

# Catholic TRADITION in Africa



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Quarterly bulletin of the District of Africa of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X

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Director of Publication: Father Loic Duverger;  
Editor: Father Denis Bedel.

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Photo: Rev. Fr. Alain-Marc Nély's conference in Enugu, Nigeria

# Nigeria

# Editorial

by Father Loïc Duverger

**"In Nigeria, as in Europe 40 years ago, the faithful turn towards good priests who keep the faith and resist this subversion..."**

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Our bulletin opens its pages today to a country where the Society of Saint Pius X is not yet installed, Nigeria. We do not yet have a priory there despite the fact that the first Missionary visits, by Frs Groche and Stelhin, to this country which is the most populated country in Africa, dates back to the early 1990s.

All really started with the joining to the Society of Father Gregory Obih, who is from this beautiful country, and the regular missionary visits of my confreres over the last few years. Several retreats have now been preached. Groups of parishioners have sprung up across different cities; several young ladies have entered the newly formed novitiate of the Missionary Sisters of Jesus and Mary in Kenya and several young men have now entered Holy Cross Seminary in Australia.

In Nigeria, the Catholic Church is very active despite the fact that she represents only 14% of the population. However, as elsewhere, Catholicism is being eaten away by modernism which destroys it from the inside. Communion in the hand was only authorised in Nigeria in 2008. It was requested from Rome by the Episcopal Conference which had given in to the insinuations of a bishop. And Rome authorised it.

Many Catholics are asking questions because they see these deviations, Holy Communion distributed by the laity, Communion in the hand, etc... As in Europe 40 years ago, the faithful turn towards good priests who keep the faith and resist this subversion. They request the Traditional Latin Mass from their bishop, who refuses their requests, even after the publication of the *Motu Proprio* of 2007.

When we visit to celebrate Holy Mass for these groups, who rent restaurant halls for the celebration of the true Mass or set up tents outside to protect everybody from the rain and the sun, the faithful ask us the same questions asked to His Grace Archbishop Lefebvre in the years following the introduction of the *Novus Ordo*. What should we do? Can we assist at the New Mass? When will you come to open a priory?

Send us some priests! You must open a chapel in our region, a priory in our country! And journey after journey the number of faithful continue to increase.

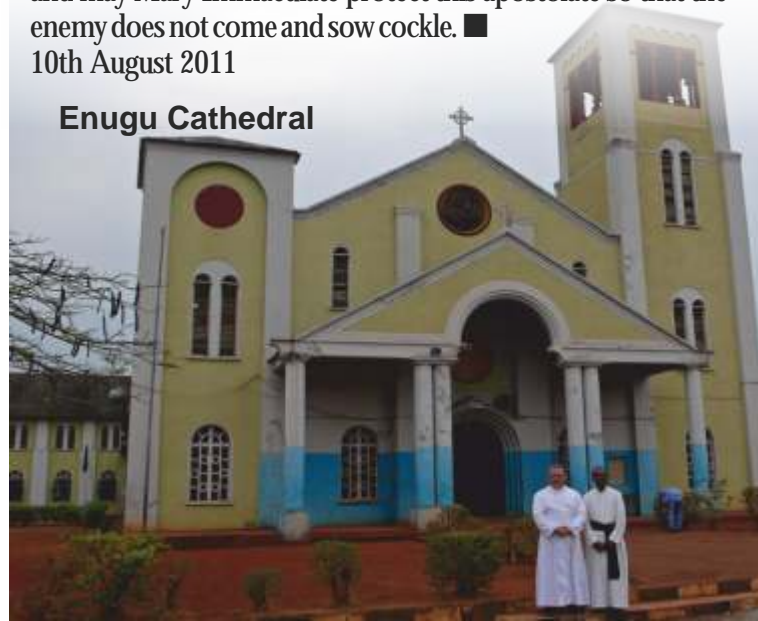
We must plan the opening of a priory there very soon. We have started looking for a house suitable for a priory, but also large enough to preach retreats and receive the young men who are considering their vocation. We must find the right priests who can set up this priory. We must also find - as in every situation - something else which is essential for the running of the priory, and, dear friends and benefactors; I think you know what I'm talking about...

