

MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA

(WHITE FATHERS)



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Mary
Queen Of Africa
Pray for Us.
Missionaries Of Africa



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REMINDER: *St Anthony’s Novena begins on 5th June and ends 13th June . All your petitions will be placed unread on the altar and will remain there throughout the Novena. Editor.*

Editor's Word After the February issue of the Magazine, a lady wrote to me saying, "I am 89 now, slowed down, becoming more and more aware of the time going by faster, while hoping I will see whatever God has been wanting me to do, and hoping too, that I will be allowed some time yet to do at least some of it...(recently) I found myself jolted into a deeper level of understanding, joyfully seeing that I wasn't any different from anybody else in being offered that unconditional love: that all that was expected of us is, very simply, to accept it."



Fr. Michael Heap

I believe that that lady has understood what Easter is about and has put into perspective the fears, hardships, loss and suffering that so many people are experiencing throughout the world.

The suffering and hurt are real. The fears are justified. How will I/we manage? How will I die?

The hurt, fears and suffering of Jesus at Easter were real. God was not commiserating with us, feeling sorry for us, nor rescuing us. Easter was about Jesus taking part with us in real life and death. But Easter is not only about death and suffering. It is about Jesus betting his life that God's promises can be trusted. The Resurrection is Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid. It is I." Death and suffering are real but ultimately they pass. Our human life will pass. All we have known will pass. Only God's promises remain. Only God's love remains. Only God's life remains, and He is offering it to us.

The story of Naaman the leper is very relevant, I think. He offers the prophet huge amounts of treasure if God will cure him of leprosy. The prophet tells him to wash in the Jordan. He is shocked because it is so simple and at first refuses. If he had been told to fast, to mortify himself, to pay a fortune, to go on pilgrimage, he would have done it. He would have somehow been in control.

If we are asked to fast, pray more, give more alms (all of which are good), we might do it, but simply to accept that God loves us unconditionally and respond to this by loving God and others, somehow seems too easy, too much out of our control.

When faced with sickness, death, failure do we become terrified because we are no longer in control, or can we accept that Jesus is there saying, "Do not be afraid. It is I"? Can we then reply with trust, "My Lord and my God"?

Is Africa Going to Die? *by Fr. Peter Ekutt MAfr*

As I write this today, the whole world is in confusion, Africa is in panic. The uncertainty about a better tomorrow that we are experiencing today as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is becoming increasingly worrying and destabilizing. Our social world is being turned upside down; loss of our usual routine; financial loss linked to the interruption of professional activities, in short, it is a disaster that is difficult to describe adequately. We know that it is a pandemic, it affects everyone, but everyone reacts according to their own situation and the way they perceive it depends on their culture. It is a punishment from God; it is a result of human carelessness with the domination of Nature; it is the fault of this or that nation because of carelessness or evil intent; it simply happens without reason; etc etc. Here in this remote province in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the heart of Central Africa, fear and incomprehension dominate and paralyse our people to such an extent that the measures put in place to limit the spread are not sufficiently followed. This fear is not linked to the Coronavirus specifically but rather to the lockdown that limits the movements of a population whose lives essentially depend on a daily struggle to make ends meet. This is all the more serious for us who live on the border with Uganda. Quarantining and lockdown has much more of a negative impact on the poor people who still have to gather in the market places. They are not afraid of COVID-19 which might happen, but rather of the starvation which will certainly result from lockdown. How can we live in a confinement where absolutely basic essentials are almost non-existent? No electricity at home; at dawn we have to go and fetch water from the only borehole in the village. In some places a mother alone bears the burden of many children. She has to feed and provide for them from the petty trading activities she



Huge country. Few resources

carries out daily. No petty trading = no money = hungry and starving children. Imagine how the confinement strangles a population that is already without means of making a living. In this context of fear and incomprehension, some pastors of the Pentecostal churches continue to discreetly organize services that are sometimes interrupted by the police. For a population whose attendance at places of worship is the ultimate remedy for all life's crises, it is difficult for them to understand why churches are being closed at this particular period of need. We are about ten kilometers from the border with Uganda. This border is now closed – a further “closing down” “closing in”. The Congo is a huge



