

# Missionaries of Africa

White  
Fathers





The mission of the Missionaries of Africa is closely concerned by issues of peace and social justice, intercultural, religious and ecumenical dialogue. Our involvement in all these areas is alive in our pastoral commitments in parishes and in our specialized Centres, especially on the African continent, but also wherever we are in the world. In the name of gospel values, we also campaign against modern forms of slavery.

We live in interracial communities in the image of an increasingly universal world. The Missionaries of Africa have almost 1,200 members, priests, brothers and associate lay people, from 36 different nationalities. Our houses of formation have actually close to 500 young people who want to become witnesses of their faith and hope.

**Do you know one or more young people who can take up such a challenge?**

For more information, contact  
Father Serge St-Arneault at 514-849-1167 ext. 217  
e-mail: [sergestarno@gmail.com](mailto:sergestarno@gmail.com)

## **The Missionnaires of Africa on the Net**

**Do you know these White Fathers websites?**

<b>Canadian website, Montreal</b>	<b><a href="http://www.mafr.net">www.mafr.net</a></b>
<b>Centre Afrika website, Montreal</b>	<b><a href="http://www.centreafrika.net">www.centreafrika.net</a></b>
<b>International website: Rome</b>	<b><a href="http://www.mafrome.org">www.mafrome.org</a></b>
<b>American website: Washington</b>	<b><a href="http://www.missionariesofafrica.org">www.missionariesofafrica.org</a></b>
<b>Mexican website: Guadalajara</b>	<b><a href="http://www.misionerosdeafrica.org.mx">www.misionerosdeafrica.org.mx</a></b>
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## The Covid-19 tribulation



«Because he has suffered the ordeal (of the Passion) to the end, Jesus is able to help those who are subjected to an ordeal.» Hebrews 2, 18.

At the time of writing this text, the curfew has been enforced throughout Quebec. This has never been seen before. The reason is well known: reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The capacity of hospitals to receive patients has reached its limits and the vaccine has not yet been widely administered. In short, we are living in difficult times. The whole world is living through dramatic hours.

«We were so well before the pandemic. Why is this happening to us?» This is the cry of the heart of many people. It is not only seniors who complain about isolation and restrictions, wearing masks and distancing. Like the general population, the mental health of young people is affected as well. It is hard for everyone.

«Why is this happening to us?» What is most troubling is the fact of not knowing where this virus comes from and how it spreads. One thing is certain: our lifestyle habits, our joy, our hugs have given way to gloom, fear or anger.

In these circumstances, will we dare to turn this immense challenge into an opportunity? Indeed, we have, so to speak, the chance to question our choices on personal and social levels. The pandemic pressures us to revisit our values and priorities under the gaze of God. It is time to start on a new path to conversion, at least are we invited to do so. If the Word of God has become flesh, according to our faith, this is even more true at this time of our existence. We are not left to ourselves to overcome the tribulation that burdens us.

Since he has suffered the ordeal of the Passion to the end, Jesus is able to help us in the ordeal we are going through. There is no adequate answer to the reason of this pandemic. The key is to ask ourselves about our reaction to reality. Jesus, let us not forget, suffered the Passion. The fact that he carried this ordeal TO THE END gives us the assurance that Jesus, by sharing our human condition, reduced death to powerlessness.

Let us build patience and confidence to overcome the current pandemic together. This is our way of being Church at the very moment when the churches are closed. Our Eucharistic sharing, if not with consecrated bread, is that of fraternal communion which, despite being distanced from one another, is deeply spiritual. The body of Christ is the pilgrim people of God that we build together even in times of lockdown.

In today's issue of Letter to our Friends, Brother René gives us the example of a man who goes TO THE END of his mission. Father Boivin invites us to an inner pilgrimage according to the seasons. We also ask for your help in a project to build a modern farm in Togo. You will also read about singing as an instrument of evangelization of the senoufo people in Ivory Coast. To be read TILL THE END.