Also, next to Nigeria, there is the country called Benin, where a small group of faithful are patiently waiting for us. Also a little further away, just over one hour by plane (thus quite close) there is Ghana where another small group have been resisting for many years under the direction of one of the faithful who, with his wife, became Third Order Members of the Society of Saint Pius X, during our last visit.

We confide to your prayers and your generosity this new apostolate which is opening for the Society. May Our Blessed Lord bless the harvest and the future workers in this harvest and may Mary Immaculate protect this apostolate so that the enemy does not come and sow cockle. ■

10th August 2011

## Enugu Cathedral





# News from Nigeria

by *Father Gregory Obih*

**Baptism by Fr. Obih**

Posters of the ruling party occupied all strategic corners of the country proclaiming: GOODLUCK NIGERIA; GOODLUCK JONATHAN, VOTE WISELY. The main opposition party also had its posters crying out: NATIONS ARE NOT RUN ON LUCK, BUT ON IDEAS! VOTE FOR...

Its was against this background of another election year in Africa's most populous nation that Fr. Martin Benoit de Clausonne arrived to help me preach an Ignatian retreat for men in Enugu (Feb. 13 – 18). This is the second Ignatian retreat the Society has preached in Nigeria. We were lucky to get a conducive venue – The Renewal Centre, Iva Valley, Enugu, owned by the National Conference of Women Religious. The property is actually being taken care of by the Immaculate Heart Sisters; 40 men participated in this retreat. The nuns who run the property commented on the admirable comportment of the retreatants, the peaceful traditional liturgy as well as the many young men who participated in the retreat: 'I thought it is only elderly people who will understand and follow the mass' commented one. 'I have not seen this type of traditional retreat before, it's so peaceful' added another.

They were willing to welcome us again, which they did for the women's retreat (May 8 – 13). 34 women turned out. This time it was Fr. Arnold Trauner who came when the elections were already over. Nigerians had voted for Goodluck. Before then however Fr. Denis Bedel's arrival to help out during the Holy Week and Easter had complemented the goodluck of our faithful in Lagos and Enugu. While Fr. Bedel had about 170 faithful to manage in Lagos, I had 130 grateful faithful assisting at the Triduum and Easter ceremonies in Enugu.

On Monday 16th May the District Superior, Fr. Loic

Duverger, arrived from South Africa to visit the faithful in Nigeria. The following day a large group of the faithful were at the Akanu Ibiam International Airport, Enugu, to welcome him. The welcome ceremony included a welcome song, placards expressing joy, hospitality and love of Catholic Tradition in Igbo, English and French. A garland was placed on the Superior's neck and a convoy of cars escorted him to the home of Col. Ikpeama where we were staying. Some onlookers wondered whether it was the pope himself!

Before the arrival of Fr. Duverger we had already visited the faithful in Asaba (109 Kilometers from Enugu). On Wednesday, 18th May we were in Owerri where Fr. Duverger offered mass in the home of Mr. Mike Ihebor. About 35 faithful were present. Owerri is 174 Kilometers from Enugu. On Thursday, we were in the parish of Fr. Samuel Abah, a priest of Otukpo diocese who had decided to join us in the battle for Catholic tradition. This was 150 Kilometers from Enugu. The district superior offered mass for over 200 faithful in Nwedoga, an outstation of Fr. Samuel Abah's parish. On the evening of Friday, 20th we met with his bishop who gave his verbal approval for Fr. Abah to join the Society. This was in addition to welcoming us warmly and having us lodged in his cathedral. Sunday 22nd was the turn of the Enugu faithful to have the district superior offer a sung mass at 10.00am followed by a conference, and a question and answer session. A reception was held in honour of the District Superior, and a welcome address was presented.

