



MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA  
**Ghana-Nigeria Link**



## **OUR MISSION IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19:**

***The joys of the Mission Vs the challenges of Covid-19***



**May 2021**

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Rwandan proverb:

**“Imitunu y  
igikeri ntibuza  
ingwe kunywa  
amazi.”**

(literal translation : The big  
eyes of a flog do  
not prevent a  
leopard to drink  
water from the  
stream.)

## ***Editorial***

Once again, the Media Team of the Ghana-Nigeria Province is happy to present the first of the two numbers it has pledged to publish in a year. But it has been a birth with quite a few complications, setbacks and even at times a bit of frustration. Though the reactions to the previous numbers have been very positive and encouraging, showing the appreciation people have for this publication, we must also honestly admit that the "time of pregnancy", was a cumbersome one. We are grateful for those who accepted our invitation to share with us their first missionary experiences. They are indeed very varied: describing how we are like a constantly being updated App in Mission, or sharing with us the hesitant steps at the beginning of the Mission, in some places including almost daily experiences of grave danger and great insecurity. It is great to read the joy of a confrere being involved in Youth Apostolate or in Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims. Thank you for your wonderful sharing. We are also grateful for those who heeded our general appeal for a contribution to this number. Very good advice is given: we should not limit our "giving hope" to only pandemic victims, while forgetting those suffering from other terrible diseases, such as HIV or Aids. And we should not forget to take care of ourselves, particularly when getting ready for a new challenge. Read how a confrere describes his few months of sabbatical. Praise God! As another confrere advises us, we should not be afraid to visit psychotherapists from time to time. Someone else shares with us the message from a short film released on the 21 April, on Netflix, entitled *From 'Zero: Being invisible is the true power'*, To be honest, I don't think that I have yet grasped that message!!

Of course, we are also happy to share with you a selection of news from the Province, and in great sympathy with those who have been mourning, a list of close relatives of members of our Province who departed from this life and have no doubt entered the Glory promised to us all by the Risen Christ.

Let me conclude by already at this moment appealing to all of you to cooperate with the Media Team when it will be preparing the end-of-November issue of this Magazine. It looks still far away, but in fact it is also already "close at hand"!!

**André Schaminée, M.Afr.**

## *Provincial's Word:*



**“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” – John 20:19-23.**

Happy feast of Pentecost! After celebrating Easter, we spent some weeks praying and waiting for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to restore our faith. Many times in our apostolate, we face challenges that test our faith. We ask ourselves, what am I doing with the power of the Holy Spirit I received? Is the Spirit alive, dormant or dead? We examined ourselves and we asked God to reawaken, renew, stir up and set ablaze the Holy Spirit within us.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples, they were (Luke 24:37) surprised and frightened and they thought they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus immediately put them at ease and told them “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” With these words of encouragement, Jesus restored and strengthened their faith.

As we witness for Christ, we too are assured that the Spirit will empower us. Je-



sus will pour out the Spirit upon us to do great things for him. We must remember that Jesus is the One who has commissioned us and sent us forth. He will not abandon us as helpless servants. In fact, we accepted this responsibility knowing that the Holy Spirit, our Helper will be with us.

Even though we received the Spirit when we were baptized, we must keep on believing and receiving. We have already experienced a lot, but there is yet more to come. Through the Spirit, Jesus will always strengthen our faith, and enable us to be prophetic witnesses. May the gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord be seen in our lives.

As we share and learn about our Missionary engagements, let us continue to open up our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit and may we bear fruits of Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control (Gal.5:22-23).

**Fr. John Aserbire, M. Afr.**

**Provincial of GhN Province**

## THE WAR IN ITURI AND WHO ARE FIGHTING?

In the beginning, “CODECO” was initially called CODEZA which means **“Cooperative for the Development of Zaïre”**, created in 1990, which ten years later became CODECO. CODEZA, according to Bruno (an elderly man), was promoting agriculture and food security in the region. CODECO now has a new meaning **“Cooperative for the Development of Congo”**. The new Cooperative for the Development of Congo is neither for promoting agriculture nor food security but now consists rather of a well-armed rebel group, killing every living human being they come across on their way. This rebel group was created by a certain KAKADO Bernad (healer) in Getty -60 kilometers from Bunia town- the capital town of Ituri between 1990 and 1991. It operated in the entire Walendu Binedi (a tribe) area with the head office in Kisezo, 18 km from Nyakunde and 14 km from Marabo in the Mobala chiefdom. Kisezo is a locality of the chiefdom of Mobala inhabited by the Ngiti of the Bira (a tribe). The war is ethnic/political as well as economic, but the rivalry between the two tribal groups is surely the major cause.

Below is a picture of CODECO fighters who arrived in Bunia town for the liberation of their brothers in the prison of Bunia on the 04 September.2020 at 9:29 am.



During the night fighters attacked Nyakunde. People were killed. Some Hemas and Biras were victims of this attack at Nyakunde. This caused a furious anger to every

tribe that has their brothers or sisters victims of the rebels' fighters. The Lendu fighters succeeded in occupying Nyakunde. Ethnic clashes (Hema and Lendu) continued to spread over all the region of Ituri till today. Some observers doubt the capacity of the Lendu resistance and their audacity to attack regularly, kill, and burn houses without the intervention of the Congo military or of the well-armed MOUNCO.

Some people suspected external support from the Mai-Mai or Ugandan rebels from Rwenzori as well as some persons from Rwanda. In the town of Bunia, there was great panic in the heart of everybody, including me. On the Mahagi-Bunia road, I noticed a foreign presence among the CODECO, physically Tutsi from Rwanda.

The Lendu settled in the CODECO in the Babira group of Musero, where the Ngiti have been living since time immemorial. This makes it seem like a conflict of land or a territorial war. With the war still on till today in Ituri, the Ngiti, also called Lendu Sud, have seen their numbers grow. Then in this light, I can say CODECO is a cooperative created by the Ngiti, probably the headquarters of the Lendu who attacked the Hema, Mobala, Bunyaka, Kunda and Borgoro. The road from Bunia to the others towns is very dangerous. A lot of CODECO barriers and you need to pay before you can pass. I testify that I escaped death many times on these roads by divine intervention.

### **GENOCIDE IN ITURI**

The number of people killed in the Ituri region is more than of people killed in Rwanda during the genocide. But the international community is not ready to say the truth or acknowledge that it is a genocide. There is a sort of hypocrisy in the war of Ituri. Many Congolese are in terms with some foreigners to perpetrate the war here because of economic gain. Everyday people are killed, innocent people, burnt alive in the villages and in the farms. But the press refuses to report about it. We continue to record attacks and killings orchestrated by CODECO militiamen on the Bunia-Mahagi road. The intensity of the gunfire increases from one minute to the next. In the town of Bunia and its surroundings, heavy gunfire and the rumbling of heavy weapons are often heard. I testify that the CODECO are better armed than the Congo Military. Where they can get these weapons, only God knows. The Congolese military is afraid of them. The rebel fighters usually attack the people, armed

with weapons, bows and arrows or cutlasses. People are cut to pieces or retreat in disarray or live in the open air.



With the war in the Ituri region of Congo, many displaced persons in Bunia live in schools and abandoned warehouses. There are a lot of displaced persons in Bunia town, including a lot of street children and men. The camps for the displaced are still multiplying because of this situation. Food crises are in the increase because those who were cultivating in their farms to supply the town of Bunia are now living in the refugees' camps. Refugees' camps are everywhere. Living conditions are very poor. There is no food and no water for these innocent victims of this stupid war. No future for them and their children.

Below is Francis Xavier A. at one of the Refugees Camps in Ituri.



Despite the fact that the killing continues every day, there is zero action from the government and the military, nor by the United Nations in Ituri. The long-lasting war in Ituri led to witch hunts and settlements of scores between people. The nights are more dangerous than the day time. CODECO kills, burns bodies in the house, throw some of them into the toilet or abandon naked bodies on the spot. The human being is nothing to them. See below the pictures:





Like the prophet Jeremiah, I can say that I was praying for peace every day and every second, but nothing good comes. Sleep has left my eyes. I have to sleep with one eye open to see when they will be coming. I want to be courageous but it is fear that comes to me. I was waiting for the moment of deliverance but only experience the punishment of war. When I enter the towns or villages, I see the dead. I feel limited and I cannot help much. Let us continue to pray for peace. Everybody is traumatized by the war.

The war in Ituri is invaded by lies. And I can say the people are invaded by lies. The suffering of people here is due to lies and not telling the truth. There are a bunch of traitors both Congolese and foreigners mixed up. There are some people when they come to Ituri, they put a lot of oil on the fire to keep it burning hotter than before. They sit in Kinshasa the capital of Congo and format the war. Their tongue is as dangerous as a bow. They have become masters of Ituri not through

truth, but through lies. They are great manipulators. Wealth seekers, they are ready to kill people to get wealth. Yes, they go from crime to crime, but no one seems to know them.