Serge St-Arneault, M.Afr

## A life totally given

**Brother René Garand was born on June 11, 1939 in Victoriaville. He is the sixth of 11 children of Émile Garand and Germaine Angers; they lived on a farm. After 54 years of missionary life, he is still in Africa.**

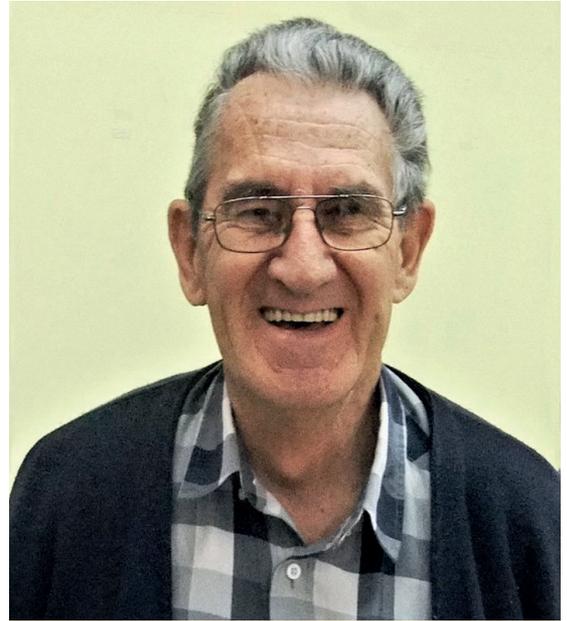
### Some Events of my childhood

Two events especially marked my childhood. The barn of one of our neighbours burned down completely and, as was customary, all the neighbours helped rebuilding. I was about ten years old. One day as we were carrying stones for the foundations, a little neighbour, my friend, sitting next to me, fell out of the car. He didn't seem hurt, but he was unconscious. I took him to the nearest house. When the doctor arrived, he could only confirm the death of my friend; he was probably dead in my arms.

The second event is that my little sister, who was five or six years younger than me, had polio. She paralyzed completely. The doctor who treated her told my parents that she probably wouldn't survive. When my parents came home, my mother told us that the only thing we could do for her was to pray. We prayed very hard and she survived. After almost a year in hospital, she returned home but had no strength in her legs: she could only walk with crutches. I volunteered to rub her legs at night, carry her upstairs to her bed and help her go to school, especially in the winter. I remained very attached to her.

### My Vocation as a Brother

Since there were eight boys in the family, my mother would have liked one



René Garand.

of us to become a priest. I finished primary school first in my class. My parents then enrolled me as a day scholar to study humanities but as I came from a small rural school, I found it very hard and I did not feel called to the priesthood. Towards the end of the school year, without telling my parents, I went to technical school. It was only after receiving my letter of acceptance that I told my parents about my decision. My father told me that if that was what I wanted, I could go, but he didn't have the money to pay for the fees. I applied for a scholarship and got it.

After graduating in carpentry from technical school in carpentry, I found a temporary job. Then, I went back to work on the farm, but the work was hard and I wasn't satisfied. I remembered that when I was in technical school, a Missionary of Africa came to visit us and said: we

need people like you in Africa to help the Fathers with construction; this was in my line! After reflection and prayer, I entered the White Fathers' postulate in Lennoxville in July 1957.

## **Treasurer and Builder in Africa**

After some eight years of training and teaching, I was appointed to Africa in 1966. Some of my confrères said to each other, «He's always sick, he won't last six months in Africa.» Despite these predictions, I am still there after 54 years. My first appointment was as bursar at the Major Seminary in Kachebere, Malawi. I first took the Chichewa language course and, before starting out as a bursar, I was asked to build the house of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa, nuns who took care of the kitchen, the laundry and many other works for the good of the seminarians. After seven years as a seminary bursar, I went to the catechists' school in Mtendere where I built a dozen small houses for catechists, a chapel, two classrooms and a few other small houses.

I was then appointed Treasurer of Dedza Diocese, also in Malawi. I enjoyed my work in this diocese because there was a lot to do. But after two years, with another Brother who worked in the garage of the diocese, we had a misunderstanding with the African priest who was secretary to the bishop and we had to leave the diocese. As I was still young, I had a little difficulty accepting what was happening to us, but after a time of reflection and prayer, I think it was a blessing.

I returned as the bursar of the Major Seminary in Kachebere and, a little



**Major Seminary in Kachebere, Malawi, where René was Bursar.**

later, I went to the Northern diocese of Mzuzu. Together with another Brother, we renovated and expanded the Catholic hospital in Mzuzu, a work that lasted more than two years. Thereafter I went to build the Fathers' House in Mzambazi. Later on, I went to Rumphu to make a water installation, with three large reservoirs and a six kilometer pipe system. Finally, I supervised the construction of the novitiate for the Rosarian Sisters, a local congregation.

## **A Parish among the Zulus in South Africa**

After all this work, in 1983, I was appointed to South Africa with a new language to learn, Zulu. After a few months, we took up residence on a farm on the KwaNdebele border, a homeland where the bishop wanted to establish a parish. Since we were white, the apartheid regime did not give us the right to reside in our parish among Blacks.

