



MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA

# Ghana-Nigeria Link



## THROW OUT YOUR NETS VOCATION JOURNEYS LIVED AND SHARED

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## Editorial

Dear Readers of the Ghana-Nigeria Link,

The year 2022 has almost run its course. Anyone who would say that it has been a beautiful, interesting, problem-free year, would do well to consult a psychiatrist. Events this year went from bad to worse and indeed no part of the world has been spared. The world was just learning how to deal and live with the remnants of Covid-19, when a new disaster with extremely serious consequences shook its apparent peace. Of course, I am referring to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was meant to be a short “military operation”: conquer Kiev in two days and install a puppet regime!! But after nine months, no one knows where and when it will end. Who does not admire the Ukrainians for their determination to defend their country? In the meantime, the rest of the world is confronted with an energy crisis and a food crisis. Prices skyrocket, also in Ghana. How to get out of this mess? How to find a solution for our problems?

When reflecting on what to write down for this editorial, I could not shake off these problems. What would Jesus tell us if he were with us today? Maybe he would look at us, as he looked at the disciples who came back, frustrated and disappointed after a futile night of fishing!! “Throw out your nets again”, he would also say to us. The disciples did so and... we all know the result.

Each one of us, active in missionary ministry, must often have felt as the Apostles, but we have continued; we were ready to throw our nets in new and uncharted waters; Imagine a young man (as Callistus Baalaboore was when he wrote one of his articles in this number) frightened at having to “swear an Oath”, but reassured by prayer! And....about 25+ years later looking in gratitude and joy at the “catch of fish” he and his confreres made in what were “new and uncharted waters” since the time they began in Togo (read his 2<sup>nd</sup>

article)! The two “Peters” (Ekutt and Koch) who each contributed an article had similar experiences of “new and uncharted waters”, as one began his mission in Karlsruhe and the other one was asked to reopen Adrar, a foundation in the Sahara of Algeria. Many confreres, such as Hilaire Paluku, felt unsure when asked for a specific and yet unknown task: am I up to the challenge to go into these “new and uncharted waters”? But they agreed! They went! Not to speak of those, like Leo Laurence, snatched away from a formation house to be an assistant captain on a boat about to begin a long-time journey? Yes, I am sure that each one of us can add our own name to this list, as without doubt we all have more than once set-off into such waters!! How nice it is to be given a chance, like Jacek Wroblewski, to take time-off in a sabbatical, to both look back and forward, and to be in person at the shores of the lake where the disciples of Jesus got into such waters? The remaining articles in this Link sum it all up: Stephen Ofonikot, whose article should have appeared in the previous number of the Link, but through a certain mix-up arrived late, shares with us the “*Grace of being a Missionary of Africa*” wherever we are, and Boris Yabré introduces himself to us, by narrating the many times that he began a new journey, from Burkina Faso to Zambia, then to Uganda and Jerusalem, and as a Missionary Priest to Mozambique and the Philippines and after a few months in France, finally (but surely temporarily) Ghana!

Dear Readers, let us never be frightened, because we are never alone on our boat when it enters new and uncharted waters. He, the Master, is always there, even if at times he is fast asleep at the back of the boat!!

**André Schaminée, M.Afr.**

WORD FROM PROVINCIAL FOR  
THE GHANA-NIGERIA LINK



The past weeks were quite hectic with many activities and meetings for some of us: Financial council meeting, JPIC-ED, Development committee, Post capitular assembly, Provincial council meeting etc. Nonetheless, I am happy that the media team is presenting us once again the LINK Newsletter to link us up by our fraternal sharing of ideas and encouragement from our confreres in various communities.

One of the biggest events in our Society this year is the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter that took place in Rome in May and June 2022. Consequently, each province was invited to bring the Chapter deliberations and recommendations home in the form of an action plan. The theme: Mission as Prophetic Witness was our guiding principle. The action plan is our roadmap that should enable us to be PROPHETIC WITNESSES in our Missionary activities for the next six years. From the 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of October, representatives from each community in our province met in Tamale to draw up a Strategic Action plan from the chapter recommendations that is appropriate and adapted for our province.

I take this unique opportunity to thank Leo Laurence Assistant General, who came from Rome for the post capitular assembly. I equally thank Ignatius Anipu, the moderator who animated the delegates and we efficiently made a strategic action plan which I believe is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely). I therefore invite every -one, individually and as a community to read it, discuss it, understand it, be challenged by it, own it and finally ACT in a prophetic manner. At some stage, dare to ask yourself, am I prophetic in what I do? I wish you a blessed season of Advent.

***By John Aserbire, M.Afr.***



## The Oath that frightens



The words of the “oath that frightens”! *Promise, swear - up to death*. I asked myself: do you know what you are going to commit yourself to?

I had been wondering why the years of formation were so long and I kept asking the question whether such a long formation was really necessary to form a missionary. But the end of formation arrived as “a thief in the night”!

When we went for the retreat before the oath and the diaconal ordination, the rector gave us the text of the oath to study and to write it out in our own handwriting. Those who wished to pronounce the oath in their mother tongue could translate it, he said.

I decided to pronounce it in my mother tongue, which is Dagaare. This was also the wish of some people in Toulouse. They have been hearing the oath in French, English, and at times in Spanish when there was a Spanish-speaking candidate. They wanted some, especially the Africans, to pronounce it in their mother tongue. However, there was the question of who would understand such a serious engagement, made before the Christian community. Of course, God understands!

I counted at least four people who could understand Dagaare, my mother tongue. Therefore, I

started to translate the text. But hardly had I finished the first line when I became so frightened by the words of the oath. In general, I was frightened by the whole oath I was to pronounce. I asked myself the question if I was really ready to commit myself.

What frightened me most was the word swear - *Puli* - in Dagaare which is not a word one can joke with. When even by mistake or curiosity a child pronounces this word - *Puli* - the child is punished and there are cases when the parents will have to ask the elders to pacify and annul it because of the child’s innocence. It is a word which is addressed to God (or other spirits) and witnessed by the elders and other people.

It is a promise made to the *gods (or spirits)* when one asks for a favour or success in life in a particular field. One engages himself to pay a ransom to the *gods or spirits* when the request is realised. It is believed that when this promise is made, there can be regrettable consequences, and even a complete failure in life which sometimes leads to the death of the person, when he does not keep his promises to the *gods or the spirits*.

When this word - *Puli* - is used to make a promise there is no turning back from the promise. It is final and cannot be withdrawn. The promise

must be fulfilled. It is a debt which cannot be rescheduled in any way, except if the person agrees to die. Even it is believed that when the promise is not fulfilled and the person dies, his posterity must take it up or else it is they that will get the malediction related to the breaking of the promise. Therefore, before pronouncing this word, one has to make a careful discernment.

In recent times this word - *Puli* - is used in the Church to make religious vows and oaths. It gives a strong meaning to the commitment one is making before God and the Church as a whole. It is a total commitment.

So, this word - *Puli* - really frightened me. I went to a monk for spiritual direction, as it was a self-directed retreat in a monastery. As he had already done the Ignatian spirituality, he asked me not to make any hasty decision or resolution, but to put it in the Lord's hands and pray.

The fear still persisted for the second day of the retreat. We, the retreatants, met at the end of the second day to share the fruits and the fears of the first two days. I was hesitant to share as for me it was fear and not real fruits, as I considered my experience to be contrary to my ex-

pectations. But when the first two gave their sharing, I found that I was not the only one to be afraid before the text of the oath. At least all of us had a kind of fear in one way or the other.

The text, proposed to guide us during the retreat, was well prepared. I got the response of what this fear could mean in my spiritual and missionary life: the temptation to run away from my personal responsibilities, the fear to commit myself in any other way, the fear to face a reality which demands making a choice, it is the fear to confront the problems of life (the problems of a community, of contemporary society...).

When I discovered that this was the fear in front of the text of the oath, I put it into the Lord's hands and prayed over it. I asked the Lord to clarify it for me. At the middle of the retreat, I found an inner peace and the fear was gone. Jesus, who had all power, did not try to escape and save himself but abandoned himself to the will of the Father so that humanity may be saved. This gave me the courage to go ahead and to pronounce the oath with the conviction that the Lord is always with me. "That your will be done and not my will".

***Callistus BAALABOORE, M.Afr.***  
***(December 1996)***

*PRESENCE OF MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA  
IN THE DIOCESE OF ATAKPAME - TOGO (PAD)*



The diocese of Atakpamé was created on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1964. It is situated in the Plateau Region, 150 kilometres north of Lomé, the capital of Togo. It is the biggest of the seven dioceses in Togo. It covers a surface area of 13453 km<sup>2</sup>.

#### Socio-Economic situation of Atakpame

Almost 80% of the territory of the diocese of Atakpamé has a rural population. However, it is in the small villages that the population is concentrated. Many of its people, however, seek employment by migrating to the urban zones so as to escape the hard conditions of rural agricultural life. Despite the possibility of good agricultural production, the population lives in extreme poverty partly because of agricultural policies, which do not directly benefit the rural cultivator.

