

# MISSION RESTORATION PROJECT # 3

*Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus*

**Reaching out to the "Poorest of the Poor"**

Mouila, Gabon, Africa – June 2013

*by Rev. Canon Henry Fragelli*

Dear Friend of the Mission,

Thanks to your prayers and/or generous support, a lot has happened at the Mission in the two months since my last report. I am anxious to update you.

Before I do, however, you need to know what I have learned that now shapes my entire approach to serving the Mission. The first section below attempts to paint a picture of this new understanding. The remainder of the report updates you on the progress of the Mission in light of this understanding.

## **THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF ALL**

Having received the commission of reopening the African Mission in Mouila, it is self-evident that it is my duty to love the souls that have been entrusted to my care in this corner of Africa. I know, however, that I cannot love what I do not know. Thomistic theology teaches us the essential combination: *know-love-serve*. But to know these people I serve is **for me the greatest challenge of all: the great African "mystery."**

My own diverse ethnic background and personal choices give me a heart free from any hint of racism. I think they also are the foundation for the great freedom, and perhaps courage, with which I have been in the search of understanding the African soul. The search for understanding is something I feel compelled to do in order that I may truly love.

So, putting aside all lies and deceit of political correctness, and always seeking to love them, I have come to peace with the reality that Africans in Gabon are very different. These differences run so deep that the truth is that the color of our skins is the least of our differences. Africans in Gabon are different from others in the world just as the Chinese are different from the Europeans, the Europeans are different from those in the Middle East, and those in the Middle East are different from the Philipino, etc.

By accepting reality, I started appreciating many of the qualities of the African soul. This brought great peace to me and to my relationship with them. Although I have yet to completely wrap my mind and heart around all aspects of their unique qualities, various certainties have guided my apostolate at the African front and resulted in my dear African faithful feeling understood by me. The fruit has been great joy for these African souls.

One of the first differences I had to accept lies in the way the Africans in Gabon think. Their reasoning and thinking processes follow other paths in the search for the truth than ours.

Discovering those paths is therefore essential to understanding them. This passage written by the first American Ambassador to Gabon, Mr. Charles Darlington, in his book *African Betrayal*, is quite enlightening:

*“African thought processes differ from ours in subtle ways. You have to be careful that your meaning is properly understood, and you must be cautious in assuming that what appears to be agreed is really agreed and will be carried out. Because Africans appear open, it is easy to delude yourself that you understand them, but underneath their surface there is another plane of consciousness where you cannot enter.”*

This is, in part, what I call: the “African mystery.”

Acknowledgment of this mystery also directs my pastoral approach and illuminates another key difference. I have come to understand – the hard way most of the time – that before reaching out to their souls in any kind of intellectual form, I must engage them in the Mission in activities that will lock their minds, their hearts, their time **and their hands** into the idea of somehow serving God. This is why we have worked so hard in the material rebuilding of the Mission and the several workshops at the Mission. This work is not any form of “activism” but instead the tough but necessary path to reaching out to the African soul . . . beyond the “African mystery.” The beginning of this struggle is what you will see in pictures and comments all throughout this Report #3.

There is much more to understanding the Africans in Gabon. For example, in my observation the Gabonese are people with little ambition. Although there are a million reasons for this and nuances to it, I’m sure you can see how this “blessing” can also be a curse. One of those million reasons for this lack of ambition is the vicious cycle that poverty creates. I found that giving them ambition by proving to them that they can do (even if only with their hands) beautiful things—things that will be appreciated by others—somehow gives them that self-confidence and pride that fuels any good ambition, even that of going to Heaven.

I thought it important, therefore, as part of this “*Mission Restoration Project #3*” to share with you that which, in all honesty, has constituted **my greatest challenge**: loving them. I am happy to share with you that, by the grace of God and in great part due to your prayers, I have taken some important steps toward the essence of my mission (loving them) by starting to understand them.

As you know, *grace builds upon nature*. So, in my humble belief, that which you and I are doing at the Mission is, with the help of God, building the foundation for the many wonders that God’s grace will soon do in that beautiful little corner of the African jungle called the *Mission Saint Therese of the Child Jesus*.