At that time, there were about half a million people in that territory but no Catholic church. After a very short time

there, we went to the bishop and told him that if we followed the regulations imposed on us by the government, we could do almost nothing.

The bishop told us not to bother about those rules and to do our job because this government was not legitimate and if we had problems, he would cover us. We had some problems: the police came twice to search our house, one of our Fathers was arrested and imprisoned for a few days. I was arrested and questioned several times and we were expelled from our parish, but after a few months the bishop managed to bring us back. We were accused of living illegally in the section for Blacks only, of being against the government and of inciting Blacks to revolt.

I first did social work, distributing food to the poorest families; I visited hundreds of families, I saw a lot of misery and, for the first time in my life, I saw people starve. In this parish, I built five small churches that also served as nursery schools during the week, a



Whites were not allowed to live in the Black-only homelands of South Africa. If they were to violate this law of the Apartheid regime, they were liable to prison.



Ladies of KwaNdebele Parish in South Africa.

dispensary where the Sisters cared for the sick, about fifty small houses for very poor families who lived in shacks that risked collapsing and injuring them. The White Fathers worked for about twenty years in that parish and founded four other parishes and fifteen centres, now in the hands of local priests.

### In the Midst of Refugees

In 1990, I went to the Mozambique border to work among refugees. It was said that there were about forty-five thousand who had fled the war in Mozambique, mostly women and children. We also founded a new parish where I had to build every thing from scratch. In 1996, I was appointed Treasurer of Witbank Diocese in



Refugee children from Mozambique.

South Africa. It was a fairly large diocese with 21 parishes. Two of my colleagues came with me to inaugurate a new parish in the suburbs. I was there for seven years.

## Provincial Treasurer

I then went to Johannesburg as the Treasurer of the White Fathers' province which included South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi. I also looked after sick confrères who came to South Africa for specialized health care. It was during these years that we built in Merrivale, still in South Africa, the Center where our missionary candidates were to study theology. After ten years, I went to rebuild the priests' house of Henley, which had been abandoned for about twenty-five years by the Oblate Fathers because of the civil unrest in the area.

In September 2014, I was appointed in Chipata, Zambia, to oversee the construction of a centre where young people from Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa who wanted to become Missionaries of Africa, could begin their training. After three years there, I came to Lusaka where I am now.



**René at the inauguration of the church that he had built in Tweefontein.**



**Kwaggafontein Church built by René. The patterns are painted by women.**

All my life, I have enjoyed working with young people: they are simple and sincere. My motivation has always been what Jesus says in Mt 25:40: «Everything you do to the little ones of mine, you do to me.» Since I am half-retired now, in addition to my work as an assistant to the Provincial Treasurer, I try to help families and especially young people as much as possible so that they can study, hoping that they will have a better future because, in general, their parents, if they are alive, are very poor and have very little education.

As you can see, I've done a lot of construction; of course, I haven't built it myself, a lot of Africans have done the job. In general, I drew the plans and trained and guided hundreds of masons, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and other workers to do their job as best as possible.

I have always been happy to work in Africa. I have tried all my life to help as many people as possible, especially the poor. God bless them all.

René Garand, M.Afr.

## The Four Seasons of our Pilgrimage



When **spring** arrives, the heat returns, the earth recovers its fertility, the sun and rain return to work. Nature is on the move. It is the season of seeds, the flowerbed of hope. This is the age of youth and dreams. It's also a time when you learn to give up and make new. The farmer comes to his fields, ploughs, sacrifices the good grain that remains, throws it into the ground, knowing that it will die there. If the farmer persists in

keeping his grain, or the seed in keeping its breath, there will be no harvest.

**Summer** is the season of productivity, the ground of generosity. Everyone gets on with it, and everyone puts in their own effort. Even nature gets involved, lengthening the hours of clarity, so we can achieve everything. You have to weed, water when the sky has forgotten, pick the fruit when they take their right colours, cut the hay that will feed the cattle this winter. A demanding job, which consumes all our strengths. This is the age of maturity and achievement. We're busy, we're calculating; we live outside ourselves. Of course, there is little time to think.

**Autumn** is the disappointing season, an inverted spring. This is the season when heaven and earth frown. We don't sow, we collect, and then we wait until we need. We no longer go out inhaling the morning air, the sky no longer brightens the evening outings. We go home, and we wait. On Sundays, we expect a visit. Let us give shelter to boredom and, during the week, we will wait for diseases. Come to think of it, if everything in autumn grows inwards, it is because nature is a wise mother.