### **ECCLESIASTICAL SITUATION IN BUNIA**

The church is not spared in this situation. Some priests are captured and taken into the forest where they are tortured. There is no love here and people wonder what has happened to the Gospel, asking all Christians to love their neighbour as the ethnic situation continues to influence interpersonal relations, especially among the clergy. It is a situation that bothers us as missionaries. There are priests who leave their parishes because they do not belong to this or that ethnic group. As for us Missionaries of Africa, we always try to live the principle of "being in the middle of the village" (so to speak, avoiding bias) but we are accused for being partial for a particular tribe. Our way of living and acting can perhaps also evangelise the church that has welcomed us. But I doubt much whether the gospel we preach has any meaning in the lives of people. People come to church for refuge or to seek divine protection.

Some parishes have been erected elsewhere because of insecurity. Others are empty of priests because of the insecurity. In our parish of St Charles Lwanga of Yambi-Yaya in Bunia, some outstations are no longer functioning because of the war. Five outstations have been taken over by the militiamen. All the Christians in those outstations are gone. We do not know where they are currently. Only few are seen in the town of Bunia. Maybe some are killed and some live in the refugee camps. Many church buildings have been destroyed. Many Christians are losing their faith because of the long-lasting trauma they are going through. Some are seeking for miracles from the Protestant churches. What is more disturbing is that many young Catholics are joining the militia because it is surest way to get money and security. Nobody can be trusted. Each one deceives the other. No one tells the truth; all have become accustomed to lying. They act so badly that they cannot return to the Lord with all their hearts. They go from one violent act to another violent act, from one lie to another lie. They refuse to acknowledge God as the creator of all life. Ituri is in a time of weeping and lamenting and this will be for a very long time. But the Congolese politician with the tongue of these people is like an arrow that kills.

Their mouths tell lies. They are unable to stop the war because it brings in a lot of money for them. I can say that the many natural resources is the major cause of the war in Ituri.

Ituri province is turning into a desert of sadness, where people cry and complain. When will peace come? Everyone is a stranger in his/her own house. Their eyes overflow with tears, that water floods our eyelids; I think they will be heard by God one day for the long-awaited peace. For me, there is not a man wise enough to understand this war or stop it. I cannot explain why Ituri is destroyed by war, why CODECO burn houses and the place is like a desert where no one passes. Positive developments are handicapped and delayed. There is no law and justice. The war is aiming to totally suppress some people and occupy their land.

Are natural resources a curse for Ituri? We wait for law and justice for the land of Ituri. We are waiting for the day when the government will be ready to put an end to the war. Yes, that will please all the people in Ituri. And that will be the beginning of freedom and paradise on the land of Ituri.



**Fr. Francis Xavier ANGKOSAALA, M,Afr.**

## My Mission at Sharing Youth Centre in the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Many confreres have got a very warm reception by sustainability of the people. Unheard about Sharing Youth members of the community. fortunately, those intended for Centre, but only a few have an Right from the beginning, I had these palliatives did not receive idea of what it is all about. For this confidence that I would live enough items for their sustainability. As a centre, little contributions were made and donated this reason, allow me to begin a fruitful mission here. I think bility. As a centre, little contributions were made and donated this piece by giving a brief introduction of the centre. Sharing Youth Centre is a youth encounter centre intended to empower the youths within the slums of Kampala. It was founded by a Dutch confrere

called Albert Fleskens in 1977. In Uganda, like many other nations, the sting of Covid-19 was greatly felt. It all began in March when the first case was identified and the whole nation panicked. As a way of curbing the spread of the virus, the government established a situation.

The centre is known for its deep enrichment and dynamism in the holistic development of youths in Kampala. Six departments are typical of the centre, viz., pastoral, catering, hair-dressing, metal fabrication, sports and carpentry. Although it was founded by a confrere, it belongs to the archdiocese of Kampala.

At the end of my theological studies in Nairobi, I was appointed to this centre. I received it with great joy because of my love for the youth apostolate. I arrived at the centre on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 and

When the lock-down was lifted, some sectors remained closed. One of those sectors is the religious sector. This means that churches remained closed even when markets were opened. It affected the pastoral department of our centre. It also affected the sacramental life of our Christians. It is true that many of them participated in life-stream Masses,

but they all expressed that they workers and the bills animate retreats and workshops felt that something was lacking. (electricity, water etc.) were the etc. Since it's a vocational institution, we ensure that the them what spiritual communion institutions sacked their workers various educational and training means. Thanks be to God that because of lack of income. ing activities or programs are the Churches in Uganda have Through our efforts and creation properly carried out on a daily basis. For example, we move been allowed to operate, re- tivity, we were able to provide around the various departments specting the standard operating solutions to these issues.

We have Masses My apostolate in Shar- in the centre every morning every day at the centre. Our ing Youth Centre has been ensuring that all workers are Sunday Masses attract a huge fruitful and productive. On arrival present and active. It is one number of youths in Kampala val, I was given the opportunity thing to be present, it is another because of their vibrancy. Alt- to learn the local language, Lu- to be active.

hough our Masses are vibrant, ganda. It is a beautiful language we still maintain the standard that has a certain sort of flow in operating procedures as stipu- its tonality. It is a language that lated by the government, like enters very smoothly in the the wearing of face-masks, the rhythm of music. Although it is use of alcohol-based hand sani- a nice language, it is not the tizers, the observation of physi- easiest to learn. Our centre is a cal distancing etc. In order to multi-cultural and multi- ensure the proper observance of national arena where people these procedures, a Covid-19 from different cultures and nationalities meet. Because of task force was established at the tionalities meet. Because of centre these variables, all activities in

Schools and institutions the centre are carried out in were seriously hit by the sting English. Our weekday and Sunday of this pandemic. Our centre is day Masses are all celebrated in a vocational institution which English.

was greatly affected. It was Finally, there is in fact a closed for more than four whole lot of things to do at the months. Of course, if an institu- centre. One cannot be bored tion doesn't function for a long here. Apart from celebrating time, its sustainability is affect- Masses, we visit our Christians, ed. The payment (salaries) of anoint the sick, counsel people,



**Anthony Ezenweke, M.Afr.**



## *Photo Gallery of activities at Sharing Youth Center*



## *My Missionary Experience in the Province of Maghreb*

My nomination to the Province of Maghreb was received with great joy. Not because that was my first time of leaving West Africa, but for some other reason. Just a reminder: my formation journey has always been in West Africa: preparatory session in Ibadan, philosophical studies in Ejisu (Kumasi), novitiate in Bobo Dioulasso, stage in Koudougou, still in Burkina Faso, not too far from where I had my spiritual year and Theology in Abidjan (Ivory Coast). I was particularly happy because I was hoping to be sent to the desert where I could already enjoy some kind of “sabbatical years” in disguise since the general perception is that there is very little to do here in Maghreb. This is, however, not the case and you will understand why in the following paragraphs. My first community of mission was Our Lady of Africa Basilica, Algiers, the birth place and root of our humble Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers).

I obtained my visa in a relatively short time, which was and still is a miracle and a blessing in the eyes of many. A blessing from the 19 martyrs of Algeria who were to be beatified two months after my arrival on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2018.

### **My Cultural Insertion and Transition Process.**

I was already late for local Arabic lessons upon my arrival on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2018 which was to take place in Ghardaia, in one of our communities and with a confrere as my teacher and a Rev Sister and another confrere as learning mates. Travelling to the desert was further delayed because I had to secure my provisional residence permit for 3 months before leaving, as issues in this matter are very delicate here. And within this time, one of our elder brothers (a confrere) with whom we had just celebrated the 150 years of the opening of the first novitiate of the White Fathers, in the chapel where they took their habits, passed on to the eternal Father. I finally started learning spoken Arabic dialect (Dherja) at the end of October 2018 with the others who had already done 4 lessons. I say spoken Arabic because I have not started learning the classic Arabic that is studied in schools and used in writing.

The cultural transition which is dear to the Missionaries of Africa, as our Founder Cardinal Lavigerie wished, is still ongoing here in Algiers like in many other places. But it is more painstaking for me. There are several factors. Firstly, the majority of the population is Muslim. That isn't a difficulty as such. The difficulty lies in the fact that a strong minority thinks that all Algerians are Muslims and if one is not a Muslim, he/she is working for the French government. This shows how religion, politics and colonialism are firmly twisted and bound in their mental makeup. They are also very different from West African states because of the philosophical identity: Algeria my land,

Islam my religion and Arabic my language which has its origin in a larger conception of the unification of the Arab world. This is already a great challenge for a personal encounter which is the base of every transition, because I found myself most of the time with priests and religious who are not natives.

