

Most Rev. Dennis Vincent Durning, CSSp

Date of Birth: May 18, 1923

Ordained: June 3, 1949

Consecrated Bishop: May 28, 1963

*Spiritans Missionary and Retired Bishop of Arusha, Tanzania
Native of Philadelphia, PA*

Most Rev. Dennis V. Durning, C.S.Sp., a Philadelphia native, member of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and retired Bishop of Arusha, Tanzania, died February 21, 2002 after a short illness, in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. Bishop Durning was born May 18, 1923 in Philadelphia, PA. He took first vows in the Congregation of the Holy Ghost in July, 1944 and was ordained to the Priesthood on June 3, 1949. He was assigned to the District of Kilimanjaro, Tanzania in 1950, where he served as a missionary until being named Bishop of the Diocese of Arusha, Tanzania. He was consecrated Bishop in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Philadelphia, by Most Rev. Archbishop John J. Kroll on May 28, 1963.

The newly-formed Diocese of Arusha included 27,000 square miles in northern Tanzania and was named after the city of Arusha, the second largest city in Tanzania. Bishop Durning governed there for 26 years. The large town of Arusha and some of the smaller towns had Catholic communities and churches already in existence. The core of these communities were mostly formed from people who had moved there from other parts of the country. Others from the local areas then sought to be baptized and join the church. In the immediate vicinity of Arusha town, first evangelization began with the Waarusha and Meru tribes in particular. However most of the work of first evangelization in the vast rural areas of the Diocese was with the Maasai tribe, nomadic cattle-keepers who maintained their traditions while much of Africa was modernizing. Spiritans such as Frs. Eugene Hillman, Edward Kelly, Vincent Donovan, Thomas Tunney, Dennis Durning and numerous others pioneered the work of evangelization and outreach to the Maasai tribe in the 1950's. After he was named Bishop of Arusha, Bishop Durning placed great emphasis on the training of local catechists to assist these missionaries in the work of evangelization.

During his Episcopacy, Arusha Diocese saw its number of local Tanzania-born priests increase from one to twenty-two. The number of baptized Catholics increased six-fold and the number of parishes and outstations increased five-fold. Bishop Durning also introduced no less than seven other religious orders of men and six of women to the Arusha Diocese to undertake and staff apostolic works, schools, hospitals and a variety of other pastoral and developmental initiatives. He strongly promoted the training of Catechists and the development of lay leadership in the church. He greatly encouraged the Spiritan Associates program, hosting more than 35 Spiritan Associate volunteers over the years from the U.S. East Province, as well as other volunteers from Austria, England, Germany and Holland.

In 1989 Bishop Durning resigned as Bishop and a Tanzanian, Rev. Fortunatus Lukanima, was named Bishop to replace him. After a year of fund-raising for the Arusha Diocese in the United States, Bishop Durning returned to Tanzania to work as a Parish Priest in the neighboring Diocese of Mbulu, as Pastor of the Catholic Mission at Bashay. Bishop Durning remained there as Pastor, while helping with the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Mbulu Diocese, and occasionally ordaining Spiritans from the East Africa Province and the U.S. East, until his recent illness.

The Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated on March 2, 2002 at the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Arusha, Tanzania, where he served as Bishop for 25 years, and he was buried in the Holy Ghost Cemetery in Usa River, Tanzania. Cardinal Bevilacqua presided at a Memorial Mass at SS Peter and Paul Cathedral, Philadelphia on Saturday, March 2 at 10:00AM.