On the evening of the same day, we departed for Aba (190 kilometers away). The next morning, Fr. Duverger offered Mass for the faithful, Fr. John-Bosco Ohadugba had helped to form. At the end of Mass, Fr. Duverger gave a



**Mass in Isolo**



Street of Lagos

brief conference, followed by a question and answer session, 41 persons were in attendance. Then we departed for Lagos – Africa's most populous city of over 14 million inhabitants. It was a journey of about 600 kilometres.

We had planned to visit the faithful in two neighbouring countries: Benin and Ghana. But this was not to be, due to visa problems. So we stayed in Lagos until Sunday 29th, when the District Superior had the opportunity of meeting with the faithful in our two mass

centres in Lagos: Isolo and Surulere. The masses witnessed large turnouts of the faithful. A modest welcome party was held in Isolo at 5.00pm in honour of the district Superior and Fr. Trauner. Both departed on Monday, 30th May after a taxing and yet rewarding pastoral work in Nigeria.

Having voted with their faith by aligning with the Society in the battle for tradition, the faithful in Nigeria continue to turn to God for the establishment of a priory in Nigeria, for He is the Good in our luck. ■

## A promising Harvest in Igbo Land

by Father Benoît Martin de Clausonne

4



Yam plantation

The Saint Pius X Mission had already explored the *Elephant of Africa*. With a territory as large as Germany and France put together, Nigeria is also the most populous country in Africa with 155 million inhabitants, or a hundred times the population of Gabon! Today Divine Providence has especially directed our Superiors towards this promising apostolate since the Nigerian born priest of Igbo origins, Father Gregory Chuckwudi Obih, joined the Society. Our colleague carries out his mission amongst the many Faithful from his country, who constantly seek the Mass of all time in the language of Faith. Since “a man helped by his brother is an unassailable fortress”, the other Fathers too have recently lent a hand to help him carry out this mission. Two spiritual retreats have been held and the Holy Week was celebrated in two strategic areas of the Southern Part of the country, namely Lagos in the West and Enugu in the East.

Indeed, one third of the Northern States follow the Islamic Shariah Law, while the South is essentially Catholic. Their origins can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Senegal

when missions were flourishing in West Africa from Dakar to Libreville, via the Gulf of Guinea. In the 1850s, Father Libermann's missionaries arrived in Liberia and the Ivory Coast, while Father Bessieux arrived in Gabon and Bishop de Marion Brésillac- the founder of the African Missions Society – settled in Dahomey (today's Benin). In Sierra Leone, several former Igbo slaves from the Niger Delta area became Christians. Now converted to Christianity, they were also concerned about the salvation of their kindred who remained in their country of origin. . . Father Chausse therefore decided to embark into an adventure in search of this people. The Gold Coast (Ghana) and Lagos which had become British colonies, fell under the influence of the Irish Spiritans, among which the famous Father Shanahan – well known to Archbishop Lefebvre – who was sent to Onitsha. It was not until the 1930s that the work of the missionaries started to bear fruit: an indigenous clergy mastering the Igbo language and really touching the souls of its fellow countrymen was established.



Makoko slum, Lagos

© La terre vue du ciel, Yann Arthus-Bertrand

It was therefore necessary to find priests who could speak English to assist our Igbo Father, and these priests came from South Africa. « *Good evening Father, welcome to Nigeria* », said Cyprian, a future seminarian, warmly welcoming me. Our taxi, a truly mobile wreck, with an incredible noise, set the tone of the surprising city of Lagos. We jumped over gutters full of garbage; the air was 96% humid at 33°C, while I was being devoured by mosquitoes. There was no running water, but a diluvian equatorial rain fell upon the city, flooding my bedroom. It was the first rainfall of the year, long awaited in this dry season; the coincidence with my arrival was too striking: I am bringing the rain, and with it multiple blessings! This is Africa!

