

# BOLAHUN:



## WHEN CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS REQUIRES A DECISION

From 1922 to 1982 the Order of the Holy Cross had missions in Bolahun, Liberia. In the 60 years our Order was there many hundreds of people were helped by our clinic or graduated from our schools. Brs. Christian and Leonard were stationed there and Br. Reginald has visited. Even the disastrous Civil War of 1989–96, 1999–2003 failed to eliminate our bonds of affection. Below, Mr. Lawrence Maxim, science teacher at St. Augustine's High School, Bolahun, shares Bolahun's experience of Ebola and preparations for Christmas.

From the two meetings about Christmas held in the St. Mary's church, not much is on the way with regards of celebrating Christmas in grand style. This is due to the untold sufferings some people went through during the Ebola crisis.

The first Ebola victim in Bolahun was one Mr. James T. Daah, a native of Bolahun who was assigned at the Foya Borma hospital. Having allegedly contracted the virus, he came to Bolahun. When repeated attempts to take him back to Foya for care and treatment [in the hospital] failed, his wife decided to take him to her home in Mambo. They were however refused entry and he eventually died in an old farm spot where he was buried by the burial team from Foya. Immediately after his death, the occupants of the two houses belonging to the Daah family were quarantined.

Sadly enough, the second and the third victims of this pernicious Ebola virus were a health worker of Bolahun called Zacchaeus B. Harris and his beloved girl friend who died in August. Zacchaeus was believed to have contracted the virus when he went to treat one Patrick Kollie a resident of Nyorkoitahun. Mr. Patrick Kollie is believed to have travelled from the district of Voinjama where he contracted the virus. He was observed to have been sick from the 20<sup>th</sup> of July to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August when he finally succumbed to the Ebola virus.

Up to present, the death toll in Bolahun from March to August stands at six (6) persons: three males and three females. However, with the help of the Ebola Emergency Response Team who

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conducted regular sensitization and awareness campaigns, residents in Bolahun and its environs were able to follow the preventive measures (the Do's and Don'ts) such as regular hand washing, no shaking hands, no hugging, no eating of bush meat, etc... The psychosocial counseling to affected family members as well as the door to door sensitization of the response of M.S.F. ["Doctors Without Borders"] and the Liberia National Red Cross made a great impact. Today, Bolahun and her surrounding villages have zero case loads and the Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) in Foya is empty.

This year, as a result, it has been decided to mourn our beloved ones and limit Christmas to church service. Secondly, Ebola is still somewhere in the corner and we do not want to encourage crowds by inviting mask dancers (devils), women groups (sassa dancers) etc.. However, uniforms for the occasion have been purchased and shall be worn by both men and women during the church service and the feasts. There will be singing but no dancing around the town or from door to door and there will be no sports played like last year.

This year, [the celebration] might last only for two days instead of five days. There will be plenty of food and drinks as usual. The only difference to me will be the dancing around the town and the population will be far less than that of last year.

Nevertheless. Our greatest fear for now hinges on three factors: 1. People moving from Monrovia to Lofa 2. Our porous borders as people (especially) business men and women moving to Guinea, Sierra Leone and back 3. The male patients discharged from the Case Management Center (C.M.C.) to take precautionary measures. If only travelling restrictions are monitored or put under control, I believe that Bolahun shall remain Ebola free. Christmas Greetings to all of you in North America.