So, for now... enjoy *Mission Restoration Project #3*.

## BAPTISMS

The month of April began with a refreshing priestly experience: baptizing my first five African children. This took place at our parish in Libreville. What a blessing!



## BELL STEEPLE - This was quite a project. Just... follow the pictures.

This was a long-winded project. It just took a lot to manipulate, with little tools, this hard and very heavy



African wood. Just the wood part of the steeple weighs 1200 lb. Thick metal plates were necessary to support the swinging of a 270 lb bell. Then the roof, also made of hard African wood.



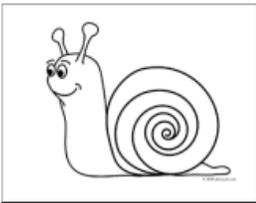
Then came the day to raise our steeple. Would it stand the test? First: prayer. We gathered asking the angel's help and protection as we consecrated the soon to be raised steeple to the Blessed Mother under her title of "*Tower of Ivory*". The operation took several hours since the weight of our bell steeple resisted the pull of 14 men and a four wheel pick-up.

Once raised, the steeple was secured with stones and concrete. Then came "Part II" of the operation: raising the bell and fastening it in an axel perfectly parallel to the ground. In the meanwhile, our brave

African volunteers kept good grip of the ropes so that the bell would not fall. At the end... I just had to climb to the top to sing "victory".



But... it was not over. How to lift and fasten the roof to the top of the steeple? A little creature of God called snail gave us the idea.



### INAUGURATION DAY

Pentecost Sunday was the chosen day. Before Mass we gathered before the steeple, blessed it, and inaugurated it by ringing its first *Angelus*.

Oh!!!! What a difference it makes to have a bell at the Mission. It was as if the Mission had been finally "baptized."



We then processed to the chapel for Sunday Mass. If you haven't ever noticed... my favorite part of Priestly ministry is preaching. (Picture 3)



## NEW "BIG CHAPEL" & ALTAR

A very generous donor – whom we pray God will reward abundantly – shipped us, from the US, all the chapel / altar items: Tabernacle, large candle sticks, Stations of the Cross, etc. They will soon arrive to complete our "big chapel", which will be inaugurated by our *Prior General* in August.

Once the sanctuary was done, and the roof fixed (Report #2) we proceeded to tiling the floor and steps in the sanctuary. Then, in order to build a tall altar, we took down the low ceiling and put in a new one following the roof design.



We then found this beautiful black hard African wood for the making of the high altar.



### The ALTAR

To represent the worship of the Gabonese people, the altar will be made not only of this noble African wood but sculpted out of authentic Gabonese stone. (See pictures of our patron saints on left.)

## LOADING & UNLOADING

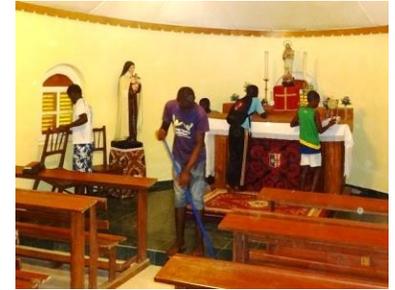
Loading and unloading seems to be a constant in the Missionary's life. It reminds me, every time, of the consoling reality that God's plan of Salvation and our ministry: Jesus who loads on his shoulders our sins to unload ours. Believe me, it makes those bricks, wood or iron weigh a lot less.



## ALTAR BOY'S GROUP



Little by little God has blessed the Mission with a nice group of altar boys. They just... "show up" from I don't know where. With over twenty altar boys in training and participating in formation programs made specifically for them, they gradually start taking part of the Mission's chores, like cleaning the chapel, polishing the brass items of the liturgy, etc.



Thanks again to the generosity of some good souls, we were able to purchase 30 cassocks of all different sizes. But before wearing them, they



must first know how to serve the *Low Mass* which includes memorizing all their prayers. It is amazing to see the effort that some of



them make just to be able to wear the beautiful blue cassock.

