

## The Great Family Spirit of Our African Missionaries

Missionaries truly form a great family — members of the same household — proud of each other. Held together by a family ideal, they forge a chain of charity strong enough to weather political storms and the daily vicissitudes of life in a foreign, tropical world. The opportunities of helping one another occur many times daily. Thus life on the Missions today, as in the past, gives a perfect example of the outcome when “Brother helps brother.”

On the Missions there is certainly a strong feeling of being cut off. Home ties are not “just around the corner.” Immediacy is as urgent in a Bush Station in Africa as it is on Wall Street. The usual means of obtaining food supplies, of repairing broken articles, of overcoming impassable roads — all these, and many, many more cry out for daily attention.

These daily demands are met by the priests and the nuns for each other. The priest turns to the domestically-inclined nun for the necessary household articles, sanctuary supplies, culinary advice, etc. (Shops are miles away from Bush Stations.) And the nuns in their turn receive the help of the priests when some mechanical device goes wrong, when students must be transported to distant schools for Teaching Practice, when motors stall (this is often) — emergencies seem to be forever occurring.

All missionaries act as couriers for each other — whether it is a crate of school supplies, a bale of children's uniform material, a few chickens or goats, building supplies of all shapes and weights — anything down to a two-word verbal message.

In this great family of missionaries special tribute must be paid to the African Priests and Sisters who have laboured side by side with us through the years. Among these are our own *Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus*, the first Congregation of African Sisters in Nigeria, who are the “spiritual grand-daughters” of our foundress, Mother Cornelia Connelly.

Here in Eastern Nigeria, where the Holy Child Missions first took root, we have been aided and guided especially by the *St. Patrick's Fathers* at every turn of the road. And the *Medical Missionaries of Mary* bind our wounds and heal our bodies. And all this, these Sisters do graciously and professionally, with a Christ-like charity to all who are in need. They pour oil on the troubled waters of life in a strange, tropical country.

This thoughtfulness for each other oils the machinery of every day Mission Life. This is the charity of the Missions. Thus it truly happens “That a brother helped by his brother is like a strong city.” And practical experience has changed, on the Mission, the old adage “What is mine is yours”, to “What was mine, is now yours.”

So, as we face certain imminent changes in Africa today, we know God has placed over us wise and prudent Bishops. He has given us the help of kindly, brotherly priests. We Sisters, without our Bishops and Priests, are of little value. The Priests bring us Life — every day in all our convents and schools, they bring us in the Mass, the Holy Child Jesus for whom we toil and labour.

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