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Capuchins instruments of peace in the Central African Republic

Br. Benedict Ayodi - Office of Justice, Peace, and Ecology OFMCap

From the beginning of 2013, the armed conflict in the Central African Republic between the Seleka and Anti-Balaka groups has had the marks of a true and veritable war. Even our friars have not been spared. The friars at Bocaranga, Ngaoundaye, and Gofu in the diocese of Bossangoa at Ouham have been targeted and harassed through the days and some still bear the consequences. According to UNHCR there are more than 400,000 persons in CAR who have had to move from one place to another within the country on account of the conflict. Hundreds of them have been received by the Capuchins at the St. Laurent Maison, Bocaranga, Bimbo-Bangui, and Ngaoundaye.

According to Br. Jean Marius: “The brothers do their best to accommodate, assist and be with those people seeking protection, needs which the Central African state is no longer able to provide for now.” Notwithstanding their efforts to welcome these refugees, the insecurity constitutes a great challenge. In effect there have been various attempts to attack the friars and refugees at St. Laurent, at first by elements of Baba Laddé (mercenaries from Chad) and by the Seleka of Berberati. Fortunately, these attacks have had not consequences because of the defense carried out by groups allied with Anti-Balaka. But different was the case of the friars and refugees that underwent an attack at Bocaranga on January 21, 2014. A woman was killed and various refugees were wounded when a Seleka group attacked the complex where they were living.

Beyond giving provisions and welcoming the refugees in their structures, the Capuchins have been active in restabilization on the inter-religious level. Radio Siriri, managed by the friars, has been a means in this work, seeking to remain impartial and carrying out a role of moderation. Directed to the public in general (Christians and Muslims), it transmits programs that have the purpose, among other things, of building peace, reconciliation, and non-violence. It is thought that the station saved thousands of people when, on January 31, 2014, in the hour that the Seleka forces were fleeing, it said to the inhabitants of the villages along the route of Bouar to abandon their houses for a time. The message was received and the inhabitants of the first large village north of Bouar had time to hide themselves in the forest. A few minutes later a hail of bullets shot by the fleeing Seleka force hit their village.

On February 3, 2014 we had at Rome an informative meeting on CAR organized by the Ambassador of the USA to the Holy See. The information given by the representative of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, Ms. Nancy Lindborg, was centered on the concrete situation on the place and commitment of the Unit-



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ed States government. During her visit in January, Ms. Lindborg met with religious and civil leaders and humanitarian activists at Bangui.

The JPE Office of the Order has words of praise for our missionaries and local friars of CAR for their courage, patience, and commitment during these difficult moments. At the same time it makes an appeal for greater support both in prayer and offerings for the friars in CAR. The offerings will be a great help for the friars in their assistance to refugees.

Welcome to Rome!

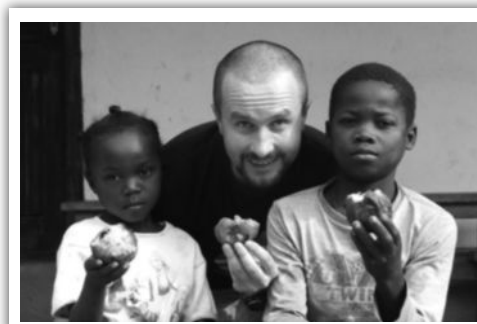
ROME, Italy – the fraternity of the General Curia welcomes a new brother just arrived from Brazil, for the Province of Rio Grande do Sul. We speak of Br. Marcelo Gasparin, who has made himself available for fraternal service in our community. Br. Marcelo has lived the

last ten years at Porto Alegre, working as porter and helper in a building for meetings, managed by the Province. To him our welcome among us and at the same time good wishes for a happy path in learning the Italian language and for a fruitful service.



