



**AFRICA GREAT LAKES REGION
January – April, 2010**

**“One can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.”
- Abraham Lincoln**



To all of you who prayed faithfully for three months, who supported us financially, who sent chocolate midway through our time away and emailed your love, to all of you who believe in what we are trying to do, here is the belated scoop on our trip.

Mission #5 was planned primarily as a teaching mission, and that certainly happened! During February, March and April, we offered four 5-day courses, two 3-day course and about six 1-day sessions. Numbers are generally insignificant, but we can tell you that we presented to over 180 students, mostly prison chaplaincy workers,

but also pastors, priests, teachers, local authorities, representatives of the police and military, Justice and Peace and various women’s initiatives.

Never before have we had the privilege of working with such a diversity of students and ethnic groups. It was often a challenge to live together comfortably for a week – in very close quarters in our rented ruins – and learn to enjoy each other despite the regular lack of water and electricity. Day 1 was often tentative: Who are you?



Why are you here? Should I trust this fellow beside me? I am tired, discouraged and unwell. Day 5 was usually a time of tears and hugs: Is it over already? Do I have everyone’s email? When should we plan a follow-up? I think my uncle knows your uncle. Eileen, did you have hot water this morning for your shower?



We presented the Basic Training in Restorative Justice several times as well as the Victim-Offender Mediation Protocol and three new and extremely difficult sessions on Sustainability within a Restorative Justice perspective. Just.Equipping is a training organization. We do not attempt to set up anything in the name of Just.Equipping, but rather to support and equip local people in their work in justice issues in their own communities.



This is why we felt that sustainability had to be addressed this year. How will the projects that have begun as a result of our teaching be maintained? How can the local chaplains and volunteers continue under their own steam and with a sense of pride in what they are accomplishing?

The fact that J.E is not a financing agent makes life very difficult. The overwhelming reaction to seeing a white person is: Here comes money! We pay accommodations, meals,

books and supplies for participants in our training courses. Many NGOs also pay a generous per diem amount. We feel that as volunteers, we are humbly offering our expertise and this does not merit paying people to receive it, a practice that simply encourages the 'receiver' mentality. We also decided to cut down dramatically on transport money for people to attend sessions. There were many raw feelings around these and other financial issues, and we will continue to pray for wisdom in this area.



Just some of the joys:

- The Bugesera Project under Pascal Niyomugabo (the genocide perpetrators and victims community rebuilding project) is growing steadily. Six more houses have been completed and 10 new beehives are starting to produce first rate honey. The owners of the 28 houses completed with the collaboration of J.E and Jean Coutu are now looking to build 28 outhouse toilets! Each needs two sheets of tin for the roof and two bags of cement for the practicalities – about \$75CAD each....There are 24 more mud brick houses built and waiting for funds to be finished. Thank you for your help in this life-sustaining project. Thank you, Bill and Linda and others.
- Joan, Donna and I, along with Chaplain Fine Furaha, delivered 75kg of sosoma baby flour, sugar, fruit and blanket rolls to the women with children in Gisenyi Prison. Each person received a ribboned package with a baby blanket, a pair of underwear, an item of children's clothing and a colourful hemmed wrap. Thank you, Susannah and your team of women who took the time this past year to prepare and send these wraps. Thank you to Bethany Baptist, Nancy and Doug, Vaila and so many others who contributed to the Great Underwear Drives and clothing collections. (I watched one young woman furtively unwrap her parcel before we left, and her grin was a mile wide when she discovered a lovely pair of silky mauve underwear). Thank you, Pierrette, for the children's educational materials, and Barb, for the little soaps – we distributed them with great joy.



- We had several opportunities to help Louise and her indomitable crew of women with the weekly Thursday meal at the hospital. About 75 hot, generous and typically African dinners are served to the prisoners first (typhoid, TB and AIDS patients) and many other needy patients. This is often the only good meal they get during the week. Canadian visitors Lillian and Luc became expert potato peelers and manioc pickers and servers.