This leads us to a second factor which slows down cultural transition. It's very difficult to make friends who are not of the same culture, religion and even skin colour. And those willing to encounter others fear the societal look. It is stunning to know that up till now, I have never paid a home visit to an Algerian friend except one of our neighbours who has started inviting the community for "iftour" that is the meal at the end of the fasting day.

These two major factors one leading to the other and others impede learning the language and the culture, making the cultural transition burdensome because much of it is theory and personal observation and very little explanation.

It is evident that the Algerian socio-political arena is undergoing serious mutation. The political contestation which started on 22 February 2019, that was baptized "Hirak" (the movement) against the then President Abdelaziz Bouteflika seeking a fifth presidential mandate in a wheel chair, took a more radical turn as series of public civil mass protest every Friday and later every Tuesday with students finally pushing the president, of course with some pressure from military authority, to resign on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2019. Since then, people seem to speak freely and maybe as a result several civilians were also arrested. There was finally a presidential election after the first two attempts had failed and on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019 a President was elected in the person of Abdelmadjid Tebboune. His election is contested because it is seen by a part of the population as a continuation of the old regime since independence (5<sup>th</sup> July 1962) that is not responding to the needs of the people. This political and civilian unrest that was kept in a sleeping mode because of Covid-19 made its come back and continues today with a lot of police surveillance. The new and modern technology of communication is no doubt a master piece of this vast change that has penetrated the Algerian society.

I feel particularly favoured to have been in the basilica where a lot of contact is made with people from all walks of life and Algerians in particular. But, honestly, most of the time, I only know what they think and show me outwardly about themselves and others than what they live. In short, I'm full of "hearsays".

What is encouraging is that I receive a lot of moral and spiritual support from confreres which keeps me going. Most of the help comes from the confreres which reduces the shock and discouragement.



### **Community life and pastoral activities**

My major activities are divided into two: in the community and in the basilica (parish). As a community bursar, I try to fulfil my duties that we all know very well with the help of confreres. I also participate in planning, organising and executing community projects. This first part we call it here community life.

The second part of my activities in the basilica which we call pastoral work, consists in working with the confreres and other pastoral ministers, laity and religious, in organising programs. Our main mission is being at the service of our Catholic cult. It's important to note that this place is also a Marian sanctuary for pilgrims who have a special devotion to Our Lady of Africa. This points to a second dimension which puts us at the service of cultural diversity as we encounter and dialogue with others from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

This second part opens us up to a series of activities. The basilica is open to visitors every day except on festive days. We receive people, explain the origin of the basilica and try to satisfy their curiosity about Christianity. We also respond charitably to those who come to convert us. We equally organise concerts still with the aim of fostering peaceful co-existence in the spirit of encounter, religious tolerance and dialogue. For 5 years now, a day is dedicated to a topic on Mary. It is named "Journée Mariale Islamo-Chrétienne". Furthermore, events are organised around world events such as the world day of living together on 16<sup>th</sup> of May.

I also do some work of bursary for the basilica and I take charge of a little shop at the entrance of the church which serves as a source of income for the basilica and is above all a memory of the humble beginning of the Basilica.

### **Concluding words of encouragement**

My humble contribution dear to my heart to what can help especially those who are fresh in the mission can be expressed in two points. We need to be attentive to people's talents and aptitudes, and encourage them in doing what they can do best. But we need also to be attentive to their weaknesses only with the desire of helping them overcome these weaknesses. Secondly, much effort should be made in making our communities real homes where each one can blossom with the grace of Jesus Christ.

**Peter Claver KOGH, M.. Afr.**







## *Come as you are! (My Sabbatical Experience)*

People go for sabbatical courses for different reasons and with varied expectations. While some may be rooted in spiritual growth and development, others are meant at improving entrepreneurial prowess, or often there is a combination of both. In any case, individuals who access sabbatical courses never leave the same way as they came; perspectives are widened, fatigues removed, anxieties calmed and new knowledge acquired.

After ten years of missionary experience of which I spent 6 years as Vocations Animator in Nigeria, I felt motivated by the call of Jesus Christ to his people to “come and rest” as narrated in Mathew 6:31 and so requested the Provincial Council for a sabbatical leave which was granted to my delight and I have every reason to be happy with the sabbatical course I have taken so far.

I was privileged to be part of the recent Sabbatical program at St. Anselm in Kenya. The program, although, spiritually oriented, incorporates holistic human development and transformation targeted at enabling attendees not just to better fit into their communities and societies but also to come to terms with themselves as well. The program provides an avenue for holistic self-evaluation ranging from fatigue and restlessness through to burn-outs to near blackouts.

The St. Anselm’s program is meant for the transformation of religious priests, sisters, and brothers through a program of four months at “Chemchemi ya Uzima” (Swahili word for “fountain of life”). We were guided into a deepening of self-integration of the whole personality, God and others. There were 23 participants coming from 5 countries and 13 different congregations for the sole purpose of resting, praying (both personal and communal) and receiving rejuvenation while following psycho-spiritual courses after a period of hard work.

As explained by an author called Wicks, the main objective of the program is to empower individuals to be autonomous in decision making, remain positive about life, have mastery over self, be organized and purposive while respecting other people’s opinion and remaining less judgmental about such opinions.

After so many years of working, people may get exhausted physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.

There is, therefore, a need to listen to and respect all these aspects of our lives and give time to attend to them as demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he took some time out to a lonely place to pray after a period of hard work.

The entire program was fun-filled, educative and transforming. Apart from praying, having games, attending psycho-spiritual courses and resting, we also had times for personal sharing in ‘Growth Groups’ where members were clustered in groups of 6-8 persons with two facilitators. Members were facilitated to identify their needs, potentials and how to be assertive. Each group also had a facilitator (Qualified Counsellor) whom they met once a week to explore their personal issues in a one-on-one encounter.

There was also a larger group where members were tested and challenged in their unconditional positive regard by their peers and facilitators to mutually help each other to grow in healthy and constructive relationships.

We were also divided into three small community groups bearing in mind the different cultural backgrounds to enhance cross-cultural integration and cross fertilization of norms and values. The community took care of doing the dishes and arranging the tables after meals, leading the liturgy and dressing the altar according to the different seasons and feasts of the day. All the three communities took turns in performing these duties. The communities met once a week for meetings and prayers. We also had time for outings (both spiritual and social) and cultural displays.

We had lectures and workshops from Mondays-Fridays. These lectures included courses on the Enneagram, Stages of Human Development, Transactional Analysis, Sexuality, Trinity, different kinds of emotions, Person-to-Person Relationships, Interpretation and Recording of dreams, Decision making, Mid-Life Crisis, Trauma, Communication, Prayers and Discernment to mention but a few.

To a large extent, the Sabbatical program was focused on self-growth. If one was open to the program and listened to one’s inner self, there would be growth. We were invited to take responsibility for our own personal growth

through introspection, silence and reflections; openness to self, others and God, non-judgmental attitude to self and others and to be gentle with oneself and with others. Here in Chemchemi we were told **“Come as you are!”**. I came as I was, and so far, I must confess that I have seen a lot of changes in myself. I realized that whatever happens out there is not the problem, but my reaction to it is the problem. Was I able to unwind? Yes! Was I about to learn more about myself? Yes! I went to the program with a lot of hurt, I was fatigued and judgmental but now I feel refreshed, relieved, lighter, rejuvenated, positive and ready for the mission ahead. I wish to thank the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) for heeding to my request to attend this sabbatical program. Am I ready for the next mission? YES! The Mission of Christ Continues.



***Fr. Victor Domshiwe Shehu M.Afr.***



## VISIT A PSYCHOTHERAPIST

From birth to death human life passes through different stages. Many people find it “normal” to help and be helped from one stage of life to the other. In that process of growth to maturity and coping with life challenges ups and downs are inevitable particularly in time of sickness. Many parents and institutions encourage, and at times force their dear ones to seek medical help until they get total recovery and that we find “normal!” In the spiritual sphere, many people have spiritual directors or companions or they do not hesitate to meet pastors or spiritual leaders to help them out, and again we find it normal. However, there is one area of life that is left aside and once it is affected, it is followed by myths, stigmatization, rejections and many other attitudes that do not encourage recovery; that is mental health! And yet, WHO “defines health as a ‘state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’”. In recent times, the definition of health has even been expanded to include spiritual well-being”<sup>1</sup>.

In so-called normal life, if one mentions mental health, many people think with disdain of psychological problems and psychologists. Many do not know how complex the system is that looks after mental health support. To an extent, some people are easily tagged to be “mad” without a prior assessment, while others who do have mental issues are simply ignored or sidelined from normal life, while again others who claim to be normal, have mental health issues with mild symptoms. The stigma is so deep in our society that even among the most educated people, very few listen with interest to anything related to mental health. At times, introducing someone as a psychologist, attracts him/her to be marginalised as some people find reasons not to associate with that person any longer! However, mental health professionals include psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, counsellors, social workers and others.