Apart from the urban centres that have a minimum supply of potable water and electricity,

the rural areas have none of these to boast of. Talo Novissi is devoid of potable water and only less than 40% of its population have electricity in their homes.

#### Our Presence in Togo

The Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) arrived in Togo, in the diocese of Atakpamé, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2012. The first reason of our presence in Togo was for vocation animation. We had already some confreres originating from Togo, and more youth were asking to join the Missionaries of Africa. Vocation animation from Burkina Faso was becoming hectic, so the Provincial Council decided that having a community in Togo would facilitate the vocation animation.

To have a close contact at the grassroots of the population we asked for a parish and the Bishop of the diocese entrusted to us a Christian community in a neighbourhood at the outskirts of Atakpame called Talo

Novissi, which in the near future could be created as parish. Eventually, a year after our arrival on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2013, the parish was created with the name "Notre Dame d'Afrique" (Our Lady of Africa) and entrusted to the Missionaries of Africa to build its structures and the Christian community. The name of the parish was suggested by the Missionaries of Africa, which the Bishop accepted.

The new parish had nothing at the time of its creation, apart from its population and ever-growing Christian community. We were staying temporarily 4 kms from the parish because there was no infrastructure yet. All had still to be constructed: presbytery, church and offices. The only structure on the land, which had been given to the diocese by a faithful Christian for the construction of the Church, was a shed divided by curtains and used as a primary school during the weekdays.

Our main activities at the beginning of our presence in Togo were the construction of structures: a primary school, our community house and the church. We started with our community house, which became the primary school for one and half years before we moved in after building the first school block of three classrooms and later completing it with another three-classroom block and a two-classroom block for the day nursery with an office and staff room.

The latest to be built was the Church with a capacity of 1000 seats, which was consecrated on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019 to commemorate the parish patron feast (Notre Dame d'Afrique – 30th April) as well. Whilst doing the construction work, we were organising alongside pastoral activities such as catechism and church organisations and movements. We also had regular encounters with aspirants; at least once a month we have a weekend with them, and we treat various themes especially the charism of the Missionaries of Africa. Spiritual direction was also regular. This has continued after the construction of the structures. We have seen an increase in the number of aspirants and in the intake into the first cycle since our presence in Togo.

We are pleased with the Christian community, which gives us joy by their total collaboration and support. A dynamic and

enthusiastic community that grows in numbers as the town of Atakpamé is growing towards our area. After the major construction work, we now have time to have a total insertion into the local population. New confreres and candidates on apostolic training and community life (stagiaires) are trying to learn the language of the people. The first confreres did not get enough time to learn fully the local language because of the construction projects, which occupied most part of their time.

We have a small but dynamic group of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation known as “*Association Sel et Lumière*” (Association of Salt and Light) which is the parish wing of JPIC. We give teachings on Church social doctrines; intervene on matters of social justice and peace and integrity of creation. Weekly we have in collaboration with the group a radio broadcast at the diocesan radio station on Church Social Doctrine, Justice and Peace. Together with this group, we organise sessions and workshops at the diocesan school of theology on Church Social Doctrine. It is a school to help the laity deepen their faith and knowledge of the Church.

Lately we have a project, financed by the Missionaries of Africa, with the group to organise workshops in some selected dioceses in Togo on Initiation into Church Social Doctrine. We

have finished with two dioceses and the others are programmed for January 2023 and before the Lenten season.

We have other groups and associations which undertake other activities in the parish and we the Missionaries of Africa guide and accompany them. We are also involved in other diocesan and deanery commissions to contribute to the missionary spirit in the diocese. We were once asked by the bishop to give a workshop to the entire diocesan clergy on the theme: “*Mission in Pastoral Work, and New Evangelisation*”.

Since a short time, we are also trying to engage ourselves in some income-generating projects such as poultry, small-scale farming and trying to explore ways how to use our second mechanised borehole to serve the households around us, which would also help them alleviate their water problem especially in the dry season. We have already sunk a mechanised borehole with a tank for the school with a population of more than three hundred (300) pupils.

The poultry has good prospects, even though the menace of viruses and other avian diseases is a threat we hope to overcome and make it stable. With the small-scale farming we rely on nature, some crops do well, for others when we miss a rain or two it is a disaster. Nevertheless, that gives us a chance to be in solidarity with



the peasant farmers who suffer a similar fate and understand their plight We really feel how the peasant farmer feels when his or her crops fail, especially after investing income and energy and seeing nature disappoint them, as their crops fail. Since three years, there is the project of having the Provincial Propaedeutic (Postulancy) in Atakpamé and we have acquired the land for that. The

General Council has also approved of this project and the proposed building plan. We are now working on having a construction permit to start the project. The architect working on the building permit assures us that by December ending or early January 2023, the building permit would be ready and we can start with the building. When the construction of the propaedeutic is finished and it

is opened, we would have two communities in Togo. Some dioceses are calling us to come and open communities and take up parishes or other pastoral engagements, but for the meantime, seeing the problem of personnel, we are not able to answer to their call.

**Callistus BAALABOORE, M.Afr.**



**Gallery includes**

- Chapel when we arrived in 2012
- Sunday celebration 30 March 2014
- First school block of three classes
- The construction of our house
- Offices Top now are rooms/dormitory
- A wing of our house in Atakpamé
- Construction of the new church
- First three confreres in Togo
- Church on the finishing
- Main Entrance of the Church





## *Mission in the African World*

### **Introduction**

As for us, Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), our formation system allows for personal growth and development. It has a lot to do with personal involvement and collaboration with the formation team in the spirit of discernment and attention to God who calls. This is a long process of shaping and moulding a candidate. And of course, it takes time to discover one's vocation.

### **God never ceases to surprise us.**

The formation house and activities were always interesting, going from one activity to the other. Philosophy was an intellectual adventure, the Novitiate treated me from within, my "stage" confirmed my missionary desire and theology exposed and strengthened my faith. However, things became more serious and revealing the day I placed my right hand on the Bible with my left hand holding my letter of commitment. That day, in the presence of my Superior General, I committed myself for life to the service of the Mission in Africa and the African world. Some call it a final commitment. I remember vividly the scenario - kneeling down in front of the altar and reading my letter of commitment which I later signed during the celebration. That was the day I realised what my life became and the consequences of all these years in formation houses. Things became serious! It is memorable but it was emotional.

Today I am a missionary, thanks be to God and to all those people who encouraged me on this long and challenging journey (I think especially about Martin Addai and Clement Alekwe). Clement Alekwe received my first letter of application as an aspirant, and Martin Addai was

my Rector in Ejisu. These two gentlemen really gave me the taste and desire to be a Missionary of Africa. May they rest in peace.

### **First pastoral experience**

My first ten years of missionary life in DR-Congo shaped and moulded me. It was an experience of youth encounter, peace and conflict management, vocation animation and administration. My apostolate exposed me to wounded people in prisons, in refugee camps, in camps for the displaced and in the local churches. I think of lifeless bodies, destroyed houses and ethnic violence, and killing in this region. I think of children abandoned without care, people on the move without destination. I think of the difficult pastoral context that confronts Missionaries in Congo. Experiencing this vulnerability, but also experiencing joy and missionary support I received in Congo, have helped and shaped me to become more missionary. Our presence in Ituri is a living testimony of love to the vulnerable. Here I discovered the pastoral importance of Being and not just Doing (presence). In Congo, I discovered the pastoral importance of Listening not just giving pieces of Advice. Theology and philosophy armed me, but human suffering and cruelty disarmed me. There are times I had to learn to be quiet in front of some human realities. There are things theology can't explain and I have lived them. In Congo, I have discovered that it is better to work with the people than to work for them. I can say with some level of fulfilment that I received more than what I gave in Congo. I went to console the suffering, but they consoled me more. I went to pray with prisoners, but they increased my faith. Any apostolate was always

an occasion to learn something new despite challenges. It is beautiful, it is great to be identified with these categories of people. They teach me about life's realities. Today I am happy that I made the decision to become a Missionary of Africa. I am proud of the M.Afr. because we are trained and prepared for life and its challenges.

### **Experience in the African world- Karlsruhe**

Karlsruhe is a city in the State of Baden-Württemberg (southwestern Germany). It is in the north of the Black Forest, close to the French border. Karlsruhe is famous in Germany for both hosting two federal courts and being a major hub for science and technology.

### **Mixed community**

Even after one's Missionary Oath, formation continues in a different way. I am still learning, and I am afraid, it is going to be life-long! I am now in another pastoral context with new challenges and prospects. God never ceases to surprise us.

As we know, Karlsruhe is one of the two new communities set up by the Society to mark the 150 years celebration as family. Arua-Ouganda is the other. Our community in Karlsruhe is a mixed community of four people (two White Fathers - two White Sisters). It is a new community, new environment, new country, new culture, new church, new approach. Everything is new and different. Even community life is new and different. If it is not a blessing, then it is at least a challenge; in fact, it is both.