Looking for water in the morning

country with inadequate transport links and communications, therefore we here tend to be very dependent upon Uganda for many essential goods. But with border closure, prices, especially of food, have all shot up. Let us turn now to Bunia, the capital of our Province. It is 180 km away by road. To get there we have to cross the territory of Djugu where the rebels of the armed group CODECO have been plundering, raping and massacring the population for the past three years! Since the 1990s, Ituri (our Region) has been experiencing cycles of violence that the authorities

and Non-Governmental Organisations describe as inter-communal violence between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups. Now, in addition, two new ethnic-based armed groups have been born: Chini ya kilima and Banyali-Kilo. The violence of these groups affects the entire province. The various successive governments have been unable to clarify and smooth out the differences between these groups so as to restore the authority of the state over these areas that have come under rebel

control. Every day brings its share of deaths; nearly 80% of this population, living mainly from farming, has had to flee, abandoning all their possessions to seek refuge in the big cities where they live in on top of one another in camps. And those who have not managed to flee are condemned to hide and survive in the forest like animals rather than human beings. Before COVID-19, which is referred to as “the great global health tragedy,” the Ebola virus was already raging here in Ituri, in the middle of a tribal war. Today COVID-19 simply adds to the moral and psychological exhaustion of an innocent population that is already suffering from chronic insecurity and extreme violence.



Social distancing? How?

Last year, I attended peace demonstrations in this region. Naked women, crying, lamenting, sitting in the dust with their hands on their heads, demonstrated the distress of an entire population and begged peace from the authorities. They called on the whole of humanity to tell the State to take its responsibilities. But we are doubly blocked: civil society in Ituri is facing a double containment. Perhaps it might surprise you to hear that what has

struck me most, during all these years of my missionary life in Ituri, is not the suffering, nor the various acts of violence and savage killings, it is rather the quality of resilience and the traditional ways the people have of taking individual responsibility for any crisis. The population is fragile and vulnerable, they have cried for a long time, they have lost everything, they have been forced to flee their homes and stay in the camps for the displaced and in precarious conditions. And yet!

Although living in these conditions, people are ready to fight, to get by, to start over. In my conversation with Madame Sophie, who has lost everything and who also lives in the camp for the displaced, she says to

me crying, “Father, we can always start again as long as there is life.” These words encouraged me. Again, I remember last November, I went to celebrate the Eucharist for the refugees from Southern Sudan who are in Congo; they had fled from violence and insecurity and ended up in the same situation elsewhere; I had gone to comfort them and spend time with them. It was the feast of Christ the King. I discovered that the refugees rather comforted me by the way they welcomed me, integrating into the local population, taking the spiritual life seriously. I went to console but they consoled me more by their life witness; they showed a tremendous resilience. I think of all those children who are forced by the war onto the roads of exile, walking with difficulty behind their mothers towards the unknown. I think of all those burnt-out houses and entire deserted villages. I think of all those families who are still trying to put their trust in God. I keep a respectful memory of all the dead, victims of these atrocities in Ituri. The passion of the people of Ituri is long-lasting; and I burn with the hope of seeing its end! May God have mercy on them!

What of the family? For a people cut down by life, for a people “on the run”, for a population on the move without a destination, the family becomes in most cases a source of spiritual support and the only real reference point for security. The individual resilience that we see has been



Africa will not die!

built within the family framework. It is true that many people suffer from psychological disorders, but this is experienced at the level of “helplessness”. We live with it and we become victims of it. The family plays a role of comfort and social security in this sense: but it only solves the problem up to a certain level. May God bless our families!

KUNGONI CENTRE OF CULTURE AND ARTS

by Michael Ukunola, a Nigerian Missionary of Africa student, at present under lockdown in Malawi after his 2 years pastoral work in a parish.

