

Dear Friends,

Togo Mission Report

2018

Greetings from our mission here in Togo. I'm happy to give you an update on our progress during 2018. Now that we have a better internet connection – as you can see from this photo of the antenna that we installed a few months ago behind the rectory – I hope to be able to send reports a bit more frequently.



A VICTORY FOR THE TRUE FAITH – OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CRUSHES THE HEAD OF THE SERPENT!

I want to tell you about an extraordinary event that took place recently here that brought joy to my heart.

A delegation of elders from the village of Hililagbe came to see me a few weeks ago with the nearby catechist. They told me that the chief of their village was gravely ill, and that he wanted to be baptized before he died. Not only that, but the chief and the elders had all decided that they wanted to destroy all their ancestral idols – literally to smash and burn them! They asked me to oversee the ceremony – to sprinkle blessed salt and then pour holy water over the charred remains, and then to say a Mass for the village.

I have to say that during my earlier ministry in the U.S. I never had a request quite like this one! Of course, I was delighted to accept. I told them that if they wanted to have a monument built with an inscription commemorating the event and the date, I would pay for half of it. In addition – although they don't know it yet – the Archbishop of Lomé has agreed to my request that he write a letter of congratulations and encouragement to the villagers. As soon as I receive the letter, I will have it framed and will give it to them.

Here are a couple photos of the destruction of the pagan shrine and the burning of the idols:



Here is a photo of the baptism of the chief of Hililagbe during the outdoor Mass I then celebrated. He is quite ill, and the villagers carried him to the Mass from his house:



OUR NEW DORMITORIES AND NEW CONVENT PROJECT

In my last report I described the dormitory projects that we have undertaken. Our parish has built six primary schools (K-6th) – one here in Atchanve where the mission is located, and the others in five of our outlying villages, some of which are quite distant. In all these schools we are currently educating over 1000 Togolese children. We have also built a *collège* (7th – 10th) here at the mission in Atchanve. The challenge that we faced was to offer our

students who graduate from our primary schools in our far-off villages the chance to continue their Catholic education at our *collège* here at the mission. Since these students are too young to rent a room and they need adult supervision, the grand plan was to: 1) build a new girls' dormitory with a capacity for 100 students; 2) convert the large convent where our three Togolese nuns live into a boy's dormitory with the same capacity; and 3) build a new convent for the sisters adjacent to the new girls' dorm.

I'm happy to report to you that although we will be paying for these buildings for quite some time, and there will be more work on both dorms as the residents increase over the next few years, we were able to get enough done for our sisters to move into their new convent and to accept our first group of 7th grade students to take up residence in time for the start of this school year in September. These students, 17 boys and 16 girls, are all children of dirt-poor subsistence farmers. Now an extraordinary opportunity has been opened for them.

This next photo shows all of them, along with their supervisors, Jacques and Claire Kpogo (on the left), who are brother and sister. Jacques and Claire were recommended to me by a priest in a neighboring parish. They are both members of the Legion of Mary and are doing a great job.



The next photo shows the new girls' dorm, with Sr. Therese Ozou standing in front. Sister Therese just celebrated her 50th anniversary of her entrance into religious life. She has overall responsibility for the girls, who love her as a mother!



PROGRESS OF OUR COLLÈGE

To give you an idea of the growth of our *collège*, here are photos from the past four years of our *collège* students, showing the increase as the students moved up each year to the next level.

7th graders, 2015-16 school year:



7th and 8th graders, 2016-2017 school year:



7th, 8th and 9th graders, 2016-2017 school year, when we were adding a second story to the school:



This year's students, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th graders, 2018-2019 school year.



We currently have 175 students including the 33 dorm residents, but since we will now be accepting additional students each year for our dorms, we expect the enrollment to reach 300 or more in the years ahead. Our plan for next year will be to begin a *lycée* here (equivalent of 11th through 13th grades) for their next level of education – but that's a story for another report!

