News



Four members of the Missionary Sisters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus in Tanzania who tragically lost their lives in a road accident in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mwanza. (Courtesy of Suore Carmelitane Missionarie Italia Malta Romania)



by Doreen Ajiambo

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Mwanza, Tanzania — September 19, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Four members of the Missionary Sisters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and their driver were killed Sept. 15 in a road crash in northern Tanzania, cutting short a journey that began with a joyful religious celebration.

Archbishop Renatus Leonard Nkwande of the Archdiocese of Mwanza confirmed the deaths in a statement, calling the tragedy a heavy loss for the church.

"It is with regret that I announce the passing on of four Carmelites who were serving at Bukumbi Girls' Secondary School, together with their driver," Nkwande said. "Further arrangements will be communicated later."

Mwanza Regional Police Commander Wilbrod Mtafungwa confirmed that the fatal crash occurred at about 7:50 a.m. local time on Sept. 15 in Bukumbi village, while the sisters were en route to Mwanza Airport.

Police said the Toyota Land Cruiser carrying the sisters veered into the opposite lane, colliding head-on with a truck; investigators said the vehicle apparently tried to overtake another car before veering into the opposite lane.

Advertisement

The victims were identified as Sr. Lilian Gladson Kapongo, 55, general superior of the congregation and a native of Tabora, Tanzania; Sr. Maria Nerina De Simone, 60, an Italian national who served as general councilor and general secretary; Sr. Damaris Matheka, 51, a Kenyan national and provincial councilor for the Province of East Africa; Sr. Stellamaris Muthini, 48, also from Kenya; and their driver, Mr. Bonifasi, 53.

A fifth passenger, Sr. Pauline Vicent Mipata, 20, survived the crash and remains hospitalized in critical condition at Bugando Zonal Referral Hospital in Mwanza. The truck driver remains in custody for questioning, according to police.

From celebration to mourning

The sisters had traveled from their community in Bukumbi to Ngaya in Kahama Diocese — about 250 kilometers (155 miles) west of Mwanza — to attend the perpetual profession of three members of their congregation, a milestone ceremony marking a lifetime commitment to religious life. After bidding farewell to the

diocesan bishop, they were heading to Mwanza Airport to catch a flight to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's commercial hub on the Indian Ocean coast, when the crash occurred.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan expressed condolences to the Carmelite Missionary Sisters, the Catholic community and the victims' families, praying for eternal rest for the deceased and a swift recovery for the survivor.

"I am deeply saddened by the news of the passing of the four Sisters of the Carmelite Missionaries of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus together with their driver, following a road accident in Mwanza," Samia posted on her official social media platforms.

The tragedy has renewed attention to road safety in Tanzania, where police report thousands of fatalities annually due to speeding, poor vehicle maintenance and dangerous overtaking. Mwanza regional authorities have urged motorists to strictly observe traffic regulations to avoid further loss of life.

Nkwande has called for spiritual solidarity as the church prepares funeral arrangements: "Let us pray for and console the community of the Sisters of this Congregation in Ngaya. This is truly a heavy loss for them and for all of us."