As a community we walk with African migrants facing some challenges of integration in the society. The centre welcomes migrants, listens to their stories and tries to orient or to aid them. We do this in collaboration with Caritas and the Local Church. We have Asians and of recent we have been receiving people from Ukraine. The story is always different and very sympathetic. Each one has a unique and challenging story. We collaborate with the local society and Church to give spiritual, psychological, social, and educational support. Our centre is known for our intercultural and inter-religious apostolate in the diocese. We also assist in some pastoral activities in the parish.

It is very interesting to notice the level in which the local Church is engaged in ecumen-

ism. I see lots of moves to collaborate and to work with other churches and religions. I have had a few occasions to participate or to visit other religions like Hindu temples, Buddhism, Bahai, Islam, Judaism, Christians and orthodox etc. These temples are not very far from our community. I am amazed at the level of competency and qualification of some of the religious leaders. For example, some protestant Churches have renowned and competent protestant pastors who have been formed and prepared to serve the Church. People are capable and they are working together to touch lives and to give hope. There is a good ecumenical and interreligious dialogue awareness. The approach to pastoral service is very different. We don't work for people but we work with people. Emphasis is also placed on working with the laity in the church. Of course, one reads about the challenges of the Synod of the Catholic Church in Germany and about women struggling for power and inclusion here and there. This is a real and serious push for an inclusive theology. The church is not full as what I experienced in Congo, but we have believers. They are not many but the few who are there are really convinced. Faith is not dead, but people have a different way of living it. Here we don't lead and others follow but we work together. When this is not possible, then others lead, and we follow. The priest is no longer a giver of moral lessons. The fact is that "things are not the way they used to be" says Bob Marley and the Wailers. I find it interesting. It makes me believe more and more that pastoral work is always contextual.

However, I am still new in the system and trying slowly to adapt. Now, I am listening, observing, learning from confreres of the Sector, and trying slowly to get into the system. I have already visited a few places like *Garden of Religion*, the *youth centre*, the *migrant arrival station*, some *temples and churches* around us. But I am really touched by the positive move of Christians and non-Christians, Protestants and Catholics coming together for ecumenical and pastoral experience. This is very positive for me coming from Congo where I have experienced some elements of doubt, suspicion and fear of encountering each other. I think we have this experience in other African countries

too. If it is not too early for me to take a position, I could say that the future of the Church in Karlsruhe is ecumenical. One can understand why we had in our city the just concluded Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Our community participated in this Assembly, and we also had some visitors who were lodged in the community. I personally participated in seminars on migration, conflict management, culture and identity, a bicycle tour for interreligious dialogue etc. It was educative, fun and an opportunity to meet people of different faiths and beliefs. We were involved as a community.

I am pleased to see all that we are doing here in terms of working and accompanying many refugees and migrants in our centre. At times, it is emotional to listen to the stories from these migrants. There are lots of stories on cases of abuse, domestic violence, crossing the sea, dead bodies, sickness, infections, victims of love, rejection, physical handicaps, traumas etc. Our centre tries to give hope, and to create a welcoming atmosphere of care to them. I think we have to do some work at the grassroot level to raise awareness about the dangers and risks of migration. The sea is now a cemetery that contains unknown and unburied dead bodies. Some of our brothers and sisters in the villages are victims of ignorance. Maybe we could do something at that level to raise awareness among the youth in our different villages and pastoral placements. Some risks are not worth taking.

### **Language experience**

As Missionaries of Africa, we give a lot of attention and respect for people and culture. Today one cannot evangelise without taking into consideration the local culture. This include learning their language. Of course, German is a difficult language to learn but I think I am getting into it slowly. I have finished the first part of the language course and now beginning another six months. The language course here takes a full academic year with exams at different levels. There is a language requirement level to reach before one begins any pastoral ex-

perience here. It is challenging at the beginning because I must get into my small head lots of new words and vocabularies.

The first part was in Karlsruhe (living in the community, while following classes in a language institute). It was interesting. In my class, I was practically the only Missionary Priest, the only African. Some don't understand what it means to be a missionary. Others want to know why I am not married. At times, I talk to some about my vocation and missionary work. But it is always unfortunate to see people link us to what they hear about the Church. It is challenging to be a priest and missionary in a context where people link our identity to paedophilia and child sexual abuse. But I am happy to live my faith as a missionary in this context. We had many people from Ukraine in our class. They discovered more my identity through simple acts of solidarity and concern. I remember once I made a solidarity card for the Ukrainians in our class. This card was signed by all of us and was presented to the Ukrainians in our class in solidarity with them. It was a simple act of love and solidarity. It was emotional. They were really touched. This is a simple way of living my missionary life in school among people who are not very hot about church things.

The second part is outside the community. I am now living with other pastoral workers who also are learning the language. We are four in our small community (two Indians and two Africans). This second part of the language course is basically an introduction to the German culture, the German Church and of course some aspects of the language. That means I will be more actively involved in pastoral work after my language course next year.

In general, there are possibilities in Karlsruhe, we can do a lot as Missionaries of Africa. I feel we have the support of the Local Church too. I am happy here as a Missionary of Africa. I hope to offer my little contribution here in collaboration with others. Remember us in your prayers.

***By Peter EKUTT, M.Afr.***



*Photo Gallery*



Cultural day with Ukrainian Youth in Karlsruhe



Interreligious tour during WWC



First Baptism in Germany



## *Throw Out your Nets, even in New or Unchartered Waters*

### **Introduction**

Sharing my pastoral experience as a White Father in Maghreb concerning such a missionary theme, "*Throw out your Nets, even in New or Unchartered Waters*" (Cf Luke 5:4-11), ignites in me the sense of belonging to this family that has for 154 years inspired, formed, sent out into mission and supported missionaries and local churches as they go about spreading the gospel of love through several encounters with a variety of cultures, generations, and nations.

Since talking about the whole of the Province of Maghreb will be pretentious, I will essentially base my article on Algeria. I will start this article by first of all situating the ministry of the White Fathers in its larger context of the Church's mission as well as the situation of the countries of our ministry, especially Algeria.

I will first outline the activities of the White Fathers. Then I will proceed to talk about major challenges of our ministry. I will equally give my personal observations on some aptitudes and virtues of the confreres in their day-to-day activities. I will conclude with a call to steadfast trust in God as we throw the nets, even in new and unchartered waters.

### **The general context of our ministry**

In our context, the "sea" for the nets is the whole sub-region of North African countries, particularly for me Algeria with about 43,85 million inhabitants within 2,382 million km<sup>2</sup> with a very high percentage of Muslims. As we clearly understand, conversion from Islam to Christianity is not our missionary desire. That is first and foremost, the work of the Holy Spirit. As we cast our nets, we intend to always come into contact with people who love humanity notwithstanding religious backgrounds: people willing and ready to collaborate with others in a spirit of respect and self-dignity, friendship, solidarity and fraternity, understanding and tolerance in order to create a peaceful and harmonious environment where individuals can strive together as one towards bettering the common good of humanity.

We are never isolated from the mother church. Our collaboration with the local church is at all levels and you will realize a strong bond in the paragraphs that will follow. This is without doubt owing to the fact our Founder contributed immensely to building the church in North Africa and Africa at large. For some people, and I



share their thoughts, one cannot talk about the church without talking at length of the White Fathers.

### **The situation of the White Fathers**

The Missionaries of Africa in this Province have always been faithful as much as possible to our charism of encounter and dialogue with other religions especially Islam. We glorify God and the past missionary activities of our elder brothers and sisters, and strive to hold high the banner by observing, listening and reading the signs of time. This we have always done despite the changing realities of the society.

We are present and in touch with citizens of our various countries in notably our libraries and centres of extra curricula educational activities as we offer remedial classes to pupils in basic education and conditional environment for university students for studies (communities in IBLA Ouargla, Ghardaïa, Tizi Ouzou).

We are equally in parishes where we have the classic pastoral activities (Tizi Ouzou, Our Lady of Africa minor basilica where we had our humble beginning). The Christian population is mainly made up of expatriates, students from sub-Saharan Africa studying with scholarships and some Algerians as well, especially in Tizi Ouzou where our four confreres who were beatified on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018 were martyred (the Blessed Deckers Charles, Dieulangard Alain, Chessel Christian and Chevillard Jean).

For three years now, the community of student confreres in Cairo is part of this Province. Apart from studies as their main apostolate, they also give a helping hand in the parishes nearby as discussions go on about the possibility of opening another mission there.

Due to persistent difficulties in obtaining visas for Algeria we have thought of opening other communities in North Africa and that has been achieved this year by the grace of God as we now have founded another community in Morocco, Rabat, as well as reopened Adrar, a foundation in the Sahara of Algeria where I am currently with another confrere, François d'Assise DIARRA from Mali. We are doing our best to be up to the task that is before us.

