

MISSION REPORT # 5
Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus
Reaching out to the “Poorest of the Poor”
Mouila, Gabon, Africa – February 2, 2014
by Rev. Canon Henry Fragelli

Dear Friend of the Mission,

It has been a while! I thank you for your friendship, for your prayers and your support despite the long silence. But believe me: silence is what we haven't had out here! It has been a very busy four months since our last report.

Where to start? I guess... “*let's start from the very beginning ♫♪ a very good place to start ♫♪*” ... chronologically.

A SHORT BUT PLEASANT BREAK

After the *marathon* that led to the inauguration of our new “big” Chapel on August 11th, 2013, I took a couple of days off to “recharge batteries”. I went to...meet the elephants.



1. Crossing the bay on boat.
2. Miles inland through a river.
3. To arrive at this place far from any civilization.
4. Nice reading time at the sound of the ocean.
5. That little male elephant actually charged at us. They are quite wild.
6. And I brought back a trophy from the elephant cemetery! ☺

VOLUNTEERS

The Mission was blessed with the visit of two volunteers: **Miss Natalie Zivnuska** who came to teach at our new “bakery” and **Miss Kate Serafino** who taught at the sewing workshop. They were here for a full month and brought so much life and joy to the Mission. The work they did was incredible. They gave a huge boost to the Mission.

In preparation for the classes they were going to give we did some shopping first.



Pictures: Shopping: in Libreville’s supermarkets, at a fabric stores and at the local market.



Then... to work!

Pictures: Miss Natalie teaching at the bakery. The ladies were very attentive and took notes of everything. Miss Natalie developed recipes using local ingredients

and local fruits such as coconut, banana and other spices. **The result...**



And the *Daughters of the Mission* were certainly very proud of what they learned and of what they now can do, thanks to Miss Natalie. See what you miss not being in Gabon? ☺



BTW: Miss Natalie is a real *pro*. Check out her blog:
<http://vindepeche.blogspot.com/>



All the while, only two doors down, Miss Kate with her needles, threads and colorful African fabrics, kept very busy too:



She diligently and patiently prepared and gave sewing and embroidery classes. And, with a dictionary on hand... all in good French! ☺ At the end we were able to offer our Bishop this gift (bottom right): A wooden tray made at our carpentry shop, holding a fancy bag made at our sewing workshop, containing goodies from the Mission's new bakery.



But not all of our volunteer's stay was work, work, and work. They had some relaxing time too.



Pictures: A visit to the historical Dr. Schweitzer Hospital. Then an excursion deep into the African jungle for some sightseeing. A couple of visits to Libreville. Some shopping on the roadside. Crossing the Equator. Enjoying meals with our guests.



Miss Natalie and Miss Kate also helped us build up a lady's prayer group.



Pictures: Rosary group. Blessing of rosaries. Cleaning of the Chapel. In gratitude, the ladies offered them a nice "African dinner" and brought them gifts.

They also helped put together our church picnic (Kermesse) **Pictures:** Preparing the Kermesse's prizes and the games. The

pignata (bottom-right) was supposed to be a full elephant but... the king of the Gabonese jungle not baring the idea of being beat up by the little ones... had a heart attack. It exploded. ☺ Miss Natalie were able to save the head and... oh poor thig! it trully took such a huge beating next day... for the joy of may children.



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OUR LADY'S GARDEN.

To close this chapter of their Missionary work, our volunteers prepared Our Lady's garden. The statue of Mary and Child is being shipped to Gabon this very moment.



What would we do without little Marc-Antoine's help?





AND THEIR LEGACY ENDURED
Upon their departure two ladies * Maman Leontine and Maman Laure, assumed respectively the responsibility for the sewing workshop and the bakery. In the first picture: Meeting with them and Noëline and Miss Poity the sewing teacher.



