



# Mission Report

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- \* **HLI's First Francophone Africa Priest Institute**
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Dear Pro-Life Friend in Christ,

In this month's newsletter, HLI Director of International Outreach and Expansion, Dr. Joseph Meaney, reports from Benin, Africa, where HLI held its first Francophone (French-Speaking) Africa Priest Institute. I had the great pleasure of attending this event and of witnessing first-hand the extraordinary fervor of these dedicated Churchmen.

Benin has been blessed with a growing number of vocations in recent years. To meet the demand for priestly formation, it has gone from having a single seminary 15 years ago to now having three. During this time, HLI has been an active part of seminary formation on life issues, and thanks in large part to the efforts of HLI Director of Francophone Africa, George Wirnkar, each one of these seminaries includes HLI's Seminarians for Life International program.

You will also read in this newsletter about the very effective presence of HLI and its Affiliates at the Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly held in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. Despite the efforts by some to expand anti-life policies throughout the Americas, HLI's voice was heard in strong opposition, and many of the proposed policies were rejected, while many others were at least weakened.

Finally, we announce in this issue HLI's new **Fr. Paul Marx Pro-Life Award**. This award has been established for the dual purpose of honoring our founder, Fr. Paul Marx, and recognizing the work of pro-life leaders active today. The first recipient of this award is Mr. John Smeaton, National Director of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children.

Please continue to pray for HLI's pro-life missionaries and all the wonderful projects that God has called us to, and may God reward you for all your sacrificial support.

Yours in Christ and in Our Lady,

Father Shenan J. Boquet  
President, Human Life International



Fr. Shenan J. Boquet  
President

## MISSIONARY TRIP TO BENIN

*By Joseph Meaney PhD, HLI Director of International Outreach and Expansion, June - July 2015*

HLI organized our first Francophone Africa Priest Institute this year. We chose for its location the small West African nation of Benin, which has a population of 10.5 million souls and is slightly smaller than the US state of Pennsylvania. Human Life International has always benefited from a warm welcome there. I have personally embarked on pro-life missions to Benin three times, and George Wirnkar, HLI's regional director for Francophone Africa, has gone many more times.

Benin had a rocky road after independence with military coups and governments, followed by a Marxist regime from 1974-1989. Happily, democracy returned and the Beninois delegation stood proudly with the Holy See to defend life, and also helped to prevent the proclamation of abortion as a human right by the United Nations at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994. They also have a vigorous birthrate of 5 children per family on average, though this is a decline from a Total Fertility Rate of 6.5 in 1995.



## THREATS AGAINST LIFE

Because of Benin's strong pro-life stance and laws, anti-life groups have targeted them. In fact, The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) organized a symposium in Cotonou, Benin in 1997 for the Francophone Africa region to promote its anti-life agenda. IPPF received money from the United Nations Population Fund

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**Thank you!**

(UNFPA) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others, to act against the 1920 French law that banned all contraception and abortion and made all propaganda in favor of birth control or abortion illegal in France and its colonies. This law remained in effect after independence.

The end result of the many high-level efforts to promote population control in Benin was the Reproductive Health Law of 2003. This legislation explicitly provides for Benin to have legal abortion for the first time in cases of a risk to the life of the mother, pregnancy resulting from rape or incest and fetal handicap. The law also makes contraceptive promotion and distribution not only legal but also a “reproductive health right” for the population. Clearly, there is much work to do to defend life in Benin.