The White Fathers are pillars of the church especially in Algeria. The bishop of the diocese of Laghouat-Ghardaïa, Bishop John Macwilliam is our confrere. The diocese has three communities of White Fathers. We arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September this year, but our mission will really begin in the year to come; we are asked first of all to make enquiries about what concretely we can offer and receive from this community. In fact, our Christian community is yet to be defined officially. But the nearest community of Christians is 220 kms from where we are. These are the sisters of Notre-Dame de Lac Bam from Burkina Faso and founded by our confrere Fr. Alain Gayé. So, what is important right now is our presence as Christians and priests.



This is the picture of the White Fathers in the Maghreb. It is quite clear that our ministry is not stagnant, but always diving into newer and unexplored waters and at the same time going back to areas which had been closed due to the diminishing numbers of our elder brothers.

The Lord has always enabled His apostles to be dynamic and zealous in their missionary activities and not just lying back on the glorious past of the Missionaries of Africa who walked these paths.

### **Challenges**

I believe it's very useful if not important to always make mention of some challenges we encounter in our ministry, since they seem to be "omnipresent". Just like many of you, we here too have one or two major challenges.

Obtaining visas particularly for Algeria is always something we have to battle with. As I mentioned above, the difficulty to come to Algeria motivated the interest of founding communities in other countries apart from Algeria and Tunisia. This challenge has never prevented us from driving far in our quest to be of good service to God and to humanity here in Algeria and elsewhere in the Maghreb, as we seek to reach "unchartered" waters.

Another challenging issue in our ministry concerns our activities within the limits of the laws of the country. The challenge lies in the fact that when we have an activity with the citizens, we do not really know how far we can go with this and for how long. We are thus constantly on the touchline doing our very best in what we have at hand and willing to comply with the law in case we are told that what we are doing is not allowed. The question of working with the migrants has always been a sensitive issue as well as offering extra tuition in the French and English languages to those in need. We are so much solicited in these two areas and yet the challenge persists. We had hoped some few years back that we could be allowed to have language schools especially of French and English but these last days, our community in Tizi Ouzou, which was being highly solicited in this respect, was asked by the authorities not to have extra classes anymore. The activities of Caritas were also stopped not so long ago, and discussions are still ongoing. Maybe the diplomatic visit of Cardinal Paul Richard Gallagher on the occasion of 50 years of diplomatic relations between Algeria and Vatican might help clarify issues for the Algerian authorities and for us.

Permanent suspicion of colonial links and proselyte activities are two other challenges that we encounter. The Catholic Church in general is still tagged to the French colonial past with Algeria and as a result, all that we do, according to some people, has something to do with the French government. Sometimes people even come to us because they think that we are a sort of French consulate that can help them with their visa problems!!

In addition to this and despite the fact that they can't prove it, we are easily suspected of proselytism as our activities for them are principally geared towards wooing believers to our side.

For the sake of accountability and responsibility in what I say and in order not to be misunderstood, I wish to clearly state that all that I have said cannot be imputed to everyone, but they are general trends. I believe there are quite a number of people who support us and are in favour of or at least do not see anything wrong with our activities because they trust our pure intentions to live as brothers and sisters.

### **Aptitudes of confreres**

Among other virtues that we can proudly boast of in this part of the vineyard of the Lord are notably: the missionary zeal to serve God, patience and courage, Christian charity.

I have realised that the missionary zeal of confreres is always at its peak in our pastoral activities that is, in encounter and dialogue, sacraments and worship, being pioneers etc.

It is also quite clear that confreres are fully armed with courage and patience. It will not be difficult for the reader to understand that the circumstances surrounding our pastoral undertakings require courage, patience and if I may add fortitude. This is very remarkable. We jokingly say sometimes that "he who is able to live his or her first three months in Algeria without thinking of leaving can live here for at least ten years".

What is also outstanding is the very high dose of Christian Charity that characterizes our communities and individuals. I will not hesitate to state that it is in fact the driving force of all our activities.

### **Conclusion**

My concluding remarks are first of all words of gratitude to God for entrusting us with this priceless mission, for the foresight of our Founder Cardinal Lavignerie, of superiors and pioneer White Fathers, and of Chapters that have always given our activities a new dynamism. Our ministry here just as in the past remains crucial as we try to dive into unreached waters.

Let me also add that, even though we live at one and the same time similar and varied events in connection to the past, God has always been present in everything we do. And we have to keep on trusting in his faithful and unconditional love to save all.

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





**Gallery related to the article**



THROW OUT YOUR NETS, EVEN IN NEW  
OR UNCHARTED WATERS



At that time, it was the year 2020, it would take us to get to our destination along with the genesis of the nation. Just like mariners of old, we found ourselves in deep uncharted waters, strange and unfamiliar. Nothing new and uncharted waters. I felt my competence and even my belief challenged. There was in me a mixture of feelings of heat and anxiety, of doubt and discomfort, of trust and responsibility. The task of Vocation Director for the Ghana Sector required me to wholeheartedly sacrifice my time, my energy and indeed my whole self. This work is hard and demanding, even though in the eyes of many it is attractive and full of enjoyment. It involves, however, a lot of movement and trips, that lead into cities and towns, villages and suburbs. And in all these corners, you meet people of every kind, tribe and culture. It helps, moreover, to know and to learn much about the Ghana people and their customs.

In those days of lockdown and partial easing of restrictions, it was hard to see where we were going and how long

about our lives seemed to be normal. We were thrown out of our comfort zones and plunged into a new and uncertain way of life that shook us to the core. Yet, throwing nets into the deep wasn't unfamiliar to those of us who follow the call of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus told Peter to throw his net into the deep waters after a whole night of unsuccessful fishing. Peter's response was swift and even reactionary. After all Jesus wasn't a fisherman but Peter was! Yet he did as Jesus asked him and suddenly there was an abundance of fish. Peter's response afterwards was quite natural. What about me? I was asked to throw nets into every corner of Ghana. Unlike Peter, my response was not as swift as his. Could I do it, was I competent for this task? Of course, I was never a Vocation Director before. When my Provincial Superior asked me to accept this responsibility, I simply

decided to give it a try. And indeed, with total trust in the Lord, there is today an abundance of young men who are aspiring to become Missionaries of Africa one day. My response, however, was not as natural as Peter's. Mine was challenged by doubts and uncertainties.

What does it mean to throw nets and delve into clean or uncharted waters? Indeed, if we follow Peter's example, the positive result will always be for our benefit. And to do that requires faith and trust, not only in the Lord Jesus, but in ourselves as well. It has of course been a time of both anxiety and grace. But we must bear in mind that challenging times, difficult moments, and hard work bring out the best and the worst in us. I am amazed at the thoughtfulness and generosity of the people I have visited in their communities. I take nothing for granted. I remain very appreciative and grateful to God and to everyone. If this experience has taught me anything, it has made me realise how important it is to trust in the Lord. Scaring things and thoughts might invade our lives but we must always keep in mind that the world is still a beautiful place to serve the Lord. My hope is that, if we work together hand in hand, we will have a harvest beyond expectation; we will 'catch' more young men out of new or uncharted waters for the good of our Society.

What are the lessons I've learnt from

this nets-throwing experience? How can I serve the Lord more faithfully? I am in the deep waters, not quite sure where I am going but always trusting that God will continue to lead me through my fear and hesitation. Not only lead me, but also open doors for me, that need to be opened for my experimental growth and my fulfilment. I continue to hope in God's abundant love and guidance in my life and responsibility in guiding young aspirants to discern their callings.

For us then, as people of faith and in our various responsibilities, we are invited to surrender our fear and anxiety to God who knows our strength and whose generosity is boundless. This, in everything, requires trust in God and an openness to receive his directives and his guidance. It also requires a willingness to consciously set aside time for quiet prayer and discernment. Fear or anxiety is natural. But the deep uncharted waters of Ghana are calling. What then are the fears that hold us back from throwing our nets into that deep clean or uncharted waters? We must always recall that Jesus tells his disciples often enough "Do not be afraid" (Mt. 14:27). Perhaps now, more than ever before, we need to pray for the courage and strength to take the first step of surrender, and trust that the Lord will accompany us the rest of the way. And as we wade into the deep of the clean and uncharted waters, and as we throw our nets, even unsure of where we are

going, we pray that the Lord will bountiful love will encourage, sustain help us to remember that He has a and guide us throughout our journey. plan for everyone of us and in his

**By Hilaire P. Nzambi, M.Afr.  
Vocation Director (Ghana)**

*Vocation animation in short Gallery*







## Throw Out your Nets, even in New or Unchartered Waters

The invitation to throw out our nets in new or uncharted waters suits me very well because during the Chapter I was asked if I could accept the election result to be an Assistant General. I said 'yes', not knowing exactly what it would entail, however I was certain of the service I was called to render to confreres and the Society. We began the General Council sessions on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and ever since, I am discovering the uncharted waters. I was asked to follow up both PAO and GhN Provinces and I gladly accepted knowing well both provinces from my past experiences.

