

## Biography of Father Francis Limo Riwa

Francis Limo Riwa (*pronounced Lee-moe Ree-wah*) was born on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro in northern Tanzania on March 23, 1956 to the late Barnabas and Francesca. He has four brothers (two are deceased) and four sisters. His family farmed coffee as a cash crop and bananas for subsistence.

Fr. Riwa was sent to the neighbouring country of Kenya for his high school education because Kenya had a better education system. In Kenya, he completed his high school studies at Thai High School and, responding to God's call, decided to study for the Catholic priesthood.

On October 1, 1983, after studies at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Nairobi, Fr. Riwa was ordained a Catholic priest for the service of God's people in the Diocese of Meru in Kenya. After several years as a teacher in St. Pius X Minor Seminary, he was assigned as a pastor to the nomadic pastoralists in the northern desert region of Kenya, where he founded Oldonyiro Catholic Parish.

The arid land and lack of rain in the desert region combined to cause widespread poverty. However, a river flowed through the area and Riwa saw this river as solution. He taught himself Italian and approached the Italian people for assistance to build a dam on the river and install a turbine to pump water for domestic and irrigation use, hence transforming the area. He founded three boarding schools and thirty mobile nursery schools, which gave the possibility to 2,000 poor nomadic children access to quality primary and secondary education.

In 1998, Fr. Riwa was appointed diocesan medical director to oversee the 46 dispensaries and 7 hospitals under the care of the Diocese of Meru and to begin a new parish in Nchiru. Working in the city of Meru, he was appalled by the hundreds of children living and begging on the streets of Meru. This was a sight he did not encounter in the desert region of the north and it bothered him deeply. On August, 18, 1999, he rescued nine thin and starving street children, took them to his parish, and the Children's Village was born.

Fr. Riwa also serves on the diocesan executive committee advising the Bishop of Meru. In 2009, in recognition of his leadership and service to the community, Riwa was installed as an elder by the village chiefs; a rare event for a non-Kenyan.

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**This biography and other materials pertaining to Fr. Riwa's U.S. visit can be found on the *Friends of Kenyan Orphans* website at [www.friendsofkenyanorphans.org](http://www.friendsofkenyanorphans.org).**