Initially, only two of them passed the exam (picture: top right). Then... two more... then three more, etc. Little by little, of a total of 25 altar boys, 12 have passed the exam.



### ... A TASTE OF AFRICA...

This is a shoe store in Mouila. There are no shoe stores that sell new shoes, only used ones. So I took the altar-boys there to buy them black shoes to use with their blue cassocks. While there, we bumped into this man carrying around his neck two huge live snakes. A thief, of course. While no one dared approach him, he filled his pockets with what he could grab.



## THE "DAUGHTERS OF THE MISSION"

For lack of a better name, for now the lady's group has named itself "*Daughters of the Mission.*"

Finally their sewing/embroidery workshop was ready for us to bless and inaugurate. We then met to discuss what their "mission" would be within the Mission.

- A prayer-group to promote the Holy Rosary.
- A lady's group to help with the cleaning of the chapel, the running of the library, the keeping of the gift-shop.
- They will also organize the receptions at the Mission.
- They will be part of the pastry making at the bakery.
- They will help organize the program for the little girls of the Mission. ... not bad for starters.



FIRST PROJECT  
Curtains for the Mission's  
guest rooms.

### PICTURES

Building the table, meeting, blessing, inaugurating and teaching at the new sewing/embroidery workshop.



### BAKERY

Besides the lady's sewing workshop and the boy's carpentry shop, we will soon have another workshop to further engage our faithful as well as to serve the needs of the many social events of the Mission: A bakery.

- The girls will learn to make pastries and bake.
- The boys will exercise their muscles in making bread.

**VOLUNTEERS:** I am looking for one or more lady volunteers to come for a few weeks to teach the girls how to bake. As to the bread making... the teacher will be myself. Just got to pull out of my memory old recipes.

**PICTURES:** The building of the bakery in progress. The concrete platform right outside of the bakery will hold a large two-door brick oven.



**SAFETY:** Wall around the Mission and night watch.

I have been repeatedly warned against thieves that will be attracted to the Mission due to the many works being done. ... I wish



the money that these devotees of St. Dimas think that they smell were true! 😊 We could never afford to make a grid that would surround the whole mission, so we bought a welding machine, over a ton of iron (pictures), and we are making the grids ourselves.

**PICTURES:** The grids top a four foot brick wall.



**NIGHT WATCH:**

In addition to the grid we hired a night watch. Our good neighbors, the *Trinitarian Sisters*, have been recently robbed seven times! Tell you the truth... I don't have enough monthly income to pay his salary. But... *rather safe than sorry*, right? For now, that's St. Joseph's task. 😊

**MEN'S GROUP**

Our men's group continue to gather twice a month. Little by little they are getting more and more involved at the Mission.



## GUEST ROOMS

Part of the Mission's apostolate is to receive guests. These include families of our parishioners from Libreville. Their presence is always a great joy to us, but it is also a source of income for the Mission.

The rooms were tiled, and completely refurbished. Observe the curtains. They are the first fruit of the girl's workshop.



Now we are building a porch all along the front of the Guest room building. Observe the beauty of this magnificent red African wood. This wood is used for making pillars to support decks on water. It can stay in the water up to 100 years without rotting.



The extra help is always welcome. 😊

## FOR AMERICANS... just a curiosity:

Having lived in the US most of my time, I can appreciate the surprise that an American would have at certain African realities. This (picture), for example, is our version of *Home Depot*. Believe me: this store is my greatest source of building materials and tools in Mouila.



Then... would you ever imagine that this is how we buy sand?



I trek through the jungle to the near river. There, young Gabonese await with their log canoes. They take turns diving to the bottom of the river with a bucket to scoop the sand which is then poured into their canoes. Then they

bring it to shore to sell to the customer. Could life be simpler?



### TILING THE MISSION'S MAIN HOUSE



Another big project was tiling the main house. First we had to remove the rotting linoleum.



What a difference!!!

### NEW PORCH



To complete the job, we closed the porch with a wooden railing.

And again.... What a marvelous difference!