The editorial team of the Ghana-Nigeria link asked me to present myself as many confreres do not yet know me. In fact, I am not new to the Province. I started my missionary life in Ghana. In 2003, I was sent to Savelugu parish for my stage. I had memorable and enriching experiences during my stage that I still treasure. Before going further, I wish to give you a summary of my life history as per editorial team's request.

I am Leo Laurence MARIA JOSEPH born on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1978 in Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu State, India. After having completed the primary and secondary school, while working as an accountant, I completed the Bachelor of Commerce degree during which I felt the Lord calling me to the Missionaries of Africa. Thus, in 1998, I joined the one year "Come-and-See" programme in Bangalore and later was sent to Suvidya College for the 3-year philosophy course. In 2002, I was sent to Kahangala, Tanzania, for the spiritual year followed by the 2-year stage in Savelugu parish not far from Tamale, Ghana. After my stage in Ghana, I was appointed to Nairobi, Kenya for the 4-year theology programme. I took my Oath on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008 at Balozi Formation House, Kenya. I was ordained a priest on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2009 at St. Pius X parish in Madukkarai, Coimbatore. The General Council appointed me for one-year home-service in Bangalore as Vocation animator and local bursar. After this one-year of home service, I was appointed to Zinder, Niger in PAO, where I learned French and lived among the Hausa speaking majority Muslims. My six years of missionary life in Zinder were marked by two attacks by extremists [14<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015]. These six years were grace-filled years whereby I witnessed concretely God's love and providence. In 2016, I was asked to go for specialised studies in Leuven, Belgium in view of initial formation. I did the STL in Systematic Theology and specialisation in Lutheran-Roman Catholic Ecumenical Dia-

logue. In 2018, I went to Rome for a one-year formation and leadership course after which I was appointed to Merrivale Formation House in South Africa. Since then, I have been a formator, lecturer, local and Sector bursar of South Africa. I was elected as a Chapter Delegate from SAP and participated in the 2022 Chapter during which I was elected Assistant General.

Little did I know, attending the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, that I would be called to service in the General Council. Our God is indeed a God of surprises. I was barely getting settled in Merrivale Formation house. After the first term of being a formator, lecturer and bursar, I was becoming accustomed to the mission, and then I heard the call to throw out my nets in new and uncharted waters. The mission task may be new; however, the call comes from Jesus who is ever faithful to his promises. I count on him for the next six years and not on my own abilities. John 15:5 underlines the need to abide in Him, so as to bear good and much fruit. Consequently, the success of mission in the new and uncharted waters depends entirely on being rooted in Christ.

Leadership mission is a challenging one these days, as it requires effective listening and communal discernment so as to accompany all confreres in that mission. The listening first of all begins with listening to the Holy Spirit. The 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter clearly outlines that "listening to, and meditating on the Word of God every day, nourished by the love of Christ, we are continually formed to live in radical fidelity to our missionary oath, simple lifestyle, obedience and celibacy. This is what makes us authentic and credible apostles, amongst ourselves and the people to whom we are sent, in keeping with the invitation of our founder: *"Be apostles, nothing but apostles..."* Referring to apostles, Pope Francis in his message to the Chapter participants says that "the apostle is not a manager, he is not a learned lecturer, he is not an IT wizard. The apostle is a *witness*." The prophetic witness we are called to live today, is both an invitation and a challenge. We can only fulfil this invitation by remaining faithful to the gospel values, to our Oath and to the charism of the Founder.

An apostle knows that "God is always new, who impels us to set out relentlessly and to move beyond what is known, towards the peripheries and the frontiers" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 135). The call to prophetic witness these days requires us to be in the peripheries and at the frontiers. In other words, we are called to leave our comfort zones in search of peripheries where no one wants to go. The Chapter underlined that "we also recognize that clinging to comfort zones and to financial security weakens our missionary zeal. Such preoccupations often paralyze and hinder our audacity to move into the unknown, due to a lack of trust in Providence." Such challenge can only be overcome if we dare to move to the peripheries. The Chapter recommendations are loud and clear concerning the preferential option for the peripheries. It is in the same line that GhN Province during the Post-Capitular Assembly drafted the Strategic Plan for the next six years keeping in mind the prophetic character of our Mission. The task ahead of us is enormous. We should not be content with the production of well formulated and beautifully articulated texts which will gather dust in our communities, rather these texts should become part and parcel of the life of every confrere and community in the GhN Province. The

letter of the Superior General that accompanied the Capitular Acts gives us the orientation that the Chapter continues. The Chapter chose the See, Judge and Act methodology. At present we are in the “act phase” whereby every confrere is called to fully participate in putting the 29<sup>th</sup> Chapter recommendations into action.

New or uncharted waters include learning the language and culture of people which is once again emphasized by the Chapter. We can't be witnesses if we do not incarnate in the language and culture of the people to whom we are sent. The success of Primary Evangelization, JPIC, Encounter and Dialogue rests solely on our willingness to be immersed in the language and culture of the people with whom we live and work. Therefore, living in intercultural communities let us take the question of language and culture seriously. May the 14 themes and recommendations of the Chapter be contextualized in our communities so that remaining faithful to our charism we all may live to the full the call to prophetic witness.

May our confreres, the Martyrs of Algeria, pray for us and our Lady of Africa intercede for us.

***By Leo Laurence MARIA JOSEPH, M.Afr.  
Assistant General***







## *Sabbatical Time, a holy Time in the Holy Land*

Last year I celebrated the silver jubilee, 25 years, of my priestly ordination. On this occasion I received many different gifts. Yet I also decided to offer myself a gift, even a special gift..... During my missionary ministry I've never had the chance to do a sabbatical time. So, exactly this was the gift I decided to offer myself. Luckily enough my superiors were also in favour of that "gift". I didn't wonder much how to spend that time, as for a long time I was dreaming about visiting the Holy Land. So, that is why my choice was the Bethesda Session organised by our Society in Jerusalem. Fortunately, after the two-year break caused by the Coronavirus crisis, this year the session could resume. So, after having filled all the required forms and documents my name was put on the list of participants.

Like that, three weeks after having said goodbye to Ejisu where I served as formator and then bursar for almost seven years, I found myself in Israel, in the heart of the Holy Land: in Jerusalem. We are seventeen participants of the three months long session: six sisters and eleven priests, among them five confreres and one MSOLA sister. All of us somehow linked with Africa, be it through our ministry or our origins. So, the aspect of internationality and interculturality, so dear to us, Missionaries of Africa, is very much present as we come from fourteen different countries and three continents.

The aim of this session was beautifully explained in the information leaflet: *"Against the background of each one's personality, experience and ministry, and taking to heart each*

*one's desire for a sabbatical period for personal renewal, we listen afresh to God's Word, so as to gain a better understanding of His ways and to follow more closely in the steps of the Lord Jesus"*. This aim is to be achieved through three components: a course on Holy Scripture, visits to the Holy Places, and one's own spiritual journey. So, from the very beginning it became obvious that it was not first of all about tourism or having a good holiday. It is first of all meant to be an experience of spiritual renewal and refreshment in an environment, which is very appropriate for that purpose. And from the very beginning it was stressed how enriching it is to read and meditate the Word of God there where it was written. Thanks to the professional skills of our confreres who serve us as guides and tutors I can already appreciate it. Visiting places which up to now I've known only from reading the Bible is indeed thrilling. It is also challenging as the reality does not always correspond to what my imagination was telling me when reading the Bible. There remains of course always a certain dose of uncertainty about the accuracy of some visited places which can be supported by faith only.

We are also offered a chance to meet people representing the two dominating nations living in the Holy Land: the Jews and the Palestinians. Those we have met so far are people who live with a lot of uneasiness the complex political situation which is a cause of division between those two neighbouring nations. Hence they try to put some efforts to change the status quo which obviously is not easy.

Very moving are encounters with the local

Christians of different denominations living here. They are a tiny minority. And it is a paradox that in the place where Christianity was born its believers are so few. Personally, this situation inspired me to pray more for my Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

On the contrary, many are the pilgrims and tourists coming from all over the world (including Ghana and Nigeria) to visit the Holy Land. To encourage even greater numbers of visitors Israel has lifted all the Covid restrictions which were pretty strict during the pandemic. Our confreres taking care of St. Anne Basilica say that now they receive more than one thousand visitors daily which is still quite far from the numbers before the Coronavirus crisis, when the sanctuary was visited by up to three thousand people every day!

At the moment of writing, I'm halfway through the session. Already now, I'm very satisfied with it. The variety of the programme offered here makes this time very dynamic and enriching indeed. It has helped me to grasp better the meaning of biblical nuances which can be understood only by referring them to the context of local cultural, geographical and historical realities. Even more importantly, following literally the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ leaves marks in my heart and soul. It helps me to restore the intimacy with Him whose question "do you love me?" sounds incredibly pertinent just a few miles away from the place where He offered His life on the Cross. And in this case there is no doubt about the authenticity of that place!