Culture is regarded as the many manifestations of the human intellectual achievement which encompasses religion, language, food, arts, music, dance and others. The members of any particular human society are always fond of their culture and it is considered as something to be treasured. It is with this view and having fallen in love with the Malawian people and their rich culture, that Rev. Fr. Claude Boucher Chisale, a member of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, founded the Kungoni Centre of Culture and Arts. Chisale is a local name given to him when he was initiated into the local tradition and culture. Because it was necessary for him to be initiated in order to have deep knowledge of the Chewa culture, as anyone who is not initiated into the Chewa culture is



Fr. Claude Boucher MAfr.
Founder of Kungoni



Kungoni Showroom

considered a child and only general aspects of the culture are known by such a person. Due to his initiation into the culture, Claude was granted access to deep secrets of the Chewa traditional customs. Thus he was able to fully understand the meaning and secrets of the Gule Wamkulu a traditional dance in the Chewa culture,

thereby helping to bring understanding where there was uncertainty and suspicion especially among Christians. And the dance which was previously considered to be bad, so that Catholics who participated in them were excluded from the sacraments, is now seen as something cultural,



Carvings on show

meaning that now Christians who participate in the dance, mostly for entertainment and for the purpose of depicting their cultural heritage no longer see themselves excluded from the life of the church and the sacraments.

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Arts is located in Malawi. Malawi is also popularly known as The Warm Heart of Africa, due to the cheerfulness and the welcoming spirit of Malawians. Kungoni is situated at Mua, Dedza district in the central region of Malawi. And it was founded in the year 1976 with the aim of celebrating Malawi's cultural and artistic heritage, and also to safeguard the culture. It started as a team of

wood carvers from all over Malawi, carving artifacts that depict their various cultures for the purpose of showcasing and also for sale. Then later came the request from the Bishop of the Diocese of Mua to build a school that teaches people in art and craft. This request was accepted by Claude Boucher and he started the school in collaboration with the already existing team of carvers so Kungoni as started as a school of art and craft evolved into what it is today. Kungoni has helped the Catholic Church in Malawi to successfully integrate certain aspects of the culture into the Catholic Liturgy, such as choirs singing in their native languages and making use of drums and other local musical instruments, as this was not the case before. Also, it has helped the people to understand the sacraments better, when explained through elements that already exist in the culture. A clear example of this are the sacraments of initiation,

most especially, the sacrament of Confirmation – initiation is an important aspect of the Chewa culture, which when done, signifies that one is no longer a child but an adult. Today, Kungoni houses cultural elements and artifacts from all over Malawi but it deals primarily with the Chewa culture. Kungoni has a gallery and show room where all the artworks which are being fabricated are displayed for sale; it has a museum that houses pictures and cultural elements that depict the history of Malawi, history of Christianity in Malawi and also the history of the Chewa, Yao and Ngoni people of Malawi. Kungoni also organises cultural displays such as dramas and dances for visitors and tourists. It has become over the years one of the most important places to visit for both Malawians and foreigners. Further, Kungoni has crafted many sculptures and art works for many churches in and outside of Malawi. It is necessary to emphasize that Kungoni is not a profit-making enterprises as most of



More Chewa carvings

the revenues from art works goes to the art makers who use Kungoni as means of showcasing their works. Apart from the aforementioned, other activities of Kungoni include taking tourists and visitors through guided tours in the museum. It also serves as a resource centre for cultural courses, especially for expatri-

ates working in Malawi and who seek to understand the culture of the people so that they can better relate and work with them. It is important to say that the great work of Fr. Claude Boucher in Malawi has been recognised both locally and internationally and he has been awarded honorary doctorates in culture and social anthropology by Share-World University and by the University of Mzuzu in Malawi.

Kuduru: a new community in Nigeria

by Br John Nkhoma MAfr

At long last, after long discussions, Kuduru community was founded last year in a remote area of Nigeria called Gyedna (between Niger state and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja). Our community, consisting of a Nigerian, a Zambian and a Dutchman and myself, a Malawian, has as mission 3 main aims:



