

**January 2024**

Dear Father Victor &

Friends at Holy Innocents.

Thanks for the acknowledgement to the last letter at the beginning of Advent. Here is a small follow-up, as we approach *Epiphany*.

Last Tuesday's 46-mile trip to Massatine, in the Gola-Konneh District of Cape Mount, was for me, the most joyous time of this Christmas Season.

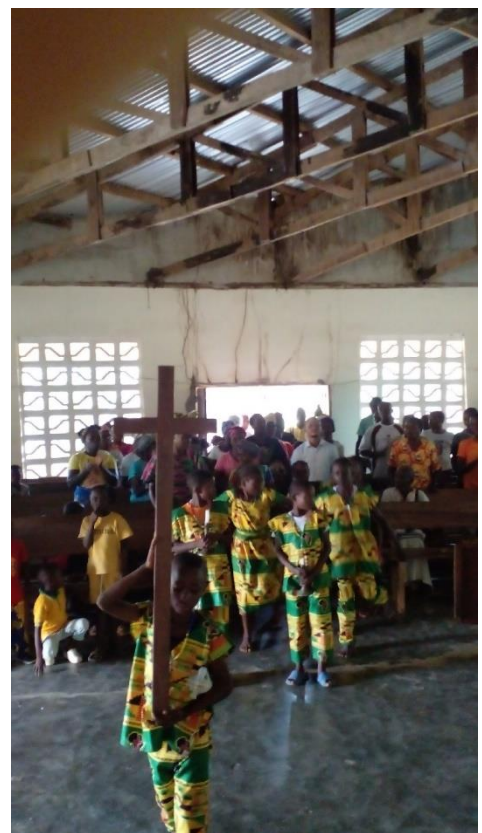
Massatine is a village that is the home of patients, who have been affected with Hanson's Disease. It is always a privilege to be with what must surely be one of the humblest communities, on earth.

As one passes through a forested area, there is a clearing and in front of the village, there is a beautiful octagonal church, dedicated to *St Damien of Molokai*.

Photo: St Damien of Molokai Church

Just across from the Church is the palm plantation that the late Sr Geraldine McGarry, a Dominican Sister, planted for the patients during the 1980's. Thanks to Sister, the people are still harvesting much needed palm nuts to process their cooking oil. And they also use the palm-nuts to make palm-butter, a soup that gives taste to the rice, or cassava.

As we entered the village in the pickup, the people must have heard the approaching vehicle, as they were already in the



**January 2024**

church. As I entered the sacristy, there were liturgical dancers and servers, ready to process into the church, and the choir raised Christmas songs in the Gola Language that we introduced over 40 years ago.

The Christmas Crib that I carry around, is always a special fascination for the children and I talk about the significance during a short homily. The offertory procession was a real celebration, with the liturgical dancers heralding the children and adults bringing up new rice, vegetables, bunches of bananas and papaya.

At Holy Communion, I was so happy to see the children and grandchildren of the patients, receiving the holy sacrament, having been baptised recently, on Christmas Day, by Fr Roger.

After Mass, we sat down on the front porch of the house, where Fr George Geayon lived, for many years; he is still remembered with deep affection by the people. Joseph Kollie, who is currently the oldest patient, at the age of 101, sat down with us and we enjoyed the potato-greens soup and rice.

Photo: Fr Garry Jenkins with  
101yr old Joseph Kollie



Then Jumah, a former student, presented a large rooster, for us to take back home. Jumah, used to live on St Dominic's

**January 2024**

Mission. He is now the *Town Chief*, which is an honour for all of us.

It was in 1977, when I first met Old Man Yonger. By then Jumah's late father was blind. He was the only surviving patient with Hanson's Disease, who had lived previously on *Massa's Island*, which is situated on Lake Piso. It was from that island, in 1948 that the patients moved to their present location, in order to sustain themselves, by cultivating suitable land for the growing of rice and cassava.

'Goodbyes' said, we then proceeded to the nearby village of Jenneh-brown, where our late catechist, Austin Seh, grew up. We have been helping Austin's son, Thomas, through High School and now he is preparing to study for a degree in Education. Thomas met his elderly grandmother and the rest of the family.

Since Austin died in 2018, this was the first time that Thomas had been able to visit his grandmother and the extended family. I promised that during the next Semester break, I would make it possible for Thomas to travel to Cape Mount, to spend the vacation with his family.

Following a prayer at Austin's grave, it was time to leave. Musa jumped into the pickup and called us, as we needed to cover the first 15 miles of dirt road, which has some narrow, make-shift bridges, before darkness fell.

Just before we reached the tar road, we met another former student, John. He was pushing a wheelbarrow, coming from a hard day's work, on the farm. John was walking with his wife Bendu, and they introduced their small baby, Joseph. And the Holy Family came to my mind, on the way to Egypt.

**January 2024**

After a ninety-minute drive on the tar road, we arrived back safely, in Bomi. And I thanked God for such a pleasant day and thought of the many wonderful people, we had met.

Praying that the good Lord continues to guide and bless you all, through this New Year.

Kindest regards,

Fr. Garry.