

Fr. Fratern Masawe, SJ (1956–2026)

Fr. Fratern Masawe, SJ, was born on 1 August 1956 in Mkuu-Rombo, Tanzania. He was the firstborn son to Mr. Michael Kiwese Masawe and Mrs. Yustina Mtemberi. He grew up in a family of eight children, with four brothers (Fortunatus, John-Eudes, Marcel and Charles) and three sisters (Albertina, Lucia and Digna). He attended Kilema Minor Seminary in Moshi (1971–1974) and Mazengo High School in Dodoma (1975–1976), before undertaking National Service at Makutupora, Dodoma, from 1976 to 1977.

He entered the Society of Jesus on 4 July 1978 in Chelston, Lusaka, Zambia. After his novitiate (1978–1980), he studied philosophy at Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin, Ireland (1980–1982). He subsequently taught Religious Education during his Regency in Dodoma (1982–1984), before pursuing theological studies at Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya (1984–1987). He was ordained a priest on 28 June 1987 in Moshi, Tanzania. From 1987 to 1989, he pursued a Licentiate in Pastoral Theology and Catechesis at the Lumen Vitae Institute in Louvain, Belgium.

Following his studies, Fr. Masawe served as Jesuit Vocation Promoter in Tanzania from 1989 to 1994. From 1990 to 1994, he was Priest-in-Charge of the Mwanza Public Oratory (St. Francis Xavier Church), while also serving as community superior, Provincial Delegate for Tanzania and a member of the Province Consult. In 1994, he became Country Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Tanzania, serving in Ngara until 1995. After completing his Tertianship in Detroit, USA (1995–1996), he served as Socius to the Provincial of Eastern Africa from 1996 to 1998. He pronounced his Final Vows at Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya, on 8 December 1996.

In February 1998, Fr. Masawe was appointed Provincial of the Eastern Africa Province (AOR) by Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, serving from 1998 to 2004. He became the first African Provincial of the Province, a significant milestone that reflected the growth and maturity of the local Church and the Society of Jesus in Eastern Africa. His leadership was marked by a commitment to strengthening Jesuit communities, developing apostolic works and fostering collaboration across the region.

He was appointed Moderator of the Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (JESAM) by Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach on 20 April 2004, a role he held until 2011, during which period he worked to strengthen collaboration among Jesuit Provinces, Regions and apostolic institutions throughout the continent.

In 2012, Fr. Masawe joined the General Curia in Rome after being appointed General Councillor and Regional Assistant for Africa and Madagascar by Fr. General Adolfo Nicolás, SJ. He became a member of the General Council of the Society of Jesus, bringing to the universal leadership his extensive experience of the African Church and Jesuit apostolates. During the 36th General Congregation, held in October and November 2016, he was elected Assistant *ad providentiam*, a responsibility that placed him among those entrusted with the care and support of the Superior General. His wisdom, prudence, discretion and deep commitment to Ignatian

service made him a trusted collaborator in the governance and pastoral care of the worldwide Society of Jesus.

Fr. Masawe also made a significant contribution to Jesuit higher education in Africa, helping to advance a sustainable, mission-centred vision for Jesuit colleges and universities across the continent. In recognition of his visionary leadership and distinguished service to Jesuit education, he received the St. Peter Canisius Medal in 2025. His commitment to the formation of young people extended beyond formal education. He served as International Chaplain of the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS/MIEC Pax Romana) from 2016 to 2019 and as Pan-African Chaplain of the same movement from 2006.

A man of broad interests, Fr. Masawe spoke Chagga, Kiswahili, English and French. He enjoyed reading novels, playing football, listening to pop music, adventure, cycling and playing cards. These personal interests complemented a life characterised by a strong sense of duty, an appreciation of people and a willingness to accompany others in their spiritual and human journeys.

In June 2025, Fr. Masawe suffered a heart attack and underwent an extended period of convalescence. He continued to reside in the community of the General Curia in Rome and retained his responsibility as *Assistant ad providentiam*. During his recovery, his duties as Regional Assistant for Africa and Madagascar were carried out on an interim basis by Fr. Chukwuyenum Afiawari, SJ, who has concurrently served as Director of Communications of the Society of Jesus.

As his condition deteriorated in early October 2026, Fr. Masawe was transferred to the infirmary at Canisius House, adjacent to the General Curia, on 8 October. He died on 19 October 2026 at approximately 6:00 p.m., at the age of 70.

Fr. Fratern Masawe is remembered as a humble servant of the Church, a wise counsellor, a dedicated Jesuit and a tireless advocate for the mission of the Society of Jesus in Africa and throughout the world. From his early pastoral ministry in Tanzania to his service in the leadership of the universal Society, he devoted his life to strengthening the Church, accompanying those in need and fostering collaboration in the service of faith and justice. His legacy lives on in the people he accompanied, the institutions he helped strengthen and the generations inspired by his leadership and example.

May he rest in the peace of Christ whom he served so faithfully.