

Frans, a lay volunteer from Holland, (right) directs the mechanics course.

The Possible Dream

by DONALD J. CASEY, M.M.

In central Tanzania, a Short Hills, N. J., missionary who saw his parish stymied by poor farming methods and tools, changed things.

YEARS AGO the Sukuma cattle thieves would stand on this rise in the plains to guard against intruders on their work. Popular legend has it that this is the way Ndoleleji—in the local dialect, “on the ridge”—got its name. From this spot in central Tanzania, a person can look over the flat almost treeless plains for miles and see any sign of man or beast.

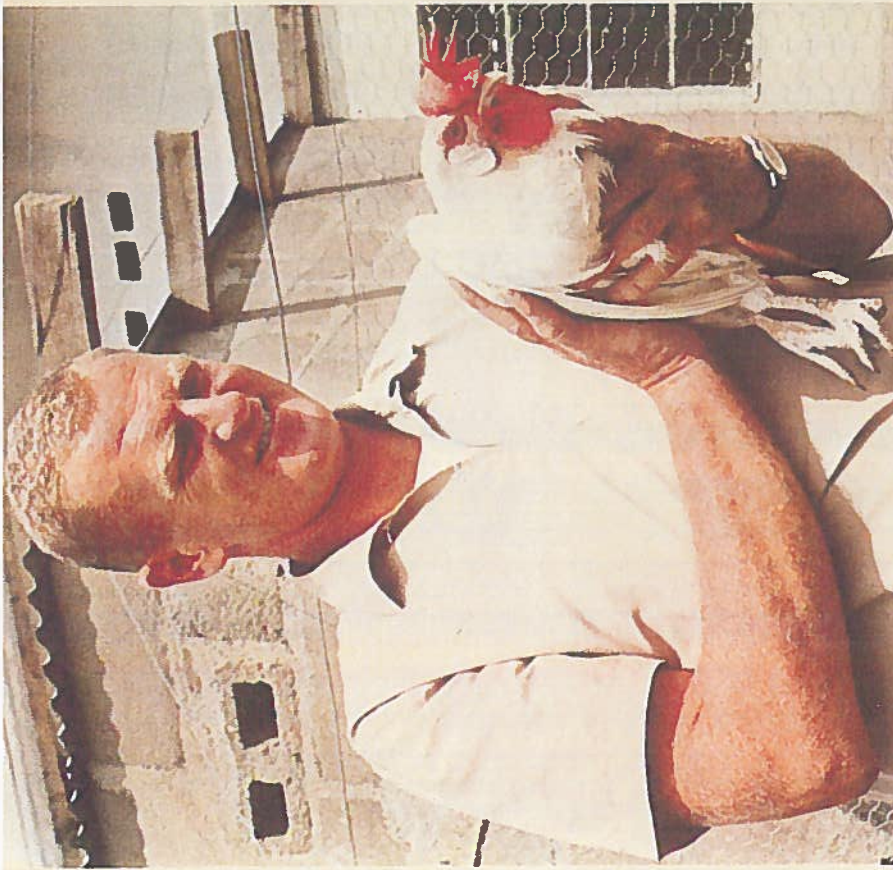
On the other side of a bridgeless

river that isolates it in the rainy season, the parish seems to be in the middle of nowhere. Where do the people come from, a visitor wonders?

As one approaches the parish center, few homes are visible. The sun reflecting off the corrugated roofs of the parish buildings gives the only indication that there is something more ahead. And there is.

Clustered together neatly in these farm lands are a large church,

Father Cotter and the windmill that pumps a thousand gallons of water an hour.



Father Keefe and a white leghorn chicken, one of fifty brought to the area to show the people how to breed better chickens and so improve their diet.

rectory, primary school, homes for teachers and Peace Corps workers, an impressive medical dispensary and a large rectangular building housing the carpentry and mechanics courses.

The man responsible for initiating most of the activity here is a tall, sandy-haired missionary from New Jersey, Father Thomas H. Keefe. He began the parish in 1961 and built the church, trained catechists to

teach the truths of the Faith, and won the friendship of this warm, energetic people.

As he came to know the people, Father Keefe soon realized that they were hindered in their very livelihood, farming, because of old methods.

Even if a few acquired a truck or tractor, often they would lie idle for months because it was too difficult or expensive to get them repaired.

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Father Cotter and **Frons** on the lip of a well, built from bricks made at the parish brickyard. The well contains water through the year, even during the dry season. The people use the water for cooking, washing and irrigating small plots of land nearby. The windmill is a cheap way to pump water from the wells in the river bed to dry land and storage.

Father noticed that many of the methods of farming were wasteful, and erosion was serious.

He decided to change a few things with the help of his curate, Father George C. Cotter, and the lay leaders of his parish.

Frans Van de Laak was a supervisor of buildings in Holland who wished to use his technical knowledge on the missions. He joined Father Keefe and in March 1964 sent a proposal to Misereor, a German Catholic group that provides resources for community development projects. He wanted to train local craftsmen in mechanics, carpentry and modern agricultural methods.

There were a few craftsmen in the area, he noted, but they lacked the proper tools and materials, and their skills were limited. Why not outfit a carpentry shop and a garage, and train Africans to take it over? Misereor and others backed the idea with funds and the "Ndoleleji Rural Community Centre" became a reality in the summer of 1965.

The idea worked so well that in March of the following year Frans made this report:

"In those early months a steady flow of tractors, lorries and cars came in for repairs. We quickly realized that we had grossly underestimated the need for repairs in the area and beyond it."

The center attracted more repair work than it could handle so the staff had to be enlarged. Two more apprentices were added. These men were trained under the condition

that they would work for at least a year in the local area afterwards.

The main purpose of the technical courses was to aid the people in their farmwork. When a tractor replaces an ox, and steel equipment, their wooden precursors, new needs arise. Father Keefe again turned to Misereor for further help. They sent a young Bavarian, the farmer Joseph Rott to assist the program. He summed up his approach this way:

"It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks, but not impossible. The average farmer here is slow to change. He is suspicious of some modern ways and methods, but not all, since he readily accepts plowing co-ops, etc. I know the only way I can make an impression on many people is by example. If my *shamba* (plot of land) is better because of the fertilizer and hoe I use, they will ask me for these things."

With those thoughts in mind, he set about showing the advantage of proper spacing in planting, contour plowing, use of insecticides and fertilizers. New crops like soy beans, lima beans, eggplant, onions, tomatoes and okra, and new improved seed for corn were introduced.

A third element in the Ndoleleji project was the use of the windmill in irrigation. Green crops flourishing in a dark brown countryside are other signs of hope for the local people and an example to follow. Father Keefe hopes that by multiplying windmills, the people will turn this symbol of the dreamer into an instrument of progress. ■ ■