## **EXPLOSION OF CATHOLICISM IN AFRICA**

One of the beautiful aspects of going to Sub-Saharan Africa is to witness the massive growth of the Church there. From 1900 to 2000 the Catholic population of Africa went from 2 to 140 million faithful. What incredible fruitfulness! Benin is currently 27% Catholic and growing, with about 16% of the population in other Christian denominations. Muslims claim 24% and 17% are explicitly followers of the Vodun cult. Other pagan traditional religions are also present. Between the years 2000 and 2013 the number of Catholic priests in Benin jumped from 415 to 858! This all the more impressive since

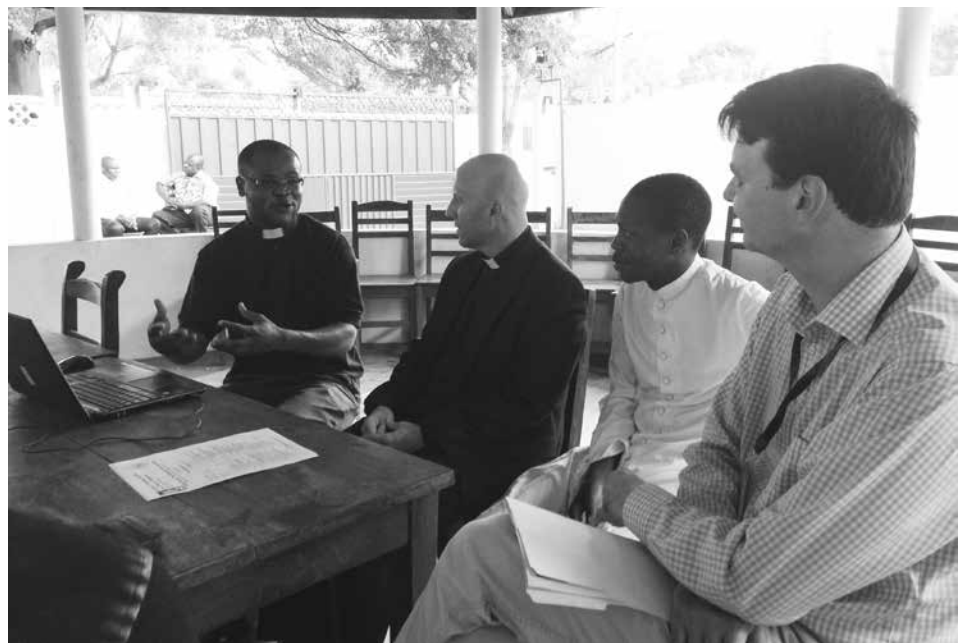
an additional 250 Beninois priests are serving as missionaries abroad.

HLI has had a fantastic response to our Seminarians for Life International program in Benin. Our program grew in tandem as the Church in Benin added two new major seminaries to the original St. Gall Seminary in Ouidah because they were stacked full with seminarians. Our pro-life seminarian program is active in all of Benin’s seminaries. This is largely a tribute to George Wirnkar’s work over many years.

We decided that Benin was the best place to encourage our “graduates” from the HLI seminarian pro-life program and start groups of pro-life priests in their respective countries. These young priests are carrying out their apostolates in a wide variety of settings, from parishes to chaplaincies and other ministries. We gathered 88 priests, 10 sisters, 18 seminarians and 8 lay people from Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Togo, Nigeria and Cameroon. We brought the priests in from these different countries and gave presentations and HLI pro-life materials to bring back with them, including St. Michael the Archangel prayer cards, pro-life films, and books. Africans hate to exclude anyone. The virtue of solidarity is highly developed there. This explains why so many seminarians, religious sisters and even some lay leaders came to an event focused on priests.

Our theme this year was “Consecrated Persons: Contemporary Challenges to the Christian Family.” It was wonderful to hear the testimonies of these fervent young priests. Fr. Benoit Tourn from Cameroon described how he was so enthusiastic to start work in pro-life and pro-family ministry after his contact with HLI that his bishop appointed him

*Continued on page 7...*



**Fr. Benoit Tourn, far left, discusses his pro-life program in Cameroon.**

## HLI Helps Lead Pro-Life and Pro-Family Surprise Victory at OAS

As it does each year, the Organization of American States (OAS) holds a General Assembly attended by national ambassadors of the 35 Member States of the OAS—including the United States—which comprise the countries of the continent of America. During the General Assembly, civil society organizations, such as Human Life International, also attend to contribute to position and policy discussions. This past June, the General Assembly was held at the historic OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C., and several representatives from HLI’s affiliate network in Latin America confronted the anti-life, anti-family organizations in attendance and defeated attempts to push their radical agenda in the Americas.