In order to pass the autumn test, the infant's expectation must be mutated into a thoughtful commitment, that of risking itself on the hidden tracks that end up within the soul. Nature discreetly invites faith. It is not unemployed, it is in the works, to prepare for winter: that of the earth, that of life. The vocation of autumn is to grow internally and to plant roots in depth. It teaches us to lose



our leaves to better store the sap that is the promise of a tomorrow. This is the age of white hair, mortality intimations; and the meadow of wisdom, at the doorway to the temple of Providence.

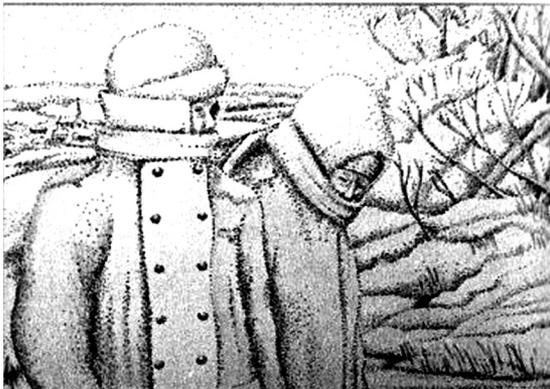
**Winter**, as it seems, is the upside-down summer, the unloved of our seasons. We don't produce, we consume. The frost has stopped everything. If, having missed the lessons of autumn, one has lingered on the surface of one's life, one also stops; and we're distracted waiting to rehearse this year the same summer as last year. The challenge is important. To miss your winter is to miss the long-term outcome of the sequence that led to it. Youth projects have a future only if old age projects are open to immortality. We are pilgrims, not simple travelers. And our destination is the heavenly dwelling that our scriptures symbolically proclaim.

Winter teaches us to leave with serenity, and to let go with magnanimity. While, under the icy ground, a dynamic network of life takes its advances by scheduling a spring in the process of inventing, in our souls, all smoothly, the precious deposit of divine life that is love is about to arrange the small happiness in bouquets of joy and bliss. Winter summons to the feast of love. A love that borrows from God the color of benevolence. A love long shaped by the brush of smile and the scissor of tears, which binds hearts in an alliance capable of facing the crossing of the Jordan.

Winter is the blessed moment of the graciously consented offering. When the call rings, if we do not let our fellow travelers embark on their paths of eternity, we will outlive them in bitterness, with the feeling that life has robbed us. Life doesn't fly, it smolders, and it has its reasons. This year's seeds will not be last year's. Maybe the



farmer either. Frost also has its motives. It preserves the life that takes refuge under the ground, and prepares for the rebirth of spring. The tranquillity of accepted decline gives the soul the time it takes to piously turn death into resurrection. Winter is the age of the climb that leads to the Infinitely Great.



Text translated from the book  
*Sagesse des meurtris*,  
Marcel Boivin, M.Afr.

## Project 62 : Construction of a Modern Farm Poultry and Fish Farming

The Missionaries of Africa have been present in Togo in the diocese of Atakpamé since 2012. Our community, made up of four confrères, takes care of the parish of Our Lady of Africa of Talo on the outskirts of the city of Atakpamé.

We are encouraged by our superiors to become self-sufficient communities. It was in this context that the four of us in the community are planning the project to build a modern poultry and fish farm. Fish farming, broiler chicken and egg-laying chicken breeding will be profitable both immediately and in the future.



Parish youth sowing yams, awaiting the digging of the two fishponds.

This project will help to sustain the parish by providing us with some resource to carry out our pastoral activities with children, young people, women, the Basic Christian Communities, the various movements and associations. It will also be a place of learning for young people who will be able to easily master the best techniques for chicken breeding and fish farming. And these youths, when organized into a cooperative, will enjoy a stable financial situation.

At the same time, such a project will help to meet the needs of the Togolese

people who are still in need of chicken meat for consumption. We also believe that this type of activity will be a deterrent to rural exodus and immigration to other countries.

A former chapel will be divided into manoeuvrable compartments, and the mesh and tarpaulin will be used to protect from bad weather. We will dig two fishponds and install a water pipe from an existing borehole nearby.

**In order to start this project, we are planning for:**

- The levelling of the land
- The transformation of the old chapel into a chicken coop,
- The digging of two fishponds,
- The acquisition of broiler and egg-laying chickens and their feeding, and the purchase of baby fish and their diet.
- The construction of a house for the farmer in charge,
- The training of some volunteers in pastoral technique.