*By Jacek Wroblewski, M.Afr.*

*My Journey in Gallery*







## THE GRACE OF BEING A MISSIONARY OF AFRICA

The gift of being a member of the Society of M.Afr. is a grace I received before I joined, considering my non-Catholic background. I was born into the humble family of Mr and Mrs Ofonikot in the big City of Ibadan in Oyo State, Nigeria, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1963. My father, staff at the then Nigerian College, was transferred when the College became a university and moved to Ile Ife. My parents, unsure of what the school system was like in Ife, decided I remain with a family friend, Mr & Mrs Umoh, who were staunch Catholics. They introduced me to the Catholic faith at that tender age. I participated in the Sunday school, which was well organized by the university community. Apart from Sunday or weekend church activities, we were very faithful to morning and night prayers with rosary prayers.

By the time I joined my parents in Ife, I was in primary four and could recite all the Catholic Prayers expected of a child of my age. My secondary school was at St John's Grammar School Ile Ife. It was a school founded by the White Fathers. The Catechumen syllabus informed Christian Religious Knowledge, one of the school subjects. Thus, I was baptized and confirmed during one of the Masses in the school in 1977.

My interest in the congregation started in the school. It was such a well-organized and disciplined institution that my preoccupation at that age was what

would happen to the school if Fr Fabien Cloutier, the founder, left the country. I wanted to work in the school, and I felt one would have to be a priest to do so. However, I was also very active in the Catholic Youth Association (CYA) activities where I was the Secretary at the parish, zonal and diocesan levels. I also accompanied Fr Yves Gilbert on vocation drives all over the country when I was free.

Sometime in 1988, I visited the Novitiate of the Daughters of Holy Ghost in Ilesa to visit friends who had joined the Convent. Outside this novitiate, I met Fr Denis Laflame, the then Vocations Director of M.Afr. I approached him and told him that I was interested in the Congregation, only for him to tell me that they would be interviewing potential candidates in two days. I went for the interview in Ede and was selected to start my formation. Well, I never wrote any application to join (Kikiki). Fr Cloutier and Fr Jan Hamelijncck were on the panel to interview me, and I still remember Fr Cloutier saying, "so the fire is still burning in you"?

I started formation in 1988 and would continue the normal line of formation to ordination. My first cycle was in Ibadan, Nigeria. We were 13 candidates from different parts of Nigeria, but today I remain the only M.Afr. from the whole lot. It is God's Grace! I did my novitiate in Kasama, Zambia, between 1991/and 92,



and the Stage followed it in Mali between 1992 and 1994. The stage was a beautiful experience, though its challenges were mainly the language. I went to Mali with little or no knowledge of the French language and was required to learn the Bambara language as well. It was a great experience - I was in a big mixed community of White Fathers and diocesans with the Bishop of the diocese as a member too. My theology was in Toulouse, France, where I was ordained a Deacon on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1997, having pronounced the Oath the previous evening with six other confreres.

I thank God for the gift of the past twenty-five years, which is the simple grace of remaining focused and focused on him who called me. I thank God for giving me the grace to serve him in the people he sent me to, the grace to serve him in the people with HIV/AIDS in Bamako, San, Kolokani and other parts of Mali. Together with Sr Suzzy, we organized workshops to create awareness of the deadly disease. We visited them in their homes to help remove the stigma and help them to accept their situation. We prepared the first sets of victims who went public to announce their status in the media. I welcomed the grace to serve God by representing the beautiful Anglophone women in the streets (you call them prostitutes) of Bamako and San in courts not as their legal counsellor but as their translator. I also extended the service to those in prison whenever called upon by the government representatives. How did they pay me back for the service? Dirty minds! They gave me excellent food and drinks whenever I visited them, and they also brought food to us in the parish. It was great working on the literacy program helping poor children to read and write the Bambara language.

My missionary itinerary then took me to Ghana, where the invitation was to remain focused and glued to the person of Christ who called me and is present in the UDS students where I was chaplain and the

primary and JSS pupils in the parish schools where I was school manager. It was then time to move to the conflict zone of Bunkpurugu in the Bolga/Navrongo Diocese. The actual setting was that of a rural apostolate. However, we lived with the conflict, and I played a vital role in bringing peace to Bunkpurugu; I was also the parish priest. I asked to leave Bunkpurugu at the end of the conflict since the trauma was a bit too much for me, and it is something I still feel when someone bangs a door or when there are fireworks. My missionary life in Zambia was a bit too short. I was in Kasamba in the Mansa Diocese. Here too, it was rural apostolate, primary evangelization. I was settling down to know the people, language and culture when I received the invitation to Rome for translation work.

My brothers' things were not as rosy as I had put them down. There were challenges, I struggled to accept and live with others, and they also struggled with me. I tried to make myself happy in a community where the one with money decided and the oldest was never wrong. I struggled to live with the stigma of my country on me. It was a big challenge when the idea was good but could not be implemented because the idea did not emanate from the person with the money. I cried when my mother died five weeks after my brother, and a confrere told me, "so you will be given some money again by the Province, you must be happy". It wasn't easy when I felt misunderstood. I suffered some allegations, and I wouldn't have been here to write about this experience if an investigation was not done (I have tears in my eyes). I was angry when a friend came from France to visit me, and my superiors asked me to leave (transfer) for another parish over 500 kms away, only to get to the Provincial House and be told I couldn't proceed to the parish because the bishop has not been informed (mind you, my friend was a "he" before you start making ideas in your head). I struggled and still struggle with the vows I took. However, if you ask me, I will tell you that obedience

has been the most difficult one to live. Obedience is accepting to go where you are asked to go, abandoning what you are doing, and accepting what you probably don't want to do even after dialogue for the sake of the mission, community and society. A confrere in Mali coming out from the provincial office while I waited to go in told me "Ils vont te dialougué, ils vient de me dialougué moi". You might ask yourself if I did anything to hurt others or made life difficult for others in the community or mission. Oh yes, I am sure I did, but no man sees himself except by a mirror. They are my mirrors, and you may have to wait for them for answers to your questions whenever they write.

I was asked to give whatever to the younger ones (it makes me feel old). I will say that we all have our own experiences, and you have to live yours. The first thing is to be yourself and let that self be what God wants it to be. It is important to know the people and the culture, as I found I was happier in places where I made efforts to learn the language or showed interest even if I did not make much progress. The people love it. The other thing is to remain focused on Christ himself, who called us to serve him wherever we are sent. When you are concentrated on him, you will always stand up when you fall because you feel there is something at the end of the journey.

It is good to have a confrere you can open up to, who can tell you the truth and why not a spiritual director. Every community has its ups and downs, and there are bound to be conflicts. The way we react to conflict situations matters a lot. Things get lighter when I accept my portion of the blame rather than point fingers at others.

I notice confreres getting angry that negative things are being said about them. The problem is not about people saying things about me; instead, I should ask myself if those things are true or "half true". If they are true, then I try

to stop, and if not, I continue with my life. An African proverb says that if you are called a thief, you don't need to dance in the market square with a goat in your hands. We make ourselves vulnerable to attacks or criticisms by sending out the wrong signals through what we do or say, thereby leaving people to conclude rightly or wrongly. Two things that make other confreres seem to have a bad image of us are financial matters and relationship issues (male/female, major/minor). Confreres tend to look badly at us when talks about mismanagements of funds start, and our lifestyle does not seem to correspond with the missionary lifestyle we are called to live.

In some cases, we find out that the one involved did not embezzle but failed to keep proper written records accompanied by receipts because he relied too much on his memory which eventually failed him. The confrere gets angry when scolded or not trusted with money, but he actually caused the situation. Relationships and healthy ones outside the community are welcome. There is bound to be a problem when this "Relation Ship" constantly takes me away from my community's shores to the extent that I am hardly present, or my apostolate suffers. My brothers, all "dogs chop shit, but when you use it as lipstick, it becomes a problem" The best thing is like a Yoruba proverb "what you don't smell, is what you don't want to eat".

When we signed on those dotted lines to say "I do" at ordination or Oath, we probably did not know the depth of the details hidden beneath those lines. I thank God we did not know the details because maybe we would not have signed. Imagine if you knew the names of confreres you would live with in missions. Imagine if the apostolates behind those dotted lines and the challenges were revealed to you. Would you have gone ahead to sign if you knew the countries you would work in and the means of transport that would be made available to you? It is God's grace,

my brothers! I thank God for the grace received.

It is the grace of falling and raising my hands for him to pull me up and continue my journey. It is the grace to see and respect him in the men and women created in his image and likeness and to see him in the events around me. It is the grace not to be crushed by negative attitudes from others. Yes, the grace to resurrect each time others buried me, or I created situations that made it easy for them to bury me. I mean the grace to stand up and walk each time I shot myself in the foot. It is a beautiful grace to see myself like a Zebra with gorgeous black and white stripes. God loves the Zebra, and I am more than the Zebra. He loves me with my white and black stripes.