AN ASSISTANT PASTOR FOR THE MISSION

I also want to let you know the good news that after twelve years in Togo it looks like I will be finally getting an assistant pastor. Jonathan Togbe, a young deacon for the Archdiocese of Lomé has finished his seminary studies and has served at the mission here since I returned from the U.S. in early October. The Archbishop has approved him for ordination later this month. If all goes well, he will be assigned here as assistant pastor beginning in January. I will be very glad to have him – there will be plenty for him to do, and he's already well-liked by the villagers. Jonathan's father actually spent his early boyhood in a village in our parish territory, but Jonathan grew up in Tsévie, a large town halfway down to Lomé. Here's a picture of Jonathan, taken last month the day we blessed a well that our mission had installed at Klokpoé, which is one of our secondary stations:



TEAK TREE PROJECT

I'm always looking to the future, and trying to plan for the financial stability of the mission when I'm no longer here. We have already planted a few thousand teak trees, and our long-term goal is to plant 100,000 of them over the next two or three years, with the idea that beginning ten years from now, 10,000 of them can be harvested and sold each year. The beautiful thing is that these teak trees regrow and can be sold again after another ten years, so if we can get this done it will be a kind of permanent endowment for the mission. The cost, including the ground preparation, the seedling, and care of the trees for the first three years, is only about one dollar per tree. Here's a photo of a small teak tree forest.



If you would like to help with the teak tree project and in this way give a gift that keeps on giving for years and years, here is the GoFundMe link:

<https://www.gofundme.com/plant-a-tree-save-a-child>

Or, to help our mission with an unrestricted donation by PayPal or by check, just click on the donate button on the home page here on our website.

Finally, as I write this, we are preparing for our annual patronal celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe next weekend. It will begin Saturday evening with a candlelight procession and a concert of choirs from ten of our villages, then on Sunday we'll celebrate Mass followed by the play reenacting the Guadalupe apparitions.

Here's a video link showing our student choir practicing for the concert – they are singing a song in French in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This song was especially composed for our mission parish. The lyrics in French are below, and I've included a translation in English if you'd like to follow along.

[\(YouTube video link to student choir singing\)](#)

Until next time, thanks so much for your support – your prayers, your sacrifices, and any donation you may be able to help us with.

God bless,

Fr. William Ryan

OUR MISSION'S SONG IN HONOR OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Notre Dame de Guadalupe,
Tu es notre Mère,
À travers ton fils, Jésus-Christ,
Conduis-nous au Père !

*Our Lady of Guadalupe,
You are our Mother,
Through your son Jesus Christ,
Lead us to the Father!*

REFRAIN :

Guadalupe ! Nous sommes tous tes fils
Guadalupe, tu sais : Nous t'aimons, Marie !

*Guadalupe! We are all your children
Guadalupe, you know that we love you, Mary!*

C'est le paysan Juan Diego
Qui a vu Marie ;
Elle a daigné lui laisser
Son image splendide !

*It was the peasant Juan Diego
Who saw Mary;
She deigned to leave for him
Her splendid image!*

REFRAIN

Marie l'envoie chez l'Archevêque
Avec une demande :
Construire une belle chapelle –
Oh, maternel plan !

*Mary sent him to the Archbishop
With a request:
To build a beautiful chapel –
What a motherly plan!*

REFRAIN

L'Archevêque voit l'image ;
Tombant à genoux,
Il accepte de faire l'église ;
Marie l'a voulu !

*The Archbishop saw the image,
Falling to his knees
He agreed to build the church;
Mary wished it!*

REFRAIN

Marie accueille en ce saint lieu
Tous avec leurs peines
Elle les reçoit et les soulage :
Toujours comme leur reine !

*Mary welcomes to this holy place
All with their afflictions.*

*She receives them and she relieves them:
Always as their queen!*

REFRAIN

Notre Dame de Guadalupe
C'est bien en Mexique
Mais quelle joie pour nous de l'avoir
Ici en Afrique!

*Our Lady of Guadalupe
It's true it is in Mexico,
But what a joy for us to have her
Here in Africa!*

REFRAIN

O Marie de Guadalupe,
Intercède pour nous,
Que toujours nos familles restent
Dans l'amour de Dieu !

*O Mary of Guadalupe,
Intercede for us,
May our families always remain
In the love of God!*

REFRAIN