In a nutshell, those professionals differ and resemble in the following ways: psychiatrists have a medical degree, and are qualified to assess physical conditions, diagnose medical problems, and prescribe medication; doctoral-level clinical and counselling psychologists are trained in psychotherapy and have considerable expertise in psychological testing; social workers have a longer history in the mental health field than do counsellors and they tend to be more knowledgeable about public policy and organizational issues;<sup>2</sup> finally mental health counsellors, “are well trained to use a wide range of techniques and approaches to help people with developmental, social, emotional, family, and career-related concerns. Counsellors conduct assessments, using interviews and standardized, objective tests; they make use of community resources and support systems to help people”.<sup>3</sup>

It follows that attending psychotherapeutic sessions does not mean necessarily that one has psychological problems, even if having psychological problems is not as fatal as such! If it is acceptable that a human person can have physical ailments and spiritual problems, what makes it strange to have a psychological issue?

Psychological problems range from neurosis to psychosis: “People experiencing neuroses live by the same rules as healthy people do, perhaps even more so; however, they perceive themselves to be insufficient in some way and maladaptively struggle to compensate. Psychoses involve a more extreme compromise whereby life’s challenges are perceived as so overwhelming and insurmountable that the only way to thwart inferiority feelings and to salvage some vestige of significance and self-esteem is to create an inner fantasy world of dreams and aspirations.”<sup>4</sup>

Many people who criticize everything and tag everybody visiting a therapist as having psychological issues, are not as normal as they think. Many of them are just victims of their ignorance of mental health: “Many people go through their entire lives never seeking out a mental health professional, but the absence of mental illness does not necessarily mean mental health. Lots of individuals struggle to concentrate at work or home, feel fatigued, are irritable, and feel tense. These complaints are common reasons why an individual seeks therapy. Seeing a therapist can improve your mental health by teaching you the skills to cope better with stress and be more adaptive to change, promote your productivity at work, and explore important factors that will allow you to have more fulfilling relationships.”<sup>5</sup> In the same perspective, “Some illnesses, such as depression or anxiety, are very treatable especially when discovered in the earlier phases. Unfortunately, many conditions are not recognized in an early stage and only become evident during the midst of a crisis.”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, since such services remain highly expensive and unpopular, many people fall in the hands of quack counsellors who offer series of pieces of advises without proper diagnosis. The stigma that affects psychotherapy has such negative consequences that many people who experience mental health issues fall in the hands of quack counsellors. It is expedient that as people do regular general medical check-ups, they should consider seeking support for their mental health, even when they do not have obvious symptoms.

As far as mental health is concerned, we are co-responsible: “Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or hurt unnecessarily or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognize also that every man who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force even though a small one.”<sup>7</sup> In our little Society of the Missionaries of Africa, the leadership has been recommending therapy to many confreres who go through traumatic and other glaring stressful situations or when there are some issues like alcoholism and some addictions that affect negatively the community and pastoral life. I strongly recommend to voluntarily have mental health assessment as a normal routine, at least periodically. Insisting on holistic formation without a holistic health care may leave many confreres at risk. Normalizing visiting therapists could alleviate the stigma that comes along with visits to rehabili-

tation centres and so improve the health of the society and prevent mental health issues from occurring. Somebody who has been helped by a therapist needs more support to enable him/her to get integrated into the society. Stigmatisation and rejection cause more damages to the convalescent person. Let us learn to visit psychotherapists.



**Fr. Gilbert Rukundo, M.Afr.**

<sup>1</sup>.M.O. OLATAWURA, Psychology and psychiatry, Ibadan, Spectrum books Limited, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Linda SELIGMAN, Diagnosis and Treatment planning in Counseling, third edition, Springer science

<sup>3</sup>Linda SELIGMAN, P. 59.

<sup>4</sup>URSULA E. OBERST AND ALAN E. STEWARD, Adlerian Psychotherapy. An advanced approach to individual psychology, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>.<https://www.sankofapsychology.com/regularly-seeing-a-therapist-is-just-as-important-as-seeing-your-physician/> Consulted on January 06, 2021.

<sup>6</sup>.<https://www.sankofapsychology.com/regularly-seeing-a-therapist-is-just-as-important-as-seeing-your-physician/> Consulted on January 06, 2021.

<sup>7</sup>.A.H. MASLOW, Motivation and personality, New York, Harper and brothers' publishers, 1954, p. 321.



## Zero - The M. Afr.

Zero, I just like the name. Could it be from existential “nothingness” or just a number? Philosophers, come and tell us!

A black Italian, *Zero*<sup>1</sup> wants to change Italians, not their colour or their culture, but their idea, understanding, accommodation, etc. of ‘the other’, ‘a Black man’. It is a very noble idea, for everyone wishes to be understood, considered, loved, ...!

I finished to watch this short movie, and then the idea of *Afrika* with its beauty and complexities, African People and Missionaries of Africa came to my mind.

Many Africans die in their search for Eldorado, what we call (today) immigration. This can be ‘intra’ or ‘extra-Africa’ immigration.<sup>2</sup> Is it always true that *the grass is greener on the other side*, or is it hardship of life which pushes to move?

As a young M.Afr., I am disturbed,<sup>3</sup> not that the story is not true, but, because all this has to happen ‘abroad’. Is it that we have no ground where Africans can finish their business? Or is it simply that it is conducive for them to produce it there, at the point of forcing the un-

derstanding?

The true question is: ‘what went wrong’ that the ‘*sale linga se lave en famille*’<sup>4</sup> is no longer applicable in our own Home and in our mission land? What about the beautiful Afrika in the counts and fables that we do not see in reality? Should we not be ashamed of our brothers (I do not mean necessarily the colour) dying in refugee camps in Africa; in the desert of Niger, Algeria, Morocco, or Libya; in the Mediterranean Sea? What about our brothers and sisters in ‘GALAMSEY’ business? Well silence is golden! Let’s respect it and pray!

Where has our ‘love’ for Afrika gone? Phagocytosed by the “Covid-19”, by political powers, or “our own struggle for positions and power?”

It’s overwhelming to see how ‘Covid-19’ has closed our eyes on very sensible issues inherent to Afrika; not miserable, but made miserable by my silence and yours.

I wish Afrika, one day, gets an African Milan background and Netflix to broadcast Afrika problems and raise awareness that a Rwandan citizen can freely stay in Kinshasa, a

Congolese enjoy his stay in Nigeria, a Ghanaian in Morocco, and Algerian in South Africa.

But how will this be possible, if we, the Mafr. are not ready to see a Somali confrere as delegate for Burundi sector, a Nigerien in S.A.P, a Togolese in Germany, an Ethiopian in GhN?

Just questioning my brain...Cause, everybody hurts. Sometimes!

O, how I wish a ‘Zero’ were produced by a Zambian in the streets of Lagos, a Malian in Lilongwe, a Canadian around Dioulassoba of Bobo-Dioulasso. And maybe, preaching by example? Why not many Zeros? Christ has no eyes and voice, but yours and mine!



**Venant BUKURU, M. Afr.**

<sup>1</sup>From ‘Zero: Being invisible is the true power’, short film released on the 21 April, on Netflix. It’s about ‘being taken for someone you’re not, or not being seen at all. But I focused on this Black Man (Giuseppe Seke, Italian of Congolese origin).

<sup>2</sup>Forgive my ignorance, you, expert in this field!

<sup>3</sup>Maybe because I ignore many things?

<sup>4</sup>A dirty cloth is washed in the backyard! Taken from west African-wisdom.

<sup>5</sup>Song by R.E.M, a rock band!

<sup>6</sup>St Theresa of Avila



## PASTORS: BE THE HOPE TO HIV AND AIDS VICTIMS

It is high time I revert to HIV and AIDS for I clinics. For some, who gather up courage to see the end in sight of Covid-19 with the coming up of different vaccines. Although, currently the number of people who are being infected with Covid-19 is still high in other countries, there is hope that one day the world will be free of it. But HIV/AIDS still remains with us; there is no need to shift our focus away from it, as it is one of the humanitarian crises in our today's society to which many people fall victims through various ways. It is true that some people acquire HIV/AIDS through licentious means. However, this does not mean that everyone with HIV acquires it through sexual immoral acts. Some people get infected with HIV by blood transfusions, others by innocent contact with her/his partner who has acquired AIDS / HIV from outside marriage. Sadly, others acquire it by being conceived in the womb of their mothers who have HIV. Despite these various means of being infected, people regard the HIV victims as licentious and treat them as such.

