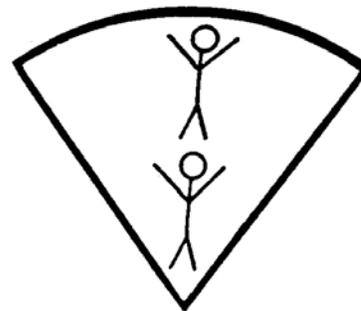
5. The Eucharist: The food Jesus left us to make us one and to deepen his life in us.  
 See the bowl? - it has bread,  
 See the cup? - it has wine.  
 When elder dies he leaves remembrances like bracelets.  
 Jesus left food that has his himself in it, his spirit, his life.  
 Below we are around table - share his food - share His life



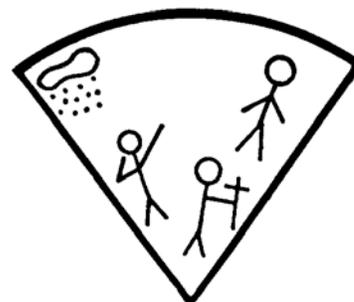
6. Cross:  
 Enemies beat Him, nailed to cross, killed him  
 Because he refused to stop teaching His message of life.  
 Because he refused to stop saying He was Son of God.  
 So those that hated Him killed Him.  
 All of us have a cross to carry  
 "Be strong like I was"  
 If you are you will share my life like Lazarus and be close to me and my Father God



7. The Resurrection:  
 The Father raised him after 3 days  
 Jesus lives  
 Jesus told us: Even though you will die like all people  
 I will raise you up as I did Lazarus and give you life forever.



8) Prayer:  
**rain cloud**  
 reminds us that **God is our loving Father who gives us all good things.**  
 Thanksgiving for all that we have  
**Always we must give thanks**  
**Only then can we ask for what we need**  
 but only according to your will because you know my real needs and what is in my heart.  
 We always end the pray  
**"We pray in the name of Jesus, your true Son."**



9. Missionary sending and Ascension

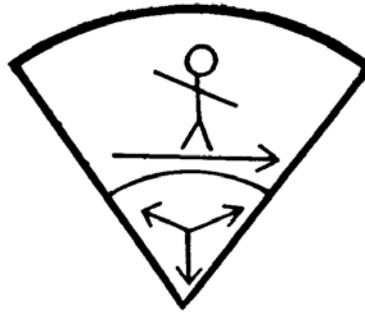
On high mountain

I return to my Father - arm up

I send you into the world - arm down

Like these arrows I send you in every direction, to every people to spread the Good News of my Light and Life.

Jesus returned to the Father, leaving us a great work to do. We go to do what Jesus told us to do. We go like these arrows to spread the Good News of Jesus.

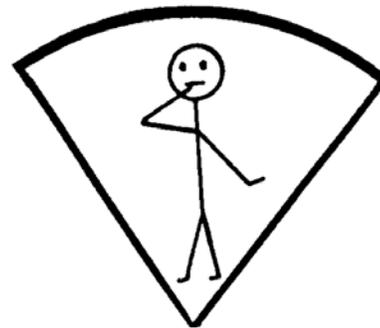


10. Jesus told us:

“I am not leaving you orphans.”

I send you my Spirit to teach you and make you one family, the people of God.

We are like one body all of the followers of Jesus because we have one spirit, the Holy Spirit of Jesus.



This man represents us.

We are the body of Jesus in the world.

We are all parts of this one body of Jesus, each with his or her own contribution to make like each part of a body has it's own function and contribution, like an arm or a leg. Like parts if a body, there is no one within the people of God without a contribution to make, without a job to do. Each of us must do his part to help the body. So that it may grow and become strong. (Teachers, singers, readers, nurses etc..) Each part of the body, that is each person in the community of God has his or her job to do.

**Next Meetings:**

Our further meetings up to the time of the baptism of the community and beyond are based on the Sunday readings.

**Baptism and beyond:**

We usually baptize after weekly teachings that last for about two years. After baptism we continue with our weekly meetings based on the Sunday readings.



Ned gives the sign of the cross at a Baptism.

## **The Sacraments:**

### ***Baptism:***

**New fire:** The hearth fire is extinguished in all the house of the village to be baptized. During the baptism ceremony a new fire is made with traditional fire sticks and carried to all the houses, a sign of the light of Christ entering the community. Green branches are heaped on the flames and the priest and elders then bless the fire. They bless with “engare-pus”, a gourd of water with a drop of milk and with green grass in the mouth of the gourd:

**Stones of the hearth fire blessed** with “engare-pus.” We are asking the ancestors of the family to bless us as we make this new beginning as followers of Jesus.

