



## PROGETTO DANTE - UMZIMKHULU

*A PROJECT FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT*



The Dante-Umzimkhulu aims to promote the value of the tradition of Italian language and culture as a means of humanising and pacifying the world.

We aim to found a new Dante Alighieri Committee in Umzimkhulu, one of the poorest rural zones in South Africa. It would be run by Koinonia Giovanni Battista<sup>1</sup>, a private Catholic association, whose members speak and live the values of our culture every day.

The new committee's main functions, supported by the Dante Alighieri Society in Durban, would be to carry out important educational work through qualified personnel capable of offering completely free instruction (and not only Italian lessons) to those who don't have the economic and/or transport means by which to educate themselves.

As well as providing Italian language education, this Dante Alighieri committee aims to help the entry of young people from the local populace into the working world, by organizing seminars and professional courses that teach new skills and limit the damaging effects of social exclusion.

The Dante- Umzimkhulu project aims to be a bridge between our two different cultures in order to develop mutual understanding and cooperation between the nations.

This is something that was also highlighted by Pope Francis in a speech on 18 April 2015, after a private audience with the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella. He expressed the wish that "*Italy, considering its noble traditions and a culture inspired largely by the Christian faith, might progress and thrive in harmony by offering its valuable contribution to peace and justice in the world.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.koinoniagb.org/en/>. Visited on 12 October 2006

<sup>2</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150418\\_presidente-repubblica-italiana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/april/documents/papa-francesco_20150418_presidente-repubblica-italiana.html). Visited on 5 November 2016

## **UMZIMKHULU MUNICIPALITY**



Umzimkhulu is a local municipality in South Africa, part of the district municipality of Sisonke of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. According the 2001 census, its population is 174,336<sup>3</sup>.

The administrative and legislative area of Umzimkhulu and its territory extends to 2,435km<sup>2</sup> and is divided into 18 electoral wards.

The local municipality of Umzimkhulu shares a border with Kwa-Sani in the north, with Ingwe in the north and east, with Umzumbe (Ugu) and UbuHlebezwe in the east, with uMuziwabantu (Ugu) in the south and with Greater Kokstad in the west.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.umzimkhululm.gov.za/>. Visited on 12 November 2016

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA AND CRITICALITY**

Umzimkhulu is located in one of South Africa's poorest rural areas, previously known as Transkei, in KwaZulu-Natal. The employment level is very low, with only 12% of residents holding jobs. There is a marked reliance on government services and subsidies. 38% of families report no revenue whatsoever. The recurrence of prenatal HIV is very high: 28% of pregnant women are infected.



## THE DIOCESE OF UMZIMKHULU



The diocese of Umzimkhulu (in Latin: Dioecesis Umzimkulensis) is a See of the Catholic Church and a suffragan of the archdiocese of Durban. In 2010, there were 156,000 baptised Catholics out of 2,097,000 inhabitants. The current bishop is the Rt. Rev. Stanisław Jan Dziuba, O.S.P.P.E. The diocese contains the municipality of Umzimkhulu, where the Lourdes Mission and the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes are located. The area is subdivided into 14 parishes.

The mission is located in the mountainous zone, 1,200 metres above sea level. The economic situation is disastrous and very often the minimum conditions for subsistence are lacking. The population, especially in the more remote rural areas of the local municipality, live in houses made of mud, without electricity and drinking water. The majority of inhabitants in

the area profess to be Christian, including those who adhere to different types of local religious sects, such as, for example, the Shemba Church. According to more realistic statistics, the proportion of Catholics does not exceed 10%.

### THE KOINONIA GIOVANNI BATTISTA FOUNDATION



The mission is managed by the Koinonia Giovanni Battista Foundation, most of whose members are Italian. All of them, in any case, speak Italian. Within the community, in fact, one communicates in Italian, one eats Italian food and one lives *all'italiana*.

In a letter sent to the Koinonia Giovanni Battista Foundation, Bishop Stanislav Dziuba highlighted the presence of the foundation as a sign of a new religious awakening for the Lourdes Mission in a land that in the past has been a source of evangelization.

### ***Koinonia for the poor and the orphans***

Umzimkhulu, the area in which the mission is located, is, as already stated, an extremely poor rural area where the most elementary services are lacking. The collection of clothing and food has begun to be promoted during monthly meetings organised by the mission with families in Durban, and during religious functions. This drive continues successfully, with donations constantly rising.

Faced with the longstanding situation of orphans and children who are unable to obtain public education, the members of the community have begun to register two children in each village, reconstructing their stories in detail and creating a family file for them. The aim is to find a sponsor for each of them, in order to be able to offer them some more hope for the future. The eventual sponsor takes care of all the child's needs. From a first project of long-distance adoption, the mission has passed to a larger-scale project aimed at "orphans and vulnerable children" (OVC). The project provides that specific activities are planned for every child, based on their most pressing needs: HIV consultation and testing, TB screening, a nutrition clinic for underweight children, health assistance, psychological help and support, help with school (for example, with uniforms, fees etc.), improvements in their places of residence etc.