NZAKOUN, Central African Republic - On February 3, 2014, (around midnight) there arrived at Nzakoun 15 motorcycles and 16 cars full of men of the Seleka group, all armed. They entered into the city and began to shoot in the air. The people were asleep. Those who heard the shots ran off into the bush. Panic broke out. Those who had not time to

flee were killed without pity. They entered in all the houses and shot whomever, killing in cold blood, without a reason, simply – shooting. On February 4, between 1 and 2, they brutally killed 22 people among which were 8 men and 14 women (among them 5 boys and 4 girls). In the houses you could still smell blood and see its stains on the ground, on the rock and



Br. Benedykt Pączka, OFMCap

“Where there is hatred...” A friar recounts the massacre at Nzakoun



on the walls. Scattered clothes and many flies. An older person disappeared, until now she has not been found. Kill and that's it. This horror lasted the whole night. The people recounted that the shots were heard through the whole night. We escaped in the darkness. Among the victims there is also the principal of the school who sacrificed life that others might escape. The bodies of the killed remained until such time as Seleka went away. The people came... and could not believe their eyes. Our guides showed us the houses that were set on fire. 25 were completely burned. In these houses the people had hidden their goods: motorcycles, bicycles, money, and other things that could have some value. Some motorcycles, bicycles, pots, and beds were saved. They also burned documents, diplomas, baptismal certificates, letters. Everything that could identify the victims. We visited two graves: one with four dead and another where lay the body of the principal. On the grave someone had put some pots: each pot indicated a body inside the grave and you could smell the decomposition of the bodies.

The Seleka group stayed in the village until Wednesday, February 5. In a short time the people had left. Seleka ransacked, burned the houses, entered inside to take away all that remained: goats, chickens, clothes, shoes... literally, everything. On Tuesday one of the generals of Seleka sent a letter to the guards of our city, in which he wrote that Wednesday they would pass through the city going towards Chad, assuring that their passage would be quiet. On the contrary, at Ngaoundaye six houses were burned.

We have no more medicine, our pharmacy was burned. Our women give birth outside, in the fields, something clearly dangerous. Our houses were burned, but we want to rebuild before the rains arrive (in May). Clothes and means of transport were stolen. The generator and balafon were stolen from our church. We need food – our supplies were stolen. In our village we have three communities that dialogue with each other: The Catholic church, the church of the friars, and the Community of God. We live as brothers and sisters. We make appeal to the world to come to our aid. First with medicine, then with the rest.

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Via Piemonte: Countdown to the return



ROME, Italy – Already we have arrived in the year of returning to Via Piemonte, seat of our General Curia. The work of renovation continues to proceed after the large restorations realized in these years. Thanks to the solidarity of many friars of the Order and the commitment and punctuality of those responsible, things go as foreseen and, having finished the whole plant, it is time for the real finishing touches. After a long work of setting the

pipes and cables without end, the plastering and painting of the ground floor has already begun, one of final works of the still-open site. Then it will be necessary to think of the furnishings for offices, rooms, meeting and common spaces, and to decorate the chapels, beginning with the largest, which is also the choir of the fraternity. Everything is going ahead according to schedule and the conclusion of the work is assured for this June. The opening celebration of the renovated friary will be held in September on a date yet to be set, and then to publish, by the General Minister and his Council.

Malawi: a new Custody is born

GULLIVER, Malawi – On February 15, 2014, a new Custody was created in Malawi. The General Minister, Br. Mauro Jöhri, and the General Councilor, Br. Jean-Bertin Nadonye, together with the Provincial of the Province of St. Thomas, Kerala, participated at the celebration. We thank the Lord for his continuing blessings on our missions. Some missions are growing by big steps; others have a strong rhythm of increasing vocations. It is a good sign for the Order, surely. On the other hand the missionaries have worked very hard to implant

the Order and to spread our Capuchin charism by means of the various ministries. The Church of mission is very much alive thanks to the commitment of the friars who work in unknown places. Local vocations are the future of the Order and of the Church as well.



