



## JUST.EQUIPPING / JUSTE.ÉQUIPAGE

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**Dear Friends:**

**Just.Equipping: Committed to educating/training/equipping in prison chaplaincy and restorative justice. (Our mission)**

**'To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' - Mic. 6:8 (Our verse)**

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**'I thank my God every time I remember you' - Philippians 1:3**

As I sat on the plane, coming back from Africa recently, I could only marvel at the fact that through your generous support, Just.Equipping has now been involved in the Great Lakes Region of Africa for ten years.

Let me review briefly what you have made possible over these ten years.

**A teaching mission:**

When in 2006, we accepted the invitation to go to Rwanda in 2007 to teach restorative justice and train prison chaplains, we founded Just.Equipping making it clear that what we had to offer was a vision - a restorative justice vision - and that we wanted to equip and encourage people to become agents of change in their own corner of the world. So we went to teach and teaching we did. Wonderful teachers such as Rod, Philippe, Eileen, David, Joan, John (3), Sue, Jeff and others joined our team at different times. Restorative Justice struck a cord in the hearts and minds of people. We were asked to return to Rwanda and we accepted. We also went to Cameroon and Burundi with the challenging message of restorative justice. **We continue** teaching, albeit more informally, as we accompany people in various projects. This past Spring we held another training seminar for prison chaplains from RD Congo, Burundi and Rwanda.

### Reconciliation ventures:

In 2008, Pascal invited us to visit his villages of reconciliation in the Bugesera area of Rwanda where survivors of the genocide and released genocide perpetrators were working together to re-create community, to re-store peace among themselves. Just.Equipping became involved. We helped build over 50 houses, offered training to the leaders involved in this unique Cooperative and, thanks to Luc and Lillian, brought water in some of the villages. **We continue** to work with Pascal and to help where we can.

As we became acquainted with the work of the prison chaplains, we noticed early on that too often their work was limited to preaching only... Not a bad thing per se....but very limited as far as the full ministry of a prison chaplain. We spoke at length about the importance of listening to offenders and of journeying with them... One chaplain, Lazare, took that seriously and as a result of his involvement, over 400 prisoners in the Gisenyi Prison (now called Rubavu Prison) wrote a letter to their survivors asking for forgiveness. So, in 2009, Just.Equipping made the important decision to focus most of its efforts on this initiative and other projects in the Great Lakes region, thus declining invitations coming from other African countries. We trained in depth a number of chaplains, we developed a Protocol for the Letters Project, we did training inside the prison on Restorative Justice for the 400+ prisoners who had written their letter, we lobbied authorities to get behind such an important project and thus began an incredible adventure. The delivery of letters into the furthest hills of Rwanda - the country of a thousand hills was no easy venture. I so wish you could hear some of the stories of the chaplains, such as Canisius, who went far and deep into the countryside to find the survivors of the genocide. All that happened would make you laugh or cry. As of now, 300 victims-offenders encounters have taken place and we marvel forgiveness and at God's marvellous grace of reconciliation. **We continue** to work at Victim-Offender reconciliation and Fine, Kizungu and Nelson are involved weekly in counselling offenders and developing a chaplaincy program at the Rubavu Prison.

### RD Congo-Goma:

Simeon from Goma, who had taken many of the teaching sessions in the earliest days of our involvement in Africa and who served often as an interpreter, invited us to become involved in the Central Prison in Goma, North Kivu, DR Congo. Goma - What a city! What a place to be in Prison! The 'new prison' built to receive 150 offenders now holds more than 1500 with problems of violence, hunger, sickness, intrigues and unrest.... Simeon and his team of workers courageously offer splashes of hope in that pool of despair. A few years ago, we were confronted with the serious health problem of 'bugs' in the prison and decided to tackle head on the juvenile section. A full de-bugging operation took place with many volunteers and that operation continues on a regular basis as well as counselling, literacy, clothing and water, health checks and Bible studies and when possible, a bit of food. It is a never-ending task.

Your support made possible the opening of 'Le Petit Sanctuaire Goma' where marginalized women, disadvantaged and released are welcome and take part in the various programs offered. Over 100 have graduated from the 9 month sewing course....and for each graduating class there has been a great party. These past few years, we were able to offer a sewing machine to the highest performing student. The women also benefit from literacy courses, counselling, Bible studies noon meals, first aid and child care on the premises. The sewing shop is now marketing items that are becoming 'best sellers' with their

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name brand: WoW (Women Wellness!). **We continue**, despite the huge challenges, to be increasingly involved in Goma, both at Le Petit Sanctuaire and in the prisons.

### **Burundi:**

In Burundi, despite economic and political challenges, Jean Bosco and his team continue to systematically visit the Prison of Burundi. They demonstrate great courage and creativity. **We continue** to help them with transportation as money becomes available.

### **Importance of times of renewal:**

Through the years, as we became more and more involved in the lives of the chaplains, we realized the importance of offering times of renewal. The work they do is very demanding. Your support made possible the improvement of the 'physical setting' for a number of chaplains as we improved their housing situation. We also try to help with the school fees for their children and, overall, to make their life somewhat less difficult. Most of the people we work with live in great poverty.

At different times over the years, we have been able to bring some of the chaplains to Canada for a time of training and renewal. One of our great desires at present is to find the funds to bring to Canada in late 2017 5-6 key leaders who are greatly in need of a change of scenery, a time of more advanced training and a time of renewal. They are key to the success of the ongoing projects that Just.Equipping is involved in. For the Goma team (20 of them), we offer long weekend times of renewal at Le Petit Sanctuaire Gisenyi (called Gisenyi Go!) under Fine's wonderful care. This initiative is a huge success and hopefully we will be able to continue. No occasion is missed for renewal and we celebrate regularly the small and big successes of the teams. We organize days out at the Grand Sanctuaire Gisenyi and the occasional educational

### **Eleven Missions and counting:**

Judy and I have gone to the Great Lakes Region of Africa over 20 times and have been involved in 11 Missions so far. Each Mission has a theme and reading the various reports from 2007 on (see [www.justequipping.org](http://www.justequipping.org)) will allow you to see what your support has made possible. Along with the difficulties, there has been much joy such as the year we focused on the 'repairing' element of Restorative Justice and saw victims, offenders and chaplains delight in the work done to their homes. **We will continue** to serve in a Restorative Justice perspective according to the strength God gives us..

### **A big thank you:**

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As we complete 10 years of involvement in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, we pause to thank God and to thank you who have journeyed with us, who have upheld us in prayers and have made it all possible through your generous donations. God bless you!

Pierre Allard, President