

## How the idea of MAYO OULDEME came to life:

Submitted by Sr Bernadette Lecluyse.

In 1972-73, Burundi went through a painful genocide. The consequences were dramatic as it was not in favor of Christianity and foreign missionaries were expelled.

In 1974, our sisters were only present in Burundi, Uganda and later, Ghana. Reading the signs of massive expulsions, as a Provincial Team, we decided to listen to different calls for a new foundation in another African country (French speaking).

Anne Marie de Brabandere, Bernadette Lecluyse, and André Comblin (a White Father) who was open to start a “mixed community” of dmj and the “Fraternite Africaine” heard different calls and planned a journey visiting Cameroon—Cote d’Ivoire—Burkina Faso.

In Southern Cameroon we visited the Sangmelima’s forest area where there was a big pygmy camp...then the West to the Bamileke society, then the North, through the Diocese of Garoua, ending in Maroua-Makolo Diocese.

We had a specific call from the bishop and the “Little Brother of Charles de Foucauld” who were in Mayo Ouldeme since 1960. They wished to have a community of Sisters to help the women and girls in need of basic education living among them and sharing our Christian faith. The “Extreme North” had mostly traditional beliefs and a strong Muslim community. There was an amazing relationship of the people with the Little Brothers and we benefited greatly from their spirit and their approach to “spreading the Good News.” It was clear that we had to start “something new”...by the way of evangelization...more by being among them than structured educational projects.



We continued our trip from Doula to Abidjan (Ivory Coast), where we stayed with Marie José Baranyanka who was teaching at the Pastoral Centre. She introduced us to different projects. Enriched by these meetings, we took the train (24h) towards Bobo Dioulasso where Pere Jean Vankrunkelsveld, a White Father, had started different agricultural projects in a very dry region of North Burkina Fasso. All along the way we were evaluating, listening, questioning bishops, local workers, priests, sisters, and lay persons who were involved in different fields.

Back to Burundi, we shared our rich time with all the sisters who had gathered for a provincial meeting...asking where they felt the best place for us to go...if we’ll have the sisters available to respond. The two which were kept were Sangmelima in the South and Mayo-Ouldeme in the Extreme North of Cameroon. We opted for Mayo-Ouldeme.

Finally, in 1980, our two first sisters: Monique Boils (back from Burundi and Louis Marie Hanrahan (from California province) accepted to be sent to Mayo-Ouldeme...indeed a very special place according to all the sisters who have been there—who have visited—and the novices who have spent part of their apostolic year (from the Yaounde novitiate).

Michelle Collignon, Provincial of Burundi, visited Mayo-Ouldeme in June, 1980, before the arrival of Monique and Louis Marie in November.

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