Haiti: The Capuchins help the victims of the earthquake

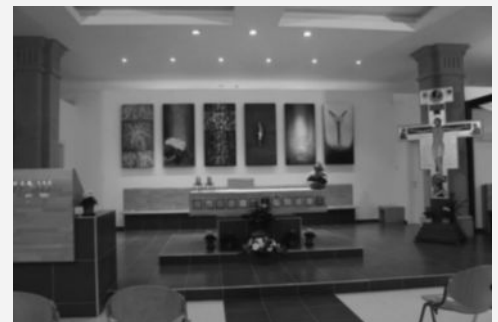


ABACOU, Haiti – After the earthquake and its tremen-

dous consequences, the Capuchins of the Province of Rio Grande do Sul, who work in Haiti, continue with commitment to help the poorest and most needy population, in an especially urgent way with health and education, but not only. The city of Abacou is found in the south of the country, and the nearest health center is 10 km away and doesn't even have a

The church of the Spirituality Center is consecrated

JERUSALEM, Israel – February 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord at the Temple, was a day of particular solemnity for our house in Jerusalem. The consecration of the altar and the church were held at 10 a.m. The title under which it was dedicated is significant: "I am the light of the world." Most Rev. William Hanna Shomali, episcopal vicar Jerusalem and Palestine, presided at the rite. Fifteen of our Capuchin confreres participated as well as a representation of the Capuchin Poor Clares of Mother Rubatto. We note, in particular: The General Councilor Br. Pio Murat, the General Bursar, Br. Luis Eduardo Rubiano, the Secretary for International Economic Solidarity, Br. Alejandro Núñez Ennabe, the provincial ministers of Venice, Genoa, and Foggia, and Sr. Marilene Legramanti,



General Vicar of the Capuchin Poor Clares. Nor can we forget Br. Pasquale Rota of the Province of Lombardy, who did so much to recover and rebuild our house. Also invited were Renzo and Cesare Rota Notari, the contractor and architect, respectively, friends of Br. Pasquale, and benefactors. The gathered faithful and many priests and religious, all appreciated the celebration of the consecration, which was well-participated and striking. They also shared the agape which was prepared in the hall adjacent to the church. There was a mood of great festivity and joyful fraternity.

Praying for the Capuchins and people of Ukraine

UKRAINE – In these days of violence and conflict in Ukraine, we recall ourselves to the solidarity of prayer and closeness to our confreres of the Custody of Ukraine. In fact, our presence in that country began in 1709, when the first friars arrived at Leopold, where they founded a friary. The tempestuous events which happened over almost 300 years did not often facilitate the life and activity of the friars, but, notwithstanding many dangers and threats, the Capuchins have always returned to these lands. In 1988, when the opportunity presented itself, we took immediately the occasion to return to Ukraine, and thus there arrived many friars of the Province of Krakow (Poland). Today the Custody of Ukraine, constituted in 2004, counts 7 communities, situated in Ukraine and Russia. The Sainly Protector of the Custody is St. Pio of Pietrelcina, whose protection we invoke as well as asking the gift of peace and stability for the people.

2015: A year dedicated to Consecrated Life
VATICAN CITY – On January 31, 2014, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life made known the objectives and the principal initiatives to be developed in 2015, ➔

a year that Pope Francis wishes to be the “Year of Consecrated Life.” The objectives are those of gratefully remembering the time passed since Vatican II until today, to welcome the future with hope, and to live the present with passion. This special year will begin on November 21, 2014 and end on November 24, 2015, within the context of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, source of renewal also for Consecrated Life. Among the principal initiatives are foreseen various meetings, conferences, gatherings, symposia, and international shows at various levels, as well as



the preparation and publication of various ecclesial documents of different magisterial degree, regarding the reality and needs of the life and mission of Consecrated persons in our time.