Human Life International representatives have attended OAS events for the past several years in order to work with other pro-life, pro-family groups to fight for language protecting the life and dignity of the most vulnerable in OAS declarations. These declarations can have real impact on the laws and policies of member states.

Just one month before the Assembly, in May 2015, Luis Almagro from Uruguay was elected as the new OAS Secretary General. Almagro, a former senator, minister of foreign affairs, and diplomat in his country, was known for promoting a “revolutionary” and “trailblazing” agenda in Uruguay favoring legal abortion, the redefinition of marriage, and marijuana distribution.

Now in the position of OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro has promised to bring “the Uruguay model” to the rest of the countries of the American continent.

Although HLI Uruguay Director Maria Freira could not attend, she organized and prepared a five-member delegation of Uruguayan pro-life leaders who were ready to respond to the anti-life

**Several representatives from HLI’s affiliate network in Latin America confronted the anti-life, anti-family organizations in attendance and defeated attempts to push their radical agenda in the Americas.**

and anti-family proposals that have become common in recent years at OAS meetings. Her work was complemented by other preparatory work from HLI’s Latin American leadership, in addition to that of other groups who have recently realized the strategic importance of the OAS.

Also flying in for the key meeting were HLI El Salvador Director Julia de Cardenal, HLI Nicaragua Director Rafael Cabrera, HLI Bolivia Director Sonia Vera, HLI Guatemala Director Pablo Ortega, and HLI Puerto Rico legal advisor Marlene Gillette-Ibern. HLI Panama’s directors Gloria Grifo and Gloria Lozano appointed representatives who were joined by HLI collaborators from Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru, who were joined by staff from HLI’s world headquarters in Front Royal, Virginia.

Since recent OAS sessions have become increasingly animated, given the deep divisions of the civil society organizations on both sides of the key issues, there was reason to expect fireworks. Such expectations were not in vain.



There was a tremendous amount of drama during the sessions, including clear concern that the pro-life and pro-family side was so well represented, which was unexpected by the anti-family organizations. Thanks to many prayers and the tireless efforts of the pro-life representatives, elements of the anti-life agenda were weakened or eliminated from approved proposals of the Assembly, and certain pro-life principles were included, even the right to life from conception to natural death.

At one session with the entire assembly, there was a question and answer dialogue encounter between Secretary Almagro and the civil society representatives. The first question came from HLI El Salvador Director Julia de Cardenal, who pointedly stated that the laws in El Salvador protect the right to life of every human person from conception to natural death, and that she expected that the new OAS Secretary General would respect the laws and sovereignty of her country.

The shock and applause throughout the cavernous room were thunderous!

Following Ms. Cardenal, other questions and comments that came from pro-life representatives clearly demonstrated to Secretary Almagro and the ambassadors that an anti-life and anti-family agenda at the OAS would be strongly opposed.

The pro-life delegation from Uruguay was also able to secure a brief closed-door meeting with Secretary General Almagro where they spoke with him, as fellow Uruguayans, about the reality of abortion in Uruguay and asked him not to promote an anti-life and anti-family agenda at the OAS. One of the members of the Uruguay pro-life delegation told Secretary General Almagro that he hoped that their words had touched his heart.

Sadly, a new treaty on the rights of the elderly was approved at the Assembly that includes sections on alleged gender, sexual, and reproductive health “rights.” The treaty also includes a “right” to request euthanasia. To date, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay have signed the treaty. Given the presence and the work of the pro-life leaders at the assembly, however, several countries said that they will not sign the treaty.

