

MISSION RESTORATION PROJECT

Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus

Reaching out to the “Poorest of the Poor”

Mouila, Gabon, Africa – December 8th, 2012

by Rev. Canon Henry Fragelli

BRIEF HISTORY:

As the Bishop of the Diocese of Mouila, the late Monsignor Obamba gave the Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus to the Institute of Christ the King in 1988, to be the founding place of our Institute. Within two or three years Cardinal Piovanelli (Bishop of the Diocese of Florence, Italy) invited the Institute to establish its headquarters and seminary in Gricigliano in a beautiful Italian villa on the shores of the Arno river. From there, the Institute, being closer to Rome, expanded rapidly taking the international dimensions it has today. As we celebrate our 25th jubilee anniversary (2013), the Institute counts 80 seminarians in its seminary at Gricigliano and 70 ordained priests spread throughout 50 apostolates in Europe, America, and Africa.

Despite no longer being the headquarters of the Institute, the Mission remains the founding place, the “crib” of our Institute. It has also always been one of our most flourishing missions in the African continent—bringing faith and education to countless children and families of the region. For reasons of sickness, financial, and other difficulties, however, the lack of a priest to “hold down the fort” caused the Mission to close four years ago. The result is very sad. The faithful are all gone and the buildings falling apart.

As we approach the celebration of our 25th anniversary, God willed that the Institute reopen this once beautiful Mission, and my superiors chose me for the task. I neither understand nor question the wisdom of their choice. With God’s grace and your generosity, I pray and hope that this Mission will be restored and again bring hope, grace and joy to hundreds of children and families of the “poorest of the poor”, as Mother Teresa would call them. But until then, the Mission needs lots of prayers, sweat, toil, tears, and much generosity. With God’s aid, I will do my part. But I can’t do it alone. I need help.

For the record, I am not here by choice. I wrote recently to one of my brothers-in-law asking him to come volunteer in the Mission restoration by helping me build the new altar (he is an accomplished furniture maker) and sharing with him my situation. I wrote: *“Dearest Brother, I am suffering immensely. Humanly this is not my cup of tea, to say the least. But here I am because I love the Church, because I’m obedient to the Church. So I feel like I have the right to ask.”* So, dear donor, I say the same to you.

THE PLACE:

On the shores of the *Angounié* River, the seemingly isolated Mission is in fact right outside of Mouila, a town of about forty thousand inhabitants.

Right next to us, our first and only neighbor is a school of the Trinitarian Sisters. With its 500 students, it’s considered one of the best of the country. Institute priests were once the chaplains and teachers at this school, and we will take up those positions again happily if we can be of service to the school. We are already in talks with the sisters. (I already preached them two retreats.)

The Mission has several structures. The main house has a chapel and an extension offering five guest rooms. There are also two other buildings formerly used for different activities of the Mission.

PICTURES:

- 1) The main house of the Mission. Behind it is the little chapel and a wing containing four guest rooms.
- 2) From the porch of the main house one has a beautiful view of the *Angounié* river.
- 3) The two other buildings. We plan for these to become a church, a sacristy, a library, classrooms for catechism, dorms for the youth camps, and a bakery.



A big thank-you to
Nancy Heidemann
(Wisconsin) who
generously sent me the
color ink cartridges for
printing this colorful
report.



RESTORATION:

The results of four years of no priestly presence at the Mission is quite sad. The faithful are gone! More than anything else, their absence gives the Mission an air of abandonment. I'm sure, though, that with God's grace they will all come back and the Mission will live again and will thrive. We see God working already! Thanks to word spreading about the reopening of the Mission, about 12 faithful attended the first Sunday Mass at the Mission. The second Sunday Mass welcomed a few more. (See the pictures below of the first two Sunday Masses at the Mission in four years!)



As soon as this number grows a little more, we will start a choir and altar boy service practices.

The Mission is very run down and parts of it falling apart. The roofs have holes and leaks. Much of the roofing structure rotted in the last four years leaving damage to the ceilings underneath and destroying ceiling fans and electrical lighting. And. . .that's only the beginning. I try not to look at the damage too much, or even think about it, because it can be very depressing to see the state of things. Luckily I am a carpenter and have done a lot of remodeling and electrical work in the United States. My plan is to fix one thing at a time as we have the means to do so. With God's grace we'll get there.

