

Welcome to the Catholic Parish of Bagamoyo

Honored by the Roman Catholic Church as the "Mother of all Parishes in East Africa" the historic Catholic Parish of Bagamoyo was a focal point both in the late 19th-century drive to abolish the African slave trade and the European exploration of the African interior, including the celebrated search for the source of the Nile.

Spiritans missionaries established the Catholic Parish of Bagamoyo on 17 July, 1868, sent by Bishop Armand Maupoint from St. Denis/Reunion Island east of Madagascar to fight slavery on the grass-roots level.

Led by Father Superior Anthony Horner, the missionaries began ransoming slaves and resettling them in a Christian Freedom Village in north Bagamoyo, carrying on the efforts began by the RC order initially on the islands of St. Denis/Reunion and, in 1860, on the neighboring island of Zanzibar.

At the Village the freed slaves received elementary school tuition as well as vocational training in areas such as carpentry, blacksmithing and farming.

Many of them adopted Christianity and became lay missionaries, traveling to Kenya and other parts of Tanganyika to establish new missions and parishes and to continue their fight against slavery.

In addition to carrying on the religious and educational traditions of their predecessors, the Parish today also functions as an open-air museum that welcomes all visitors while memorializing Bagamoyo's history and the mission's past.

Open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., points-of-interest include:

- a Cross, erected on a nearby beach where Catholic missionaries in 1868 first set foot on the East African mainland;

- a Baobab tree on the mission grounds, planted that same year to commemorate the Mission's founding;
- the 1872 church tower, the first to be built in East Africa;
- the Old Fathers House, built during the years 1863 - 1903;
- the Sisters House, now the Parish Museum, completed in 1876;
- the "Grotto", a small chapel built by ex-slaves and completed in 1876;
- the Old Cemetery, which includes 47 tombs housing the remains of early missionaries;
- the "new" Parish church, built from 1910 - 1915.

Catholic services are held on Sundays at 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. Conducted in native Kiswahili, all the services are accompanied by some lively singing.

Today's Catholic Parish of Bagamoyo also runs Kindergartens, a vocational training school with departments for carpentry, electrical engineering, masonry and tailoring, a health center, and a secondary boarding school for girls. The suburb of Majengo is the home of a second, recently completed Parish center.

An international team of Spiritans serves the parish:
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