After the conclusion of the event, HLI joined its collaborators in a press conference on the steps of the OAS building, in which leaders repeated calls for the OAS to respect national sovereignty and not engage in what Pope Francis has called “ideological colonization” of these Christian nations. Moreover, one of HLI’s collaborators hosted a meeting with Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations and the OAS, who encouraged and thanked the pro-life leaders for their mission at the OAS.

HLI is already looking toward next year’s OAS General Assembly in the Dominican Republic in order to continue to lead the 35 OAS Member State ambassadors towards a culture that will reflect the authentic reality about the human person and the human family throughout the Americas.



**HLI-Uruguay collaborator Carlos Lafigliola speaks at the pro-life coalition press conference held in front of the OAS building on June 15.**

## HLI Fr. Paul Marx Pro-Life Award



**H**uman Life International has established the Fr. Paul Marx Pro-life Award both to honor HLI's founder, Fr. Paul Marx, and to recognize the commitment of outstanding pro-life leaders. The first recipient of this award is Mr. John Smeaton, National Director of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, who received the award during the Seventh Prayer Congress for Life in Fatima, Portugal.

### ABOUT FATHER MARX

In the late 1950s, Fr. Marx received a special call from the Lord to spread the message of the Faith to protect respect for human dignity and the family, especially to protect unborn babies whose lives are at risk. The call led him to launch the Human Life Institute in 1972, which became Human Life International in 1981.

From the beginning, it was clear the Lord was blessing Fr. Marx's mission in very special ways. In 1979, Fr. Marx met Pope John Paul II, who said to him, "You are doing the most important work on earth." Ten years later in another meeting, John Paul II called him, "The Apostle of Life."

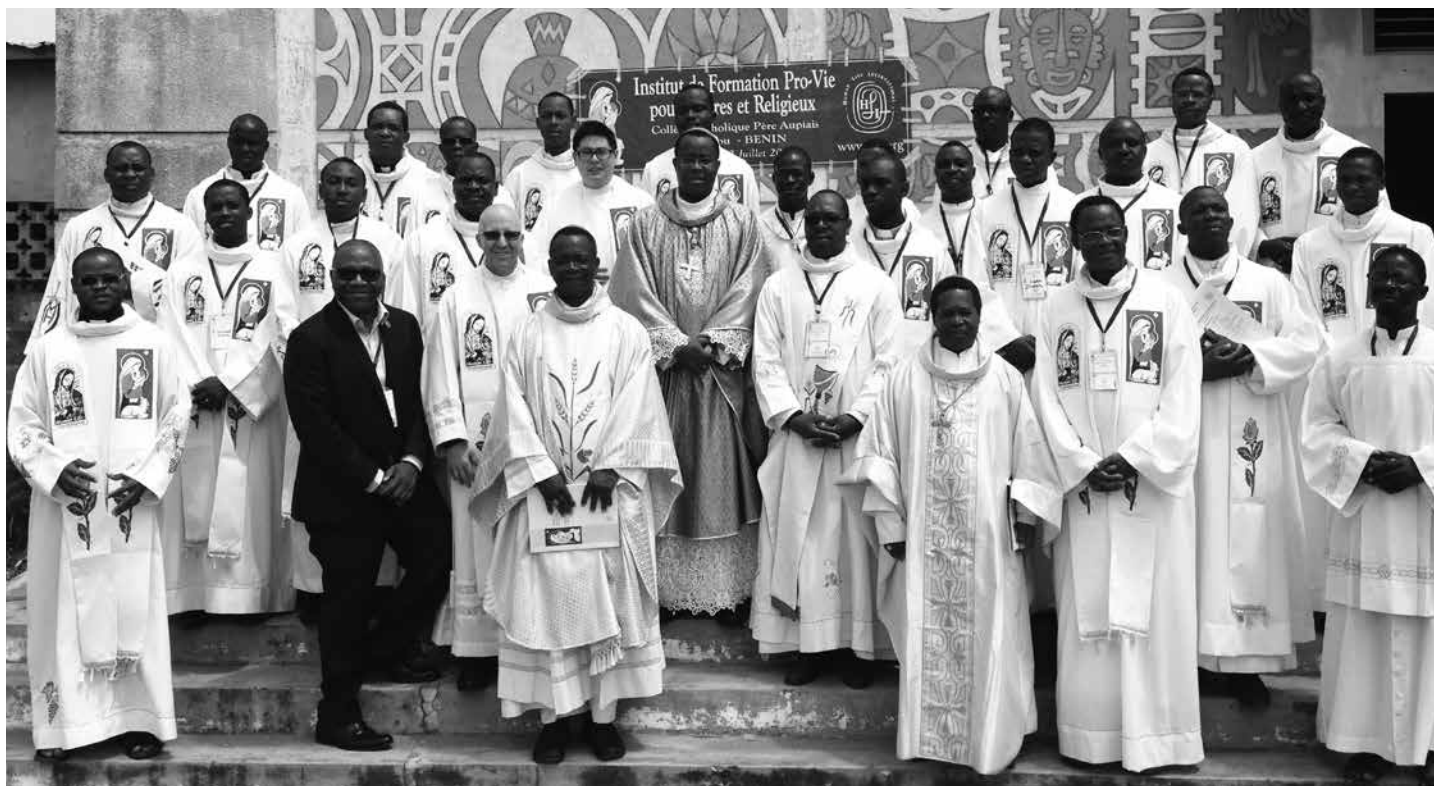
Human life cannot be defended effectively without a firm belief in the Creator and Source of Life, in God. Fr. Marx underscored that the faith must be taught in an integral way, both in its dogmatic and moral teachings. This teaching needs to be fortified by a serious spiritual life, the frequent reception of the sacraments and systematic spiritual reading. Fr. Marx underlined early in his apostolate that, "HLI's most important service is to present the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, clear-headed analysis of what's taking place in society, and, based on its international experience, suggestions for effective ways to deal with problems."