**(It took quite a bit for me to get used to it, but here in Gabon very few women go by "Madame". The local tradition calls them "Mamam" even if they are not a mother. And the same for the men: "Papa".)*

THE BISHOP'S VISIT

One day, after a meeting of the *Prebyteral Council*, our Bishop, Msgr. Madega asked me, in all simplicity: "*Can we all come eat "chez vous" tomorrow?*" The answer was obviously "yes" and though we had to do a lot of preparations... it was really an honor. It was his first visit to the Mission. And with him all the Priests of the diocese.



We prepared and aperitif in the front lawn, followed by lunch at the terrace. Then Msgr. Madega went on to visit the Mission blessing everything and... taking pictures.



Then we gathered back in the main house for coffee.



On the first picture of the row above: Msgr. Madega reads the letters of the foundation of our Institute. Letters by Cardinal Oddi, Cardinal Piovanelli, Cardinal Palazzini and Cardinal



Stickler. Our Institute was founded at this same Mission, at the same place where those letters hang today.

“God writes straight through crooked lines” says the adage. Perhaps it would be more accurate: *“We see crooked in God’s straight lines.”* Yes, He had it all planned out to the smallest detail. It was not just “by chance” that it Msgr. Madega was the one who gave me all my Minor Orders. (Picture on the right.)



THE “KERMESSE” (Mission’s “Church Picnic”)

Coordinated by our faithful Major Charles, posters announcing the *Kermesse* were posted all over town.



But first... a test of faith. For the WHOLE week preceding the *Kermesse*, the Mission looked like this (picture.) Constant and torrential rains told us we had picked the wrong time for our Church Picnic. The faithful kept on looking at me with long interrogative faces, and every time I told them the same thing: *“If it’s sunny we say: ‘Thank you, Lord’; if it rains we say: ‘Thank you, Lord.’”* Well... He was not going

to let us down. On *Kermesse* day the sun shinned bright and beautiful for the first time in the season. For me... that was the most beautiful part of the day: the Lord’s *blinking of the eye* to us.



There were over 250 awards or purchase items, either from our bakery, or sewing workshop, or from donations that you sent to the Mission. Prize number one was a beautiful oil painting offered by my sister Andrea.



There were over **250 children** and they had the greatest time of their lives. They had never seen something like it.



The tossing of the water balloon game was their favorite. They were good at catching them but... not always successful.



It took the boys over an hour to climb up the greasy pole and harvest their prizes. But... they didn’t give up until every one of them came down.

Some pictures... don't need explanation!



At each game the children earned ticket that allowed them to "buy" prizes, on all the "booths", and the best won points that allowed their names to be raffled for final prizes. (picture)



Tug of war – And the girls were just as competitive



Then there were several smaller games, for all the ages, so that all could have fun and win prizes.



Honored by the visit of the Governor and his wife

The Pignata



At the end... the reward for the winners.

YEARLY RETREAT



In October the *Institute* flew me to France to participate in our *Priestly Yearly Retreat*. It took place at the Benedictine Abbey of Our Lady of Rondol. We were 33 Priests. How wonderful it was to be among my Confrères! (Though... being the only one in white, I felt I was the “black sheep” of the bunch. ☺) Humor aside, I don’t know how I, or any of us, could make it without that yearly *tune up*



and *oil change*. From there I took a train to Lourdes to pray for the Mission and so many other intentions. I lit a candle at Our Lady’s Grotto for each benefactor of the Mission. And if by chance I forgot a name or two, I’m sure Our Lady didn’t. Then, back on another train, I went to pay a visit to our *Boss* and Patroness of the Mission: Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus. And again... the list of intentions to pray for... poor St. Therese, she must have been bored to hear so many.

