

Sr. Janine, the angel of the prisoners in Ngozi

23/03/2014 [Philippe Ngendakumana](#) 3

For nearly 30 years Janine Mairaux was the guardian angel of the detainees of Ngozi. At the heart of the prison she created a carpentry workshop : work and income for the prisoners!



The work of Sr. Janine, recipient of the medal of the order of Knights of the Belgian Crown, is still little known in Burundi.

This little sister with white hair, fragile and stooped, lived only for the prisoners. Now aged, she sometimes stumbles on the way to the prison but always sets off again at a run. She knows what awaits her.

Janine Mairiaux, Daughter of Mary and Joseph, discovered Africa at the age of 27. “When I arrived in Burundi I participated in the setting up of the prestigious ‘Lycée Clarté Notre Dame de Vugizo’ where I taught mathematics” the sister tells us. In 1972, she returned to Belgium and followed courses in Theology. Since 1974, she has lived in Ngozi except when she was

expelled from the country in 1986. “But I returned 3 years later, for good.” At the heart of the diocese, she ensures the financial administration of development projects : dispensaries, schools.... “ among our ministries there was also visiting prisoners. It was in this way that I discovered the men’s prison in Ngozi where there were 1000 prisoners. Their circumstances were very difficult. I began by opening an infirmary, and supplied medicines, glasses, tonics... some needed to learn how to read, others wanted books, to learn a trade...” she recalls.

Quick Bio

1930 : Born in Chimay, Belgium.

1954 : License in Mathematics from the University of Louvain.

1954: Entered the Daughters of Mary and Joseph

1957: Arrived in Burundi, foundation of “Lycée Clarté Notre Dame”

2010: Opening of Carpentry workshop.

So the sister set up courses in literacy, sewing, IT, tying as well as a library. But all that is expensive “We needed an income generating project capable of financially sustaining all the rest.”. In 2010, thanks to the partnership between the Diocese and the General Directorate of Penitentiary Affairs, the carpentry workshop was set up; Seven ultra-modern machines allow prisoners to make furniture and coffins ... "The project works very well, says Reverend Nyamweru, supervisor of the works, with the money we earn, we finance the other aid." For the prisoners, Sister Janine is a listener and a consolation. She believes in them. Despite her long presence in the country, the sister does not speak Kirundi. Reverend Nyamweru serves as

a translator during her meetings with the prisoners. Those who know her well do not hesitate to joke with her, to tease her, which makes her laugh. But the delegate general of the prisoners knows it: "Sister Janine is the mother of the prisoners. You will see at Easter, as every year she will offer each of them 250 grams of rice. Prison director Aloys Hakizimana also acknowledges the sister's help to the detainees, especially attending Mass every Sunday and Friday in the prison chapel.

His sisters also admire her devotion. They would like to protect their eldest, without success! "When I'm a burden for the community," she admits in a frail voice, "I'll be back in Belgium, with many regrets." She cannot imagine leaving the prison !