This instils fear in many people who have been tested HIV positive to come out into the open, that they are HIV carriers because of the consequences they have to bear once they are known. Consequently, some HIV patients opt to keep it as a secret to themselves and avoid doing anything that can make people become suspicious of their statuses such as going for ARVs to the

disclose their HIV status, find themselves in big troubles. They tend to be dismissed from service by their employers for no reason but just because of being HIV victims. Friends set apart from them and some relatives also express dislike mentality towards them. They tend not to share the same plates or drink out of the same cups with them. When they complain of falling sick, they receive less care from family members. As a result of this kind of treatment, the victims of HIV experience double sufferings, the one of the disease and that of the stigma.

However, HIV victims are not to be treated in such a way but in the manner Jesus demonstrated through the way he treated the leper. HIV victims today can be compared to the leper in Jesus' time as leprosy by then had no cure or vaccine. Lepers in the Jewish settings were regarded as outcasts; they were being taken to secluded places away from families and friends to leave them there to die. But Jesus made a big difference in the way of looking at them. He was close to them and treated them with dignity as human beings and exhibited high sensitivity to their plight. Even when healing the leper, he might have used words only but he employed a touch to demonstrate his closeness to him.

In today's society, pastors and well-meaning Christians are to emulate Jesus by being closer to HIV/AIDS patients and show them love and

## PASTORS: BE THE HOPE TO HIV AND AIDS VICTIMS

care. They must use their strong voices to insist that organisations do not channel the available resources to Covid-19 alone or to other pandemics which may break out, and in the process neglect or forget about HIV/AIDS patients with regard to medical supplies. In this way, even if they cannot give them physical healing, their love and support towards them, will give them emotional and spiritual healing. Such an attitude towards them can make them accept their status and feel free to access medical health centres for treatment and medication. Besides that, Pastors should regard it as their duty to encourage society at large to embrace HIV/AIDS patients and make them realize that it is the responsibility of the whole society to look after these patients and give them all the necessary support they need in their sickness. If it means to take risks for the sake of the victims of HIV, they must be ready to do so. This is what Christ demonstrated by touching the leper against the customs of the time. Pastors unwilling to take risks, are not true pastors or Christ followers but we may call them “Christ’s spectators”. To demonstrate who these “Christ’s spectators” are, I wish to narrate a short story in which the man with the bicycle stands for Christ and the ten young men for “Christ’s spectators”.

to the swamp. In that swamp, there were snakes and crocodiles such that when a person falls into it, he/she cannot survive. The man who had the bicycle erected one pole at one end of the swamp and another one at the other end. He tied a rope from one end of the pole across the swamp to the other. He then asked the ten young men, “can you believe that I can climb up with my bicycle to the top of the pole and push my bicycle along the rope from one end of the pole to the other and return?” They all expressed doubts. The man climbed the pole and pushed his bicycle along the rope to the other end and returned. The ten young men noisily applauded for him. Then he asked them, “do you believe that I can ride the bicycle along the rope from one end of the pole to the other and return?” they all replied confidently yes. The man rode the bicycle along the rope to the other end and returned, and once again all applauded for him. Then he said, “I want any volunteer to come so that I can carry him on the carrier and ride along the rope with him from one end to the other and return.” All the ten young men were quiet; he asked them again for the second time, no one dared to volunteer, and they all fell in dead silence. Being courageous concerning faith is a lot easier said than done.

Ten young men followed a man with the bicycle From the short story above, it is clear that the

term “Christ’s spectators” refers to people who believe in God, listen to Christ’s words but these words do not become service to the people because they are not rooted in Christ’s courage, which is vital in expressing our faith. As pastors, to experience God in life is not about a personal relationship with Christ alone, but also includes the capability of sharing Christ with other people, in which courage becomes part of our faith. With courage, Pastors stand side by side with the outcast and oppressed to give them hope and healing. They do not skip the oppressive issues in order to tell the safe truth which appeals to the hearts of the people of God, the world and the devil but the truth which convicts the heart of the guilty and edifies the people making effort to live in God’s ways. They understand and are touched by the pain of the people around them and share their sufferings with them. But this kind of courage comes about only by living a life in unity with Christ which implies to take up our own crosses and follow Christ with full awareness that we may also be crucified on the same crosses we are carrying by our enemies and those who may not agree with our teaching and values.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” Matthew 16:24-26



**Fr. Christopher NKANDU, M.Afr,**

## Are We Finished Apps Too?



June 15<sup>th</sup> this year would mark four years since I left the fourth phase small formation group at St Anne, Jerusalem. Remembrance of her comfort, consolation, protection, love and care are very fresh in my mind. Such pleasant memories occasionally induce me to the error of blind comparison of realities. There is no doubt St Anne's SFG was my shield, nurturer and teacher. Her preprogrammed formation life served me a great deal and has thus accomplished its intended purpose. Much was learnt and lived but much yet remained to be learnt and lived in the real field of mission. Whenever I reflect on the whole phase of our initial formation, I see the dynamics of an application software development at work. An excellent app is

conceived and developed in such a way that it is able to function correctly and conveniently in the hardware designed to host it. It is meant to function correctly and conveniently for anybody with or without its developer's intervention provided the user gives the right commands and inputs. The core functions of such an app are all enabled so that it readily performs any basic task desired by its user. Advanced functions are also inbuilt to the app for advanced usage. An advanced user can therefore choose to enable these functions in order to perform further tasks that may not be readily performed using only the basic functions. To use these same software terms, I would say that at the various stages of my initial formation I was well conceived (received) and developed<sup>1</sup> (formed) and thus equipped with the basic tools and utilities to operate properly and conveniently with or without any secondary support (all the basic skills and values such as faith, prayer, love, hope, perseverance, etc. were received and enabled).

As I was leaving the walls of Jerusalem on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2017, I felt somewhat convinced that I was a well-conceived and developed "app" hitherto installed on the hardware named the Society of the Missionaries of Africa through the Missionary Oath but yet to be fully activated through the act of ordination. Therefore, from that day onwards, though I would be needing a constant updating as do all good apps, I nevertheless could function properly and conveniently in whatever location I was assigned within the mission world of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa.

Just like an app would need to be *started* in order to function, I was in fact "*started*" by the act of ordination. Verily, the act of ordination is also an *enabling* act. Therefore, all the faculties proper to it and relevant to doing mission work are activated propelling one into action. I set out to Mali, as it were, to contribute my widow's mite in the Church's general attempt to incarnate the Gospel of Christ already in vigour in this vast West African nation since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. My arrival in Mali was quite easy and interesting. I reached Mali by bus traversing Burkina Faso. As I crossed over to Mali, I hardly noticed any marked difference between their climate

and human settlements and those of mine in northern Ghana. Such a similarity made me feel at home. Nonetheless I would discover later a much harsher harmattan and a prolonged dry season in my actual place of work, Nioro du Sahel. One day, a strange heavy hot dusty wind swept through Nioro du Sahel forcing a sudden and terrifying nightfall at day. The event lasted about thirty minutes but it was enough to put me in extreme distress! I never knew night could really fall at day!

As I gradually settle in the Malian soil, I feel at home with its culture. Though largely marked by Islam on the surface, its core bears many similarities with my original culture; not much difference in foods and drinks, in social comportments, beliefs and customs among others. However, in terms of languages, all are completely new to me. I find none akin to my original language. Of the many indigenous languages of Mali, I had to learn Bambara, the most widely spoken. In comparison to the other languages I have hitherto learnt, Bambara is the most difficult. All the same, I have been able to grasp its essentials and while still an intermediate user, I manage to write my homilies and talks, get them corrected and delivered at ease. Prior to learning Bambara, I loved listening to music in Bambara. Now I enjoy Bambara music all the more since I understand it.

Generally, my transition into the culture of Nioro du Sahel in particular and the Malian culture in general has been smooth thanks to the many similarities that cut across the West African geo-cultural space. The general hospitality of most Malians stands out as a core value that permits strangers to immediately feel part of the Malian society. The expression “e bora e ka so, e nana e ka so”, literally meaning (you came out of your home, you have come to your home) hardly misses out in most Malians’ welcoming words to a stranger. Indeed, I feel at home anytime I make my planned visits to people and places.

Contrary to the value of hospitality, I loathe the embrace of extremist Islamic doctrines, an attitude that engenders and nurtures the present Malian religio-political predicaments. For more information on this, I refer you to my article on the 1108th February 2020 Edition of the Petit Echo. There, you will also get a quick description of how, as a M.Afr. community in particular and the Church in general we live mission amid the present Malian amalgam of crises. Doing mission in such times obliges the acquisition of special strategies, resolutions, resilience, vision and above all greater faith and hope in Christ our Teacher. One would need to switch to an advanced mode as one would do with a good app when the basic functions of the latter fail to execute superior and complex tasks.