Lagos was just a stopover towards our destination Enugu, where I would be preaching a retreat. It took us a day and half by bus to bridge the 500 kilometres which separate the two cities. First we had to say the Divine Office, and what a surprise it was to see two choirs of followers who could chant the Psalms! Despite the early hour of the mass – 4:30 AM – some two score of the Faithful were in attendance. They were so happy to have a mass that they started singing their best hymns; this helped to wake everyone up, while I was celebrating the Holy Mysteries with only one bulb powered by a generator to provide the light. It was still night, but already one could see signs of the humid heat through the sweat that rolled down the heads, even African heads. I was soaked in sweat after a simple Low Mass.

There was complete chaos at the bus station! In the dark night lightened up by buses' headlights, a disorderly crowd was in motion; some battling to buy bus tickets, others dropping off tons of luggage and others selling grilled peanuts and telephone prepaid vouchers. In the midst of this mess, I strived to keep an eye on my precious chapel suitcase. Then we finally sat in the bus; I would finally be able to say some hour or other of the Divine Office... or so I thought. A crank dressed in a suit and a tie started to shout with a broken voice- he was apparently a protestant preacher. For an hour, he would run back and forth from the back to the front of the bus, which was being tossed over potholes. He would scream in our ears, making passengers sing some hymns and clap their hands; he'd open the Bible citing passages from the Old Testament, while giving his interpretation of it as "The purest truth", pronouncing multiple prayers in the Name of Jesus, which would confer on all various blessings...it was impressive: He controlled his audience and filled his pockets; I

had been warned that in Lagos it suffices to open a Bible to make a fortune.

During the thirteen-hour trip, the landscape was nothing like Mauritius: The roadside was paved successively with municipal dumps, shells of vehicles and cemeteries of trucks, small market places in half-completed brick buildings. The road was dangerous: dented mini-buses and overloaded motorcycles crisscrossing enormous beaten-up trucks on the dusty roads, driving the wrong way and zigzagging between lanes in order to avoid the potholes. Our guardian angels had a lot of work to do that day! but it was greatly rewarding in the end: Sunday Mass for 120 Faithful, several hours of confessions, adult baptisms...so many comforting ceremonies. The Faithful, thirsty as they were for knowledge, were very attentive during the conference on the Society, its history, goals and struggle; not to mention the numerous sacramentals, which, taken together, would take more time than the baptism of a new born.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary welcomed us with great warmth and care in their property located on a small and pleasant windy knoll in Enugu, which itself means « on top of the small mountains ». The place was exceptional, nothing like Lagos: quiet, two retreatants per room, chapel, conference room, park; it was simple and clean, the cuisine was essentially composed of delicious classics: grilled fish, chicken, rice, fufu, taros, cassava leaves. The Chaplain was absent for the week, so the tabernacle had to be repositioned at the centre of the altar for me and the problem was sorted... We preached the five-day Ignatian retreat to forty men of good will, amongst whom a priest, who wanted to join the Society and came with a goat as a present; enough to sustain ourselves during the retreat! No absentees, nor desertions, the retreatants were on time, readily accepting the silence – I collected a fortune: about thirty cell phones... The sermons of Archbishop Lefebvre found their place right next to Saint Ignatius'. The day of the Prodigal Son was magnificent; the Fathers rejoiced having heard seven hours of confessions! Many blessings came from heaven to the Souls; the Holy Spirit worked wonders.

At the end of the retreat, we left the serenity of Enugu to betake ourself to the great Babylon with its ten million inhabitants, « *The City of Hustle and Bustle* ». Lagos is entrenched in a lagoon, from whence its name was derived after its discovery by the Portuguese in 1490. Some kind of African Venice, with its vast and dense forest of rusted roofs, scattered



Starting of the Third Order of the Society in Ghana

with mobile phone aeriels! We took the « *kekenapepe* », those tricycle-taxis imported from Asia, to avoid the perpetual traffic jams on the packed and potholed roads. Everywhere people were at work, small informal businesses were on every street corner, a dress-maker carried his old mechanical sewing machine on his shoulders, hordes of motorcycles blithely crossed the muddy, half-flooded and bumpy roads, carrying up to three passengers, with some times a baby at the back! The city clearly was alive!