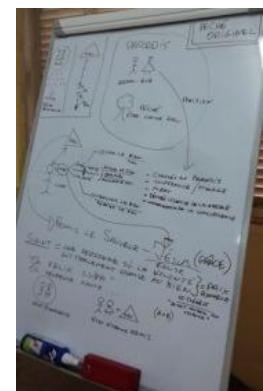
CATECHISM



The highlight of the Mission schedule is the Catechism classes on Saturday: two classes for the children and one for the



adults. All are being prepared either for Baptism or Marriage. You might find my drawings childish but...



here concepts must be transmitted in the simplest form possible. Teaching catechism here is the hardest I ever had in

my life, because they struggle grasping any universal principles. They relate only to the singular and concrete day-to-day reality. A “problem” that, from reading the Gospels, it is evident that Our Lord Jesus had too. (How consoling!) More than anything else, one has to tell stories, use images, examples, and like Our Lord: metaphors. Or nothing will stick.



ENGLISH CLASSES

In November we started giving “Advanced English Classes” every Monday, at the Mission. It has attracted a group of about 25 students, all of a somewhat more elevated cultural level. Not all that come are Catholic, but... I use the class to pass on Catholic stories and teaching... all in English.



TIME FOR SOME SPORT? Or should I say... “SUPPORT”?



Yes it is **better to laugh and humor than to cry**; but the truth is that it hasn’t been easy without a car. Our pickup is up in age and showing the signs of it too. Every month, systematically, something broke in it and... I couldn’t afford it anymore. So I left it in Libreville and bought a bicycle. Yes, it has been good for sport, but several Mission activities are suffering for the lack of a vehicle. We are praying to God to inspire a generous donor to give the Mission a new vehicle. We need it badly.



The GREEN comes back... but also the SNAKES

As the dry season came to a close (four long months without a drop of water falling from the sky,) the green came back and the Mission seems alive again. But with the green came also the snakes. Though, thank God, this year they have been a lot less numerous than last year and... none in the house.



ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY - AFRICAN DINNER



To celebrate one year of my arrival, the faithful prepared a surprise “*African Dinner*”. It was touching to see their gratitude. Yes, there is a lot for all of us to be thankful for to our good Lord and



our Blessed Mother, especially if we consider that just one year ago, this place looked abandoned. Today, as Monsignor Wach told me several times already: “*The Mission is more than just alive again.*” And, as I thank Our Lady and Our Lord for their blessings, I count you, dear Mission Benefactor, and I ask Them to reward you a hundred-fold for your generosity.

THE GREATEST JOY



It is always a great joy to look forward to, being with our confrères in Libreville. I go up to the capital once a month and we catch up on a lot of conversation, mostly around the table.



NEW EMPLOYEES

Time and experience imposed a recent change of staff. *Charlin* is our new full-time gardener, house-keeper and handy-man; while his wife *Raïssa* works for us part-time (two hours a day) keeping clean the Chapel, Sacristy, Library, Bakery, Carpenter Shop, Sewing Workshop, and all the public bathrooms and areas of the Mission. Their little son *Chardin* was baptized on December 8th. And... guess who is his



Godfather? And: very important: *Marc-Antoine* got a new little friend and playmate. ☺



ODDS & ENDS

Blessing Fabrice's new restaurant.

By recommendation of Fr. Jean (my confessor), we had the joy of having Abbé Wilfrid (diocesan seminarian) for his yearly retreat at the Mission.



FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION A day long waited for: the first BAPTISMS at the Mission

After visiting the Mission, Msgr. Madega quickly and generously granted us his permission for us to give all the Sacraments at the Mission.

This was the day we had worked for the whole year. It finally came!!!

Nine infants were baptized, and then consecrated to the Blessed Mother of her Feast Day.



As always... at the Mission we got to build it first. (Picture: Making of the baptismal font.)