LAWRENCE MAXIM, A/OHC



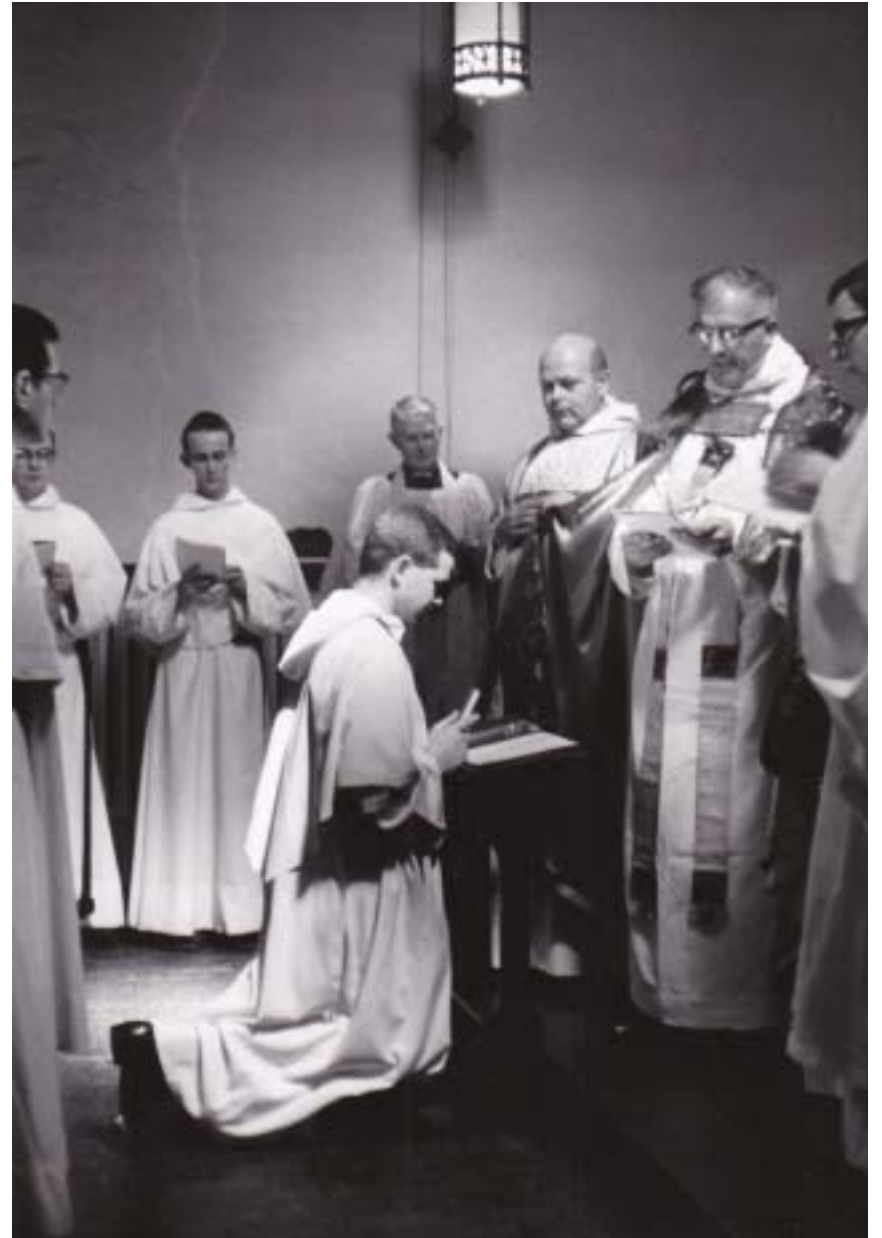
*Traditional Christmas Mask Dancers (Bolahun)*



