

CHAD MISSION (TCD)



Official Languages: French, Arabic

Vision-Mission Statement

We commit ourselves to work among a people eager to welcome Jesus as their Savior, to proclaim his Word of Life to them. In an ethnically divided society, our harmonious international community life strives to stand as a signpost of unity (Vision). To continue the mission of the Incarnate Word, we commit ourselves to primary evangelization. In collaboration with the local clergy and the laity we reach out in dialogue to people of other faiths – especially Islam and traditional Religions. We stand by the poor and the marginalized to help them rise to dignified human life in a just and peaceful society (Mission)

1. Societal Setting

Chad is a land-locked country in central Africa, of 1,284,000 km² sharing borders with Niger, Libya, the Sudan, Republic of Central Africa, Cameroun as well as Nigeria. The country is comprised of some 110 ethnic groups, with a total population of about 14 million (2015 census). People speak quite a variety of local languages, but French and the local version of Arabic are the most popular ones.

Chad is really rich in history. This large Saharan and sub-Saharan area hosted several kingdoms in the past, most notable among them being the Kanem-Bornou around Lake Chad, until the French took over the country as a whole in 1888. Colonizing the area was no fun for the French as there were several rebellions and resistance movements against them then. Independence from France dates back to August 11, 1960. The following decades, however, were marred by more than one coups d'état, and the ensuing civil wars have devastated the country. The present regime has been in place since 1990, instituting a democratic form of government.

Chad has a brutal climate, with its two-thirds territory being part of the Sahara desert. Chad is one of the poorest countries in Africa, due to the civil wars, coups, endemic corruption at all levels, 65% illiteracy, poor primary health or sanitary facilities, a neglected public education sector, and almost unorganized transport and communication sectors. The Human Development Index placed Chad as the 186th amongst the 188 countries in the world. Yet, the country is so blessed in natural resources like oil, diamond, gold and sunlight!

The Chadian economy is still largely based on subsistent agriculture. About 80% of the population lives by traditional agriculture (corn, groundnuts, millet and sesame) and related trades, as well as by keeping herds and fishing. Like many other African countries, Chad also extracts oil – *the black gold* as it is known here does not always bring happiness and development to the population. The oil wealth hardly drips down to the ordinary folks, but instead has created a new middle class section of people who are part of the ruling elite. The recent depression in the oil market has brought down the Chadian economy almost to its knees. The infant mortality rate is estimated at 93.61 for 1.000; the average life expectancy for men is 49 years and for women 54. Less than 5% of the population has access to electricity; about 50% have access to clean water; more than 70% of the population lives under the poverty line. In spite of a high percentage of young people, only about 35% are literate – about 80% in rural areas. The negligence to educate the young population is both the fault of parents who believe that working in the cornfield and tending the animals are more important for children than going to school, and the government. In spite of the efforts of a multitude of NGOs, the health sector is much wanting, especially in areas like primary health care and the fight against malaria, VIH/AIDS and infant mortality.

The country is easily seen as divided socio-culturally between the predominantly Muslim north and the largely Christian south. Fortunately, there is no civil war now in the country, but social injustice (oil production centers are all in the south, but the people of the region hardly benefit from it) and economic poverty, coupled with paralyzed health and educational sectors, constantly keep the general population in misery. All powers are concentrated in the hands of the people of the north.

The latest census shows the following figures when it comes to the different religions and their adherents: Islam – 55.3%; Christianity – 40.6% and Traditional Religion – 4.1%. With the support of the powers-that-be in the north, Islam is easily making in-roads into the south; one finds mosques constructed in villages even where there are hardly any Muslims. Business is run by Muslims mostly; they are also the land owners, even buying land in the south. It should be noted, however, that there is no fundamentalist Islam playing out here (Chad always resisted

militarily the inflow of *Boko Haram* from the neighboring Nigeria), which thankfully allows the other religions to freely exist.

2. Ecclesial Setting

After the unsuccessful initiatives of the Capuchins in 1663, Chad had to wait until the arrival of the Spiritans in 1929 for the first Christian communities to be formed. Protestant missionaries had come into the land already by 1920. Both missionary groups had to pay dearly for their enterprises due to endemic civil wars and deadly malaria. The second phase of evangelization began in the early 1950s, and the first diocese of N'Djamena (the political capital) was erected in January 1951, followed by diocese of Moundou in the south in May 1951.