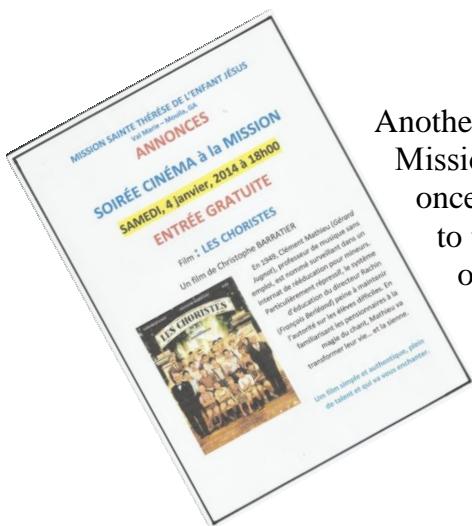
This was undoubtedly the most beautiful day since I set foot in Africa. The miracle of baptism! The joy of “transforming” simple creatures of God into Children of God!



and the carpentry workshop and all its tools, from... itching hands.

NEW GRIDS

But... we are not in Heaven yet. We are in a *valley of tears*, and in this *valley* there is... theft. So we made grids and put them to protect the bakery, the sewing workshop



CINEMA AT THE MISSION

Another activity that has attracted many to the Mission is our “*Soirée Cinéma à la Mission*”. And once again, thanks to the generosity of our donors. We have it twice a month.



CHOIR FROM LIBREVILLE



The choir is often one of the biggest challenges for a Pastor. It is certainly true at the Mission. I have sung 22 years of my life in different



choirs but I feel totally incompetent to teach music. So Libreville has kindly lent us, on some occasions, a few members of their choir who come to Mouila for a weekend or so, to give our little and off-tune choir a boost of enthusiasm. With the grace of God (and a LOT of good will,) we will get there!!!



Remember when we told you the story (in Mission Report #2) of how St. Joseph gave us new furniture for our Sacristy? Well... it arrived! It is all here (picture) packed up and ready to be assembled... next week.

You might also remember how (in Mission Report #3) we asked for reservoirs: one for the house, the other for holy water. Well... here they are!!! And a big THANK YOU to YOU!

In the next Mission Report, God willing, you will see pictures of the new Sacristy as well as pictures of the inauguration of our little 1000 liters holy water tank. Yes... we do intend to bless and exorcise all of Gabon! ☺ No joke!



GABON AND ITS ABUNDANCE

As always we add to our *Mission Reports* some “non-Mission” related items to get our readers a bit more familiarized with Gabon and the culture that surrounds us.



I have not yet met a non-Gabonese that doesn't believe pineapples grow on trees, me included. It blossoms like a flower and crown.

These are elephant tusks that were seized by the police from illegal hunters. There is, unfortunately, quite a bit of that in Gabon. But the government is determined to finish with it. These tusks are burned in public square.

When the mushroom season comes, like everything in Gabon... it comes in great abundance. We wash them, cook it, freeze them, and have mushroom sauce for... a long time to come.

We have at the Mission 3 large mango trees. I calculated that they give us 14,000 mangos during the season. It is usually all wasted, but this year we were better prepared, so we harvested a good part and froze it to make jam & dessert.

IN GRATITUDE

We are so grateful to those that generously send us donations in kind. It is so much an “essential” part of the Mission now. From tools, to Mass vestments, to toys, to the painting that served as our main prize at the *Kermesse*, and so much more. **My God bless your good and generous hearts!**



NATIVITY and CARPENTRY SHOP



The carpentry shop has been busy with Mission restoration projects. But soon it will start serving to give classes to the boys. For that purpose we have made 12 working tables. This (picture) was the boy's first activity: the Nativity scene. They were very proud of their "first project".



CARPENTRY SHOP & SOCIAL SPACE **IMPORTANT**

As the Mission grows, it is badly in need of a gathering space so that we can have our meetings and "parish socials". That space is now been taken by the Carpentry Workshop. So... it is time to move it. We pray God to inspire the generosity of new donors so that we can build an open shed (like the one on the picture) to move our Carpentry Workshop to. It will



cost 9,500 dollars. This price also includes a spacy enclosure to lock all the tools, and the large concrete slate that will serve as floor to the whole shop. We have, as you know, most of the tools, electrical and manual, plus 12 working tables that we have just made for the boys to work on.

