

# FRONTLINE REPORT

November–December 2007  
Vol. 45 No. 6



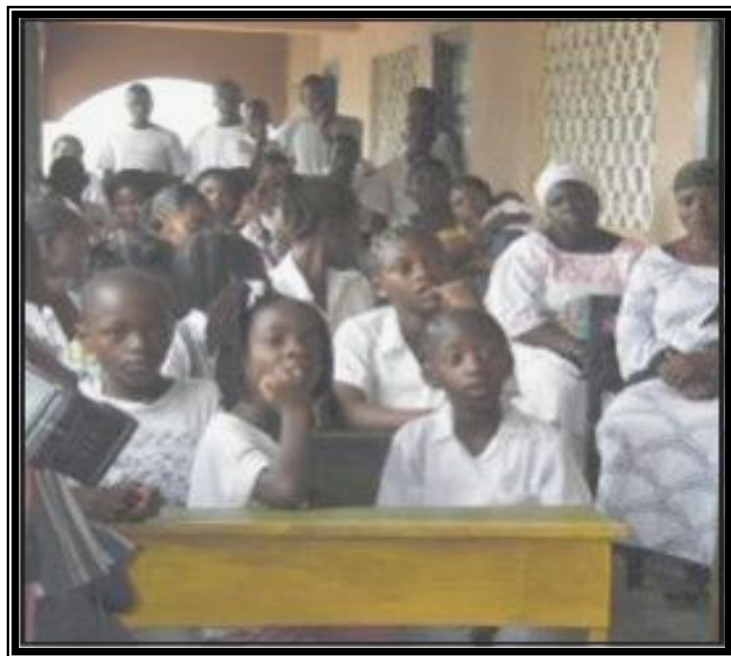
Society of African Missions  
American Province

23 Bliss Avenue, Tenafly, NJ 07670  
Ph. (201) 567 0450  
www.smafathers.org

## Poverty - Obstacle to Education



Above: A father in **Ganta, Liberia** asks, "Please help me pay the school fees for my two children."



Above: Students are happy to be attending the **Buduburam School for the Deaf** at Buduburam Liberian Refugee Camp in Ghana.

In the West, we take so much for granted. If we were to walk in the footsteps of our brothers and sisters in a developing country, our eyes would be opened to a harsh reality that faces 3/4 of the world's population. Many eke out an existence in dire poverty. Basic needs—food, water, shelter, health care and work—must be met before other important needs like education can be addressed. One of the biggest concerns parents have today is their children's education. The desire is there, but

often the opportunity and the means are lacking.

Jacob in Liberia writes: *Please help me go to school. I do not have anyone to help me. My Mother is not working. She is very old and she cannot see. My Father used to send me to school, but he is not alive anymore. So, I am kindly asking you to help me.*

Letters like this are common, especially as Liberia recovers from years of civil strife. Most students' education was severely disrupted by the years of

war and chaos. On the brink of graduation, the high school students' hope was shattered as war enveloped their country, making normal activities, like school, non-existent for a time. As life returns to normal, students seek to complete their schooling and to go on for college and specialty training. Funding for higher education is needed, as most people cannot afford the tuition. With 80% of unemployment, people try to help themselves, but it is a

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## Poverty - Obstacle to Education

(Continued from Page 1)  
struggle to cover even the basic needs. Getting a good education is necessary, if the people are to fill the great need in their country for qualified professionals and skilled, well-trained workers in the various trades: carpentry, construction, plumbing, electricity and agriculture. **Education is the path to a better future!**

As Missionaries try to respond to the needs, it can be overwhelming at times. There are so many lacking the means and the opportunity to get an education. However, if we all shared in this mission of **helping students in need**, who otherwise would not have a chance to receive an education, we would be making a great contribution towards a better future for the students and their countries.

*Education is  
the most  
powerful  
weapon  
which you  
can use to  
change the  
world*

*Nelson Mandela*

## The Magi's Treasure

by Fr. Daniel Lynch, S.M.A.



*“The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims His handiwork.” (Psalm 19:1-2).*

Vincent van Gogh expressed the sentiment of the Psalmist in slightly different language when he wrote, “I have....a terrible need... shall I say the word? ... of religion. Then I go out at night and paint the stars.”

