

The Work of Their Hands: Our Story from Kamba Land – Kenya



MSA Sisters who visited Kitui

On 5 January 2026, a group of our sisters in Kenya made a special pilgrimage to Kitui to visit the grave of **Sr. Margaret McGoldrick, OSF**, who rests at **St. Patrick's Diocesan Cemetery, Mutune**. Sr. Margaret died on 14 June 1991, but her memory continues to inspire the mission she helped shape. The sisters were warmly welcomed and hosted by the **Ursuline Sisters**, who currently serve in Kitui.

Pilgrimages like this remind us of the deep commitment the Irish missionaries made

wherever they served. When the first **Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa (FMSA)** stepped onto the red soil of **Muthale** and **Kimangao** in Kamba land in **1956 and 1958**, they brought little more than their faith, their training, and an unshakable conviction that love and service could transform lives.

Among the pioneers were **Sr. Paschal Crawford** and **Sr. Champion Jenkins**, both nurses who dedicated their lives to caring for the sick at **Our Lady of Lourdes** and **St. Bernadette**. They served at a time when **over 75% of the population suffered from severe malnutrition** (Unfinished Canticle, p.151). The land was dry, the roads rough, and the needs immense—but the sisters were not easily discouraged. They came to walk with the people, not above them.

Healing, Teaching, and Accompanying

The sisters began their work in simple, makeshift clinics—sometimes just a room with a table and a few supplies. They tended to mothers in labour, children burning with fever, and elders weakened by drought and hunger. In Kimangao, they found a non-functional hospital built by Bishop Dunne and the Kiltegan Fathers, and they worked tirelessly to bring it back to life.

They trained local women as community health workers, teaching them how to recognise danger signs, treat common illnesses, and care for their neighbours. Slowly, the clinics grew. A dispensary became a health centre. A health centre became a lifeline.

Where there were no schools, the sisters helped build them. Where there were no teachers, they became teachers. They taught reading and writing, but also dignity, confidence, and the belief that every child—girl or boy—deserved a future.

They walked long distances to reach remote homesteads, encouraging parents to send their children to school. Many of those children later became nurses, teachers, administrators, and community leaders.

The sisters learned the Kamba language, shared meals of ugali and sukuma, danced at weddings, mourned at funerals, and prayed under the same wide Kenyan sky as the people they served. They were not visitors; they were family.

A Legacy Carried Forward



FMSA Sisters in brown and beige and some Ursuline sisters in Blue in Kitui during the visit

Time, however, is a patient teacher. Many of the pioneering sisters have now retired. Some have gone to their Maker, their earthly work complete. Their names are spoken with affection in villages where their footprints remain in the dust and in the hearts of those they served.

Yet the mission did not end with them.

Today, **African FMSA sisters** continue the work with the same Franciscan spirit—rooted in simplicity, compassion, and justice. They are joined by other congregations, including the **Ursuline Sisters**, who bring their own gifts and strengths. Together, they build on foundations laid long ago, responding to new challenges: HIV care, education for girls, sustainable agriculture, youth empowerment, and community development.

And Still, the Work Goes On



FMSA sisters at the end of general Chapter 2025-where they revision to stay relevant to the needs of our world today

In the early morning, as the sun rises over the hills of Ukambani, you can still see a sister walking the dusty path to the clinic or hear the laughter of children in a school the FMSA helped build. The quiet strength of the mission endures—carried on by religious communities such as the **Little Sisters of St. Francis**, the **Ursuline Sisters**, the **Kiltegan Fathers**, and by the local people themselves.

The pioneers planted seeds.

The people nurtured them.

Today, the harvest continues—abundant, hopeful, and alive.

*All are welcome to be part of this journey. It has never been ours alone. Join the FMSA legacy through prayer, material and financial support, volunteering, or by leaving a financial legacy to the **Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa**.*

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