

## TOGO PROVINCE

### Togo and Benin

Official Language: **French**

#### Vision Statement

*Inspired by the Word and guided by the Spirit, for the Reign of God amongst all peoples. The Incarnate Word and the Spirit of the Risen Lord are the sources of our energy, and we are thus sent forth to the entire humanity as witnesses to God's presence and reign.*

#### Mission Statement

*We actualize our mission by constantly renewing our way of life as religious missionaries, and by contributing towards a viable local church in particular, and through integral programs of development of the civil society in general in the areas where we live and work.*

### 1. Societal Setting

**Togo:** Since its independence from France in 1960, Togo has struggled to build a stable country and economy. Following four decades of heavy-handed rule under Gnassingbé Eyadema, his son has ruled since his death in 2005. Since 2007, Togo has held multiple presidential and legislative elections that were deemed generally free and fair by international observers. However, political reconciliation has moved slowly, with opposition par-



ties insisting that important political measures such as presidential term limits and electoral reforms need to be implemented.

Togo's population is estimated at nearly 8 million people of some forty ethnicities. With nearly 60% of its populace under the age of 25, its median age is 19.8 years. Some 55% of the population lives below the poverty line. Despite ordinary people's daily struggles, Togo is enjoying a period of steady economic growth with increased political stability. The economy depends heavily on both commercial and subsistence agriculture,

which provides employment for around 60% of the labor force. Cocoa, coffee, cotton and other agricultural products generate about 20% of export earnings. Togo is among the world's largest producers of phosphate, which provides more than 20% of export earnings.

Christians account for 29% of the population, Muslims 20%, with nearly half of the population maintaining indigenous beliefs.

**Benin:** Like Togo, Benin gained independence in 1960. After a series of military governments, Benin has had free elections since 1991, although allegations of irregularities sometimes surface.

Benin's population stands at 11 million people, with some 55 different ethnic groups. Almost 65% of the population is under the age of 25, bolstered by high fertility and population growth rates. The median age is 18.2 years. About 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. Benin's economy has had steady growth in recent years, averaging about 5% annually. Cotton is a key export commodity; high prices supported export earnings, but prices have fallen. Inflation has subsided and remains just 1% over the past several years.

The religious affiliation of the population is as follows: Muslim 27.7%, Roman Catholic 25.5%, Protestant 13.5%, Vodoun 11.6%, other Christian 9.5%, other traditional religions 2.6%, other 2.6%, and none 5.8%.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

Togo has a unique relationship with the SVD when it comes to its Church history. Although Protestant missionaries were already present here, and with the exception of one SMA Catholic missionary who tried without much success to establish a Christian community in the mid-southern part of this country, it was the privilege of Arnold Janssen to send the first-ever Catholic missionaries to Togo, at the request of Leo XIII. The five SVD missionaries - three brothers and two priests of German origin - arrived here on August 27, 1892. More SVDs and then SSPs followed, and Christian communities were established at several parts of the then German-protected country over the years. The first Catholic Bishop of Togo, Franz Wolf SVD, was consecrated in 1914. The First World War, however, saw all the German missionaries deported, and the last of them left in January 1918. Thereupon, Togo became a French colony, up until independence in 1960. The missionary activities continued nonetheless with the SMA missionaries taking on the leadership of the Church here. Togo today has seven dioceses, all of them headed by native bishops. Benin was a French colony ever since the scramble for Africa, until its independence, also in 1960. The SMA missionaries from Lyon, France were the first missionaries there, and in 2011, the local Church in Benin celebrated 150 years of evangelization. The Church in Benin boasts of 10 dioceses with their local leaders, among them one SMA and one Dominican.

The local churches of both these countries, it is safe to say, have thus grown into adulthood. Both the countries have more than 500 diocesan priests each. Togo is presently home to nearly 1,300 religious men and women; in Benin, their number is slightly higher, with a very good number of natives. Both the countries can today boast of democratic governments in place, albeit with their problems, and they are on their way to socio-economic development gradually. Both the countries had experienced, since independence, military and/or Marxist dictatorships; and it is evident that the local Churches made and continue to make an enormous contribution to national reconciliation and solidarity. The role of the Catholic Church in the by-now famous national conferences of both countries, which helped them evolve into democracies, is part of their history and marked in golden letters. Given the volatile situations in some African countries, justice, peace and reconciliation should be an ongoing process. The Church has not backed from this crucial role; the episcopal conferences of both countries have often deplored, through their strong pastoral letters, the lack of political will of the leaders to move their countries in the right direction. They do this while remaining impartial and objective in the political debate.