Fr. Marx also understood early in this effort that the Holy Spirit was moving him to spread the pro-life message worldwide. His boundless energy and knowledge of the pro-life movement inspired leaders on all continents. In more than a half century of pro-life activism, Fr. Marx visited all fifty states of the USA and ninety individual countries, travelling over three million miles, or the equivalent of six round-trips to the moon.



**Left to right: HLI Regional Director of Europe, Joannes Bucher; National Director of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Mr. John Smeaton; HLI President, Fr. Shenan J. Boquet; and HLI Director of Austria, Dietmar Fischer.**

Continue reading at [www.hli.org/2015/10/first-father-paul-marx-pro-life-award-given-to-john-smeaton/](http://www.hli.org/2015/10/first-father-paul-marx-pro-life-award-given-to-john-smeaton/)



**Participants of the first Francophone Africa Priest Institute in Benin, Africa. The papal nuncio to Benin, Archbishop Brian Udaigwe is pictured in the center.**

to direct the Family Life Office of the diocese when he was still only a transitional deacon! Here is his description of his apostolate: “I visited numerous parishes and wrote letters inviting couples to recollections, weekends for couples, talks and meetings focused on family life. Every week I host an hour-long program on Radio Maria Cameroon called ‘family crossroads.’ I pay special attention to situations where people are ‘wounded in their affective life.’ I invite couples to live in an upright way family and Christian values. Currently, I am setting up a pro-life program and the teaching of natural methods of birth regulation.” We can look forward to 50+ years of fruitful sowing of the Gospel of Life by Fr. Toum, who was ordained to the priesthood in 2013.

### **HLI PRESIDENT COMES FOR PRO-LIFE PRIESTS EVENT**

We were very happy to have HLI President Fr. Shenan Boquet as the main speaker at this conference. He went back linguistically to his French-Louisiana roots at this Francophone event. He spoke to encourage these men to continue defending Life and Family as a central aspect of their priestly ministry. Fr. Boquet showed how our educational apostolate, which focuses on Contraception, Abortion, Euthanasia, Reproductive Technologies, and Marriage & Family could really transform parishes and the Church, using the pastoral plan Pope St. John Paul II originated for creating a Culture of Life.

