

Article



Handing over the keys after the purchase of the plot of land in Nairobi.

Creating a better world in Kenya

The community of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Nairobi is growing continuously. With a Pax Bank loan, the order purchased a 4,000 square metre plot of land in Nairobi in 2020 to create more space for community life and to offer an opportunity for the social and spiritual formation for young people.

- Africa does not know empty churches.
- Local religious are gradually replacing European missionaries in leadership positions.
- The relationship with Pax Bank is characterized by trust.

Churches in Germany are often sparsely attended - even before the pandemic and there is a lack of vocations. In the Global South, things are usually different. A good example of a steadily growing community is the East African province of the Salesians of Don Bosco, with the Province headquarters in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, and the parish entrusted to it by the archdiocese. When parishioners flock to the Salesians' Mary Help of Christians shrine on Sundays in Upper Hill, a neighbourhood of Nairobi, the church is literally bursting at the seams. Due to the pandemic, the service could only take place online recently. Otherwise, however, well over 1,000 faithful regularly come together to attend one of the seven Sunday Masses at the site. The Holy Masses there resemble joyful celebrations for which the visitors dress up and enjoy the Eucharistic celebration with the other faithful for many hours.

This is how it should be again after the pandemic. That is why the community wanted to expand its premises and received a loan from the Pax Bank for this purpose. Father Eric Mairura SDB, the Provincial Economist, who coordinates finances and projects for the Province of East Africa, turned to Andreas Machnik, the head of the

foreign customers branch and the Pax Bank's representative for religious orders. The two still know each other from their time in Jerusalem, where the financial institution is also active. "In addition, our bank has long maintained good relations with the Don Bosco Mission in Bonn and other Salesian provinces," says Andreas Machnik.



The Salesians' Mary Help of Christians Shrine in the Upper Hill community in Nairobi, Kenya, is a place of pilgrimage.

Land prices have risen enormously

In the province of East Africa, the Salesians of Don Bosco are now active with a total of 30 institutions in Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan and South Sudan. The headquarters are in Nairobi, on the same property as the Upper Hill community. When the Salesians of Don Bosco took up residence there in 1979, the neighbourhood was still a neglected area on the outskirts of the capital. But like most metropolises in Africa, Nairobi has grown enormously in recent decades. Whereas at the end of the 1970s there were only just under one million people living in the city, today there are already 4.9 million. Upper Hill, where many embassies are located today, is now almost part of the city centre. "Land has become scarce and, above all, expensive," economist Mairura says. "That's why in 2020 we took the opportunity to acquire a 4,000 square metre built-up plot in our immediate neighbourhood with a loan from Pax Bank, because we need more space for our community members and our many activities."

Highlighted quote:

"We want to make this world a better place and create an environment where children and young people can develop."

Father Eric Mairura SDB, Provincial Economist, Salesian Don Bosco Province of Eastern Africa

The Salesians mission is to help young people lead a better life. "Africa has a young population. But the state does not seriously take care of the young people. That's

why we take on this task and get the children and young people off the streets so they can do schooling and vocational training. We want to make this world a better place and create an environment where children and young people can develop. We want to help them lead a dignified life," explains the Father. One focus is also on girls, who often marry early and have many children. The Salesians are supported in their work by their confreres and sisters all over the world, but also by the German government, which knows that financial aid is in good hands with the Salesians of Don Bosco.



A "Centre for Holistic Spirituality" is to be built on the acquired property in five to six years.

A place for soul, body and spirit

In order to be able to fulfil this task even better in the future, the Order is planning a "Centre for Holistic Spirituality" on the new property, partly in the existing buildings. "Young people should feel welcome here. A place where they can develop their soul, body and mind, meet friends, learn and play," the economist outlines the project. Sports facilities, psychological counselling, a call centre for people in need and a restaurant are planned. Parishioners will be able to spend time together here after mass. There are also plans for a new building with conference rooms and parking spaces.

Increasing self-confidence

In order to realise this project, the parish has set up a "Board of Directors" consisting of experts from different disciplines who professionally accompany the project. This board is chaired by Fr. Simon Asira Lipuku, the Provincial superior. "We have learned to take our destiny into our own hands and are no longer in the role of recipients, but we can rely on ourselves as a community. That is why we are planning projects that

will enable us to stand on our own two feet," says 51-year-old Father Eric, who joined the Salesians 26 years ago as a young teacher.

Andreas Machnik of Pax Bank observes a change in responsibilities among the religious orders in Africa. "European missionaries used to call the shots on the continent. Today, more and more African Fathers and brothers or members of religious orders from other classic mission countries are taking on leadership positions, now also in Europe." Father Eric and his team had convinced all the bodies in the bank of their intention. "The religious know exactly what they are doing and approach it in a very structured way. And there is a lot of trust," says the branch manager for foreign customers. "Moreover, the project is also so good because it is motivating and can be an inspiration for other religious institutions."

Box

Salesians of Don Boscós

The Salesians of Don Bosco are one of the largest religious orders in the world. A total of around 28,000 male and female religious live and work in more than 130 countries on five continents. In Germany, the Salesians are represented at 45 locations. The order was founded in 1859 by the priest Don Giovanni Bosco (1815-1888). In the Italian city of Turin, which was shaped by industrialization, he sought answers to urgent social questions and was particularly concerned with the welfare and education of young people. The faith community still follows this tradition today. Most Salesians live in India, Italy, Spain, Poland and Brazil.