Site for the new foundation

1. To found a new parish (St. Luke's) among the Gbabyi tribe, one of the smallest tribes of Nigeria. The Gbagyis are the original inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory (FTC), but were displaced when the FTC was created in 1975. At the

moment, there are continued tensions between the Nigeria Government and the Gbagyis over the way they were evicted from their ancestral home by the Government. Since the parish is in a remote area, our apostolate is mainly Primary Evangelisation, which means preaching the Gospel to those who have never heard it, by catechism, and formation of the laity through liturgical groups such as choirs and altar servers. There is also outreach through a Justice and Peace group, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism and encounter with African Traditional Religion. 2. To set up a house for our Society. This would be have 3 purposes, first as a home for retired Nigerian confreres, secondly as a house where young men who want to learn more about our Society and Mission may spend a few days observing and reflecting as to whether this could be the life for them or not, and thirdly the community here

is to welcome both Nigerian confreres and students travelling or processing their papers in Abuja. Abuja is the centre of administration in Nigeria. In the past, confreres and students used to have headaches trying to process their documents in Abuja. Travelling from and to Abuja was expensive and dangerous. As a result, confreres and students were making long and unnecessary journeys and lodging in hotels when they wanted to go home for holidays or travel for mission. Now, this is no longer a problem. Kuduru, our Abuja community has changed all that.

3. To build a training centre where local young Gbanyi can learn vocational skills which would help them earn a living. The Centre would also boast a “sports complex”. This is a lot more modest than it sounds! It will be a place to play team games – football, volleyball, basketball etc. However, apart from designs and plans for those buildings, nothing much has been done, we are still searching for funds and processing the documents of approval of our designs and plans with the local government.

The Gbanyi people amongst whom we have been sent are one of the 250 tribes of Nigeria. They are well known as peaceful, artistic farmers. They are polygamous, and practice patrilineal system of marriage, that is a man may have several wives, but inheritance always passes through the male line. In the past a man would have to work for his in-laws for 7 years before a marriage could be concluded. Nowadays, instead of serving the 7 years in the bride’s father’s house, the groom simply pays the “bride price”. But since many young men cannot afford the bride price, many young people just live together. This causes problems with the in-laws and the whole community, since an unmarried man traditionally has no standing in the community. The most important activity for most Gbanyi is farming. It is literally their life. Because of this most young men are sent to work on the farm and schooling is not considered important – hence the widespread illiteracy. When needing to speak with non-Gbanyi people Hausa is used. This means that the Gbanyi language is dying out.

The Gbanyi have a distinctive dance and distinctive clothes. They weave their clothes from cotton and dye them dark blue or black, the men wearing a sleeveless tunic and the women a tunic fitted under the

arms. Dressed thus they dance carrying various farming implements like hoes and food (soup made from locust beans) and drink (maize beer) in calabashes. As we can see, growing food is at the centre of everything, however this “centre” is under threat. Although the Gbagyi were the original habitants of the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, in 1976 they were hurriedly forced off their land by the military government to make way for the construction of the new capital. They were promised compensation and resettlement, however not everyone was compensated or relocated. Some families lived in settlements camps for a long time and compensation plans were bungled. Now, decades later,



Young Gbagyi prepared for dance

er, they feel that the federal government has betrayed them, and deprived them of their lands and heritage. The suffering is more given that the Gbagyi rely on farmland to survive, and this is gone. To make more farmland, the Gbagyi cut down the trees and the women collect it for firewood. women are very good at fire-

wood fetching. Consequently, all the natural forests have disappeared, and there is no re-afforestation. Alone the Gbagyi cannot do much; they need support to ensure that more children go to school, women’s rights (poor in a polygamous society, totally controlled by men) are promoted, wanton cutting down of trees is reduced and the land dispute between the Gbagyi and the government is settled amicably.

We pray that the presence of the Missionaries of Africa may be a sign of hope for the Gbagyi people of Gyedna. We are present and willing to work with the community of Gyedna to reduce some of those problems highlighted above.

Experience of a Christian Community.

By Fr. Francis Nchekwubechukwu Eze M.Afr. (a Nigerian missionary in Togo).



