

My dear friends,

Greetings during this most trying time when our country has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and so many lives have been turned upside down. Know that all of you remain in the daily prayers of us Assumptionists both here in the United States and in the Congo and especially among the students at the Beni School Complex.

I would be remiss if I did not share with you in this number of the newsletter a word about one of our most remarkable Assumptionists who died this past May at the age of 104, Fr. Oliver Blanchette. After a long and distinguished career as a teacher, pastor, and retreat-master, Fr. Oliver accepted to go to Africa at the age of 83 (!) to help our young men studying for the priesthood there. Let me share with you part of an article that appeared in the local Catholic newspaper.

“The oldest Assumptionist in the world, beloved by many in the Worcester Diocese, and missionary to Africa in his 80s, died Monday, May 11….. ‘Fr. Oliver didn’t just live a long life,’ commented Assumptionist Fr. John L. Franck ‘He was a man of great wisdom … experience … foresight … support and an apostle. … I can’t tell you how much he’s going to be missed by so many people.’

‘Ever since Fr. Blanchette returned from Africa, at the age of 90, he’s been raising money for Assumptionist projects there,’ Fr. Franck said.

‘I went to Africa when I was 83,’ Fr. Blanchette told The Catholic Free Press for a story marking his 100th birthday in 2016. ‘I came back when I was 90.’
Fr. Blanchette said he’d always had a little desire to go to the missions and was sent to be present to the younger people, partly to inspire aspiring and new Assumptionists. He was an English teacher and spiritual director, serving from 1999 to 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya, and Arusha, Tanzania. People here in the US formed Friends of Father Oliver (FOFO) to help fund his projects there.”

Among the projects he enthusiastically supported was the Beni School complex. Fr. Oliver remained alert to the very last days of his long life and took a special interest in the progress of the school. He was particularly happy to know that the needs of these young victims of the ongoing conflict in the eastern Congo were receiving a quality education.

I wish to pay tribute to this humble but dynamic Assumptionist whose legacy will not soon be forgotten.

He would have been overjoyed to see the progress that the school complex continues to make due to your own support. I am including in this issue some photos illustrating this progress as the new junior high school wing takes shape. It will be accommodate students at the elementary school who have been successfully making their way through this stage of their education and are eager to complete it.

Many thanks for your continued assistance for the needs remain many.

Donations may be made to the Assumptionists (memo line: Beni School Complex)
330 Market Street
Brighton, MA 02135

Sincerely,

Fr. John Franck, AA



Blessing of the cornerstone of the new junior high school wing (March 2020)



First stages (March 2020)



First stages continue (March 2020)



Interior takes shape (June 2020)



Exterior (front) takes shape (June 2020)