We count on your generosity and say thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Francis Eze, M. Afr.



Old chapel which will be transformed into a henhouse.

## Many Thanks

Thank  
you



Dear friends,

Let us be grateful to the people who give us happiness: they are the charming gardeners by whom our souls are blooming.

Marcel Proust

Letter to our Friends comes out once a year, to ask for your help for various projects in Africa. These projects are initiated by Missionaries of Africa working in the field. Without you, they would not be able to fulfill their mission properly.

The majority of these projects are geared towards physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual well-being. Evangelisation comes first and foremost through respect for people and the dignity of their human, intellectual and spiritual growth. It is to meet these different goals that our confrères in the field regularly come to ask for your cooperation. As you know, all the money collected goes to the project for which it was requested.

We publish this Letter to our Friends in English once a year. But we also publish it in French four times a year. Adding up all your donations (from the English and French publications), we have received for the last six projects a total of \$142,538.

We want to express our gratitude on behalf of all those who benefit from your consideration, encouragement and generosity. Among those projects, you have generously helped the following:

**Project 58, from Letter to our Friends of March 2020**, has been presented in two parts: a request to help the New Hope Centre and a request to help the Akamuri Centre in Burundi. They received **\$23,250.00** because of your donations.

**The New Hope Centre** is involved in tracking down, treating and following patients with HIV/AIDS. Today, 26 years after its foundation, more than 2,534 patients are registered to receive treatments and help, and more than 2,962 orphans and children, in a varied form of urgency, can receive some help.

### **The Akamuri Centre**

They were a group of nearly 25 children and adults last year. They had one thing in common: they lived with a form of handicap, either mental, psychological, or physical; some were suffering of downs syndrom, others of autism, others of microcephaly, and others of congenital malformations or paralysis. They were asking for your help, and you answered generously so that they are now able to assure a better future!

On our behalf, and especially on behalf of those who have benefited from your generosity, we say **THANK YOU VERY MUCH !**

## Singing as an Instrument of Evangelization

**The region of Korhogo, in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), is mainly inhabited by the Senoufos, a people very attached to its customs and traditions. Evangelisation began there in 1904, by the Society of African Missions (SMA). It took 70 years for the Diocese of Korhogo to be created. With the creation of the Diocese in 1974, evangelisation took on new impetus.**

### Role of Songs

In the evolution of this evangelisation, the composition of religious songs played a big role. Indeed, to memorize the message of the Good News, the songs seemed a great way. The Senoufo choirs of Korhogo city parishes took the initiative to compose songs. To do this, they came together to form the «Maîtrise Saint Michel» (Saint Michael's Choir). It was in 1980. At that time there were three parishes in the city of Korhogo, including the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption, newly founded by the Missionaries of Africa.

The first compositions were Christmas and Easter songs. They were songs of joy, songs to animate the dances and parties. They were composed to traditional tunes and with the accompaniment of balafons (african xylophones) and tam-tams. The composers were choristers, some of whom were unschooled. As for their content, the songs were verified and corrected by catechists and priests.

The catechumens and baptized villagers learned of the existence of these Christian songs, and wanted to know and sing them. How to do that? At that time (the 1980s), there were no regional or diocesan Catholic radio stations.

The national radio would broadcast a 30-minute religious programme every Sunday morning. It was a programme about the Sunday gospel, only in French. It was therefore not possible to use the radio to broadcast these songs.

Although radio stations were not yet widespread in the area, cassette players existed and many people, both in the city and in the villages, owned them. The peasants went to the field with their daba (kind of hoe), but also with their cassette player. They listened to music while working in the field.

The Saint Michael's Choir then launched a happy initiative. «Why not make cassettes with Christian songs in the Senoufo language?» They studied the issue and decided to get involved in the production of such tapes.

To make good recordings, there was a quiet place: the Spiritual Training Centre of the diocese. As recording equipment, there was a cassette recorder/player and a good quality microphone. The place and the



Senoufo Choir of Korhogo in Ivory Coast.

equipment, while being really basic, were going to do the job. So we had to take action.

## Two Days to Compose and Record

For a serious and quality recording, it was considered good to spend 2 days on site at the Center, located in Lataha, 17 km from Korhogo. We had to leave in the morning and come back the next day in the evening. Selected choristers, accompanied by balafon and tam-tam players, boarded a «Dyna» (18-seat minibus), and the musical instruments were attached to the luggage gallery. And then, off we go!