Community Eucharist

Coronavirus or Covid 19 started like a fairy-tale. It originated in the Wuhan province of China in late 2019. Little did we know that with time, what seemed to be a “China disease” would rapidly become a global epidemic. President Donald Trump of the United States claimed that “the world is at war with an invisible enemy”. Yes, indeed we are at war with an invisible enemy which has caused the world to shutdown, has claimed many lives and provoked a global existential panic. Throughout Africa and the World, we have all had similar experiences al-

though the degree of disruption and hurt have been different. Togo, my beloved mission territory, is certainly no exception to this. We recorded our first coronavirus case on 6 March 2020. By 17 March 2020 we had 84 cases (30 active, 5 deceased and 49 recovered). Like many countries of the world, Togo has put in place measures to prevent the spread of this deadly disease. Measures put in place are: a public education programme, ban on movement and public assembly, and the recognition of epicentres. These measures are a step in the right direction and are actually bearing fruit. However, concerns have been raised as the majority of Togolese rely for their survival on what they earn each day. This implies that without some kind of financial and material support, the “hungervirus”, that is starvation, may become the main cause of death in Togo.



Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles

Here at St Anthony of Padua's parish Agou-Gare, in the diocese of Kpalimé, Togo the situation has been fairly typical. However, it is in the lived experience of my new Christian community that I find inspiration. I arrived in Agou-Gare about six months ago with a view to learning Ewe, which is the local language in Atakpamé, where our mission is. While learning this language, I have been lodging with the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles, an international community coming from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Ivory Coast,

and Togo and going each day to practise speaking the local language in the villages.

I had just begun with the practical stage in the language learning when the Government announced that everyone must stay indoors. It was quite a blow for me. I could neither continue with my language course in the villages, nor return to Atakpamé, my place of Mission. The simple response of the Sisters was, "You are a member of their community. Make yourself at home".

So far, we have done everything asked of us - shopping rarely, lockdown, social distancing, sanitizing our hands, eating and drinking well, recreating well, keeping up to date with the news, giving one another the needed social support, and praying for the world. However, I am more fascinated by the effects of Covid 19 epidemic on the different members of my community. Sr. Hortense from Chad sees it as a remind-

er of our fragility, mortality and dependence on God; Sr. Edenne from Ivory Coast feels it has reminded us that we all belong to the human family. Sr. Inas from Burkina Faso finds it is a call for a deeper unity, solidarity and cooperation among all people; Sr. Thérèse from Benin sees it as an invitation to put priorities in our lives. Sr. Thècle from Togo accepts it as a call to conversion; Sr. Suzanne from Congo has experienced it as helping her to rediscover her personal prayer life. It has become for each person a spur to growth.

At this distressing moment, our hearts are with all those infected and affected by the Covid 19. May they find solace in Christ, the Wounded Healer. In this uncertain moment, let Christ's presence lead us to life



Fr. Francis and the sisters who have welcomed him

and hope, each in our own way. May we see the Risen Christ who is saying, “Peace be with you!” We pray for you daily especially through the Eucharistic sacrifice daily offered to God and ask you to pray for us.

FENZA: Bringing forth new treasures from old

by Fr Romaric Bationo MAfr. from Burkina Faso

Jesus said: “ Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his store-room both the new and the old.” (Mt 13:52). Could that statement also mean that the faithful missionary is the one who treasures, shares and enhances (builds on) the heritage i.e the fundamental driving spirit and fruits of his predecessors or ancestors? Isn't that what we mean by “living our charism today”? Well, in my years of work (2013-19) at FENZA (Faith and Encounter Centre Zambia) in Lusaka, I have come to appreciate how we the Missionaries of Africa working in this centre draw

new treasures out of the old ones.



FENZA main offices

Established for an in-depth evangelisation

It is often said that “ every great idea starts with a problem”. Likewise FENZA started with a crisis. After over 100 years of evangelisation which resulted in a well-established and flourishing local

Church, the Missionaries of Africa in Zambia started to wonder how they can remain missionaries i.e pioneers, people who venture in the “frontiers”. There was clearly some dissatisfaction among many White Fathers that they and the local Church have become too inward-looking, too absorbed by caring for the grown Catholic Church. There was also a desire to go deeper and wider with regards to the Christian faith and other faiths. Community discernments led the 2004 post-capitular provincial assembly to decide the creation of a centre that would spearhead a deeper evangelisation of culture, and take the Missionaries of Africa to new frontiers and instil a missionary drive in the Church in Zambia.