BUDGET:

The budget is almost non-existent. I get no salary, and I receive only \$250.00 per month for all the Mission expenses. This amount doesn't even pay for the food. When my superior told me that the only financial support would be \$250.00 per month, I thought he was joking. He was absolutely serious. He expects me to fundraise, too. Poor Father does not have a less difficult situation in Libreville himself. Anyway, this wouldn't be a mission if there were no challenges, right? But we've got to make it better! There are hundreds of children in the area that could be coming to catechism if the Mission were up and running. Hundreds of young people could have educational programs and activities at the Mission if it had at least a basic structure.

Budget Point of Reference: Prices here can be 2 or 3 times more than the US, except for gas which is the same price. 98% of Africans live in poverty. They eat one meal a day, mostly taken out of their gardens in the back yard. The poverty is amazing. If it weren't for the Catholic Missions the children wouldn't even have the basic education. The stores and supermarkets are made for the wealthy 2% of the population composed of politicians and those that work in the petroleum industry. There is not a middle class in this country. It is an absurd. It is Africa!

THE PROJECT:

I toured the whole Mission, building by building, room by room, jotting down all that needs to be repaired. I separated this into **SEVEN LISTS according to priority**. Then I went to Libreville, the capital, and ran around for four days getting estimates and prices so that this “*Mission Restoration Report*” would be accurate.

LIST # 1: CHAPEL – OUR BLESSED LORD

The first list concerns our little chapel (because one must ALWAYS take care of Our Blessed Lord first.) It needs some small repairs and painting. We also need a new ciborium, vestments, and the linens need to be changed. Those that we have simply are not worthy of divine worship. Other items are acceptable for now.

(As to the linens, I have already written to a group of pious ladies from Brazil – who were at my ordination – and they will make new linens and a set or two of altar cloths.)



Repairs and Painting	\$750
Ciborium	\$300
New Vestments	\$4,800
TOTAL	\$5,850

LIST # 2: ROOFS & MOST URGENT

The second list is that of the most urgent work that needs to be done immediately to avoid further damage and to start making this place livable. We must fix the many leaks in the roofs and replace the parts of the beams that rotted. Once the roofs are water tight, we must replace the ceilings of several rooms either damaged by or completely caved in from water leakage. Finally, we'll fix some of the bathrooms and make other important basic repairs.

Fixing leak on roofs	\$750
Changing rotten roof beams	\$1,200
New ceilings in several rooms	\$1,400
Doors for 5 bathrooms	\$650
Changing locks on doors	\$380

Paint: rooms, doors, windows.	\$850
Changing 4 ceiling fans	\$750
Electrical work	\$1,500
Hot water boiler	\$400
Roof painting	\$2,350
TOTAL	\$10,230

LIST # 3:
NEW BIG CHAPEL

The third list is for the enlargement of the chapel. Our current chapel holds only 25 people, so I can see that we are going to outgrow our little chapel very soon. I will then add a second Mass on Sunday in order to gain another month or so, but by then we will have to go to a new and bigger chapel. There is a large building in the Mission that can be used for that purpose. The space could seat about 150 people. We will fix the leaks in the roof and rotten beams, fix the ceiling, give it a thorough cleaning, and paint it to make it fit for Holy Mass. The electrical work also needs attention, and five of the ceiling fans need to be changed. In the meanwhile I plan to use my carpentry skills to build the new altar out of wood.

Behind the big new chapel there is a little house with bathrooms. These bathrooms need to be operational by the time the new chapel is open to be used by the faithful. These bathrooms will also serve those attending the youth programs, catechism classes, retreats, etc.

Electrical	\$1,800
Painting	\$600
Changing ceiling fans	\$900
Building and Tiles for Sanctuary and Altar steps	\$1,300
New Altar	\$2,600
Altar Statue	
Pulpit	\$550
Cry room and confessional	\$700
Church pews	\$14,000
Sacristy furniture	\$5,500
Sacristy A/C and Dehumidifier	\$850
TOTAL	\$28,800

LIST # 4:
CATECHISM ROOMS – CLASSROOMS

The fourth list is for the many improvements that need to be made and the fixing of the other buildings of the Mission so that we can organize catechism for the children (there are hundreds of children in the area that have no religious instruction), classrooms (I plan to start offering English and Spanish classes to attract more people to the Mission and thus receive religious instruction), dorms for the youth programs, retreats, etc. We will also have a bakery to make and give bread on

Sunday to the poor families that come to Mass. After Mass we offer a snack to the children. We will bake cookies at the bakery.