**The village is blessed:** The priest and elders walk around the village blessing the singing people, the animals and the houses, sprinkling all with “engare-pus”

**Sign of the cross on the forehead with chalk:** The Maasai use the symbol of marking a person with “endoroto”, chalk, to sign protection from curses and

other evils. A Christian is protected from curses by his or her faith in Jesus. Also, as a man's herd is branded with a unique brand, so also Jesus marks his followers with his unique sign or brand, the cross.

**An unblemished cow skin** is placed in the center of the cattle enclosure. Each person to be baptized sits on the stool to receive baptism.

Fr. Arkado  
has mass  
at Olbalbal.

After all have been baptized, the priest gives each woman **a burning ember from the new fire** with a sprig of green leaves to light the new fire in her house.

### ***Eucharist:***

**Black vestments sign the black rain clouds** that bring all good things to Maasai country. Black is also the color of the clothing worn by Maasai on their pilgrimages of prayer.

**Liturgical music and prayer** is the Maasai language and form.



**The Prayer of the faithful** is in the Maasai prayer form.

**We bless the sick in each liturgy.** When the first Maasai priests were ordained in mid 70s., they took the decision that following baptism people

should not go to the “Laibon.” This Maasai is the name for the Maasai intermediary between God and man. Certain ailments and conditions seem not to respond to interventions by modern medicine or the “Laibon” or Maasai healers. Thus people are left without recourse in certain situations. Toward fill this lacuna, we have a blessing of the sick at most liturgies that includes anointing, laying on of hands, and the blessing with “engare-pus.”

**At the offertory** we bless the offertory procession and gifts with “ngare-pus.”

### ***Penance:***

We have **communal penance services** prior the major feasts. During our penance service **all hold a tuft of green grass**. Holding a tuft of green grass is a traditional way of asking for forgiveness.

### ***Marriage:***

**In addition to the traditional exchange of rings**, the groom places the “monorrit” chain around the neck of the bride. The bride places the necklace of blue beads called “onongoi” around the neck of the groom. The clasped hands of the bride and groom are **smearred with sheep fat** and blessed by the priest.

### ***Priesthood:***

The celibate Catholic priesthood presents tremendous challenges to young men who might aspire the ordained priesthood. **Celibacy, far from seen as gift of oneself to God and his people, is rather seen as a curse** and is totally unintelligible to the Maasai. A man who dies without children has no respect and his name is never mentioned again.



Bible, gourd, stole, green grass and black cloths used at mass



Ned has Easter  
Mass at Olbalbal

### **Challenges:**

The **physical challenges** become more limiting, as I grow older. I can no longer walk to places for teaching and meetings with the people. I used to be able to go to two or three places each day. Now my energy level enables me to go to only one place each day. Fr. Arkado is able to walk and goes to our places that can't be reached by car.

**Relating the teaching to the life experience** of the Maasai continues to be a tremendous challenge. Fortunately in the last 20 or 30 years they have come to know cultivation and many parables have this theme.

**Most Maasai are not fluent in Kiswahili.** I find expressing myself in the Maasai language to be an ever-present challenge that doesn't seem to become easier as the years go by.

**Most missionaries have no additional sources of income to support their work** in Maasai country. Our Sunday collection here at Olbalbal averages the equivalent of \$5.00. The five hundred dollars a month that we receive from the American Province hardly covers the normal mission expenses that would normally include:

Salary for a cook

Salaries for full time catechists

Upkeep and fuel for the mission vehicle

The monthly cost of food and other household expenses

Spiritans are often stationed in Maasai Missions for relatively short periods of time. One would almost get the impression that Maasai missions are seen as stopping off places on the way to more attractive posts and the much sought after assignments to study overseas. There is little continuity. There is clearly no possibility of getting to know the people and their problems and becoming familiar with Maasai language and culture during a two or three year stay in a place.

Fr. Arkado is now leaving Olbalbal to open a new Maasai mission with two other Society of Africa Missions. Arkado and I have been together for the last four years here at Olbalbal. He has been a tremendous asset to the Maasai work and a good person to live with. We will miss him but are thankful that the Maasai work is expanding.

*Ned Marchessault  
Olbalbal Mission  
March 19, 2018*

