

Sr. Louis Marie Hanrahan's recollections of North Cameroon.

Beginnings in Cameroon

Evangelization in the North Cameroon

In 1947 the evangelization of North Cameroon and part of Tchad was confided to the Oblate Fathers, OMI, who were soon joined by many other congregations.

The essential task of the missionaries was getting to know the people: their languages, customs, values, rhythms of life, methods of agriculture and gradually coming to understand the people's relationship with God. In a sense, it was a kind of a love story with, of course, challenges on both sides, but it was an "accompanying," a "walking with"—what Pope Francis is asking of the Church today.

From the people's point of view, what might first have allowed the possibility of a relationship? Maybe the social aspect, like healing through the dispensary, attempts at literacy, interest in agriculture, help in questions of injustices, and gradually, an introduction to Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Years down the line, books have been written recounting the journeys of different ethnic groups preserving, for present and future generations, the richness of their heritage.

The Fraternity

Back in 1951, two founders, Rene Voillaume and Little Sister Magdalene were in the lorry that crossed the Sahara with the first Little Brothers and Sisters, a congregation inspired by the life of Charles de Foucauld. The history of the relationship between these missionaries and two small ethnic groups – Ouldemes and Madas – is well documented at the Fraternity of the Little Brothers of the Gospel in Belgium, especially recently by Jean Bian, pfe.

Monique Boils and Louis Marie Hanrahan



The two DMJs became part of this Apostolic Team – about four Brothers and Earna, pse.

We prayed together morning and evening, had the main meal together with the dispensary team, and usually met every week or two to keep abreast with what was going on. Our "sare," a concession of about six dwellings was located right in the front of the village well.

We were never short of company!

Language

Monique got inducted into the Mada language very early on. Since 1960, André had worked in this domain – “virgin territory.” First, young lads like Daniel Papa and Slelemke had to be initiated into the French language. Through time (20+ years) and enormous patience, the New Testament, the readings needed for an RCIA program, books for a basic education (Reading, Math, History, Geography) and a French-Mada dictionary were translated and printed for the people.

Philippe did the equivalent for the Ouldemes. Along with this body of work, the legends, myths, traditions, and beliefs of the people were written down, waiting for a local anthropologist to continue delving into their past, guarding the treasures of their heritage.

“Mumbalanga”

Monique continued translating for the weekly liturgy and we both, bit by bit, helped out in formation programs in any way we could.

One small decision we made early was that Sunday afternoon we would *walk here and there with no particular destination in mind—Mumbalanga*. It was our key to get to know the people and we had some memorable adventures to boot!

Diocese of Maroua-Mokolo in the 80’s

The Diocese of Maroua-Mokolo had its first bishop in 1973. Msgr. de Bernon, OMI, was a very affable man. He knew the names of the “Responsible” in each parish, would bring carrots from the market, and he knew the sufferings of the people. A revered local priest from the South, Baba Simon, had only recently died. Francis Vidil, pfe, with the support of the Mafa Christian community, and some friends launched the **Jesus Mafa** catechetical project, a series of 60 Biblical illustrations widely used throughout Africa and beyond. Jean Marc Ela, a theologian from the South, was in residence in Tokombere. Rene Jaouen, OMI, an anthropologist, gave sessions on inculturation. A member of the SFB Congregation was a lawyer able to deal with questions of injustice.

The Priests, Sisters, Lay Volunteers were a great mixture of different nationalities – African, Canadian, Columbian, European, and Asian. This young Post-Vatican II Diocese already had two synods!

The Early Christians

The early Christians had a real sense of being Church.

I remember Matthias Shagwa, with great self-assurance, dictating a letter to Monique for the catechumens of the village.

And when Lwanga, one of the “Responsables,” noticed that a village in the mountain had very poor leadership, he, with his family, went up there to be their support for a few months. I treasure, too, the memory of a Sunday liturgy ‘way up in the mountains, being conducted by a bare-foot Sliman, whose message was that Jesus, the Son of God, became small for love of us. **“Eckching-va”** (made Himself small) this he repeated.

It was a message he believed strongly.



Another event that marked the faith-life of the people was the appointment of Philippe Stevens as the bishop to replace Msgr. de Bernon. Philippe had lived among them for 30 years—planting, digging wells, translating the Ouldeme language. He would be **their** bishop.

