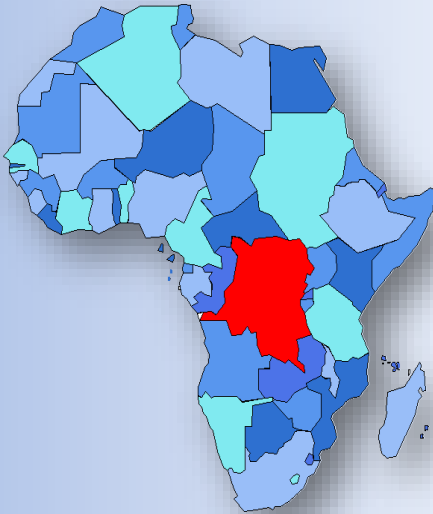


December Letter

to my Brothers and Sisters



This letter has a special story. It's a patchwork put together in **different countries**, on the verandas in Kisubi and Dungu, or in this old hotel in Arua where the pulsating music strongly invited you to work late into the night! It was continued between two flights at the airports of Entebbe, Amsterdam and Paris, and I have formatted it after my landing on this piece of the planet that I already find in hibernation. I have just returned from a trip to the heart of the **African continent** where I had the privilege of sharing the joy of my colleagues on the occasion of the **Golden Jubilee of the FIC mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo**. On August 4, 1969, four Brothers landed there, invited by the bishop of a bush diocese who wished to give back new life to his college, nowadays the Wando Institute. For them, it was the start of an odyssey after the example of Abraham, staking all on a new country and on an abundant posterity ...

A lot of water has run over the dams of the Congo since - and it is said that the country's rivers, if harnessed as our northern rivers are, could supply electricity to the whole of the African continent! It was to underscore this often **heroic** half-century that Br. Gaétan Arseneault, Father Jean-Claude Hould and myself, representing the Mennaisian Family of North America, joined the Congolese Brothers, the visitors from Rwanda and Uganda, and even Br. **Hervé Zamor** and Br. **Jean-Paul Peuzé**, two major superiors of the Congregation, a double exceptional presence, as pointed out by Br. **Pascal Mbolingaba**, superior of Central Africa and host of the celebration.

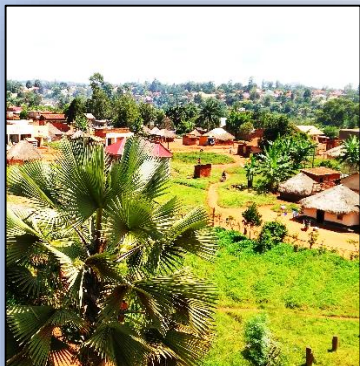
What **images** do I keep of these busy days? Sensations, music and meetings linger, and are difficult to translate in a few sentences. The first image is very **graphic**. Tradition has it that printed on huge half canvas half cotton fabrics are **colorful and joyful symbols** of the event we are about to celebrate. A large number of participants made clothes of all styles out of these materials, including elegant dresses and traditional women's headdresses. Part of the crowd proudly displayed the faces of Jean-Marie and Gabriel, the coat of arms and the motto of the Institute, the places of mission of the Brothers in the Congo, and the main reason for the celebration: **FIC Jubilee 50 years!**

Among other memories I bring back is the long **thanksgiving Mass**, a real piece of heaven ... and not because it lasted forever! **Choirs** waving in unison on these **rhythms** unique to the African peoples; girls and boys dancing gracefully and setting the tempo with bells fixed to their ankles; two young Brothers in the prime of life pronouncing in front of all their **perpetual vows** ...



Neither will I ever forget the party which, after the gargantuan meal, took an absolutely magic turn when the canvas installed to protect from the sun burst under a **tropical downpour**, and the crowd spontaneously began to dance in the typical red mud of the country, the *poto-poto* ...I also remember Br. Gaétan being lifted up by vigorous bearers for a traditional dance of thanks to the **missionaries of the Good News**. I again hear the songs – including some raps – composed by the students as a tribute to Father de la Mennais and to the Brothers. I see myself flying over the African bush in this famous small **ASF aircraft** that I have heard so much about and in which each trip becomes an adventure in itself ...

I share with you part of the text I proclaimed on Saturday morning, November 23rd in the **Dungu Cathedral** filled with a happy, attentive and ... patient crowd!



"Please allow me to share with you my feelings of **pride** and of **hope**. I am proud of the **decision** made by two Canadian Provincials in 1969 to unite their efforts and limited resources, and to rally the Brothers around this bold project. I am proud of the **first four pioneers** on the Congolese soil: Br. **Jean-Claude Hould**, educator, here present today, Br. **Albert Simard**, man of kindness, creativity and joy; Br. **Richard Doyle**, most resourceful and still active in the Philippines at age 85; and Br. **Raymond Hamelin**, the founder, the giant, who has stamped his mark forever on this fledgling mission and who gave his name to the last established Brothers' school.

I am proud of the **missionaries** who have given their very best here - I salute my colleague **Lucien Fortin**, the last Canadian in the Congo, always available, always invaluable - and I am proud of those who have breathed **new youth** into their lives, lending a hand to the formation, to the constructions, or to simply be companions of the youngsters engaged in the mission (** a list of these former missionaries still living accompanies my letter*).

I am proud of the solidarity and incredible generosity shown by so many Brothers and lay people by way of **Avions Sans Frontières, Terre Sans Frontières, Secours-Missions**. I am proud that we, the Brothers of the Province of Jean de la Mennais, continue to support the development of the **community** and its **work** in the DRC.

Finally, I am **filled with hope** when I look at you, my Congolese confreres, who together with your Rwandan colleagues, carry the challenge of incarnating and keeping alive the **Mennaisian charism in Central Africa**. You testify that God is alive, that He is still calling to the religious life and that He does not let you down. Your commitment, your love of the brotherhood and your contagious joy fill me with hope, despite the **difficult events** that you have gone through with such bravery and resilience.

On behalf of the Mennaisian Family of North America, kindly accept our **affection**, our **admiration** and the assurance of our **support**. "

Thank you for having lived the adventure with me. My very best wishes for the **Advent** and the **Christmas seasons**!

With friendship and affection,

Dr. Manno

December 2019

Thanks to Br. Robert S. for the translation