The stars speak to many in varied ways and they do, indeed, proclaim the glory of God and his handiwork. The famed astronomer Carl Sagan, in *Cosmos*, tells us that “what we see at night is the merest smattering of the nearest stars. Meanwhile the cosmos is rich beyond measure: **the total number of stars in the universe is greater than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the planet earth.**”

The theologian Denis Edwards, in his work *Jesus and the Cosmos*, writes “**that the sun is one of more than two hundred thousand million stars that make up our galaxy, the Milky Way,**” and

“**astronomers now tell us that the observable universe contains more than a hundred thousand million galaxies.**”

And, so it was, one starry night, that three men from the East, fascinated with the heavens, variously known as astrologers, kings, Magi, or wise men, gazed into the star-studded sky. “The star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was” (Mt. 2: 9-10). It shone upon the Maker of them all, God made flesh who came to dwell amongst us.

Selecting one star among millions, or, at least, one from the many made visible, was an act of faith and mystical insight more than one of astronomical calculation.

The Magi were mystics, I suspect. The Carmelite John Welch in his understanding of mystics and from his reading of the noted German theologian Karl Rahner, says that mystics “were the same as we are, [and] not a different breed of humanity.” Where they differed from many of us was in their “particular sensitivity to the transcendent.” This sensitivity is “offered to everyone everywhere.” It only requires the eyes of faith and then, Welch tells us, every bush “may be the burning bush,” and every star will proclaim His handiwork!

Like the Magi and other mystics, we too can “come to the awareness in our lives that we are continually seeing, touching, tasting God.” **We only need to look up, to look within, and to look around us in order to see that everything speaks of the divine.**

Robert Frost in his little poem,  
(Continued on Page 4)

1-3: Images from African styled Mass



African Dance workshop

6-8: Many vendors presented a variety of African Arts and Crafts



6

**5th Annual S.M.A. AFRICAN FESTIVAL**

Heartfelt thanks to all who supported and participated in the 5th S.M.A. African Festival on September 8, 2007 at Tenafly, NJ. It was a lively experience of African Culture and Art.



Tenafly City Mayor, Peter Rustin and Festival's MC

African Drumming workshop



Fr. F. Wright and friends enjoying the Festival



4-5: Performers encouraged people to dance to African rhythms

## The Magi's Treasure

(Continued from Page 2)

*The Star-Splitter*, tells of a modern day wise man. He was a New England farmer who loved gazing into the night skies more than the drudgery of tilling rocky soil. Desirous of owning a telescope, he knew that he was "Beyond the age of being given one for Christmas." So he disposed of his farm "And spent the proceeds on a telescope to satisfy a life-long curiosity about our place among the infinities." So important was this quest that he was heard to say, "Someone in every town, seems to me, owes it to the town to keep one."

Perhaps it was with the same sentiment that the Magi of old were employed to gaze into the heavens to show us "our place among the infinities." With their "particular sensitivity to the transcendent" they reminded us that "we are continually seeing, touching and tasting God." May this Christmas be a reminder that we too owe it to "the town" and to ourselves to keep our eyes focused, once again, on "our place among the infinities."

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE by Fr. Frank Wright, S.M.A.

One of the more interesting ideas to come out in the area of Justice and Peace work is the concept of "restorative justice." Although the term may be new to many of us, the idea behind it is very familiar, because it is the ethos behind the concept of justice in the Old and New Testaments. When a wrong is committed, it takes more than finding the guilty party and punishing him in order to restore the original harmony in Society.

This idea is behind much of the practice of justice in traditional African society. Where I was working for the past four years in rural Kenya among the Kikuyu-speaking community, even today many disputes are settled by the clan leaders. Once everyone has had a chance to have his say, and the pros-

and cons have been discussed at great length, then the leaders can attempt to heal the breach that the wrong has occasioned.

At present, the Advocacy Network for Africa, an informal assembly of many U.S. organizations interested in current African affairs, and in particular in the numerous conflicts that have impeded development on the continent, has prepared a resolution for presentation to the U.S. Congress. The resolution urges the Congress to use the concept of "restorative justice" as a tool in its foreign policy.

This concept has been attempted in South Africa, Rwanda, and Burundi, and although it is not a panacea for all of the political and ethnic conflicts on the continent, it promises to heal the wounds of Society far more effectively than the traditional English adversarial system, which seeks punishment for the wrong but does nothing for the victim.

*Fr. Wright is the Director of S.M.A.'s Office of Justice and Peace.*

Merry Christmas  
and  
Happy New Year!