A short time before the ordination, there was a moment of panic when word came that the Pope had invited the newly appointed bishops to Rome to be ordained. Happily, that did not happen!

Instead, it was the excitement of who would actually be present in Maroua. There were lorry loads from every parish.

In addition, two days later in Mayo-Ouldeme, there was a gala celebration for the people and for Philippe's family (six sisters, I think, plus husbands, etc.). A great, great day!

Then, at nightfall, one of the Brothers, Jean Bian, vomited blood and barely pulled through the night. When he was strong enough, he was expatriated to Belgium; he returned to continue for another 10 years.

The above is a little window into the beginning of our history in the region of Cameroon. Each person who lived there has her segment of the story...

To be continued!

A DATELINE OF SORTS FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE CAMEROON REGION

1980 November 4th.

Two DMJs: Monique Boils of the Burundi province and Loiuis Marie Hanrahan of the California province arrived in the Diocese of Maroua-Mokolo to join the Little Brothers of the Gospel in Mayo-Ouldeme.

1980 – 1987

They remained two but had many DMJ visitors (e.g. Teresa McShane, Mary Enda Creegan, Margaret Haller)

1984

Pope John Paul II visited Cameroon

1985

Meeting with Bernadette and DMJs in Ghana re: our new Constitutions.

1987

*Agnes Philips and Renee Butoye arrived in Cameroon for the new foundation of Meme.

*First migration of the local people to Toubouro (distance of 600 km) in search of better rainy season.

1988

Visit from Bernadette Lecluyse (S.G.)

1989

General Chapter in Melle.

Joan Roddy new S.G.

Counselors: Linda Webb, Marie Jose Baranyanka, Theresa Clements

1990

*February 11 – Nelson Mandela released from prison.

***NEW AFRICA PROVINCE IS FORMED:** Uganda, Burundi, Ghana and North Cameroon;
Agnes Charles is the Provincial.

1991

Bernadette Lecluyse arrived in Mayo-Ouldeme in preparation for entry as a hermit.

*November: Provincial meeting in Ahotokurom

*November-December: “Hermitage de Nations” was constructed.

1992

*Jan.6: Bernadette officially installed in the hermitage by Msgr. de Bernon.

Arrival of Jen Condron

*August-December: Louis Marie sabbatical in Israel

*December: Muyange Assembly in Burundi

1993

*Monique Boils delegate to the Chapter in Uganda

*Coup in Burundi – Renee’s sister, Silvia, and son and other family members were assassinated.

*Agnes Charles (Provincial) visits North Cameroon

1994

*March: Beatrice Ndayubaha professed in Burundi and arrived in Mayo-Ouldeme in May.

*April: Rwanda genocide

*May: Provincial meeting in Meme

Joan (S.G.), Agnes Charles (Provincial) and the four Regionals:
Margaret O’Rourke, Janine Mairiaux, Noreen Murray, and
Monique Boils

*December: Msgr. de Bernon died.

Philippe Stevens named Bishop

1995

Philippe Stevens ordained Bishop of Maroua-Mokolo.

*September: Swords, Ireland – 60+ group Louis Marie

Agnes Philips to Canada

*December: Regional mtg. with Agnes Charles, Renee, Jen, Monique,
Bernadette and Louis Marie

*Engelbert Mveng, SJ, a well-known Cameroonian artist and
historian was murdered

1996

Burundi: very troubled; Sister’s choice to go or to stay

*February: Monique began Part 1 of Sabbatical in the hermitage.

Bernadette to Belgium

*April: Provincial Assembly – Mushanga Uganda: Monique, Bea, Jen
from Cameroon; Marie Jose Baranyanka named Provincial
(’96-02)

*August: Renee Butoye leaves Meme Dispensary for formation in
Switzerland (9/96 - 6/98)

Bernadette returns

*October, 1996 to August, 1997: year of preparation for the General Chapter

1997

*January: Agnes Philips returns from Canada

*February: Rosemary Kamahoro started in Meme Dispensary
Linda Webb visited the North

*May: First Discernment regarding Mayo-Ouldeme/Meme
Marie Jose, Agnes Charles, Monique, Agnes Philips, Bea, Jen,
Rosemary and Louis Marie

New appointments: Agnes Philips to Uganda as Novice Mistress,
Monique Boils to Yaounde as Provincial, Jen Condron Regional
of Cameroon

Jen-home leave, operation in July, returned by Christmas

Bea-home leave, postponed her studies for a year because of
changes

Agnes Philips delegate to General Chapter; left Meme definitively
July 27th.