We will then gain a large indoor hall that, with a bit of painting and fixing up, will make a very nice meeting hall for our community that is growing every week. **We need it badly.**

ADORATION and DAILY MASSES and SUNDAY MASS



It does not hurt to mention...
All at the Mission gravitates around Holy Mass, Adoration to the Blessed Sacrament, of which, of course, the Altar Boy training is such an intricate part. They are turning out to be the... *best Altar Boys in... Africa!* ☺



CHRISMAS CARDS AND GIFTS
Before Christmas the *Daughters of the Mission* prepared, at the Mission Bakery and Sewing Workshop, cakes and baskets that were distributed to all of our "important contacts" in the region. We were then happy to realize how many new friends we made in only one year. I was happy to distribute over 120 handwritten Christmas cards, many of which were accompanied by goodies from the Mission.



MIDNIGHT MASS: OUR TWO FIRST ADULT BAPTISMS

As always... the most beautiful night of the year

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For the joy of the entire Mission, we were able to baptize our dear Noëline as well as Jessy our oldest and most dedicated altar-boy. Then they received their First Communion and at the end the Miraculous Medal of Our Lady. And... to keep the tradition, a little celebration followed in which we gave Noëline a gift and sang her happy birthday. She was born on Christmas day, thus her name.

Three others also received their First Communion during Midnight Mass.

CHRISTMAS DAY

For Christmas we were honored by the presence of Fr. Jean, my confessor and our good friend from Libreville, whom I invited to preach for us on Christmas day.

For Christmas we were honored by the presence of Fr. Jean, my confessor and good



1. Fr. Jean preaching.
2. Around the Crèche singing Christmas Carols and adoring the Infant Jesus.
3. Again, Mass was preceded by the Baptism of two



new babies.

4. Thanks to the great love and generosity of Fr. La Pastina and his *Saint Gabriel Parish* in Stamford Connecticut, we had gifts to give to all the children this Christmas. For



most of them it was the ONLY gift they got.

5. For our Christmas dinner we had to make it in two ambiances because, thank God, we don't all fit in the terrace.



... ONE YEAR LATER ...

GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS

As we look back upon this first year at the Mission, we cannot but be filled with gratitude for so many blessings that Divine Providence and our Blessed Mother bestowed upon us. In the words of our Prior General: "*The Mission is more than just alive again!*"

Gratitude to THEM but also to YOU. With so many blessings from "above", You (and I a little bit too) brought grace, hope, joy and a chance of salvation to so many. Even though, as I look back, I see so much more I could have done, or done better, so much I failed to do. To my gratitude I add then a confident pleading for forgiveness. *Gratitude and forgiveness:* two essential ingredients to any work that claims itself to be God's. But two things are certain: 1) This only a beginning. 2) I could have NOT done any of it, or very little, without you. So, before God's eyes, I am sure, you are just as much a Missionary as I am, and if there is any merit in being in the *front line*, I'm happy to share it with you, with your families and loved ones, because more than anyone else I know that **I could have not done it without you.** In gratitude and in thanksgiving, I remember all *Mission benefactors* in the intentions of my daily Mass.

"DRY MARTYRDOM" In corresponding with a very dear friend and benefactor of the Mission, and talking about being a Missionary, he said: "*It's like a dry martyrdom.*" I found that term so appropriate! Because *that is exactly what being a Missionary is.* Even though... I imagine that one has to live it to truly understand it or even appreciate it. I just thought I'd share that with you.

CARE PACKAGES

If the *care packages* that some of you send to the Mission didn't have a real and physical return address on it, I would believe they were sent from Heaven. No kidding! Because that is the effect that they have in the moral out here. They tell us that beyond the desert there are souls that truly care, and worry, and pray, and think of us. That we are part of a larger family that loves us. That we are soldiers of the same *war* for the Kingdom of God and that we are not alone in the *trenches*.