Electrical	\$1,300
Painting	\$450
Changing 6 ceiling fans	\$780
Class tables and benches (fix old and new)	\$3,700
Bunk beds (fix old and new)	\$1,300
New mattresses	\$1,400
Materials for building bakery wood oven	\$1,950
TOTAL	\$10,880

LIST # 5: NEEDED NEW PROJECTS

The fifth list is that of new projects, such as (1) a water tower to avoid the frequent water shortage; (2) a large generator to avoid the DAILY power outages that we have; (3) a bell and bell tower; (4) installing internet and email connections (right now I have to go to town each time I need to send an email); and (5) installation of air conditioning in the little chapel.

Water tower	\$3,500
Generator	\$16,500
Internet connection	\$600
A/C for little chapel	\$350
TOTAL	\$20,950

Once all the above is up and running, I would like to build another building to house work and craft classes. For example, I propose offering carpentry and clay work for the boys and sewing and embroidery for the girls. But that is a bit down the road—perhaps a year from now. So that will be part of “*Mission Restoration Report – Part II.*”

LIST # 6: TOOLS

Prior to all the above, of course, is a list of the tools and power tools I need to get the work done. Without good tools one gets nowhere.

Table saw	\$520
Power tools	\$1500
Hand tools, wood clamps, etc.	\$500
Glue, screws, nails, etc	\$400
TOTAL	\$2,920

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW:

I do NOT do “temporary” work or repairs. I prefer to live in a shack while building something permanent and durable. Temporary work turns out, most of the time, to be shabby permanent. That’s not acceptable to me. So we will do the rebuilding of the Mission only in as much as we can do it well with your generous help.

LIST # 7:
MONTHLY BUDGET

Once all is in place, we’ll need generous donors to sustain the Mission with a monthly gift. The Mission must never close again and must continue to reach out to souls with the message of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

This monthly budget includes:

- a. the salary of a night guard to watch over the Mission;
The Mission has been robbed several times in the past. The night guard also works part-time during the day as groundskeeper.
- b. the salary of a lady to do the cooking, the laundry, and cleaning;
Because the Mission is in a jungle with dirt roads, the buildings require daily cleaning. Also, she must iron each piece of laundry thoroughly to destroy insects that plague us and that carry diseases. Her cooking skills keep us from getting other sicknesses that come from the food. Her work is a full-time job. For the time being, just to be safe and avoid contracting any of the many African diseases, I hired a lady **part-time**.
- c. food and cleaning supplies;
- d. phone and utility bills (water and electricity);
- e. sacristy expenses (sanctuary lamps, wine and hosts for the Masses); and
- f. gas and car maintenance.

This monthly budget does not include a salary for the priest. We live off the goodness of family and friends.

Two salaries (night guard – cook & cleaning)	\$800
Food and cleaning supplies	\$350
Phone and utility bills (water, electricity)	\$530
Sacristy (sanctuary lamp, wine, hosts)	\$150
Gas and car maintenance	\$300
Extras (Office, Postage, Light bulbs, etc.)	\$150
TOTAL	\$2,280

JUST A THOUGHT... for YOU!

When we speak with such admiration of the Martyrs, we think of those that were the heroes of our Faith because of their heroic defense of Christ in the last minutes of their lives. But we often forget the continuous martyrdom of the missionary effort, which I am convinced is THE MOST BEAUTIFUL unwritten story of the Catholic Church. I never fathomed that I, big sinner that I am, would one day be right in the middle of it. By inviting you to be a **Monthly Donor of the Mission**, I’m inviting you to be part of that epic history. And don’t say you don’t deserve it because I don’t either.

So my immediate goal is to have the means of getting the tools and materials to get started right away to tackle the problems room by room, project by project. Funds allowing, I'll hire help for some of the tasks. (Labor is VERY cheap here.) I'll need one or two workers that I will instruct and direct. In the meanwhile I'll work on getting estimates and funds to be able to rebuild the Mission and make it live again.

SPIRITUAL:

In addition to many other family and friends like you, we are blessed to have a Benedictine Monastery, a Convent of Poor Clare Sisters, two Convents of the Precious Blood, three Convents of the Sisters Adorers, and several Cloistered Carmelite Monasteries praying for the spiritual and material success of the Mission.