*August: General Chapter in California-Agnes Charles S.G.
Counselors: Deirdre Slade, Margaret Eason, Mary Enda Creegan
Monique left Mayo-Ouldeme definitively.

*October: Kate Creedon (1 month-Father's stroke)

*November: Yaouda first Ouldem ordained
Njele (founder of M-O 51) came from Israel

1998

*January: Harmattan time-lovely cold weather, wind from Sahara,
dust everywhere

Second Discernment re: M-O/Meme-opted for Meme

Shared the decision with the Brothers.

DMJs in Mayo-Ouldeme from 1980 to 1998.

*February-March: Regular apostolic activities continue.

Marie Jose in Yaounde negotiating for a provincial house.

Monique joined her. Rented Mvolye.

*April: Jen Condron hospitalized Palm Sunday the 5th.

Decision to evacuate her the 13th. Journey to Yaounde the 15th.

Died at 4 PM on the 16th. Mass and burial the 19th.

*May: Bea to Yaounde (Surgery)

Rosemary left the North temporarily.

Louis Marie to Ireland, England, Wales (Jen's family)

Bernadette –sick leave – Mayo-Ouldeme and Meme vacant

*September: Provincial assembly and chapter in Kampala, Uganda

Bea studying in Yaounde

*December: International meeting for the young professed in

Belgium and Rome

Monique and Liz McCarthy participated. Rosemary represented the North.

1999

*January: return from International meeting of young professed

17th Meme – Rosemary, Lucy Lolem, Louis Marie start again.
Andrew Leanders, Frans' Temporary Replacement, a great
pastoral man
Sessions – Women, young girls, young men, Cop'monde, etc.

- *February: Salome Kafungwire died in Uganda
- *May: Council meeting in Bujumbura
- *November: visit from Marie Jose (Provincial)
- *December: Big celebration in Mokolo for the Jubilee year

2000

- *March: after 9 years, Bernadette leaves Cameroon
- *April: Death of Lucy Lolem's mother; Lucy, in Karomoja (4/10)
- *May: Visit from Marie Jose
Money for "Jen's Well" and 8 sewing machines—gifts from
the Condron family and their parish in Wales (Sts. Gabriel and Raphael)
- *August: 3 Indian sisters, Daughters of the Cross, from Bombay/Kerala
replaced the DMJs in Mayo-Ouldeme
Dedication of new church in Meme. Rosemary very
involved in the Liturgy.
- *December: Meeting regarding having the African Novitiate in
Yaounde
In attendance:
Present were: Agnes Charles and Margaret Eason,
Noreen Murray, Maureen O'Connor, Marie Jose
Baranyanka, Pat Pearson, Christine Ntibarutaye,
Anna Mary Mukamwezi, Louis Marie Hanrahan,
plus the Facilitator

2001

- *February: Rosemary Kamahoro leaves Meme (worked in
Dispensary from 2/1997 to 12/2000)
Visit from Mary Enda Creegan (G.T.)
- *March 24th: arrival of Marie Claire Nakayiza
- *April: Lucy and Louis Marie attended a mtg. with Logam (Muslim
Chief) regarding a 2 room school in Mehe (financed by the
E.U. Mandara Project).
Hedwig Birakwate finally professed in Uganda
- *June: Anani – our new pastor
Bujumbura re-opened.
- *June to September: Ushaw plenary
General Chapter in Kilkenny
- *August: Bea finally professed in Burundi
- *September: Theresa Bateta named Novice mistress
11: Terrorist attack in New York

2002

- *March: Provincial Council Meeting in Ghana. Theresa Bateta and

Louis Marie traveled together.

*April: Silver Jubilee of Anna Mary Mukamwezi and Donatilla Nyirarwanga

*May: Lucy Lolem left Meme for studies in Yaounde

*June: Region began voting process for the new Provincial

*July: Marie Claire's operation in Yaounde

30th – Yves Lescanne, pfe, murdered by Zacharie in Maroua
a la Belle Etoile

Dona Nyirarwanga's famous expedition from Uganda to Ghana,
then back to Abijan (Ivory Coast), to Douala, then to
Yaounde. (The novices got their entry visas through
Abijan.)