6 In Nigeria, poverty lives side by side with arrogant wealth: 90% of the population of Africa's first oil producer live with less than two dollars a day. The peninsula of Ikoyi, with its exotic seafront villas and its enormous skyscrapers are a far cry from the poorer districts. This *Manhattan of the Tropics* overhangs its Bronx: the impressive and insalubrious fishermen slum of Makoko, filled with steel huts on stilts, which are only accessible by means of local dugouts. One passes from the wheelbarrow pushers shining with sweat, to the businessmen in luxurious cars with air conditioning, opening one of their tinted windows to buy a bag of dried bananas from a poor retailer on the street. This is where the nerve centre lies, fuelled by a resource discovered in 1960 which dramatised the destiny of the Biafra: The black gold of the Niger Delta. These striking contrasts favour the proliferation of charlatans: numerous sects with gigantic buildings compete with the mosques. The Pentecostal movements from the United States spread the message that success comes to those who pray. *The Latter Rain Assembly, The End-Time Church, Holy Ghost in Action, The Redeemers...* The Cherubims, the Seraphs, the churches of healing born during the plague and the *Born Again*, who throw themselves in the sea wearing their white dresses, to signify the baptism of 'new Christians'!

Nonetheless, the Catholic heart is still beating strongly

and the Faithful awaited us for the Sunday Mass. At the two Mass Centres, around 120 of the Faithful turned up; one of the centres was at someone's home, while the other was a rented terrace somewhere. During the conference, most questions revolved around which attitude to adopt with respect to the prevailing waves of charismaticism...we provided sacramentals, blessed the sick, water, houses and pious objects. A kind family welcomed us with great charity. They lived in the midst of the city centre, in a small room with two children; the kitchen was right next to the bed, we were tight with the plates on our laps! They constantly had power failures, which in the absence of a fan, made it very hard to breathe in the house. In spite of all this, they had been blessed by the Lord and had kept their Faith; despite the dances in the parishes, the never-ending calls for prayer from the muezzins or from the *Knight Fighters*, who wave weapons in the air in order to "kill the demons"...

In the midst of such huge difficulties, some have gone back to false gods and paganism, while others have to content themselves with a church full of modernism, and subscribe to ecumenical ideologies to try and reconcile what is irreconcilable, with the threat of Islam which often degenerates into blood shed; however some souls have been pushed towards the heroism of holiness. The Faithful, of whom I only saw the visible tip of the iceberg, proud to have priests and a vocation for Tradition, and noticing with perplexity the crisis of the Church, press for our settlement and hope to see Catholic life flourish again one day in their lands. Let us hope this visit encouraged them- God give us priests! It is also to be hoped that soon the Mission of Gabon, stronghold of the Society, will be only a part of our wider missionary outreach. This is enough to fill the hearts of several priests with priestly joy, may God Almighty allow us to come to the rescue of these souls! ■