## BOY'S CARPENTRY WORKSHOP

While I was still a seminarian, on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, I met a very devout couple who have recently made the Mission a very generous donation. A multi-function machine to work the wood. Functions like the saw-table, wood planer, molding making, etc. This machine will be part of our Boy's Carpentry Workshop. It will be used for three big projects during this month of July:

1. The making of the new altar for the new "big chapel".
2. The making of 20 church benches for the new "big chapel".
3. The making of the shelves of the new library.



Our hearts turn, in prayer, to Our Blessed Mother, asking her to reward our generous donor and his family.

## LIBRARY



The new door that you see in this picture is that of our new library. For now, we divided a large room to make a library and sacristy for the new chapel, thus the reason for the new door.

Once the new chapel is made we will go on to make the shelves for the new library. God willing, and if we get new donors, you will see the continuation of the library project on the next Mission Report.

## SNAKES

I have been at the Mission for a little over 6 months, and have bumped into 12 poisonous snakes, an average of 2 per month ☺. Three of them inside the house... one inside my closet. But wearing a St. Patrick's medal that a good Carmelite Sister sent me, has kept me safe.

Since the tiling of the house and the many works and cleaning around the house, it seems that the snake population decided to move elsewhere. ☺



## LITURGY

For now the liturgical life at the Mission is limited to daily Mass, Adoration on Wednesdays and Sunday Mass.

But this month... we had our first funeral. Obviously... we had to build our own tomb. It was also the first time our altar-boys wore their blue cassocks.



**OTHER SMALLER WORKS**

Fixing up an old house requires, of course, many, many other small works.  
 Pictures:

1. New siding for the buildings.
2. Restoring the garden's flower vases.
3. Same
4. Cleaning the palm trees. A very tough job.
5. Digging/building two new septic tanks



**ODDS & ENDS - Pictures:**

1. Our pickup climbing into the ferry boat. For these past several months a bridge on the route to Libreville has been under construction obliging us to wait, up to 6 hours or more, in long car lines, to cross the river on a ferry boat. ... just another of the many African realities.
2. New lawn mower for the Mission
3. To the little ones, at times, I give them as "homework" to bring flowers to the Blessed Mother.



**PR & VISITORS**



Due to the broken bridge, we have had no visitors from Libreville these past months, except the parents of Canon Bergerot, one of our Priests in Libreville.

Our good friend, the Police Chief, just had a new son. So he brought him for me to bless. He will soon be baptized.



Then our Good *Trinitarian Sisters* invited us, the local priests, to celebrate with them "their feast day", Trinity Sunday.

They are good and holy sisters. They teach at the local Catholic High School. They also run a primary school and a pharmacy. At their invitation I have preached them already 3 retreats.



## CARE PACKAGES

Once again, our immense gratitude to to help the Mission by sending *Care* good souls realize the good that they with many needed items, they make



the generous souls who have chosen *Packages*. I don't think that these do! Besides providing the Mission home feel less far away.

IMPORTANT: Please **do NOT** use the address of the BRICHAUX family anymore. They returned to France.

FOR ALL PACKAGES AND CORRESPONDENCE USE ONE OF THE TWO FOLLOWING ADDRESSES:

Capitaine Vincent ANTHONIOZ  
BP 72 - SP 85 701  
00864 – ARMÉES  
FRANCE

Madame Sabine HOCQUEMILLER  
SP 85716  
00864 – ARMÉES  
FRANCE

**VERY IMPORTANT: Do NOT put my name on the address**

And once again: THANK YOU!

## BOY'S & GIRL'S CAMPS

End of July and beginning of August, will bring to the Mission lots of children for our traditional one-week summer camp. Please pray for that. And please pray that we can finish some of the basic works such as the chapel and the bakery that will be needed for the camp.

## ANOTHER GOOD PIECE OF NEWS

God willing, in September, we should get extra help at the Mission; a Seminarian. Most importantly we will then be able to have some community life such as the singing the *Divine Office* every day, etc.

