

Mission Letter

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA (WHITE FATHERS)

September 2017

Dear Friends and Benefactors of the Missionaries of Africa,

Today, in this short letter, I would like to explain the presence of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) at the church of St. Anne in Jerusalem. Why this today? Because at the beginning of this year, I was asked to come here in July and August to welcome the pilgrims coming to visit the site where we remember the birth of Mary and where we find the ruins of the pool of Bethesda (John 5).



RUINS OF THE POOL OF BETHESDA

The Crusaders built the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem just before 1140, but it was taken over by Muslims in 1192, when Saladin conquered Jerusalem and turned it into a school of Islamic law. More than six hundred and fifty years later, in 1856, it was given to France by the Ottoman sultan in gratitude for French support during the [Crimean War](#). Some years later it was entrusted to our founder, Cardinal Lavigerie, who had just founded a new religious order called the Missionaries of Africa (1868). Cardinal Lavigerie, who had always been interested in the Christian presence in the Middle East, accepted it immediately. So, since 1878 the Missionaries of Africa have been present here.

A few years after their arrival, in 1882, a minor seminary was opened on the site for the formation of the local clergy of the Greek Melkite rite; a major seminary followed in 1886. In 1967 the seminary was transferred to Lebanon.

Today, what are the Missionaries of Africa doing in Jerusalem? They continue the formation of the clergy by giving sessions with a biblical, spiritual and missionary character, as well as retreats for their own members and those of other missionary institutes, and for African clergy. Fr Frans Bowen, a Belgian, has been here for the last fifty years, working to foster dialogue between the different Christian Churches present in Holy Land. After so many years, we can see signs of the improvement in their relations in the regular meetings and discussions that take place. One very concrete sign of these improved relations is the fact that they all agreed to the renovation of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

For some years now there has been another aspect to our presence here: young candidates who wish to become Missionaries of Africa are welcomed here to complete their theological studies. As you can see in the picture, these candidates are all Africans but from different countries.



PILGRIMS AT ST. ANNE BASILICA, JERUSALEM



M.AFR. STUDENTS IN JERUSALEM

Another aspect of our presence here is the welcoming of pilgrims. Most of them stop here to see the ruins of the pool of Bethesda, where Jesus cured the paralytic (John 5), and those of the nearby fifth-century Byzantine church, and to visit the Church of St. Anne where we commemorate the birth of Mary.

Our founder accepted to send missionaries here so that, at the site of her birth, they could pray to Mary, our mother, for their confreres in the missionary fields in Africa.

I was very happy to come and help our confreres here, and so give them some time to rest. For me, it has been a source of renewal to come and visit the holy sites, especially here in Jerusalem where I can pray for you all who are giving us a hand to spread God's Kingdom in Africa. May God bless you all!

Fr. Marc Angers, M.Afr.