- The new Goma, RDCongo, Community Chaplaincy is overloaded with work. Women ex-offenders and victims of sexual assault pour into the storefront with their babies, their illnesses, their hunger and their despair. Simeon, Corneille, Monique, Eugene and their team tirelessly minister to their needs spiritually and materially. I have seen the staff, who are themselves all volunteers, search from purse to pocket at the end of the day to find 500FR (50cents) to give to a mother going home to hungry kids. These people define sacrificial giving. Without God's strength, hourly, they could not go on. Kudoos to the CSC Quebec chaplains who are supporting this initiative!



- The sewing workshop attached to the Goma Community Chaplaincy program and led by Espérance now has 4 sewing machines and 13 students. The change in these girls in the last six months is remarkable. They are there all day without food, water, electricity or washrooms. Yet each one thanks God for the opportunity to be part of the program. They have found a home and are creating community together. Thank you to Gleaners Ontario, Eileen and Randy, Mme Fleury, Lise and Michel, the Denault women and others for food, machines, material, medicine and underwear!



- G-400 continues to be the Magnificent Obsession. (400 inmates from Gisenyi Prison wrote letters asking forgiveness of their victims for genocide crimes. These letters resulted in the development of a Victim – Offender Mediation Protocol, often resulting in a victim – offender meeting inside the prison). Chaplains Fine and Lazare and three others are deeply committed to this project, but it has been bogged down for several months in internal conflicts. Many painful hours of discussion were spent with all the parties, and there is still no clear cut resolution. It is as if there is an oppressive force working against these efforts to give renewed life to not only victim and offender but also communities and ultimately the country of Rwanda itself. The practical challenges alone are incredible.

- After 16 years, how do you find a victim in the mountains with no mailing address, no roads, no newspapers, no desire to be contacted by the person who murdered her husband, children, parents, siblings? Where do you find the money to travel, stay overnight, offer a Fanta to the victim's family? How do you present the letter? How many visits will it take before she decides to accept or reject the process? Will she ever have the strength to forgive? Will the perpetrator tell the truth? Will he be willing to answer all her questions? Will he work at reparation? Jeff has some new video footage of the story of Anastaisie and Mr X which is astounding. They have been reconciled and are living in peace. In their case, there is no longer any need for the families of the victim or the perpetrator to fear each other or plan each other's murder. As Anastaisie said: I have no tears left. I forgive them all. We are deeply appreciative to 3 CSC chaplains from the Prairies region for support for Fine.





- Pierre, Philippe and Simeon flew inland to Beni, RDCongo to meet with Justice and Peace representatives, give a mini-course in RJ and visit the prison there. The area is unstable and dangerous and the prison conditions are very discouraging, but there is a faithful core still wanting to forge on. In Burundi, the team was able to visit four prisons, share a message of hope, and bring in food and soap to five, as well as give a one-week course.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging moments of this trip came at the very end - our first day with the students in Bujumbura, Burundi. Several of them had been with us in 2008 and they quickly reminded us of what they had learned about RJ then and how they have tried to put it into practice. Seeing their commitment two years later to victims, offenders and community, to listening, truth-telling and reparation, in one of the most difficult places in the world, is encouraging and motivating.

This trip stretched us all to the limit, so we must trust that God will somehow use it despite our human frailties. We take comfort in the hope that his word scattered across the Great Lakes Region will bear fruits of peace, modicums of justice, and perhaps some relief from the incredible daily suffering of so many marginalized people.



The Congrégation Notre-Dame continues to be used of God in their faithful support of Just.Equipping. Christophe and Jean-Claude: we could not have managed without your help on-site. I have named some of you, but there are many others who have contributed to this mission – you are appreciated!

We have been repeatedly encouraged by Don, Sharon, Norm and Carol. Our Lady of Victory is a wonderful host. Thank you to Irene, Jacqueline, Gaston, Grandpa, Garry, John and Frida for keeping business running at home. The beautiful pictures are from Jeff. This report is dedicated to Pierre who stayed the course while all around the edges were fraying.

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