### *Christmas at the Priory*

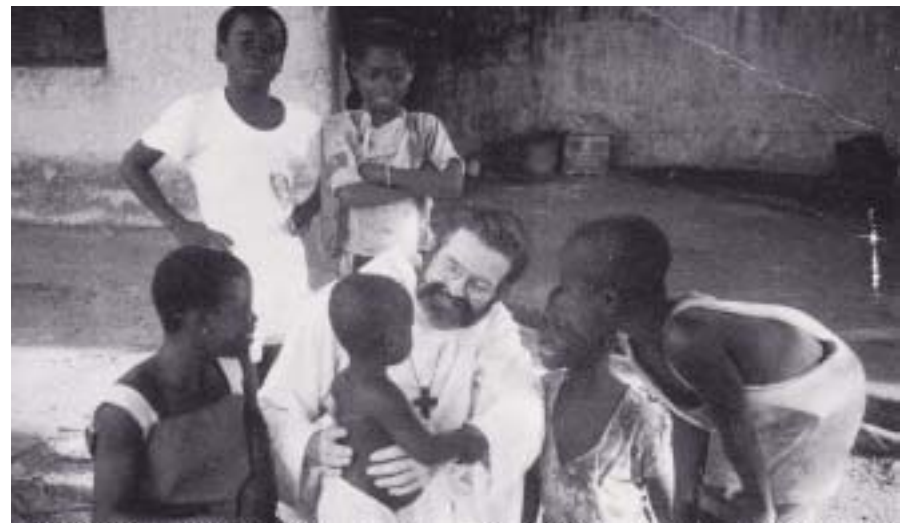
Our Christmas will begin with the singing of the "Great O's". At Vespers on each of the eight days preceding Christmas we will sing, first seven antiphons proclaiming a title of Christ: "O Wisdom", "O Adonai", "O Root of Jesse", and so on; then, on the eighth day we will sing, "O Virgin of Virgins", honouring the woman who was instrumental in bringing them into our history. After Vespers on Christmas Eve there will be a great dispersal as those with parish duties go to various churches. After a simple "Day Mass" on Christmas Day for those at home, the community will reassemble for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vespers of Christmas and a quiet "family" Dinner. Our celebration in "grand style" will be on the following day, Boxing Day, when we will gather with friends for a Mass and Dinner in honour of St. Stephen. Naturally, in addition to the Divine Office, the Brothers will be characteristically busy: **Br. Leonard** is in Ghana, teaching; **Br. David** is assisting at the Cathedral and several other parishes, and doing spiritual direction; **Br. Christian** is doing spiritual direction and continues his friendship with his former parish, St. John's West Toronto; **Br. Reginald** does spiritual direction and assists **Br. Brian** at St. Paul the Apostle, Rexdale; he also helps a number of other parishes with specific transitions; **Br. Richard** has finished with teaching for this term at Trinity College and, aside from directing some doctoral theses, is concentrating on spiritual direction and writing. We are all looking forward to a visit from **Br. Adrian** on Christmas. One further thing: more than 6 month ago, the last of our wallboard kitchen cabinets "gave up the ghost"; so, after 25 years we were obliged to renovate. Recently we were informed that the last details would be ready in time for Christmas. A wonderful Christmas present indeed!

## A Golden Jubilee!



On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Christian George Swayne, made his Life Vow in the Order of the Holy Cross. He vowed to Almighty God that he would observe the three-fold Vow of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience in the Order of the Holy Cross for the rest of his life. The Order has since changed the form of that Vow to Stability, Conversion, and Obedience, but not its substance—Christian Swayne has been keeping that Vow (in both its forms) faithfully ever since. Now, on Thursday, **March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at 12 noon** he will be celebrating his Golden Jubilee! Fifty years of observing that Vow and (we trust) many more to come. The celebration will take place at **St. John's Convent, 233 Cummer Ave., Toronto, ON M2M 2E8**, and will be followed by a reception. This will give us an opportunity to share another anniversary at the same time: the Silver Jubilee of Sr. Jessica Kennedy, SSJD, who made her own Vow on the same day in 1990. We hope as many of you as possible can join in these celebrations.

This 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is very important to all of us, in part because, as a Canadian, Christian emphasized to the Order the importance of having a Canadian House, and Holy Cross Priory is the fruit. But more than that, given the moving letter from our Associate Arthur Maxim, is his deep commitment to Africa. He spent 13 years there, first at Bolahun, later in Ghana. Since then, he has remained at "home" in Canada, where we are all immensely proud of him. **THE MONKS AT HOLY CROSS PRIORY**



*Br. Christian's Liberian "Family"*

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*The cover art is a detail from Brian Kershnik's stunning print, "Nativity"*