I came across beautiful people along the way - beautiful confreres, beautiful com-

munities that served as a good support system that made life and things look easy. Some communities and confreres were challenging (not to say frustrating), but when I look back now, I can't help but thank God for those moments and confreres, for they were like booster jabs to my system. They made me stronger! When you see an old monkey, know it has escaped many arrows (through God's Grace). You know it has experienced different weather, and you only see it because it is alive. I am grateful to God for the many kinds of weather I have been through and especially for the grace of not remaining stuck in the harsh ones. Like in the beautiful song *Amazing Grace*: I say, "it's grace that brought me thus far, and grace will lead me on".

**By Steve Ofonikot, M.Afr.**



*Know a bit about Boris YABRÉ*

### **Family background**

I am from Burkina Faso. My place of origin is called Zabré which is about 40 kms away from the Namoo border in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Zabré is where I grew up in a family of seven children comprised of three girls and four boys. I am the fifth born and the second boy. My Father Gabriel was a full-time trained catechist. He served in Gon-Boussougou which was an outstation at that time, about 35 kms away from Zabré parish. That is where I was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1979. He passed away when I was eight years old. My mother Agnès is currently staying at home in Zabré. Two of my three sisters are religious. The rest of my siblings are married, save one who is still searching.

### **Missionary call and training**

I joined the Missionaries of Africa in September 2003 after completing my secondary school education crowned by the *baccalauréat*, a diploma which gives the right to pursue university studies. Since my ten-



der childhood, I had the desire of becoming a priest. However, my desire to become a missionary-priest was born after my return from the World Youth Day in 1997 in Paris. The desire of meeting people from different cultures was burning deep inside me. Consequently, the missionary orientation of the Missionaries of Africa attracted me. Thus, from 2003, I embarked on the journey of their formation programme. The first stage of the formation took place in Ouagadougou. Meditation according to the Ignatian spirituality, Philosophy, Introduction to Scripture, to Psychology, to Sociology, Apostolate, constituted the backbone of my training there. My faith was shaken during the first year with a course entitled: *le Mystère Chrétien* (that is, the Christian mystery). It had never crossed my mind that God whom I believed to be all powerful, could be vulnerable. Yes, the mystery of faith goes beyond a pure rational thinking. I completed the first stage of my formation happy and grateful for all the discoveries and transformations in my life.

In September 2006, I left my country for Zambia for the Spiritual year. We were all together thirteen young men from nine countries. The whole programme was centred on spiritual matters inviting to have a deeper and a personal relationship with Christ. I learnt to face myself, to review my life, to listen to my deepest desires and to see God present, guiding and sustaining me all through. The spiritual companionship facilitated this process. At the end of the noviciate, I remained with three words: silence, forgiveness and double life. Silence is necessary to listen, forgiveness liberates, double life is lying to oneself. The passage of Scripture in which I found nourishment and inspiration at that time, was the *Shema* Israel: "Listen Israel... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... (Dt 6: 4ff).

In August 2007, I left Zambia for Uganda for two years of pastoral experience. The provision was for me to stay in Eastern Uganda in Soroti diocese. After three months of learning Ateso language in Acumet, I was asked to go to Kampala in a newly established parish called Mapeera-Nabulagala. It was at that place that the pioneer Missionaries of Africa celebrated the first Holy Mass in Uganda land in 1879. In Nabulagala, I learnt what it means to be close to people, that is, being with them, learning their language and trying to see things as they do. However, everything did not go smoothly. The three months of my stay in the East with the Iteso had an impact on my interaction with the Baganda in Kampala. They are two quite different cultures. The former is open whereas the latter is reserved and hierarchical. I was helped to integrate those differences and to move on. Visiting the sick with the holy Eucharist and sharing the Word of God with them, being with the youth and the parish committee for justice and peace, were part of my humble participation in the foundation of the new parish. Also, there was a significant presence of Rwandese within the parish. Some of them were not fluent in English. I tried to give them some listening ears and to be a brother to them. At the end of my pastoral experience, I was accepted to continue with my formation and the place indicated for the final stage of my training was Jerusalem.

In August 2009, I found myself in the Holy Land to pursue my theological formation. I was very happy to be in the very place where the mysteries of the Christian faith unfolded through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jerusalem is a place of encounter and of religious diversity. Jews, Arabs, Muslims, and Christians of various denominations are there. For four years I studied at the Salesian Pontifical University-Jerusalem Campus, together with many other students from different parts of the world. Besides studies, I had a pastoral engagement in a centre for mentally challenged people, Jews and Arabs alike, at Ein Karem (The place where Mary visited Elisabeth). Through my interaction with those disabled people, came about the topic of my B.A. theological synthesis: *God's self-revelation as Father and Christian Initiation as the seal of the divine Sonship. The heavenly Father's apparent silence in regard to human suffering, in light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus; and the Church's mission as a sacrament of God's love in the world today.* The experience of suffering is a universal problem. For a believer, it is a challenge to our faith in God who is all love. Scripture tells us that Jesus

is the beloved Son of the Father. Yet, he went through suffering. Luckily enough, suffering did not have the last word on him. He triumphed over death and evil through his resurrection. The living Jesus is always the same and will always be with us. He goes ahead of us today in all the areas of human existence to use us as his instruments to give life to all through love.

### **Missionary Oath and commitment in different places**

I made my missionary commitment through the Oath on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2012 in Jerusalem, and I was ordained deacon a month later in Bethlehem. The following year, that is, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2013, I was ordained to the priesthood in my home diocese of Manga. I chose Micah 6, 8 as my motto: “Walk humbly with your God”. In October 2013, I arrived in Mozambique for the first time, as a fully trained new missionary. The experienced confreres I found there offered me their hospitality. After learning Portuguese in Beira, I went to the diocese of Chimoio, in Sussundenga Parish. There, I had to learn Chiwute. By God’s grace I could manage. After a relatively short time, I became parish priest and the diocesan chaplain of the legion of Mary. I was happy to share in the faith journey of the parishioners and the legions of the diocese. However, I could not stay as long as I wanted to. I left Sussundenga for Beira in January 2017. The day following my arrival there, around 6.00 am, I was praying the rosary in the compound of our Sector House, when our own dogs came and fiercely attacked me. I was rushed to the hospital and got the help I needed. In Beira, I continued to carry out my service of being Provincial Delegate. Visiting and welcoming the confreres and animating our five communities in the three dioceses were my first priorities. I learnt a lot from listening to the confreres and stagiaires (Candidates on pastoral experience). All the discussions and deliberations in the various Provincial Council meetings and Sector assemblies had been a school of learning and wisdom. Besides, I participated in the preparation of our Mozambican aspirants for their pre-phase formation training. I was responsible for vocation promotion at one moment. As a service to the local Church in Beira, I was appointed Archdiocesan coordinator of the lay movements, and I was giving spiritual accompaniment in the minor diocesan seminary. Sometimes, I could give a helping hand in the nearby parishes through Mass celebrations. My time in Mozambique was pastorally fulfilling, though I was feeling overstretched. Indeed, the Owner of the Mission gave me the energy necessary to accomplish the mission entrusted to me. I give him praise.

In May 2019, I left Mozambique for the Philippines. It was to join the formation team there in Cebu while pursuing a Master’s degree in Philosophy. I had a beautiful and enriching experience in the Philippines. I appreciated their popular devotion to Santo Niño (the Infant Jesus); the light and the popular joy during the Christmas season with the series of dawn Mass celebrations were a discovery for me. Our Missionaries of Africa’s simplicity and proximity with the people are highly appreciated by those coming close to us. I had a very supportive community, and I enjoyed the collaboration and the welcoming spirit of the Filipinos too. My sense of ecclesial belonging became stronger. Indeed, in the church, wherever we are, we are brothers and sisters no matter our cultural differences. The Gospel message is the same everywhere and in all languages. It is that of love and universal fraternity in God. The challenge everywhere is to live up to the gospel’s message and values.

From the Philippines, I was sent to Lyon in France at the Jesuits’ centre called *le Châtelard*. I arrived there in January 2022, for a formation on spiritual companionship and the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. I stayed there for six months. It was another level of a “noviciate” where the opportunity was given to review my life once again. After concluding that formation, I received a new appointment to join the formation team at Saint Martin of Tours Formation house in Ejisu-Ghana. I arrived there on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022 ready and willing to be of service to our candidates. This year, they are 36 of them from Nigeria and Ghana. I was accepted to lecture at the Spiritan University College where three other congregations and some lay people do come for classes.



### My hope for our formation today

Looking at our candidates, full of energy, desiring to be with Jesus, to follow him, to give their lives for his mission, fills my heart with awe and gratitude. We did not do anything to deserve their love for the charism of our Missionary Society. Indeed, the mission is God's first; and he alone is the origin of their call. However, he uses the human mediation to confirm. My hope as a formator is to be God's instrument in the process of the vocational discernment of our candidates and not to lose any genuine vocation sent to us by the Lord of the harvest. It may not always be smooth and straightforward. But his grace will never fail us. My hope for our candidates is to seize the opportunities given to them here and now, to grow in the understanding of the missionary vocation and to be grounded in all the spheres of their formation programme. This is the time to cultivate discipline, availability, generosity, openness, the sense of sacrifice and self-giving. This is because our today and our tomorrow are intertwined. To some extent, the candidate of today is the missionary of tomorrow and the missionary of today was the candidate of yesterday. To be a good missionary tomorrow means to be a good candidate today. And being good is not about pleasing and impressing the formators and the superiors to find one's way through formation. It is not being perfect either. It is rather being oneself in truth and sincerely seeking to be a better person for God's greater glory.