Fr. Antoon van Kessel MAfr. Administrator of FENZA

Thus FENZA came to existence in 2007 with the lofty mission statement: “to empower Christians to face the challenges of contemporary and tradition-

al cultures with openness, and to encounter people of different Christian denominations, contemporary religious movements and religions”. If you visit FENZA what you will first see is the Library and Archives; even the signpost from the main road highlights that. The first White Fathers in Zambia wrote extensive notes and documents about the culture, the languages and customs of the people of Zambia. They also re-



Catholic Church’s memory in Zambia; FENZA archives

corded in diaries and reports the events that marked the life and growth of the Church. These precious collections are well kept at FENZA as archives and put at the service of students, researchers and pastoral workers. It wouldn’t be pretentious to say that FENZA Archive is a memory of the Catholic Church in Zambia. No wonder researchers and people interested in history patronise

our resource centre. Beside the Archives, we have our library consisting of consisting of about 8000 books on Zambian and African History, Religions in Zambia and Africa, Ecumenism, Anthropology, and Inculturation. No need to say that these are resources that provide insights to understand the cultural and religious dynamics in Zambia. I have often heard our readers praise our library and Archives for their invaluable resources.



Fr. Bernard Udelhoven MAfr.
Class on Witchcraft and Satanism

ders in Zambia. White Fathers are highly esteemed in Zambia for their passion to learn the language and culture of the people among whom they lived. Here in Zambia they were among the first to write dictionaries, grammar books, proverbs and sayings in the local languages. The Bemba language school of Ilondola was a reference until it closed in 2005. But new Missionaries of Africa and missionaries from other congregations and churches keep on coming to Zambia; and they desire to learn the Zambian languages (Nyanja and Bemba) and cultures. Thus the Missionaries of Africa at FENZA saw an opportunity to tailor language and culture courses to address this need. The culture and language courses of FENZA are not replicas of the White Fathers language courses but they draw a lot from their long experience of learning and teaching the local languages. These courses are gradually becoming a “trademark” of FENZA. Witchcraft and the world of spirits are always hot and fascinating issues in Zambia. There are among the ambivalent realities of African cultures that Christianity --tackled swiftly or ignored-- must still address. In Zambia, witchcraft and the world of spirits took another twist amid the booming of pentecostal churches, and

At FENZA, we also took up the task of bringing to completion some of the collections (proverbs, customs, history) of earlier Missionaries of Africa -- whom we could call the collectors, in Zambia. To date, FENZA has published four books that were notes of our el-



Fr. Romaric Bationo MAfr



Learning about traditional initiation

brought about Satanism. This coincided with the creation of FENZA, which seized it as a golden opportunity to research more about it. Bernhard Udelhoven, one of the pioneers of FENZA took up the challenge and studied passionately and with openness the issue of witchcraft and satanism. This research meant a deeper encounter and collaboration with

traditional healers, churches and traditional believers. Bernhard's work not only gave birth to a FENZA publication (Unseen Worlds: dealing with spirits, witchcraft and satanism) but also put FENZA on a frontline of addressing this issue through workshops and accompaniment. I see FENZA work in this field as also a ministry of liberation and reconciliation. The person-centred approach proposed in the book and our workshops takes people's experiences and beliefs seriously. While demystifying the fears surrounding witchcraft and satanism it helps individuals, families and communities to work on their unresolved interpersonal relationships.



Class on Traditional Healing

Trying to take a lead in Encounter

One of the founding objectives of FENZA, was to venture into the often neglected mission of encounter and dialogue with culture and other faiths. So straight after the opening of FENZA, its pioneers established contacts with various churches, muslims and other religious communities in Lusaka. They also formed reflection and animation groups with traditional healers and traditional initiators. With these groups and communities they organised functions, workshops and conferences. The succeeding teams continued to nurture those contacts and followed

up what their predecessors had started. These religious communities and groups feel very welcome at FENZA. I often received requests from traditional healers to organise functions at FENZA where they have opportunities to share their knowledge and beliefs. Other religious communities have similar requests and want FENZA to become a