Then... *last but not least*, the fact that all that you send is very useful and needed. So, once again: THANK YOU!!! God reward you!



WHAT TO SEND? Some asked for ideas of what to send. I suggest that, at each time, you send me an email and ask. Because the needs change all the time.

There are a few things that you can always send:

- Religious articles. Crucifixes, religious statues, medals, etc. (For now we have a lot of Rosaries. But if you have some to send... they will be put to use.)
- Ink for our printer: Inkjet Canon 35 and Inkjet Canon 36. We can always use those. In fact, the reason why I am printing only a few of these reports this time it's because I don't have more ink.
- But, if you wish to send a donation in kind to the Mission, please drop me an email and I will give you a list of the Mission's most immediate needs.

FOR ALL PACKAGES USE ONE OF THE TWO FOLLOWING ADDRESSES:

(These addresses are good through June, 2014. I will give you others in *Mission Report #6*)

VERY IMPORTANT: Do NOT put my name on the shipping address. And once again: THANK YOU!

Madame Béatrice ASSÉMAT
GS BDD - SP 85 703
00864 – ARMÉES
FRANCE

Madame Sabine HOCQUEMILLER
SP 85716
00864 – ARMÉES
FRANCE

MALARIA

Many have asked about me contracting malaria. To avoid rumors or over-worrying you, let's just make it official. Yes, I was diagnosed with malaria early in May, and I had a relapse of it in December, after Christmas. But that is not really a big deal out here. Malaria is unavoidable for anyone that stays here for a longer period of time. It is, as they say: "*Africa's baptism.*" And like baptism... once it is there, it is there to stay. However, if it is treated and if we are careful, one can live with it. What causes the resurfacing of malaria? Bad hygiene, malnutrition, lack of sleep or stress. I was guilty of the latter two over the Christmas holydays, so my Christmas gift was... a few days in bed. ☺

(As you can see in this map, Gabon is at the "heart" of malaria infected countries.)



SUMMARY OF THE MISSION'S MOST IMMEDIATE NEEDS																
MONTHLY DONATION																
Little by little we started becoming financially independent from Libreville. Today, we are totally on our own. To cover our monthly overhead we don't need much more: only 1,400 dollars of monthly donations. So, if any of you feel inspired to join the missionary effort by a monthly sacrifice... I ask that God bless you in double.																
FIRST ON THE LIST : A CAR																
	Anything with four wheels, but new, would do.		New Carpentarie	9,500	Finishing of the wall around the Mission	3,600	Finishing of the garage and water tower	2,800	Shelves and furniture for new library	4,500	Fixing up and furniture for new parish hall	3,500	TOTAL	23,900	If we could do the above by February and March, we would go on to other needed projects such as the tiling of the chapel and the furniture for the big sacristy.	
																
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NEXT MISSION REPORT

- The installation of the large statue of our Blessed Mother that was donated to the Mission. The statue arrived only a few days ago. ☺
- "As we speak" the new furniture for the Sacristy is being installed. So you will see that also in *Mission Report #6*.
- New missals (forty) were donated to the Mission. They will be given (accompanied of instruction) to the older faithful so that they can better follow the liturgy.
- Hopefully the new Carpentry
- The boy's baking lessons
- Hopefully more stories of volunteers. Please do come. You can do so much good out here. (See above)
- And God willing many more Sacraments, as we are preparing everyone for either Baptism or Marriage.

***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.
- 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.

* You can also send a donation to the Mission by sending a check to our headquarters in Chicago. Make sure you send it “care of Mrs. Hall” and that you indicate that your donation is for *Mission Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus*, in Mouila, Africa.

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.
Don’t miss this chance of “being a Missionary” too.**

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. I remember all of the Mission donors and their families in the intentions of my daily Holy Mass.

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

Rev. Canon H. Fragelli

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