If you have good and caring brothers, you can always enjoy their comfort, support, wisdom and encouragement. I was brought and introduced to my province of mission by an elder brother and confrere. Another took “delivery” of me in my sector of mission. The province took up its responsibility for the rest. Besides its yearly grand forum, my province of mission organized an important “experience sharing” forum for us the new comers in a bid to facilitate our insertion into our communities as well as enhance our community life and apostolates. That apart, the provincial has been a great help to me in my times of difficulty and special needs. His efforts are often eked out by the fraternal support of my home province. I feel therefore sufficiently supported.

The Parish of Notre Dame de Fatima, Nioro du Sahel, where I work is small in terms of population but vast in space. Its nearest outstation is about 90km, the farthest being 450km. (To reach the later, one cuts through a Djihadist prone zone. How frightening that has always been!). The Christians of our parish all come from other parts of Mali. There are no indigenous Christians except one protestant. Besides seeing to the sacramental needs of our Christians, we engage in interreligious dialogue since a vast majority of the inhabitants are Muslims. I am particularly assigned children apostolate and adult catechism and formation. I also engage in teaching basic ICT to youth and children hitherto stopped by Covid19. I must say that I really enjoy doing these activities thanks to the good collaboration and support from my community as well as the Christian faithful.

To conclude, I would say that provinces and communities should continue to offer practical aid to arriving confreres in order to ease their insertion and enhance their apostolic activities. Of course, all aids to a confrere may not serve him any good unless he accepts them with gratitude and makes the best use of them. Since mission belongs to God and is achieved through the guidance of His Son in union with the Holy Spirit, one may not want to wholly depend on material aid in order to do mission though that be crucial too. When we are wholly committed to following Christ our Teacher, we can do more with him with little or even nothing at all.

**Fr. Cletus ATINDAANA, M. Afr.**

<sup>1</sup>I say so with humility only to indicate that I received the required formation I needed. Just like any good application receives all the basic instructions to function, the formation program offered me too the essential tools to operate as a missionary. But just like applications need constant updating to meet the needs of the changing needs of their users, I too need constant update to meet the changing needs of mission in our world today. Despite their efficacy, apps are prone to viruses and thus corruption. I admit that despite all, I too am prone to sin and its consequences

### On Pictures:

From left to right: Desert life, nightfall at day, ICT Class, Cletus with children of our neighbours, children receiving formation on the children rights and duties.





## My Silver Jubilee – 25 Years of Missionary Oath and Priesthood, of Humble Service

I pronounced my missionary oath on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1994 in London and was ordained deacon the same day, together with 3 colleagues (George Kambembo, Jacek Wroblewski and Bernhard Udelhoven). As the system of formation with the White Fathers, by then would permit, we remained deacon for almost 2 years in order to complete our studies before returning to our respective countries to be ordained priests, and that is why I was ordained a priest 2 years later in Ghana, at the Cathedral in Bolgatanga, on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1996. It was the feast day of St Lawrence. I was ordained with 2 diocesan deacons (Clement Beerli and Samuel Atinga). We were ordained by the late Bishop Lucas Abadamloora of blessed memory. The following day, each of us celebrated his thanksgiving Mass in his parish of origin. It was an honor to have the Bishop with me during my first Mass in the Church at Wiaga.

It has been 25 years already of priestly ministry and service to the people of God, with the Missionaries of Africa! Who would believe? Time flies indeed. I have always considered my priestly calling to be a special honor and grace from God. That is why before I proceed to write about my missionary experience, I would like, first of all to thank all the people who have helped to make my dream come true and made me the person I am today. I cannot forget my family members (especially my mom and dad), my formators (both at Tamale – St. Victor's and later on in London – St. Edward's), my classmates, religious brothers/sisters, priests, colleagues and friends. I am very grateful to them all for their help and prayers all these years.

One of my favorite Bible stories is the one that recounts the violent storm that arose while the disciples were in a boat trying to cross the lake and how they were so frightened and thought they were going to perish. They turned to Jesus who encouraged them and told them to have faith as he ordered the sea and the wind to be calm and restored order and peace. Just like the

disciples, I can say that my experience of priesthood, all these years, although with its ups and downs, has been a journey of confidence and trust in the Lord.

The past 25 years have been full of surprises from God. Since my ordination, I have had the privilege to exercise a variety of ministries. Immediately after my ordination, I was appointed to Niangoloko Parish in Burkina Faso, where I had done my stage. Upon arrival, I found the same confreres (Jaquinod, Favre Rampard and Bernard Fagnon) with whom I had spent 2 years during my stage. They were all French people, but each with a completely different character and style of life. Jaquinod was the parish priest, he was a simple man and very pastoral minded and effective. He spoke the local dialect call Guin, but preferred using Julia to communicate, as it was the most widely spoken language in the region. I had to learn Julia instead of Guin. Favre was the easy-going type, always on the move, for he liked driving and travelling around the whole sub-region. He was also suffering from over-weight, but that did not stop him from moving around. He liked taking pictures. Fagnon was a solitary person and an intellectual. He liked reading and teaching French in the secondary schools around the area. He also liked to work with the literates in the parish, organizing them into associations like the Catholic Workers Association etc. He was more at ease with the intellectuals than with the peasant farmers. I was very happy and privileged to have lived with these 3 confreres in the first years of my apprenticeship of missionary life, for they were fantastic mentors to learn from. I must also mention Mgr. Anselm Sanon (now retired) who was our Bishop by then, before Bobo-Dialasso diocese was split. I learned a lot from these experienced pastors. One thing I retain from them is that, there is no single right way of being a shepherd or a pastor, because every single priest is a gift to the people of God, and there are so many ways of

being a minister, each person with his proper style and charisma. I had 2 fantastic years in Niangoloko before moving to Konadugu parish. 1998 – 2000, my next stop was Konadougou. This was my first experience of being the one in charge of a parish. Konadougou is a rural area with a population of mostly peasant farmers and animists. The Christians were a minority as compared to Niangoloko. They were mostly young people, except a few older women, often widows. The main dialect there is Senufo, but we had to use Jula for catechism and Mass. I enjoyed my pastoral work in Konadougou because of the many outstations we had to cover. We went to the outstations on our motor bikes practically every week, and often stayed over-night for 2 or 3 days, teaching catechism and visiting families. While I was in Konadougou, Bamfara diocese was created, as such we were given additional responsibilities, apart from our own parish work. I was appointed youth coordinator for the whole diocese. Because of that I had often to visit the youth in the other parishes and organized things like retreats, meetings and workshops for the youth. Apart from that, I was also incharge of vocation animation for our Society (MAfr). The novitiate in Fribourg (Switzerland) had just been moved to Samagan in Bobo-Dialasso, and I was asked by Claude Rault (the novice master), to help-out by coming from Konadougou to teach at the novitiate from time to time. I was to share my experience “about how to live by the constitutions and laws of our Society” with the novices. For several years, I had to combine parish work and teaching at the novitiate. This proved to be a lot more stressful than I had expected, for I had little experience and practically no training or guidance from the superiors. I had the impression that they were experimenting with me. But I was getting the help I needed from the Holy Spirit. Even when I was posted to Meguet parish, I still had to carry on giving the 2 weeks seminar I had prepared for the novices, once a year. That meant driving from Meguet to Bobo (500 km) at least once a year.

From 2000 – 2005, I was posted to Meguet Parish in the archdiocese of Koupela, situated on the Mossi plateau. This is where our first Missionaries of Africa settled down in when they arrived and started to evangelize the whole country. I had to learn Moore quickly before starting to do pas-

toral work. I was with a Belgian and a Canadian, who were both much older than me. I looked-up to them not just as confreres, but more like parents. The parish priest (Walter Oyaert, who is late), was indeed, of the same age as my dad; and Garneau Armand, the Canadian, was the oldest. He was 74 by then, is now 90. I really enjoyed my apostolic work in Meguet. Here too, I was involved in youth apostolate and vocation animation. I also prepared the students and government workers to receive the sacraments. We had lots of construction works going on at the parish and in the many outstations. My confreres were ingenious in finding finances for all our projects. We embarked on projects like: the building of Churches, Chapels, houses for the catechists and teachers, schools, wells and bore-holes for in the outstations and villages around Meguet. Since I was much younger and stronger then, I was doing most of the driving to Ouagadougou the Capital city (about 150km) or to Koupela (55km), to buy cement and other building material, to deposit or withdraw money from the banks etc. I had to learn how to write reports and letters to our benefactors for the financing of numerous projects. My confreres wanted me to be self-reliant and not to depend on them for anything. At first, I did not understand this, but as time went on, I saw the point and importance of it. Today I am grateful to God to have had the opportunity to live with such confreres and received all that they taught me.