There are currently 1500 children up to the age of 20 involved in the project, as well as 420 tutors. Every one of them is monitored on a monthly basis by health workers, who number around 30.

### ***Koinonia working with and for young people***

The big challenge regarding young people is always the same: offering them the possibility of work and social inclusion. That is particularly the case in an

underdeveloped area such as Umzimkhulu, with a very high level of unemployment.

The community has worked in different ways to reach out to young people, from prayer meetings to sports days. Some professional clubs have been invited to these sports days so that they can see the local youngsters participate in tournaments and competitions on the mission's sports field, which was recently designed by an architect. Indeed, a proper football championship has been formed, involving many teams made up of youngsters aged 14 to 25.

In terms of afterschool activities, the mission has created a play area with table tennis and table football, and also offers help to children with their homework. In the near future, the mission is considering opening a small library replete with books for the youngest groups, as well as installing a small playground in the nearby green spaces.

## THE DANTE ALIGHIERI - LOURDES MISSION PROJECT

*In cooperation with the Mediterranean Shipping Company*



The **Dante-Umzimkhulu** project, as stated, proposes to establish a new Dante Alighieri Committee managed by the members of the Koinonia mission itself and supported by the Dante Alighieri Committee of Durban.

The foundation of such a Dante Alighieri Committee would bring great prestige to Italian cultural and educational activities in all of South Africa, and would draw media attention to the Dante Alighieri Society and its great work in promoting peace and the development of the area. With its efforts provided free of charge and devoted entirely to social work and the most needy, the Dante Alighieri Committee would be a point of pride and would bring no little prestige to Italian culture in all of South Africa.

It would thus be a cultural society with an active role in the promotion of change and social progress, and would stimulate the development of an open society. It would be respectful of cultural diversity and ready to cooperate.

For its part, the Mediterranean Shipping Society would take care of restoring the lustre of the mission's buildings, which in their time formed one of the biggest centres of evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa.

The mission is composed of the big cathedral, the only building that has been refurbished, as well as the ruins of the once flourishing convents and schools. The grounds of the mission also contain the primary and secondary schools, currently frequented by 500 children. The buildings are currently in very precarious conditions, and require costly refurbishing works.



## **THE ADVANTAGES FOR THE DANTE ALIGHIERI**

We wish to promote an international campaign of cooperation that raises media awareness, led by the Dante Alighieri Society. We think that such a project could bring immense benefits to the image of the Dante Alighieri Society and could also bring international prestige to the glorious, longstanding Italian cultural organization.

The Dante Alighieri Society worldwide will contribute by launching a collection of funds, to contribute to the promotion of the campaign and the launch of the new Dante Alighieri Committee in the area.

The total collected funds would be constantly updated on a website or web page constructed specifically for the purpose, and donors would see their names (unless otherwise requested) published in real time on the website. Donations of every amount would be accepted, and furthermore, one could also establish three fixed amounts, each corresponding to a different coloured brick. The bricks, each bearing the name of the donor, would then adorn the walls of the rebuilt hall.

The project would of course be accompanied by an appropriate media campaign, supported by famous South Africans in the world of sport, who would voluntarily lend their images to such an important charity drive.

Finally, all donations received will be entirely devoted to the charitable aims of the project, without any other uses, overheads or associated costs.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

1. To found a new Dante Alighieri Committee in the diocese of Umzimkhulu
2. To promote the image of the Dante Alighieri Society in South Africa and in the world
3. To bring fresh impetus to the educational activities of the mission

## **WHAT DURBAN WOULD PROVIDE**

For the campaign, we in Durban would organise:

- 1) THE MERCHANDISING: Material to distribute and sell to members, students and other interested people, with the aim of attracting the local public to the project.
- 2) LOTTERY: The organisation of a global lottery to help gather funds. The first prize, to be awarded at the end of the campaign, would be a FLIGHT TO DURBAN. The holiday in South Africa would then include ACCOMMODATION IN DURBAN and an MSC CRUISE OF FOUR NIGHTS IN MOZAMBIQUE. The lottery would also award secondary prizes. The various committees could take advantage of such a campaign to create other initiatives that could increase their visibility even more.

Durban would organise and plan the campaign. It would also try to attract other private sponsors and look to include famous South African personalities who would lend their image to such an endeavour.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We would like the Dante Alighieri to have a more active role in the promotion of change and social progress, and to be an agent of development for a more open society, respectful of cultural diversity and open to collaboration.

We would like this project to be just a point of departure. In this and other, future projects, our commitment will be aimed at increasing the visibility of the Dante Alighieri Society in South Africa and in the world, so that it will bring prestige to our glorious association and to Italy as a whole.



La Missione





Ivana Surian  
Photography

*More than 2000 children receiving their Christmas present.*