For 2 days, we compose on a given theme, we rehearse, we record, we listen to the recording, and... Let's do it again. Sometimes a bird sang too loudly in the trees. Sometimes a baby (who came with his mum singer) cried a little too loudly. Sometimes the balafons didn't set the right pace. Sometimes a singer coughed (too much dust in the air). We start again, and finally, after two days, here is a tape recorded, to the satisfaction of all.

## A Great Success

This first cassette is reproduced and put up for sale. It sells like hotcakes. Everyone buys, not just Christians or catechumens, because the songs are in senoufo, with traditional tunes and instruments. It's a great success! These tapes are even heard on buses traveling between Korhogo and Abidjan. In villages, where Christians are very few, cassettes are also used during prayers and celebrations, and for catechism. Since we don't yet know the songs by heart, we listen to them with the help of a cassette, and we learn them at the same time.

Productions are multiplying. After the songs for Christmas and Easter, others are



**Our Lady of the Assumption church in Korhogo.**

recorded for the common Mass, and hymns to the Virgin Mary. Then we move on to the production of themed cassettes. They are cassettes with songs, Bible readings and comments on specific themes: peace, forgiveness, the social commitment of the Christian. In all, more than 20 cassettes were produced. In recent years, parish choirs have also produced them, always with the aim of spreading the Good News.

In December 2011, the Saint Michael's Choir organized a festival to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its existence. It was a year late, but it doesn't matter! It is like evangelisation itself: work moves forward in small steps, slowly but surely. During this festival, they recorded a DVD.

The time for audio tapes is over; one has to get up to date. And not only technology has improved, the St. Michael's Choir as well. It goes on writing new songs. Given the socio-political situation in the country, 2011 was a year in which new songs on the theme of peace and reconciliation were composed. Thus, religious songs in Senoufo contribute in their own way to the rebuilding of the country.

Jozef de Bekker, M.Afr.

## In all simplicity... to help us

Parents, benefactors and friends

If you wish to help the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers),

- \* Donation for a specific project (see page 10)
- \* Donation for the works of the White Fathers, in general
- \* Life annuity investments
- \* Requests and legacies
- \* Bursaries for Missionary of Africa candidates
- \* Gift of publicly traded securities

You can use page 15 of this letter to our friends, fill it according to your intentions, cut it out and send it with the return envelope to one of our addresses on the last page.

You can equally go to our Website ([www.mafr.net](http://www.mafr.net)) to make a safe online donation.

You can also go and meet a missionary at one of our houses.

## Thank you for keeping Africa in mind

### The policy of the Missionaries of Africa concerning the projects published in the Letter to our friends:

- 1- All the projects published in the *Letter to our friends* are exclusively for Africa
- 2- The whole amount received is sent to Africa
- 3- It is essential to have a Missionary of Africa (White Father) as a respondent.

### Proverb

*When you have only one spear, it should not be used against a leopard. (Cameroun)*

**Meaning:** *You have to think twice before using your last cartridge.*





(Cut here and insert in the return envelope with your donation)

# I wish to help the Missionaries of Africa

(For an **ONLINE DONATION**: [www.mafr.net](http://www.mafr.net) > Online Donation)

Donation .....\$ for the Missionaries of Africa.

Donation .....\$ for Project No 62 (CF page 10)

*For a donation of \$10 or more, you will receive a receipt for tax purposes.*

## Other ways of helping the Mission:

### • Life annuity investments

- *I you are 60 or over, you can put your money into the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) Life annuity investment. This annuity is guaranteed for life and offers a varying rate according to the life expectancy.*

- *You will receive a tax receipt for at least 20% of the sum paid. Only a small part of the payments you receive could be liable for tax.*

### • Bequest and legacies

- *“Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost. .” (Si. 29:10)*

### • Bursaries for our 500 Missionary of Africa candidates

- *One-year scholarship: \$ 1,700*

- *Three-year scholarship: \$ 5,000*

I enclose a cheque payable to the Missionaries of Africa

I prefer to pay by credit card (tick which card)



Card number:.....your CVV.....

Expiry: .....Signature:.....

### • Gift of publicly traded securities

- *You will receive a charitable donation receipt.*

**N.B.:** *If you do not receive this newsletter “Letter to our friends”, on request it will be sent to you free of charge, once a year, as well as a calendar.*

Your First and Last Name:.....

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# Thank you!

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“Keep Africa in mind!”  
<http://www.mafr.net>

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