The SVD came back to Togo in 1974. We began in Benin in 1987. Of the seven dioceses in Togo, we are present in five. Of the 10 in Benin, we are only in two northern dioceses. All the dioceses in these two countries, in spite of their above-mentioned adulthood in terms of history, consider primary evangelization as their essential pastoral

task; and with our missionary charism, we are much wanted and fit into the pastoral framework of the local Church. There are four SVD-run parishes in northern Benin and nine SVD-run parishes in Togo. A tenth parish is in the process of 'being born' and would offer a great opportunity for interreligious dialogue, since it will be created on the outskirts of the main Islamic town, Sokode, in central Togo. The four other SVD communities in the province, besides the 12 parish communities mentioned above, are composed of confreres who are actively involved in other specialized apostolates, including initial formation. These confreres offer a supportive missionary presence to those involved in direct pastoral parish ministry.

### 3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	35	71.4	60.5	58.0
<b>Education</b>	1	2.0	0	0
Schools	1	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	2	4.0	4.9	4.9
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	3	6.1	4.9	4.9
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	9	18.3	13.3	14.6

JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	5	-		

### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/Orientation	1	2.0	13.0	12.2
Retired/Sick	1	2.0	0	0
Others	1	2.0	3.4	4.9

In all we are 49 confreres in perpetual vows here in the province, of 9 different countries of origin. Such diverse international and intercultural presence is much appreciated by the local Church as a true Christian witness. Although it is not without its inherent difficulties, our intercultural teams offer contributions in the given local dioceses that are noteworthy and, if it is any sign of natural appreciation and encouragement, more than one Bishop in both these countries want us to take up more pastoral ministries.

The TOG vision-mission statement approved at the 2009 provincial chapter considers the following as our preferential dialogue partners: men, women, youth, and children of our Christian communities; adherents of African Traditional Religion and Islam. The TOG vision-mission

statement further specifies the diverse forms by which we enter into dialogue with these partners: constant accompaniment of Christian communities - families, Basic Christian Communities, Friends/Associates of the SVD, lay leaders and catechists, farmers and youth, and internally displaced and marginalized persons; as well as through ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue with our partners.

### Characteristic Dimensions

**Biblical Apostolate:** a) *Lectio Divina* and sharing of the Word are very much part of our community/district meetings regularly. b) Trained confreres are teaching and/or animators of the biblical pastoral ministry at different levels. c) Our parishes are venues of biblical pastoral ministry in diverse ways, viz., annual Bible Week, Bible correspondence courses, etc. d) Distribution of thousands of biblical print materials beginning with the Bible, produced by our own publishing houses like Verbum Bible, Edi Verbum and CEBILO, all over West African French-speaking countries.

**Mission Animation:** a) Introduction for new missionaries is a well accompanied program during the first year of their life here, enabling them to enter into dialogue with the local culture, faith groups and other realities of life. b) A wide network of distributors of our mission calendar, biblical diary and other publications of the SVD. c) Presently we are making efforts to create a network of local benefactors. d) Mission awareness is created and spread through parish

lay groups like *Friends of the SVD*. To this group another has been added, that is the *SVD Associates*. This step was needed to reinforce the collaboration with laity, in the light of the Congregational Directions and in our own Action Plan. It was felt that our lay collaborators are to be given the liberty to establish their groups with specific objectives. This will enable the various lay partners interested in the mission and activities of the SVD to belong to a group which could meet their aspirations, interests and expectations.

**JPIC:** a) District coordinators of this area come together at regular intervals to share experiences and concerns, especially in being the voice of the voiceless in our parishes - through tackling of different concrete social (in) justice issues in their daily lives. b) Accompanying youth, especially adolescent girls, in their informal-sector training or in formal education with a view to promoting a better future for the next generation. c) Collaboration with the SSpS here especially in accompanying the HIV/AIDS affected individuals/families. d) Participating in international/inter-congregational training seminars and workshops to improve networking and collaborative ministry in this field.