107 years: the oldest sister in the world with Pope Francis

VATICAN CITY – On February 20, Sr. Candida, Alma Bellotti in the world, a Camillian born in Verona, blew out 107 candles and set a record, and on the occasion went to visit Pope Francis. She is the oldest sister in the world. She wanted to be a missionary in Africa but when she knocked on the door of the Comboni Missionaries, there were 42 people ahead of her waiting to enter the congregation. There would have been at least a year to wait for admission, but Alma didn't give up and decided to “embrace the red cross,” that of the Camillians. For Sr. Candida, there have passed more than eighty years from that day, “the most beautiful of my life.” In her long life she has seen nine pontiffs. Wholly lucid, sometimes ironic, and substantially in good health, she's not at death's door. “Let's not say that I met Pope Francis. I saw him. There was a crowd, there wasn't time to talk, it just wasn't possible.” But there was an affectionate greeting: the Pope asked how many years old she was and complimented her on good health. She gets up at dawn every day, gets ready, sets up her room and at 5 is already in church her with sisters for prayer. “I don't do anything else,” she says with a smile, alluding to her age that doesn't allow her to do more for the assistance of the sick, the charisma of St. Camillus, a saint for whom in this year we celebrate the fourth centenary of death.



► ... Haiti: The Capuchins help the victims of the earthquake car. To visit the inhabitants of the mountains the friars go on foot, by horse, or by mule. They have had to realize large works, such as the construction of bridges and the installation of solar panels in order to renew electrical current so that the school can function. With the collaboration of the Canadian missionary and nurse, Sr. Anna-Maria, they have set up a clinic to assist the people with the most urgent needs, in addition to making free medical care available to 1,600 children of the school.

Brazil: VII Course for Franciscan Spiritual Accompaniment



PASSO FUNDO, Brazil – The seventh session of AEFran (a course for Franciscan spiritual accompaniment) was carried out beginning on February 2 in Rio Grande do Sul, with the presence of 15 participants, the greatest number possible, given the dynamics and intensity of the course. The course has patronage and civil recognition at the *Escola Superior de Teo-*

logia e Espiritualidade Franciscana – ESTEF, and functions as university extension of 320 hours. It is directed toward formators, pastoral workers, educators, and all those who work in a Franciscan way and wish to experience involvement in Franciscan psychology, spirituality, and tradition, especially the thought of St. Bonaventure. The program seeks to put theory and practice together: the participants are challenged to travel their own spiritual path in order to help others. The participants are: 9 Capuchin friars and 6 sisters coming from various regions of Brazil as well two friars from Angola and one from Haiti. The course is coordinated by two Franciscan sisters and by General Councilor Sergio Dal Moro.

A Franciscan among the winners of an international prize

MILAN, Italy – On February 15, 2014 in Milan, an important recognition was given to Friar Nguyen, the young Vice Dean of St. Bonaventure received this important award on February 15 in Milan. Friar Nguyen is of Vietnamese nationality. He is a professor of exegesis and biblical theology at the Seraphicum, the Gregorian University and at the Catholic Theological College/MCD University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia. In addition to being a religious in the Order of Friars Minor Conventual, Friar Nguyen is also an electrical engineer. He is emblematic of the intercultural character of the Faculty and its commitment to research and study. Reaching this level of international recognition is a nice end in itself, but it's also a starting point for many other important projects. The winning work, entitled, “The Bible and Asian Cultures: Reading the Word of

God in Its Cultural Background and in the Vietnamese Context”, was conducted by Friar Nguyen with two of his former students, Tran Thi Ly and J.B. Pham Quy Trong, both Vietnamese.

The work examines the biblical proverbs of Vietnam, the image of Jesus the Son of God in the New Testament and in Vietnamese tradition, and finally, the language of love in the Song of Songs and in Vietnamese literature. As stated in the rules, the work should be an unpublished study that opens up new horizons and future research. However, the Award Jury, in explaining its reasoning, pointed out that: “Three young Vietnamese scholars have been able to give, through their work, a stimulus for the development of further research on the relationship between the Bible and Asian culture.”

Source: Friars Minor Conventual