**by Boris YABRÉ, M.Afr.**

### Boris in Gallery





*Selected News Items from the GhN  
Province since May*



Our vibrant Province of Ghana-Nigeria is bustling with activities, initiatives and enthusiasm! It will not be easy, in fact impossible, to mention all the events that have taken place in the Province or affecting the Province. My apologies for those who would have liked attention to be given to this or that event. Of course, allow me to be a bit self-defensive if I give a good hint: one obvious way to make sure that what you find important does indeed appear in the GhN Link is to write an article about it and send it to us!

#### The Chapter and its Aftermath

All will agree that I mention first the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of our Society held in May 2022, during the time that our previous number of the Link was being prepared, which gave due attention to it. Obviously, we were delighted and proud, that once again a member of our Province was elected to the General Council (= GC). Richard Baawobr was the first Councillor in the 2004-2010 GC, then in the GC of 2010-2016 he was the Superior General. In 2016 Ignatius Anipu was elected a member of the GC and in the latest Chapter, Francis Bomansaana emerged as the First Councillor! A quite impressive record!! But when we say “Chapter” we almost immediately have to say “post-Capitular”, because the Chapter and its insights have to be put into practice in each of the Provinces of the Society. Indeed, also in our Province we held a week-long post-Capitular Assembly from 25-29 October under the firm guidance of Ignatius Anipu. The GC was represented by Leo Laurence Maria Joseph, who, ‘a long time ago’, was a stagiaire in Savelugu. The post-Cap produced a *Strategic Plan from 2022-2028*. Each Community and indeed every M.Afr. has now to put its contents into practice.

#### “Happy Events”

I am sure that each one of us could give a long list of happy events in his parish or at his place of appointment. Unfortunately, I have to make a choice.

This year, 2022, the Province happily opened (or are about to do so) some new communities. Nigeria had already done so on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022 with the opening of the Quasi-Parish of St. Augustine at Ojoo, with Alain Sossou (Civ), Julian Kasiya (Mwi) and newcomer Felix Kiboba (DRC), as the pastoral team. As you read this report, surely the lastborn “baby-community” is that of St. John the Baptist Church, P.O. Box 4, Atonsu (A.R.) in the Konongo-Mampong Diocese of Ghana, just over an hour’s drive away from our formation house at Ejisu. The three pioneers there are Paul Donnibe Dery (Gha), Vincent de Paul Wanok Jacan (DRC) and newcomer Ephraim Konkobo (Bfa). The Province hopes to give birth in the not too distant future to yet another community (in Wa Diocese), but no one knows when this “pregnancy” will have run its course.

#### “Happy People”

One of the biggest surprises since our last issue was surely the appointment of our confrere Richard Kuuia Baawobr, Bishop of Wa, to be a Cardinal! Pope Francis knows what he does!

The what is popularly known as the “red hat ceremony” and officially a “consistory” took place on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Many people from Ghana, including some confreres, travelled to Rome to witness the occasion. Unfortunately, as we all know, the Cardinal-elect fell sick and upon arrival in Rome, was admitted to a Roman hospital. Yet, the Pope declared him a Cardinal from a distance. The healing process is very slow indeed, but we all hope and pray that he will soon be able to return to his Diocese and resume his pastoral functions. He surely will read these lines and we ask him also to remember all of us in his prayers, as we pray for him!

Before the Cardinal-elect travelled to Rome, he had ordained our confrere Bernard Deo-Angyi to the Priesthood. This celebration took place in Kaleo (Wa Diocese) on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Not long afterwards, on 6<sup>th</sup> July, another confrere, Augustine Gonsum, was ordained a Priest in Patchin Diocese, Nigeria. Congratulations to them both! In its meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, the GhN Provincial Council called Ernest OSEI (now in Merrivale) to receive the ordination to the Priesthood. This is planned to take place in January 2023. At the same time, Candidate Luke Sabie Naa (also in Merrivale) was called to the Ministry of Acolyte. By the time that you read this, three new confreres of GhN will have pronounced their Missionary Oath and have been ordained Deacon in Abidjan (26 November 2022). They are Anthony ABU Ejeh, Moses Asinafe Odogbor (both from Nigeria) and Peter Kojo Salaam (from Ghana). The Provincial and GC Member Leo Laurence hope to be present for it.

It was surely with happy faces that, at the beginning of the academic year, twelve young men entered St. Clement Formation House in Ibadan (seven from Nigeria and five from Ghana), while the first phase of formation in Ejisu received 12 candidates for the first year. Altogether in Ejisu there are now 36 candidates: 12 Ghanaians and 24 Nigerians, seven are in fourth year, one in third year (these eight are preparing themselves for the Spiritual Year), and twelve in second year. More grease to your elbows, guys!!

There was of course a lot of movement: some confreres went or are on home-leave, others returned or will soon do so; some left the GhN Province for other vineyards: Prosper Harelimana to Rome, Jacek Wroblewski, as rumours have it, will also go elsewhere after his sabbatical time in Jerusalem (read about it in his article elsewhere in this Link). His place as Bursar in Ejisu has been taken over by Norendro Nayak. Also, Mike Targett will soon say a definitive goodbye to Kumasi and Ghana. We wish him a happy home coming. There were some movements within the Province, but I limit myself to the seven young confreres, very recently ordained, who joined our Province. I am happy to introduce them. They are Emmanuel Banda from Zambia to Ejigbo; Felix Kiboba from RDC to Ojoo; Aimé Bienvenu Lalsaga from Burkina Faso to Agbowo; Paul Sanogo from Mali to Gyedna; John Bosco Mukulia from Uganda to Bolgatanga-Soe; Mario Emmanuel Nyirenda from Malawi to Wa and Ephrahim Konkobo from Burkina Faso to Atonsu (Ghana, A.R). Fruitful apostolate to you all.

We were also happy to welcome four new stagiaires: two in Nigeria, Dominick Makinini from Tanzania and Emmanuel Kato from DRC and two in Ghana, Eraste Amuli Murhagane from DRC and Edwin Gechure from Kenya. We wish them a very happy experience with us, so that in the not-too-distant future they may join us again as young confreres

At the end of these news items allow me to mention one confrere who longs to rejoin his mission in Ibadan, after having gone to The Netherlands for a regular medical check-up. It took him indeed many months to deal with his medical problems. His sister Willemien looked after him. Both were very happy, when finally, finally, he got the green light from his doctors to go back to Nigeria. But..... then his sister fell very seriously sick, and he had to stay home and look after her, as she had been looking after him. The roles were simply reversed!! Of course, I talk here about Piet de Bekker. Hopefully, his sister will recover, but lots of things are still very unsure, so Piet had to postpone his return indefinitely. Lots of strength and courage, Piet and Willemien, from the readers of the GhN Link and abundant blessings from Above.

***By André Schaminée, M.Afr.***

*Eternal rest grant to them O Lord*

06 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Joseph Midah, uncle of Victor Shehu
12 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Hilary Dery, paternal uncle of Richard Abobopuo
02 <sup>nd</sup> July 2022	Abbé Ghislain Kayo, maternal uncle of Norbert Issa
10 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Melue Nwabudu, maternal uncle of Eke Nelson Chinedu
15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Fr. John March Cheitnum, cousin brother of Jonathan Bahago (kidnapped and murdered)
16 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Uche, brother-in-law of Toby Ndiukwu
18 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Louise, sister of Alain Sossou
20 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Fr. Evert van Oostrom, M.Afr., cousin of Johan Miltenburg
23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2022	Susan, maternal aunt of Otto Katto
08 <sup>th</sup> August 2022	Victoria Kesse, mother of stagiaire Frederick Koomsong
08 <sup>th</sup> August 2022	Suurikye Abiba Genevieve Dakura, maternal aunt of Anthony Wie B.
17 <sup>th</sup> September 2022	James Molonaa Gandau, uncle of Bernhard Angkyi
27 <sup>th</sup> September 2022	Marcel Chimpali, dad of Clenerius Chimpali, formerly in Ghana
01 <sup>st</sup> October 2022	Jane Shetu Abobo, sister-in-law of John and Vitus Abobo
03 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022	Annette Chitimba, aunt of John Mubanga
06 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Camille Mutamba Kasende, uncle of Anaclet Kasende
08 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Cariton Bararwerekana, senior brother of Prosper Harelimana
15 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Oga Aizoba Monday, great friend/helper of the Nigeria Sector
27 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Richard Cardinal Baawobr, Confreere and Bishop of Wa Diocese
30 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Fabienne Watine, sister-in-law of Damien Watine



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