*November: Arrival of Caritas Ntibarutaye in Meme

*December: Arrival of Hedwig Birakwate in Meme

10 Josephites for supper; Caritas and Hedwig, newly arrived,
prepared a great meal. Our Josephite brothers
(with whom we had a very good relationship) were
Responsible for two missions in the Diocese:
Douvangan and Durham. They were having their
E.G.C. meeting at this time.

Msgr. Wouking, Bishop of Yaounde, died.

He had already given permission for the novitiate.

Etoudi-temporary Novitiate

2003

*February: Rene Jaouen, OMI, died. He was an anthropologist and
linguist. Did his research with the Giziga of Moutourwa.

*March: Visit from Anna Mary Mukamwezi (our new Provincial)

*May: Provincial Council in Yaounde

*July: Final profession in Uganda of Pascazia Kinkuhairé, Lucy Lolem, and Marie Claire Nakayiza.

*August: Visited our Pastor Anani in Yaounde (liver problem)

*November: Novitiate moved from Etoudi to Mvolye

*December: Anani, 33 years old, died on the 9th, funeral the 13th.

Hedwig and Caritas helped Yaounda greatly.

2004

*January: Abalangaz-new pastor

*March: Provincial Council and Retreat in Uganda

*September: Nellie's profession in Yaounde. Agnes Charles present
for the occasion.

*October: Alice Impundu, first novice from Mvolye to come to the
North for her apostolic year (ended July '05)

Hedwig returns from Uganda after her brother's death.

Dona did a second grand tour to enable the postulants to have
visas via Abijan.

2005

*January 1: Priscilla Birungi, Clarisse Nirere, Sarah Tumuhimbise, Evelyn Kahumuuro, Scovia Kabatangare, and Claudia

were received as postulants.

30: Collection in the Parishes for the tsunami victims in Japan

*February: The small village of Terafiyika made 600 bricks for the new school.

15th-24th: Anna Mary (Prov.) visited the North

*March 1-3: Symposium on our Founder in England

16th: Robbers came to steal our new Toyota pick-up truck.

A shocking evening. Caritas, at gun-point handled the situation very well. Hedwig followed up on the details. All ended well, T.G.

*April 2: death of John Paul II.

19th: Pope Benedict XVI elected

*May: Provincial Council in Burundi (Agnes Charles present for some days)

4th: News of the death of Anna Mary's father

11th: In Mbarara, the Final Profession of Rosemary Kamahoro and the celebration of Theresa Bateta's Silver Jubilee

*August 1: John Garang (President of Southern Sudan) was killed in a plane crash

7th-20th: General Chapter in England

Linda Webb S.G.

Counsellors: Donatilla Nyirarwanga, Kate Creedon, Josephine Beebwa, Laetitia Geeraerts, Sheila Moloney

16th: Jews in Gaza were told to leave

17th: Br. Roger of Taize murdered

28th: Cyclone Katerina in Louisiana, USA—Disaster of the Century!

*September 14th-18th: Anniversary of "Ecclesia in Africa"

*October 1: First Profession in Yaounde: Rosette Kyogabirwe,

Lucy Sagal, Fauster Komuhangi,

Eleanor Niyonizeye, Alice Impundu

5th: Five young professed and Lucy Lolem leave for Uganda and Burundi

16th: Social evening with the Josephites in Douvanger

Robert Hamilton (S.G.) was on visit.

22nd-27th: Caritas attending a course in Garoua ("How to face up to today's technology in Religious Life")

*November 4: DMJs 25 years in Cameroon

13th: Beatification of Charles de Foucauld – Founder of the Little Brothers

2006

*January 6: Adama Anne Marie received as a Postulant.

She was our only Cameroonian.

17th-24th: Provincial Council Meeting in Bujumbura

*February 14th: Involved in the construction of wells in the villages
of Bigwari and “Madagascar”

*March 25: Caritas left Meme to prepare for her studies at Tangaza U.
in Nairobi

*April 5-26: Kate (G.T.) visited Cameroon

*June: Rosemary and Pascazia fundraising in U.S.

24th: Celebrations

Burundi – 75 years

Janine Mairiaux – 50 years

*July 28: Hedwig prepared Louis Marie’s departure

-a Mass of Thanksgiving

-a celebration with the people and later with members
of our Zone

*August-September 8/25 to 9/10: Provincial Chapter – Uganda

The story continued.

Hedwig Birakwate

Martina Lobur

Grace Asimwire

Beatrice Ndayubaha