**Communication:** a) Through local production and distribution of different media material (books, radio programs, CD/DVDs, photos/videos, newsletters, province bulletins, etc.), especially in conjunction with the other three dimensions. b) TOG provincial coordinator for communication is also presently the AFRAM zonal area coordinator for this area and conse-

quently, he can make use of the different province/diocesan/zonal web and blog sites. c) Our parish communities are dialogue partners and/or platforms for effectively communicating the Good News, through the missionary childhood and other youth groups, mothers/women's solidarity groups, etc.

### Priorities among Congregational Directions

**Primary and New Evangelization:** The social and cultural realities of the province are such that we are to adapt our way of evangelization to the reality on the ground. We could effectively carry out evangelization through helping the literacy of the lay people, good formation of our catechists, our publications and giving Bible courses to the lay faithful. There is the need for our parishes to have a well-established pastoral plan for each year.

**Bringing about  
reconciliation and  
peace building  
between the peoples  
of the north and  
of the south.**

**Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue:** Our major ecumenical partners are the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Islam and the Traditional African Religions are our main interreligious dialogue partners. In order for our interreligious dialogue to be more efficient, there is the need for confreres to be formed in the fields of anthropology and Islamic studies. More importance should be given to ecumenical celebrations and joint activities. We however deplore the fact that our Islam experts are usually not open for dialogue.

**Reconciliation and Peace Building:** To be able to work on reconciliation and peace building presupposes that we ourselves cultivate and apply them in our own communities before proposing them to others. We are therefore called to handle the conflicts in our own communities before becoming bridge builders to others.

### Collaboration with SSps and Others

The fact that all the above-mentioned and other related things are done by a group of men and women, belonging to an international missionary family, with members issuing from diverse cultures, races and languages, cannot be hidden; and is talked about and noted - consequently, it has its bearing on the witness value. The members of the Arnoldus Family (TOG is the only province in the whole of Africa where all the three branches of the Arnoldus Family are present) interact with local dialogue partners spiritually, as well as through diverse programs and activities; obviously, thus our leadership and missionary presence are quite relevant and much appreciated.

### SVD Lay Association

As mentioned above, we have two groups established in our parishes, the *Friends of the SVD* and the new *SVD Associates*. We are committed to sharing our heritage of biblical and missionary spirituality with people of good will. We work to pass on leadership skills to capable lay leaders of the local Church.

## 4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	0	1	0
Clerics	47	45	38
Brothers (final vows)	2	3	3
Brothers (temporal vows)	1	0	0
Scholastics	0	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>49</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	45.2	43.7	40.5
Nationalities	9	15	13

**Spirituality:** The Word and the Eucharist remain for us the basic spiritual means of strengthening our local community/district level fellowship and brotherhood. Members participate in the regular recollections organized by the district or diocese, on-going formation sessions and annual retreats. We had the pleasure to benefit, last year, from a retreat organized by our local Arnold Janssen Spirituality team.

**Community Life:** Our mission statement beckons us to constantly improve upon our religious community life, by living our vows and fraternal life more and more faithfully. Weekly/bi-monthly local community meetings, monthly/quarterly district gatherings, an annual gathering of all confreres either for a provincial assembly and/or

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for the annual retreat, sometimes even with the SSpS, all enable us to foster community living. With nearly fifty confreres from ten cultural and national backgrounds, we offer a missionary model for Gospel-living/proclamation and a challenge in intercultural living. We work at overcoming cultural, racial and linguistic differences for the sake of the Kingdom and to manage conflicts that arise in communal living by way of upholding the Kingdom values of reconciliation and peace.

**Leadership:** We are aware of each one's role, as a missionary leader, whatever his function in the province may be. To that extent, each one tries his best to exercise this role. Occasional workshops enable us to train ourselves in some of the leadership qualities before we are able to pass them on to lay leaders, etc.

**Finance:** TOG is still heavily dependent upon the generalate for a lion's share of its budget subsidies. The TOG province, again with the

support of the generalate and other entities, boasts today of a multipurpose center in the northern part of Togo, a center that aims to generate funds. However, there is still a need to keep consolidating these efforts towards self-reliance. We are constantly trying to enable the local Church and the SVD community towards eventual financial autonomy.

**Formation:** We seek the sustained growth of the Society by promoting local missionary vocations. In line with the Congregational Directions, initial formation is intended to be more integral. There is a conscious effort to immerse our postulants into our social and mission contexts. Organized vocation promotion and accompaniment of our aspirants is something recent and picking up. Ongoing formation of our confreres is done informally through sharing of articles, updates on interesting themes, participation with the local clergy in some training sessions/seminars, etc.