Class on Initiation



Initiation Workshop

secretariat for inter-religious dialogue in Lusaka. I hear some grumbling: “FENZA is not visible enough”. That is true to some extent. But it is important to remember that FENZA is only 13 years “young”. And borrowing from François Richard (first director of FENZA) who used

to compare FENZA to a river born of tributaries, I would add that a river gets bigger by gathering water from its tributaries one after the other as it flows. Moreover as Missionaries of Africa, we speak of our society as “Notre petite société” to mean its humble and modest character. It seems to me that FENZA has that character too. So, as you can see FENZA over its 13 years of age is doing great things, bringing forth treasures both new and old. They may look little to some of us but to our collaborators and those who receive our services, they are much needed and invaluable. I hope and pray that FENZA continues to do so as long as the Missionaries of Africa continue to be present in Zambia.

A Visit to Vietnam, a Communist Country with a Proud Catholic History

*by Fr John Gould MAfr, at present the superior of the Asia Sections .
This includes India and the Philippines.*

Two years ago I spent a fortnight in Vietnam, staying with the family of our Vietnamese-born confrere, Vincent Tran, who was home on leave. They live near the coast, about 80 kilometres South-East of Ho Chi Min City, formerly Saigon, just a few kilometres from the district town of



Vietnam is still a communist country

Ba Ria, the headquarters of the local Diocese. Their home used to be one of the villages along the road that runs between a line of hills and the wetlands of the delta. But now the whole area is an industrial development zone. The road is an eight-lane highway and the villages have merged into a continuous strip of

houses, shops, hotels, factories, government buildings etc. Much of the land between their home and the delta, formerly paddy fields and fish farms, has been filled in with rock quarried from the nearby hills. Two deep-water terminals for container ships and cruise ships have been built, along with chemical factories, assembly plants, waste recycling facilities and a steel rolling mill. A second highway is being built to take container lorries straight from the port to Ho Chi Min City. Companies from China, South Korea, Japan, the USA and Europe are all investing there. All this economic development is fairly recent, and partly a consequence of the communist Government moving away from a policy of automatic repression of initiative and enforcing conformity everywhere. They understand that it is better to allow and encourage private enterprise within the economy, to help overcome years of economic stagnation, so that people can prosper and enjoy a higher standard of living. New work opportunities at home may lessen the flow of young people

emigrating to look for work. Along with economic development and liberalization, in recent years the Government has also begun to show greater tolerance towards religious faith and practice. That is a far cry from the situation when the communists came to power in North Vietnam in 1955. Religious orders were dispersed, property confiscated



Outside the cities, “paddy fields”

and Church institutions and schools were shut down or taken over by the State. Almost a million Catholics fled to South Vietnam. Although overall, Catholics make up 7% of the population of Vietnam, the influx of refugees into the area east of Saigon boosted the figure to between 25% and 30% for Ba Ria Diocese and the two neighbouring dioceses. This led to a burst of church construction and the establishment of new parishes in the sixties and early seventies. Churches stand out every few kilometres miles along the highway from HCMC to Ba Ria and beyond, most of them modern concrete designs that are familiar in Europe. But that growth stopped in 1975 when the communists took control of South Vietnam and united the country. The repression and persecution of political opponents and of the Church that had occurred in the north in 1955 was now extended into the south. Priests and bishops were among those sent to ‘re-education camps’, some for many years.

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Traffic zooms past the cathedral

The number of priests ordained each year was strictly controlled by the government. Many young men had to be trained for the priesthood in secret 'underground' seminaries. It was only in the late nineties that things gradually began to change and there has been a slow but steady improvement year by year. Yet if public demonstrations of faith were penalized, years of repression and persecution by the communists did nothing to undermine the large part that religion has always played in the daily life of the people. In many Catholic homes there is a room set



Catholic devotion still visible

aside for prayer, a shrine with holy pictures, statues and a crucifix, and photos of dead parents and grandparents who are venerated. Families pray together every evening, parents with their married children and grandchildren. Friends and neighbours pray together as small Christian communities, each fami-

ly taking turns to host the group - and for three months of the year they pray like that every day. All the schools above kindergarten level are run by the State, so children get no religious education in school, and Marxism is a compulsory subject at university level. But the Church can run kindergartens, and many communities of religious sisters take advantage of this. They can have a lasting influence - not only on Catholic children but also on those from communist families. But in the main, the faith is handed on in the family through prayer, devotion and example, as well as catechesis in the parish.

