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# Christians Reaching Out to Muslims in Tanzania

## Holy Ghost Fathers See Dialogue As a Part of Life

By John Newton

LONDON, SEPT. 28, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Catholic Church is helping to transform life on an island off the west coast of Africa through its interreligious and educational work -- with the help of charities in Britain and Ireland.

The expansion of the Church's work, aided by the construction of a new church and pastoral center on Pemba -- the second largest island in Tanzania's Zanzibar archipelago -- will have a significant impact on society in the predominantly Muslim country.

This was the assessment that Holy Ghost Father Father Apolinarius Msaky gave Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need during his trip to Ireland to thank the organizations which have made the new buildings possible.

Aid to the Church in Need provided the funding for a church and parish center while volunteers Fatherom Pemba Support visited the island in June and July 2011 to decorate and help finish the buildings.

The Pastoral Centre in Chake-Chake, near the centre of the island, will help the whole society and encourage good inter-faith relations with the Church's Muslim neighbors according to the missionary priest.

Father Msaky said: "The construction of the center, which has been going on for three years now, is of really great value for the people of Pemba -- not only for Christians but Muslims as well.

"Given the small number of Christians on the island, for us to have such a center is a good symbol of stability and engagement with the society."

Father Maska described how his order, the Holy Ghost Fathers, has a long tradition of working in Muslim countries, starting their mission to Islamic lands in the 1860s.

The priest told ACN: "We see interreligious dialogue as part of our life, not only the question of religious affairs, but also social activities, like health, like education, like improving the social services at large.

"We call that a dialogue of life, whereby we come together, we share our joys, we share our sorrows, we cooperate too to work together for the improvement of our society.

He went on to say: "So this center apart from providing a place for prayer and worship, will be used as a kind of interreligious dialogue centre -- that was the original idea of the building."

The center will also run courses -- and Father Masky said that there is a tradition of the Catholic Church providing education and social services in the country.

The Church is providing short courses in IT and evening classes in English and Mathematics to "to widen [people's] chances of getting employment" because, as Father Masky said, the level of education on Pemba is not as high as that on mainland Tanzania.

Education courses will also be run at the new Church in Vitongoji, which Father Masky hopes will be operational in January 2011.

During the recent visit by volunteers from Pemba Support, windows and doors were installed, the altar was built and the sanctuary was tiled.

In 2000 the population in Vitongoji, in the south of the island, increased after two new military camps were established on the island.

The old Church was little more than a wayside chapel, but it now has to cater for a large community.

At present, Christians in the area walk three miles to the outstation for Mass.

Again education courses run in Vitongoji will be open to the whole community.

Father Masky said: "The agenda is to build relationships, when we go out we don't go out to convert people it is to build relations -- although those who are willing convert of their own decision, they make up their mind.

"We see ourselves as people of God, created to serve God irrespective of the various Faiths."

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