After 10 years of active parish ministry, I asked for permission to take a sabbatical before going for further studies; for the provincial superior was talking of sending me out for studies. I went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where I also did my 30 days retreat. And that was quite an experience that I will never forget, that I still cherish today. After Jerusalem, I spent some months in Paris (Rue Friant) before returning to Ouagadougou to prepare all the formalities necessary for a visa to Belgium for studies. Between 2005-2007 I was in Lumen Vitae for studies in Catechesis and Pastoral.

After Lumen Vitae, I was appointed to Amani Centre in Brussels run by the MAfr (from 2007-2011). This work had to do with taking care of African immigrants. It was a totally different type of ministry than I had expected. It was very challenging and but rewarding, I must say. The

joy of it was the contact with people from all walks of life: young and old, women, men, children, students, priests, religious nuns etc. My office was always full of people cueing-up to see me. For the first time in my life, I had my own secretary (a nun), who organized my agenda and received calls for me. I was not only the director of the Centre, but also the president of the ASBL as well, (an ONG for the Centre). This meant attending board meetings, and doing lots of administrative work.

On top of that, Cardinal Daneels appointed me to take part in his council of priests. I was the only African in the group of 28 members who met every 2 months to discuss matters concerning the diocese, often in the presence of the Cardinal himself, for he very rarely missed our meetings. I was also appointed as the priest incharge of coordinating the apostolate specifically directed to the African immigrants in the archdiocese. This meant preparing some people to receive the sacraments, presiding masses: funeral, weddings, feasts days etc. This ministry was fulfilling, but also very challenging and tiring most of the time. But I always felt loved, supported and encouraged by the people and by the Confreres.

From 2011 to 2013, I had to go back to Leuven University to complete my studies. I went in to do an advance masters degree in pastoral theology. In 2012, I had to hand-over the Centre to my successor, in order to concentrate on my studies. Brother Simon Gornah had kindly accepted to leave his beloved Tunisia to come and work in Belgium. After taking him through a thorough initiation of the work to be done, I handed-over to him: the keys of my car, the bank- accounts of the Centre, the bank cards and signatures. I also gave him the keys to the Centre. All this was done during a Mass we had organized to mark the occasion; with the presence of Andre Simonart (provincial superior by then), many important dignitaries belonging to the ASBL, the workers and other members of the Centre. From 2013 to 2017, I was appointed to Ibadan in Nigeria, to take charge of our pre-first circle. There, I felt like a real father figure (a dad) to young men in search of the vocation to become missionaries as priests or brothers.

Apart from teaching and giving spiritual direction ('companion' is perhaps a better word) to our candidates, Piet, Victor and I made it a habit to visit their families as well. I got to know other parts of Nigeria through these visits. At the end of my work in Nigeria, I was told to prepare myself to go to our Philosophy house in Ejisu in Ghana; which I had gladly accepted and was very excited about. I left Ibadan on the 15<sup>th</sup> July for my home leave in Ghana and later on to Germany where I was spending part of my leave. Then I received a phone call from Rome, asking: "would I kindly consider to Kinshasa, instead of Ejisu?" Of course I willingly accepted the proposal and here I am in Kinshasa.

2017 – Till today in our Theology Formation house here in Kinshasa.

I am very happy to be part of this community. We are 4 confreres in charge of the formation, and the students are between 35 and 40 depending on the academic year in question. And like in all our formation houses, we are organized in 4 teams, each with a formator and about 8 to 10 students. In this house our candidates are matured and very conscious of the role they have to play in their personal formation. We the Staff members are doing our best to give the best training we can. We give them the chance to exercise a lot of responsibilities throughout the 4 years they have to spend here. We trust them to assume these responsibilities in order to become role models and good pastors in the near future. I sort of feel proud to watch these young men "grow up" and "graduate" and go out to serve the Church in different countries.

For all these 25 years, I feel really blessed to have had the opportunity to exercise a variety of assignments as a priest. I put my heart and love into whatever job I have to do. I love it here and sincerely hope that I will stay a little longer time around in this present job than I did in my past assignments. I trust that the Holy Spirit is in charge of my assignments. In conclusion, if I am asked to say in a nutshell what have I learnt, or what the priesthood has taught me, in all these years about missionary life, I would underline 3 points: I have dis-



covered that I love my vocation because Jesus Christ is so loving and so forgiving, that I feel privileged to serve him through his Church and through the Missionaries of Africa. Secondly, I have learnt about the importance of Prayer and Trusting in God. Like the disciple in the boat, Jesus listens; it may look at times like he is sleeping, but he is not. He cares and is always listening. Although things that I ask of him may not be granted immediately as I would like, he always finds a way to answer my prayers. Thirdly, it is about preaching and living the Gospel (the Good News) with joy. The Church could use more joyful priests and good ones. When life gets complicated and stressful at time, one needs to refocus on the essential: the Word of God (the Bible), the Eucharist (and other sacraments), Jesus, Mary and lots of prayer.



**Fr. Andrew ANAB, M. Afr**



## Echoes from Official GhN Meetings



Our Ghana-Nigeria Province is full of life, and everywhere there are a lot of activities taking place. It is hardly possible to mention them all and we will have to be a bit selective in the news items that will be presented to you in this short article. They are also not necessarily in the order of importance, as all that is taking place is by its very nature important!

Let us first mention that since its inception the new GhN Provincial Council had two meetings, not yet counting the one that is taking place as this issue is being printed. The first one took place in November 2020 (at the time that the previous number of The Link was being given its final form!!) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> one followed in January 2021. There were also two extraordinary meetings of the P.C. (18<sup>th</sup> March and 29<sup>th</sup> April), mainly to function as Councils of Calls for the various ministries.

## Communities in the Province

The official hand-over of Nyankpala Parish to the Archdiocese of Tamale took place on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Since then, Gaspard Cirimwami has become a member of the Wa Community, while continuing his work in the Provincial JPIC-ED Committee. On the other hand, the January Provincial Council took a firm decision that to establish a community “near Ejisu” so as to support the formation house. Things have still to be worked out.

Pierre Songre has been confirmed as member of the Morin House Community, while offering his services to the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Centre in Tamale.

Bolgatanga community said a definitive goodbye to Kevin Rand, who returned to Canada and the Ejisu Community welcomed with open arms Bonaventure Gubazire as new staff member.

Johan Miltenburg exchanged the Minna Community for that of Agbowo, St. Thomas. Ibadan was happy to welcome back in its midst Piet de Bekker, who had been absent for “far too long” due to his own health reasons and made worse by travel restrictions because of Covid-19. John William Nkhoma has begun special studies, while remaining member of the Minna Community. John Mubanga has begun his studies at GIMPA (*Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration*) in Accra, and is now attached to the Ejisu-Kumasi Apostolic Area.

Victor Shehu has completed his terms as Vocation Animator of Nigeria, and by the time you read this, may already have taken up his new appointment to the Mgh Province, to be more precise, in Tunisia. It is hoped that the new Vocation Animator, Otto Katto, will soon arrive in Nigeria to take up his appointment.

## Other Personalia News

The Province is happy to receive this year five new confreres. By the time you read these words, they will probably have been given their places of appointments. Welcome to these five confreres. One of them, *MBONIHANKUYE Salvator*, is already well-known to us, because of his long hospital treatment after the tragic accident in which stagiaire Bruno died. The new confreres are in alphabetical order:

*BASHOMBANA B. Jean-Pierre* from RDC born on 07-03-1990, 4<sup>th</sup> phase of formation: Nairobi.

*CIMANUKA M. Patient* from RDC born on 12-04-1990, 4<sup>th</sup> phase: Abidjan.

*LULENGA AMANI Jean-Claude* from RDC, born on 03-07-1992, 4<sup>th</sup> phase: Jerusalem.

*MBONIHANKUYE Salvator*, from Burundi, born on 12-10-1986, 4<sup>th</sup> phase: Abidjan.

*SAWADOGO Charles*, from Burkina Faso, born on 31-12-1990, 4<sup>th</sup> phase: Kinshasa.

Two confreres from this Province, both from the Sector of Nigeria, will receive priestly ordination in the coming months. They were called to the Priesthood by the Provincial after consultation of



the Provincial Council, gathered in extraordinary meeting on 29 April. They are:

*AONDOER, Cyprian Chia*, from the Diocese of Gboko, to be ordained on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021. He received his appointment for PAC.

*IJEGE, Peter Ohobu*, from the Diocese of Ogoja, to be ordained probably in July 2021. He has been appointed to PAO.

In that same meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> April, the Provincial Council warmly recommended that *DAGO Estima*, originally from SAP-Mozambique, who exercised his diaconal ministry in Minna, be ordained to the Priesthood.