# The Church in Africa

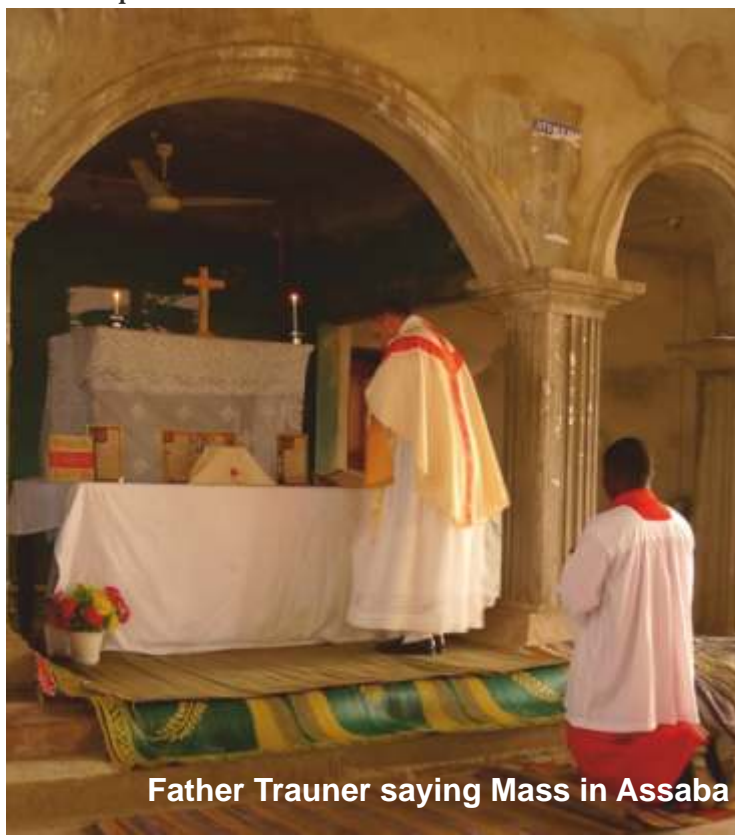
by Father Denis Bedel



## The Mariannahill Missionary Congregation (CMM)

This religious congregation, little known except for those places where it fulfils its apostolate, finds its origin with the Trappists. An Austrian monk, Father Franz Pfanner, Trappist and prior of the Mariastern Monastery in Bosnia, was sent to found a monastery in South Africa. In 1882, thirty monks landed at Port Elizabeth before being invited to come to the Vicariate near Durban by Bishop Jolivet OMI. This was in 1882. They baptised the land entrusted to them with the name "Mary-Ann Hill", in honour of Our Lady and her mother. The monastery would become an Abbey in 1885, Father Pfanner becoming its first abbot. His zeal knew no limits. In a short space of time his monks would help the missionaries in the evangelisation of the Zulus. Many houses affiliated to the Abbey were built in other areas (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia ...). Abbot Pfanner would also found the Precious Blood Sisters to work in schools. In the space of a few years, the Mariannahill Monastery would shine all over Southern Africa. In 1893 a new abbot was elected and Father-Abbot Pfanner retired to Emmaus, a humble mission where he would live as a hermit. However, a problem arose. How can Trappists live such an active life? Can they reconcile the missionary life with long hours of prayer, rigorous fasts, silence etc, as required by the Cistercian rule? The Abbey and the other houses founded by it would enter into conflict with the Trappist Order to the point that no other solution seemed possible except the dissolution of the "rebel" Abbey. Finally, in 1909, Pope Pius X would sign a decree of separation thereby establishing Mariannahill into an independent missionary congregation. This new religious society, keeping its

austerity, would now be able to work full time for the expansion of the Church in Africa. Father Pfanner died on 24th May 1909, his soul in peace. The immense work and methods of the Mariannahill Congregation are unanimously appreciated by South Africans, be it with those with whom they work as well as with the civil authority. At the death of its founder, Mariannahill had 55 priests and 223 brothers scattered in 42 centres, having converted more than 20,000 souls. The congregation continued to expand to other African countries, (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya...) as well as in the rest of the world. It receives aspirants in their Houses of Formation in Europe and North America. ■



Father Trauner saying Mass in Assaba

# The Priestly Society of Saint Pius X in Africa

For information:

