



Just.Equipping

PO Box 2984
Gatineau, QC
Canada, J8L 2X5
Tel.: 819-617-1112 - Fax: 819-617-1114
allard@justequipping.org
www.justequipping.org
Registered charity #889184891RR001

Report on Mission 8 Africa Great Lakes Region October – December 2012, January – April 2013

**Our God has said: Encourage my people!
Give them comfort. Isaiah 40:1**

*If I had to choose just two words to describe
Mission 8, they would be 'Hard Work' and
'Excitement'.*

The Letters Project has moved into the 'meetings' stage. All the letters written by prisoners to their victims and survivors have been delivered – all 430! This took some time to do as the victims were often hard to find after so many years since the 1994 genocide, and each visit was costly. We owe huge gratitude to the 'Kili Climb' team for helping us complete these deliveries. Donna Morrin and Monty Bourke headed up a team of Canadians who planted our Just.Equipping banner on the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro and gifted us with the proceeds of this climb. With this important step completed, we were able to begin working on the over 150 cases of victims and

survivors who have requested to meet with their offender in prison.



So here is a typical week with the Letters Project: **Chaplains Lazare, Fine, Canisius**, and sometimes **Kizungu** from Kigali and **Nelson** from Gitarama as well, contact 2 or 3 victims and ask if they are ready to come for a face-to-face meeting with their offender. We arrange for them to arrive at the **Petit Sanctuaire Gisenyi** on Monday, and we have dinner together on Monday evening. They are invited to share the meal, their stories and their expectations. We pray together. The next morning, one chaplain goes early to the prison to call the prisoners and check that a meeting place is available. One or two other chaplains then take the bus or moto and arrive with the victims at the prison. After they have passed through the necessary security steps, they are seated at one end of a table, flanked by chaplains and they await the arrival of their offender. Often this person arrives fearful and bent over. Some fall on their knees when they come into the room and must be encouraged to take their place at the table. The emotion is palpable. The letter that the offender wrote asking for forgiveness is then reviewed and he or she is invited to speak to the victim. It is then the victim's turn to ask any questions he or she may have felt had gone



unanswered for so many years. How did my family die? How did you kill my children? Where is my husband's body? Did they suffer? Why did you do it?



In most cases, incredibly, these moments are both extremely difficult and extremely grace-filled. In most cases, the victim reaches out to offer forgiveness, a hug or handshake, a wish for a better future, some money to help with food. When the victim is not satisfied or the offender is not honest or forthcoming, the process is halted and the chaplaincy team plans an appropriate follow-up.



If the victims have travelled a long distance, they return to the Petit Sanctuaire for another night where they will eat, sleep and debrief with the team. Almost all ask when they can come back! They crave more friendship counseling.

After the victims have gone home, the chaplains must visit the prisoners for a feedback session with them, and then begin the whole process again for the next week's group. This is exhausting work, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our chaplains are deeply affected by each encounter and after so many years, I feel they need special care and renewal themselves. Some victims are also left emotionally fragile and need to be in close contact. Most begin a healing experience that they have been searching for since the genocide conflicts. It is truly amazing. We cannot explain it. God can.



Let me tell you about Emmanuel. He is a shepherd. He was a very young boy when he hid under his mother with several thousand other people in a church in April, 1994. Grenades were lobbed into the church, and those who were not killed rushed outside to be massacred as they tried to escape. Then, after a couple of hours, men came into the church and with their machetes randomly finished off the people lying there. Emmanuel received a machete coup to the head and lay bleeding for a day or two. He does not remember. Miraculously he did not die, the blood clotted and some sympathizers helped him to the Congo border where he hid. When he was able to return to his home territory, he was blind in one eye and suffering a severe brain injury. He began looking after cattle in the field and wearing a hat. Many years later, our chaplains came looking for him in the fields and read him his 'letter'. When he came down from the mountains to the house, it was his first visit to the city of Gisenyi – a completely new experience. Over supper, he took off his hat and asked me to feel where his skull was deformed, then he put his hat back on – for fear that someone would hurt his head! We wondered how the meeting in prison would go. It went well. The offender asked forgiveness, Emmanuel asked his

questions and offered forgiveness, and then went out to lunch with the chaplains. When they asked him how he felt after the whole experience, he said he felt good, that the only thing to do was to forgive. He wanted to get right back to his village though, because he did not relish the thought of spending another night inside a stuffy bedroom in a house in the city! He wanted to see the stars above his head!