## LAST and LEAST

This (picture) is not some kind of liturgical innovation. It just happened that in preparing the Mission for Sunday Mass, we found our dog "Guinesse" dead. She was bitten by a snake. ...if only she had been wearing a St. Patrick's medal... ☺



## OUR GRATITUDE

For all those that have been contributing to the Mission, please know that not one day goes by that you are not remembered in the intentions of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Before God's eyes, I am sure, You are as much a Missionary as any of us up here on the front lines. It is in gratitude to you that we put together this "*Mission Restoration Project #3*".

## URGENT REQUEST

MONTHLY DONATION  
**The most needed right now.**

My fear at the moment is not being able to maintain all that has been done at the Mission, especially all the many programs that have been put into place. More than large one-time donations, at the moment, we urgently need generous souls that will join the Mission through their monthly donation.

JUST TO SUSTAIN OUR CURRENTLY MONTHLY EXPENSES OF THE MISSION

**we need an increase of U\$ 3.200 worth of monthly donations.**

What am I doing to supply that now? I borrow and "run after the money" every end of the month.

I'm aware that this can be a sacrifice, and perhaps a big one. Just know that anything and everything that you give is deeply appreciated. Your donation, big or small, does make a huge difference!

I pray that God will truly reward you and your family with all that you and your family need.

*BUT... THERE IS MORE*  
*These are the more urgent jobs that we need to finish.*  
*We beg your generous heart to help us in these tasks.*

<b>NEW BIG CHAPEL</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> the roof, part of the electrical; the tiling of the sanctuary. We also bought the wood for the making of the altar. <b>NEEDED:</b> Wood for the 20 church pews; painting of ceiling and walls. To finish at least the essentials so that we can inaugurate the new Big Chapel in August	\$8,500
<b>NEW SACRISTY FOR THE NEW BIG CHAPEL</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Large two-leaf oval-topped entrance door; walls and sink. <b>NEEDED:</b> All the Sacristy furniture. <i>Generous donors have sent us a few beautiful vestments, a tabernacle, the altar candle sticks, thurifer, stations of the cross and other church items.</i>	\$13,000
<b>LIBRARY</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> New door (picture) and wall. And building shelves. <b>NEEDED:</b> Building all the shelves and putting in air-conditioning.	\$5,100
<b>GUESTROOMS</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Ceiling, floor and walls are done. <b>NEEDED:</b> We need now to work on the furniture and other details of the bathrooms.	\$6,000
<b>MAIN HOUSE</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> The house is all tiled and painted. <b>NEEDED:</b> Several minor repairs are still needed such as solving the constant water shortage, etc.	\$4,700
<b>GARAGE</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Nothing yet. <b>NEEDED:</b> Building a garage and place to house a big electricity generator that is being donated to the Mission.	\$4,500
<b>BAKERY</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Walls, roof and electrical. <b>NEEDED:</b> Electrical oven, refrigerator, freezer, brick oven and all the utensils. <i>This bakery will not only bring income to the Mission but it will also be a craft shop for the youth.</i>	\$9,500
<b>DORMS</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Nothing yet. <b>NEEDED:</b> Restoring beds, painting, electrical. (We are preparing for two week long youth camps in July and August.) The purchase of 30 mattresses (for the youth camps.)	\$8,100
<b>CLASSROOMS</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Nothing yet. <b>NEEDED:</b> Two class rooms. Painting, electrical and mainly building tables and benches.	\$6,500
<b>EXTERNAL BATHROOMS</b>	
<b>DONE:</b> Nothing yet. <b>NEEDED:</b> All doors need to be changed. Plumbing and electrical needed.	\$1,200
<b>PHOTOCOPIER</b> - Mainly for the use of the choir.	\$550
<b>TOOLS</b>	\$1,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$69,150</b>

Please consider joining the Mission through your prayers, but also through a MONTHLY gift, or any other kind of gift, so that we can continue the work at the Mission

*INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DONATE TO THE  
Mission St. Therese of the Infant Jesus  
Mouila, Gabon - Africa*

To safely send a donation or a monthly donation to the Mission is simple:

**Step 1**

- a. Go to [www.institute-christ-king.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

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

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.

*Rev. Canon H. Fragelli*

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