Good friends are building a website for people to sign up with their prayers and sacrifices so they'll be a constant chain of prayer going on for the Mission. They are calling the website: "*Friends of St. Therese*." A whole parish in Florida has "spiritually adopted the Mission." In their entrance hall, they have a sign-up sheet for the faithful to offer prayers for the Mission. I could tell you a lot more about this. I worked quite a bit, prior to coming here, in getting people's prayer for the spiritual support of the Mission.

To "put the cherry on the top"... a good mother of 11 beautiful children and grandmother of 23, wrote me the following: *"Remember that I promised you I would do some small thing for your new assignment in Gabon? Well, it came to me that I should involve all of our grandchildren and Godchildren in praying and sacrificing for your mission. I wrote a letter to all of them- included a large map of Gabon, and asked them to fill it with little crosses every time they say a prayer or offer up something for your mission. I reminded them about the Little Flower's desire to help missions, and how she sacrificed for them in the convent. I sent them a picture of you so they would think of you when they did this little project, Father. I also told them that I would keep them up to date on how you are doing there in Equatorial Africa. I still think you should make audio cassettes each day, perhaps as a diary of daily life. You asked who would listen to them- I would! If I can interest anyone else in this I certainly will. My daughter-in law will ask at the Catholic school if they would "adopt" your mission thru their prayers, if that is o.k."*

I'm a BIG believer in children's prayers. So you can just imagine how touched I was by this initiative. It just had to be part of this report.

Dear supporter of the Mission. Please join me in this epic effort to conquer more souls for Heaven. Think of how much God has blessed you in your life, materially and spiritually, and how you could, by an extra sacrifice, share a bit more of those blessings.

With a grateful heart... for the *poorest of the poor*.

Yours truly, in Jesus and Mary,

Rev. Canon Henry Fragelli

Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus Mission

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PICTURES

I had added to this report several pictures I took of all the leaking roofs, rotten beams, caving ceilings, "vandalized" bathrooms, rotten doors and windows, hot-wired electrical connections, and many other depressing picture of the Mission. But, besides wasting a lot of expensive color ink, I thought it made this report too "dramatic" making it somewhat tacky and thus unreal. I will save those for when I can hopefully cheer your good heart with something more positive like a "Before & After" session.

IMPORTANT: I will send you regular updates of the Mission's progress and blessings.

INSTRUCTIONS: In the following page you will find detailed instructions on how to donate.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DONATE TO THE

Mission St. Therese of the Infant Jesus

Mouila, Gabon - Africa

To safely send a donation (one time donation or monthly donation) is simple:

Step 1.

- a. Go to www.institute-christ-king.org.
- b. Click on *Shrine of Christ the King*.
- c. Click on *Donate*.
- d. Click on *African Missions*, and follow the prompts for donating. You can make a one-time donation or set up for a recurring donation.

Step 2.

- a. Send an email to our secretary, Mrs. Mary Hall, at info@institute-christ-king.org to let her know that you wish your donation to be sent to the *Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus*, in Mouila, Africa. Or if you wish, to make it clearer: "for Fr. Fragelli's Mission". *
- b. IMPORTANT: Copy that email to me at fragellihenrique@hotmail.com so that I can follow up on it every month.

* You will get a yearly tax-deductible receipt for your donation.

* If you wish you can contact Mrs. Mary Hall at: (773) 363-7409 ext. 3.

We need urgent help. There are literally hundreds of families waiting to receive catechism and the Sacraments. But we need about eighty thousand dollars to restore the Mission to its minimum operating conditions. Then, just as important, we have to keep it up. So, in considering helping the Mission, I would beg you to consider donating perhaps a little less, but then signing up to our monthly donation program, so that we can guarantee the continuity of the missionary work. The monthly donation budget will be the measure of the Mission's growth. I will NOT build a "magnificent mission" even if it means evangelizing a lot of people, if we cannot guarantee its continuity.

May God repay you a hundred-fold. Your name and your family will be remembered in ALL the Masses said at the Mission.

In a few weeks I will be sending, to our donors, and extensive report of the already great progress we have made, by the grace of God, at the Mission. I have a lot of good news to share with you. Please consider joining me in this Mission through your generous donation.

And please be assured of my prayers and immense gratitude. Being out here is quite a challenge. Having you "on board" means a lot to me.

May God bless you and Our Lady be always in your good heart.

Canon. H. Fragelli