The whole Just.Equipping and Letters Project chaplaincy team feels compelled to find the financial means to complete this privileged ministry assignment of victim-offender meetings.

The **Petit Sanctuaire Goma** in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a book unto itself. It is a constant hive of activity despite the irregularly regular fighting among various rebel and government groups. The city is plagued with water and sanitation problems, food shortages, electricity black-outs, poor roads and transportation, unaffordable school costs and medical care, and a general sense of discouragement and danger. This is perhaps the most dangerous place in the world for a woman. Children are at a disadvantage and are often sucked into violence, and many men are depressed, angry and in compromised health.

Can God work wonders in Goma? Indeed!

Simeon heads up the chaplaincy team which has about 15 core members.



The Central Prison is open again after being closed and looted last year. Just.Equipping, through you, has been able to send the chaplains in with women's and men's t-shirts and other clothing, beautiful baby packages, coveted underwear, blankets, Bibles, bags of flour, rice, beans,

sugar, salt, soap, and medicine – all because of your generosity in supporting us.

PJRIDI (Promotion de la justice réparatrice et des initiatives de développement intégral) Community Chaplaincy follows up in the community with pre- and post-release work. The Petit Sanctuaire Goma has just undergone major renovations for blocked latrines, a covered spot for cooking and inventive re-spacing to accommodate several new aspects of ministry.

WoW! The Women's Wellness Centre



So – you get to the Petit Sanctuaire Goma either by a kidney-awakening, bone-jolting jeep drive over so-called roads of lava rock or you take a long, hot, dusty and sometimes dangerous walk with a baby on your back and parcels on your head. You hear the singing and chatting before you go through the gate. A group of women closest to the door are gathered under a small shelter



participating in a literacy class. On a good day, everyone has a pencil or a 'Bic' and some paper. Otherwise, we share. A couple of meters farther, on the veranda and in the first room, women and girls are sitting at foot-pedal sewing machines or at the table where they cut and iron. They are learning to sew and just beginning to look for a market for their bags. Upstairs, we have a daycare for the children who accompany their moms to these programs. Try to imagine about 25 infants and pre-schoolers in a bedroom and balcony with one fulltime maman and some rotating help from downstairs – in the African heat and with minimal supplies! You will understand when I say that we should immediately grant sainthood to all the childcare workers!

Beside the children's space, we have had to open a dispensary. Two doctors and two nurses felt they were sent to the Petit Sanctuaire for this and so, in fear and trembling, we are providing basic health care and public health education. Everything stops around 1:00pm when lunch is shared – usually a bowl of 'bouillie'.

initiatives with the women, babies and men in several Rwandan prisons with ICOPUR (Initiative communautaire pour l'unité et la réconciliation). In the midst of all this activity, hospitality, networking and teaching remain the bedrock of our call.



The year brought some particularly happy events. A Canadian, Madelaine, rallied friends to 'Build a House for Fine' and we were able to completely rehabilitate an abandoned house for our woman chaplain Fine in Gisenyi. Lillian and Luc raised funds to provide running water to one of the reconciliation villages where the women previously were obliged to walk about 16km to bring not-so-clean water home to their families. On both of these occasions, I would have given anything to have you all there to witness the singing, dancing and prayers of thankfulness.

Even as I mention these two events, several others come



Restorative Justice principles – Listening, Truth-telling and Repairing with Victims, Offenders and Community in a spirit of respect, dignity and prayer for all – permeate and are the basis for our work in the Great Lakes Region. In fact, this year our emphasis is on 'Repairing', on making things right. As funds have been available, we have begun symbolically to make small repairs to the homes of chaplains and victims. In October, we hope to pour a cement floor in the mud brick home of A., a genocide ex-offender who now takes care of one of his victims. The story of the Reconciliation Villages (where genocide perpetrators and survivors live and work together) and your gifts of cows, goats and chickens would require another newsletter, as would **Pascal's and Deo's** work with children of victims and offenders; sexual assault and domestic abuse counseling; work in trauma healing; Jean Bosco's prison ministry 'Barnabas Africa' in Burundi; and

to mind. So many of you have helped with so much! Please know that your support means everything to us and is the reason we are able to carry on. It is hard work. It is exciting. Thank you.

Judy Allard
For the Just.Equipping Team
Photos: Lazare, Lillian and Luc, JC.