Of the 40% of the population who are Christians, more than 22% profess the Catholic faith. Today there are seven Catholic dioceses and an Apostolic Vicariate in the country; in all, there are around 120 parishes and 700 pastoral agents. The Diocese of Gore, where the SVD began its missionary activities in 2004, was established in 1998 and has 50-some pastoral agents including nine diocesan, 17 religious and one *fidei donum* priests. Since 2014, the SVD has assumed the pastoral care of one of the city parishes in Moundou – the commercial capital of the country. Few young people enter the seminaries or the convents. Consequently, the Church survives and is sustained by an in-flow of missionaries from abroad. Although the Church in Chad committed itself in the jubilee year of 2000 to be a “Church Family of God”, socio-pastoral challenges abound in areas like primary evangelization, primary health care, education, and integral development. In our own parishes we count adult catechumens in the hundreds; people are hungry for the Word of God – what a blessing for the Divine Word Missionaries!

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Characteristic Dimensions

All the bishops in this country would like to have the SVDs working in their dioceses here for the sheer shining power of our missionary charism! The bishops invite us: “Come to my diocese, proclaim the Gospel, organize the Biblical Pastoral Ministry”, making an ideal context to exercise and live our Characteristic Dimensions as SVDs. Thus far, we try to incarnate the Characteristic Dimensions primarily through our parish presence.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

We began in Laramanaye, bordering Cameroun, in the diocese of Gore, on September 8, 2004. After 13 years of our existence and missionary service here in Chad, we can hopefully affirm that the SVD is here to stay – although we are just 10 confreres here at the moment. What keeps us moving is our missionary mandate, realized through our Characteristic Dimensions and Congregational Directions: ***primary evangelization***, training lay leaders and faithful, educational

programs, missionary animation, accompanying *families and youth*, promoting justice and peace, small self-help projects towards integral human development especially in the rural context, *ecumenical and interreligious dialogue* with our partners especially Muslims and adherents of the many other churches.

Primary evangelization remains the *raison d'être* of our continued presence in this diocese, in this country. It's really a challenging missionary context here: our dialogue partners are Muslims and members of the multifarious churches, which are many. What's interesting is that the dialogue is more on the practical (and not at the philosophical-theological) and concrete daily living level. There is work to do in bringing about *reconciliation and peace building* between the peoples of the north and of the south. That would be placing ourselves in the service of the poor and marginalized, to say the least.

Collaboration with SSps and Others

The SSps are not present in Chad, but we collaborate well with the other religious and clergy that are here. We especially collaborate with the lay leadership in our parish contexts.

SVD Lay Association

Training lay leaders and catechists is an essential priority of our mission, to empower the protagonists among the faithful people of our communities. We give primordial importance to accompanying them, especially by training the lay leaders who are responsible for the different associations and groups within our parishes. Catechists are our principal collaborators and we organize regular training sessions to equip them for their ministry with the people at the grassroots level in the village communities. Our objective here is to train as many lay leaders as possible to proclaim the Word while waiting for the Lord to raise up many more religious and priestly vocations from amongst them. Formal education and literacy programs also go hand in hand with such religious formation.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

Spirituality:

Despite the difficulties of our beginnings and the struggles which continue, we can confidently say that thanks to the guiding hand of the gentle Spirit, the mission in Chad is a God-sent opportunity for the SVD, especially as we continue to entrust ourselves to the merciful heart of our God, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Mother and our holy patrons and founders. We sustain our personal and communal spiritual life by relying on these spiritual resources.

Community Life:

Our beginning here was quite tragic. Anthony Puthumana, the first Mission Superior, had to leave for his native India for reasons of health, hardly two years after they began work in Chad.

This was followed by the death of our Zimbabwean Brother Eddy Dzinda, and the road accident which made Brother Marek Wojtas to return to his home country of Poland. One would have thought we were closing down the Mission! Those trying moments prepared those who stayed on to fight the good fight and keep the SVD flag flying high, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. A few more confreres came in to strengthen the team, and soon we were talking of life and mission in intercultural communities. Our international communities remain at once a challenge for ourselves and a real source of witnessing to Christian values for the local clergy, other pastoral agents and religious – especially for the people at large, Christians and others alike, in a deeply divided society along north-south and ethnic lines. Today, our confreres live and work in three parish communities (two in the diocese of Moundou and one in Gore) and in the new postulancy formation house in the neighboring diocese of Sarh.

Leadership:

Being a small number, leadership is the shared responsibility of all. Each confrere takes up responsibilities in carrying out his assigned work, and in starting new initiatives.

Finance:

Our Society is on an adventure with the local churches, having signed the contracts with the two bishops of the dioceses where we have the three parishes. We provide the missionary personnel, the bishops provide for the better part the infrastructure and means for evangelization. The good will really is there on the part of the local church, but the recent economic crisis is not helping anyone to stand on their feet without financial help from external sources. We are trying our best, with the help of the SVD Generalate, to streamline our financial sources towards a long-term financial self-reliance, in relation to our local context.

Formation:

We do have young men interested in joining our religious missionary life. After having sent one to Togo for philosophy, we recently started our own postulancy house of formation in the diocese of Sarh. Our students attend philosophy classes at the interdiocesan major seminary, together with students of the Comboni missionaries as well.