Maison de district -  
Our Lady Queen of Africa  
House

P.O. Box 14881

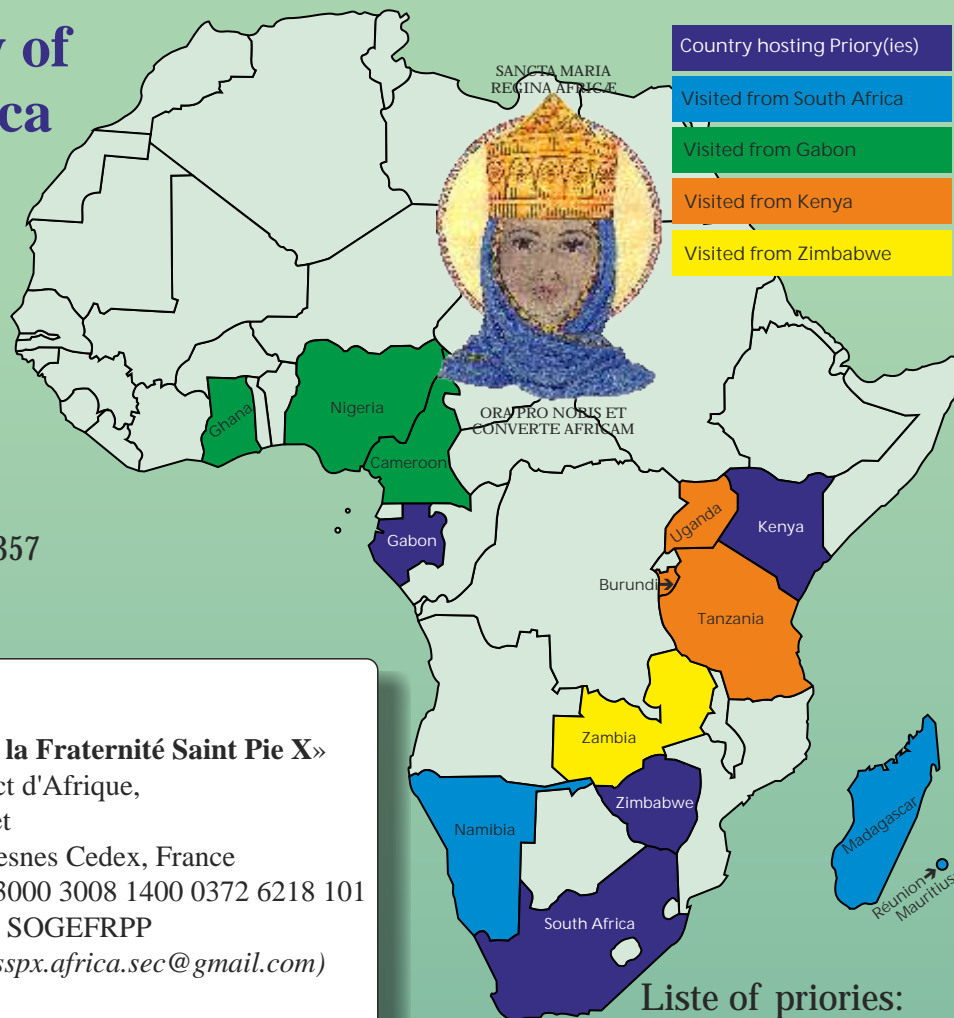
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South Africa

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Fax: +27 866 970 120

fssp.x.africa.sec@gmail.com



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-P.O. Box 878 - Roodepoort 1725

Tel: +27 11 763 1050 - Fax: +27 86 672 8789

[olsorrows@mweb.co.za](mailto:olsorrows@mweb.co.za)

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Bulwer - Durban 4001

-P.O. Box 52009 - Berea Road - Durban 4007

Tel & Fax: +27 31 201 6642

### GABON

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Mission Saint Pie X

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Tel: +241 76 60 18 - Fax: +241 74 62 15

[mspxgabon@yahoo.fr](mailto:mspxgabon@yahoo.fr)

Juvénat du Sacré-Cœur

-Quartier Rio - B. P. 2149 - Libreville

Tel. +241 72 18 66 - Fax. +241 72 18 65

[juvenatsacrecoeur@yahoo.fr](mailto:juvenatsacrecoeur@yahoo.fr)

### KENYA

#### Nairobi

Holy Cross Church & Priory

-9 & 11 Amboseli Rd. - Lavington

-P.O. Box 852 - 00502 Karen

Tel: +254 20 38 62 214

[holy.cross.priory@gmail.com](mailto:holy.cross.priory@gmail.com)

### ZIMBABWE

#### Harare

St. Joseph's Priory

-9 Jean Lane - Strathaven, Harare

Tel & Fax: +263 4 339 440

[sspxzim@yoafrica.com](mailto:sspxzim@yoafrica.com)