Fr. John wrote this article for the Magazine about 18 months ago and I have been unable to fit it in in its entirety, putting it off until the next issue. At last, I have found room for the first half in this issue. God willing, the second half will appear in the next issue. Editor.

Taking Possession in Rome



Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald
MAfr

The Holy Father created Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald a cardinal last year and in February Archbishop Michael went to Rome to “take possession” of his titular church. He writes:

“ Each Cardinal has to “take possession” of his titular church. This is because of the idea that the Cardinals have, as it were, replaced the parish priests as the advisors of the Pope as the Bishop of Rome.

The title can be presbyteral or diaconal. The title can be presbyteral if the Cardinal is a residential bishop or archbishop, or diaconal if he is or has been in the service of the Holy See. Since I served as a Nuncio I

have been created a Cardinal deacon. The date of this ceremony is coordinated with the people who look after the titular church, and also with the Office for Pontifical Ceremonies. One of the Masters of Ceremonies is designated for each Cardinal, and will be at his service whenever he is in Rome.

For me “taking possession” occurred in the evening of 1 February 2020 before Vespers. It is a simple ceremony: the parish priest, or whoever is in charge of the church, welcomes the new Cardinal at the door; a crucifix is presented to him which he kisses; since my title, Santa Maria in Portico, is the patroness of security in the city of Rome, I was also presented with a bouquet of flowers by officers of the police force; then there is a moment of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. In my case, this was followed by the First Vespers of the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (this date was chosen because the church is run by Regular Clerics of the Mother of God). On the Feast day itself I presided at a solemn Mass, but this is not necessarily a part of the “taking possession”.

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Lockdown in Rutherglen

From 23rd March we suspended all public Masses in our chapel, gatherings for prayer groups and recreational Bingo sessions. Our annual Mass for deceased members of our community and the Parents & Friends Association was cancelled, as well as the buffet which followed it and our annual gathering at the end of August at a local hotel, for our community, the members of the P&F Association and local clergy. All of us here, except one, are over seventy years of age, so our lives outside the house will be limited for the time being. Our daily community timetable has not substantially changed, except for the absence of the regular friends of the Society who normally attend our daily Mass at 9.30 and our weekly Friday Prayer Time & Benediction. Our Morning and Evening Prayer and daily Eucharist is led in turn according to the rota and we naturally include prayers for those affected by the virus and for the deceased. Our programme has continued as usual in other ways, except that we are now all together for everything! No more absences of members of the community for supplies and appeals, nor local parish visits. For the moment, we are 'confined to barracks'. Our secretaries in the Promotion Office are working from home and collect the incoming mail once a week, which is laid out on the porch table whilst the other three staff members are in lock-down in their families. Only the gardener continues as usual since his work is outside.

'You never miss the water till the well runs dry'.

We keep you in our thoughts and prayers. Fr. Donald MacLeod MAfr

Your charitable prayers are requested

for those who have recently died
and our deceased parents,
relatives, friends and benefactors.



Margaret McVay

Edinburgh

Patrick Fitzgerald
(brother of Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald)

Ottawa, Canada

Fr. Peter Kelly MAfr

**Little Ealing Lane Ealing,
London**

Sr. Tecla de Souza MSOLA

Brentford, London

Joan Redmond

Kirkby, Liverpool

John West

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Philip Kelly

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May they rest in peace



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Information

The White Fathers Missionaries of Africa

In England & Wales:

The White Fathers
15 Corfton Road
London W5 2HP
email: corfton@mafrgb.org.uk
tel: 0208 601 7900

In Scotland:

The White Fathers
9 Milrig Road
Glasgow G73 2NG
email: wfscotland@btconnect.com
tel: 0141 613 0209
tel: 0141 613 0039



Enquiries concerning the Magazine should be addressed to:

The Editor,
MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA (WHITE FATHERS)
15 Corfton Road
London W5 2HP

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