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Mission Coop 2020 Letter

The Assumptionists are a world-wide religious congregation founded in 1845 by Venerable Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon to, in his words, “penetrate the world with a Christian idea…and to do so in words that it can understand.” The Congregation is located in 30 countries and numbers some 1,000 priests and brothers. Inspired by the founder’s vision, the Assumptionists are engaged in the great causes of God and society: education, the press, social outreach, pilgrimages, ecumenical work and foreign missions. Among these foreign missions, one could cite those in Asia (Vietnam, Korea, and the Philippines), in Latin America (Mexico, Ecuador, Chile), in Eastern Europe (Russia, Bulgaria, and Turkey) and in Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, and Madagascar).

In the United States, Americans would most probably be familiar with some of our publications like *Catholic Digest* and the missalette, *Living with Christ*. We also run a university, Assumption University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

This year we would like to draw attention to one of our neediest missions located in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most Americans are unaware that the Congo has been in a state of civil conflict since 1997, that is, more than 20 years. What is more, most are unaware that during this time, according to United Nations reports, some **six million** people have died from the effects of this conflict….from the violence itself, disease, or malnutrition. Unfortunately, one of the worst hit areas has been the Province of North Kivu where more than 150 Assumptionists work and study. In 2013 three Assumptionist priests were kidnapped by one of the many unidentified armed militia and are presumed dead. In 2016, after surviving more than seven attempts on his life, Assumptionist Fr. Vincent Machozi, who had been a doctoral student at Boston University, was shot dead by unknown soldiers in his home village while visiting his mother on her 98th birthday. His crime – denouncing the government’s complicity in mass killings of his people and in the scandalous and brutal exploitation of the region’s natural resources (gold, uranium, precious woods, and coltan, a mineral essential for fiber optic production).

Although there have been calls for our religious to leave their works and seek safety elsewhere, they have refused to abandon their people and leave them at the mercy of multiple military factions. To the contrary, they have continued to run a university, high schools, dispensaries, numerous parishes, skill training centers, radio stations, and social outreach programs. In spite of the ongoing unrest, there are more than 60 young men in the area preparing to become Assumptionist priests or brothers.

If we were to cite one particular work in this region that has been the focus of special attention on our part, it would be the Prince of Peace School Complex in the second largest city of the province, Beni. This town has been one of the hotbeds of violence and terrorism. It is not unusual for entire villages in this area to be attacked in the middle of the night or farmers to be slaughtered in their fields in broad daylight. As a result, large numbers of people have fled to Beni seeking safety while they abandon their homes and sources of income. Among these internal refugees, there have been orphans of war. To provide them and other children with a

basic education, Assumptionists in the United States have undertaken a vigorous effort to help build a grammar school and, eventually, a high school. Construction began 5 years ago with the first class of pre-school and first-graders arriving in the fall of 2016. What began with just 4 classrooms and less than 80 students has blossomed into a complex of 13 classrooms and over 400 students. Also, ground was broken this past year for the first phase of a high school.

Our African Assumptionist brothers chose to call the school Prince of Peace to convey the heart of the education they wish to offer their students. The school has become a sign of hope for a people who feel that the world has forgotten them and their plight.

We wish that we could have been here at your parish in person to meet you and see you face to face, but we understand the current situation has made that pleasure impossible. Nevertheless, we would like to thank you for giving us an opportunity to present our missionary efforts to you and thank you in advance for your kind generosity.

Gratefully,

The Assumptionists