The papal nuncio to Benin, Archbishop Brian Udaigwe, was the main celebrant and homilist at the opening mass. He is from Nigeria and his assistant at the nunciature is a Filipino, another example of the universality of the Church. Two bishops from Benin also came to the conference. His Excellency Eugène Cyrille Houndékon, the vice president of the Bishops Conference of Benin, and His Excellency Victor Agbanou from the diocese of Lokassa both welcomed HLI and its mission. We were overjoyed by the endorsement of HLI by the pope’s representative in Benin and the bishops there as we work together towards a common goal.

The conference talks were broadcast live over Catholic radio thanks to some Franciscans. The main Catholic newspaper, *La Croix du Bénin*, did a front page article on the event. Our media impact also included individual interviews by George Wirnkar and myself.



What struck me particularly was the courage displayed by many Beninois in the face of coercion from the Culture of Death. Mrs. Christiane Tabele served as government minister of health in the past. She refused point blank to advocate for condoms when in office, despite pressure from the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Other government officers were given generous stipends to travel and speak, but since she spoke up fiercely against abortion her funding was cut and her pro-life interviews were not aired... A young priest told us of his work to help medical students live their faith in the face of threats. They are told to give “injections” to women who have three or more children without at times these mothers even realizing this is a birth control shot. If the medical students refuse to collaborate, their graduation is at risk...

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFENDING CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

All these examples highlighted the points I made about forming and respecting the consciences of Catholics and all people of good will. It is a fundamentally totalitarian and perverse mindset that seeks to coerce the consciences of others and force them to do what is evil in their eyes. This is sadly one of the key objectives of the death peddlers as Fr. Paul Marx called them. Whether in the Health and Human Services (HHS) Contraceptive Mandate in the US or in population control programs that coerce health care workers in Africa, these evils are spreading and must be rejected with steadfast and even self-sacrificial determination. It was beautiful to see that many Africans are doing so. More will be encouraged through HLI’s support and a growing number of priests formed through our Seminarians for Life International program.

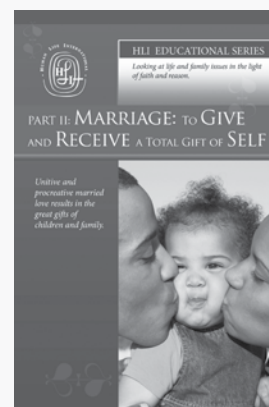
With the help of our supporters, HLI hopes to bring even more vital pro-life information and materials to seminarians and priests throughout Africa and the world, including the United States. After seeing the enthusiasm with which our pro-life resources were snatched up by these pro-life priests, it is clear that we must redouble our efforts to equip them and the young seminarians who are coming forth in ever greater numbers from the world’s “Spiritual Super-Power,” as Pope Benedict XVI called Africa.

## DONATE \$53 OR MORE TO HLI THIS MONTH AND GET OUR LATEST PRO-LIFE RESOURCE!

This month, when you donate \$53 or more to support HLI’s life-saving mission, you’ll receive our latest pro-life educational resource: ***Marriage: To Give and Receive a Total Gift of Self***. This is the second part of a 4-part series on marriage. (See next month’s *Mission Report* for Part III.)

“Marriage is a lifelong partnership of the whole of life, of mutual and exclusive fidelity, established by mutual consent between a man and a woman, and ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation of offspring.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1601) Take away anything, even one bit, of this well-considered definition and you have deformed what marriage is meant to be, both naturally and supernaturally. From this definition comes its purpose, and understanding this purpose requires much greater attention on our part.

**Please send your gift of \$53 or more to HLI today,** and we’ll ship you this new pro-life resource!



***Marriage: To Give and Receive a Total Gift of Self* is this month’s pro-life educational resource.**