*John Atugonza*, who finished his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of stage in Savelugu was also strongly recommended to be allowed to continue his formation, and two candidates in Nairobi, *Daniel UWAGBOE Poe* and *Jochim AZANGE* were called by the Provincial to receive the order of Acolyte.

Soon after his arrival in Wa, the new stagiaire, *Josephat KAMBALE Ndaliko*, was involved in a nasty accident. We thank God that his recovery has been good and steady.

Finally, with sadness we report that another candidate from Nigeria for the Spiritual Year in Arusha, *Lawrence Idako YAKUBU*, was refused a visa for Tanzania. He bided his time by helping out in the Parish of Ejigbo, but then moved to Ouagadougou to learn sufficient French before starting his spiritual Year in Bobo Dioulasso later this year.

## Forthcoming and Ongoing Issues

The Confreres in the Province responded positively to the request from the General Council to let them have the fruits of their first brainstorming about the Chapter of 2022. No doubt, a lot more is to follow!

The Province, through its Secretary, shared with those concerned its ardent wish to be allowed to open a second First-Phase Formation Centre, as at this moment admission possibilities are very minimal taking into account the great number of inquiries and applications.

**André Schaminée**  
**GhN Provincial Secretary**

## MINNA PROJECT

Minna Project, by God's grace, has become a reality in a much faster pace as anticipated. It is a project which from the onset was foreseen to take a long time to materialize. Nevertheless, as the scripture states that, '*God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8)*', we have seen a wonderful holy hand of God at work. What is realized within the period of two years and some months, regardless of the Covid-19 negative impacts, is surprising, consoling and motivating. As at now, the following fruits are in place: Duplex, Laundry, Vocational School, two Self-Contained Rooms, Security Office, Light, Water, Car Garage, Motorbike House, Generator House and the Store Room.

It would have been miraculous for the project to be completed without challenges. The challenges we encountered throughout include the rise in the prices of building materials, the cost of labour, the unstable exchange rate, spoiled materials during work, and materials getting stolen, just to mention a few. They say that '*If you carry your own water, you will know the value of every drop*'. These were painful experiences. The sudden death of the Contractor before the completion of the duplex and laundry was the greatest blow for us.

Many people contributed positively to the successful story of the Minna Project. To start with, I appreciate the Treasurers at every stage for being up to the task. They were very cooperative. The Contractor was excellent, a great man to work with. It is rare to find a contractor who is always at the site, working with his labourers and leading them by example. Niger State and Tafa Local Government Town Planners, Architects and Quantity Surveyors did a great job. They monitored and evaluated the progress of the building. We never moved to the next stage until the previous stage was evaluated, corrected or advice given on what was already done or what was to follow. This to a larger extent might have contributed to the contractor's effectiveness as they always warned him of the consequences should he fail to meet the building standards. The Finance Secretary (Dago do Rosario Estima) made a lot of sacrifices, and was very accountable, observant and ready to work at any time. Even the contractor and site supervisor appreciated his cooperation and desire for the best quality job. The Site Supervisor, though a bit relaxed at the beginning of the project, after we (Gilbert and Virgilius) had challenged him, became very strict, registered all the materials bought and used, and submitted a daily report. Purchase of the materials was done together with the Contractor, Site Supervisor, Dago and Markos when he was around. Daily job evaluation and planning for the next day/week was done with the Contractor, Site Supervisor, and Finance Secretary after our dinner. Visits of Markos and Gilbert as Building Committee Members, Emmanuel as Provincial Delegate, Bishop John of Oshogbo Diocese, Bishop Paul of Ilorin Dio-

cese, Auxiliary Bishop Luke of Minna Diocese, Malachi Oleru and some Diocesan Priests were very energizing and refreshing. They actively participated in the activities they met. They also gave advice.

It was providential that we went for only contract labour. We would have not gone far if we had opted for the full contract or else the quality of materials would have been compromised. This was obvious from the estimates people were bringing who wanted to buy the materials and do the work. Many are the times that we returned the materials to where they were bought due to low quality. At last, we could convincingly state that the final product of Minna Project is beyond our expectations. We give glory and honour to God our Almighty Father who sustained us through this challenging yet rewarding project journey. We are considering the last week of October or first week of November for the Blessing and Official Opening of the House and Gyedna Vocational School. This is to give enough time to the General Council and the Provincial Council to plan their attendance. The Community Members Dago Estima, Norbert Issa and Virgilius Kawama have been in the new house since 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021. We have enjoyed the visits to our new abode by Johan Miltenburg, Development Committee (Abobo John and Gilbert Rukundo), St Clement Pre-First Phase students (Timothy Kadiri, Godwin Hassan and Lambert Donmee), our Auxiliary Bishop, priests and sisters.

The wise elders say that *'The mouth that chews is always grateful to the hand that provides'*. I would like to express my heartfelt gratefulness to the General Council, the General Treasurer, the Provincial Council, the Sector Council, the Sector Building Committee, the Benefactors, and all confreres who supported us genuinely in realizing this mighty project. Your spiritual, physical and moral support can only be rewarded by God. In particular, my deepest gratitude goes to Laurent Balas. Though he gave me sleepless nights, I learnt a lot from him. His great interest in this Society Project, cooperation, and desire for nothing but the best quality have brought about this unique modern edifice. The sacrifice he made for this project challenged me so much that sometimes I asked myself, "if Laurent as busy as he was with his studies and apostolate could not sleep because of this project, who am I not to comply positively for the common good?"

Some people say that *'When a man is crying so hard for the death of his aged parents, do not just console him, give him money for the burial, it may be the reason for the cry'*. Our cry continues. Despite the fact that God has favoured us so much through different people and organizations, we still need funds for building the Youth Centre, Chapel, and Hospitality Centre.

**Fr. Virgilius Kawama, M.Afr.**

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*Photo Gallery of the Mina Project*





## Obituaries

- 29<sup>th</sup> November Paul Naah Sabie, father of candidate Luke Sabie Naa.
- 04<sup>th</sup> December Prosper Bapuoh, junior brother of Pascal Bapuoh He died in a motor accident.
- 06<sup>th</sup> December Mari, paternal aunt of Jacek Wróblewski, due to Covid-19.
- 02<sup>nd</sup> January Elizabeth Gornah, SMI, sister of Simon Gornah.
- 06<sup>th</sup> January Jeannette Boroto Kalimurhima, the half-sister of Serge Boroto (same father, different mothers). She died in Kinshasa at the age of 57 years.
- 02<sup>nd</sup> February the dad of first year stagiaire in RDC, Pius Eshiesimua.
- 02<sup>nd</sup> February Maria Jesus Mendivil, aunt of Maralf Jimenez Mendivil, due to Covid-19.
- 10<sup>th</sup> February Patience Dakorah, the elder sister of Stagiaire Evans Dakorah (Ouagadougou). She died in Accra at the age of almost 32, a few days after giving birth to her first-born.
- 12<sup>th</sup> February Francis Noyen, uncle and godfather of John Bosco Naa, who died in Kalba, age 56 years.
- 27<sup>th</sup> February Mihret Wouldu, mother of Tewelde [Gebremichael](#). She died at home in Ethiopia, at the age of 65.
- 06<sup>th</sup> March John Atindaana Abisaare, the dad of Cletus Atindaana. His dad had received baptism exactly two months earlier.
- 07<sup>th</sup> March Cyril Bagrviel, uncle of Richard Baawobr) who passed away on 7th March at Nandom hospital. He comes after Richard's mother.
- 07<sup>th</sup> March the aunt of Stagiaire Josephat (Wa), who died in Congo.
- 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> March Seraphine Fiiriter, aunt of Peter Claver Kogh (Algeria) and younger sister of Peter Claver's mother. She passed away in Tamale Teaching Hospital.
- 02<sup>nd</sup> April Ambroise Songré, eldest brother of Pierre Songre (Burkina Faso).
- 03<sup>rd</sup> April Blaise KYAHI, maternal uncle of Bahati Muhindo Ephrem (Stagiaire in Bunkpurugu) whose death occurred in Goma, DRC.
- 05<sup>th</sup> April Lawrence Oko, maternal uncle of Peter Ijege (Deacon in Abidjan), who died after a vehicle accident in Kaduna, Nigeria.
- 21<sup>st</sup> April Cynthia Sinabisi, niece of Roger Sinabisi, aged 43.
- 27<sup>th</sup> April Semere Gebremichael, younger brother of Tewelde Gebremichael. He died after having been involved in an accident.

***May all our Beloved Deceased Rest in Perfect Peace***

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**Pope Francis**  
**Prayer for protection from Coronavirus**

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen. We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas - we who are put to the test - and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.



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**Ghana-Nigeria Link is a newsletter of the Ghana - Nigeria Province of the Society of the Missionar-ies of Africa**

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