

IN DETAIL : FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

40 ans d'expérience au service de la mission et encore de nombreux projets pour faire grandir la flamme missionnaire !

The South-North mission: what if we reversed the missionary movement?

In 2019, we had the project outline. In 2020, after a year and a half of preparatory work, we made our intuition a reality: investing in reciprocal volunteering with new missions from the South to the North. This paradigm shift is revolutionizing the logic and habits in progress in the world of development and international solidarity. From Rwanda to France, Aimé and Laura are the first volunteers to venture down the path we have dug, cleared and built. Arriving in September 2020 for a year of mission at the service of the poorest, they both testify to the graces they have received.

“At first, I was afraid of stepping into the unknown and being confronted with this inner violence buried in the hearts of the homeless. I didn't dare, but mostly I didn't know how to help them. Quickly, I realized that **you don't have to be a fantastic person to do good: you just have to say yes, welcome others and respect them.** You should not be afraid, but **surrender to others:** it is by spending time with others that you form a relationship. To stop at appearances is to be mistaken: you have to try to **open up to the hidden beauty that is in each individual.**» Thus, Aimé shares with us in a mission report. He lives in a shared apartment of the “Association pour l'Amitié - APA” (Association for Friendship) and is involved in a day reception of people living in the street within the association “Aux captifs la liberation” (Liberation to the captives). Vincent, his hub manager, knows he can count on him: “Aimé is a young person who brings a lot of help within our association; strong and serene, he is someone **naturally turned towards the other, with an open mind.** It is a real gift to have a **rich and different culture** among us. In addition, he is involved for **a whole year,** the time to be **totally immersed and devoted** to our cause! «.

For her part, Laura will remain deeply marked by her year of volunteering in France because it brought her much more than anything she would have wished for: “This mission within



Laura ♡ Mission Simon de Cyrène, Paris [FRANCE]

the “Simon de Cyrène” association, dedicated to helping disabled people, brings me **great inner joy.** It is a gift to be able to know the person deeply in a privileged way (his tastes, his history, his weaknesses and his joys ...). This community life has made me grow in humanity and **increased my desire to help others,** vulnerable or not, and therefore to **find myself.** It made me realize that I needed to work later in the social sector and to **serve others** in order to thrive «. Ouarda, apartment manager at Simon de Cyrène, measures the great richness of the arrival of this Rwandan on her team: “These people from southern countries have anchored in them the aspect of living together, essential for life in association. They really want to be here, attentive and available. This is the case with Laura, whom we welcome for an entire year, the time to flourish and sow fruit at the heart of our association, unlike the other volunteers hired for 6 months. She says things in a sympathetic and diplomatic manner. Everything is simple with her. Laura is a driving force in the team; peaceful and smiling, she is a pearl that will be missed!

Throughout their year of service, Aimé and Laura followed a continual formation, leading to diplomas, thanks to the partnership we have with the Catholic University of the West (UCO). The goal: to help them reread their mission experience, to value this experience, through obtaining a diploma, in order to facilitate their return home. This return is scheduled for

September 2021. To prepare for it, they also received specific support. They were able to take a step back to better take the post-mission step.

“In the history of Fidesco, there have already been volunteers sent from countries in the South. Laura's mother has been a Rwandan volunteer herself, but for the Ivory Coast. So, why launch the South-North mission? The mission abroad is the response to a call from the Church which concerns people of all origins. It is not a Western privilege. Like the others, the volunteers of the South leave their country and their habits to serve. They set out to meet another culture, to meet suffering brothers and sisters; because if the countries of the South have poverty, the countries of the North also have it. **The implementation of reciprocal volunteering is driven by the urgency of building a culture of encounter!** » Explains Emeric Clair, director of Fidesco.

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This very positive experience will be repeated in 2021. A second group of volunteers is on the way. Trained in 2020, the volunteers will be welcomed in September 2021. The project is built over the long term and is consolidated, with the help and support of our partners in the countries, from which the young volunteers come, but also with our partner associations in France.

Mission of retirees: a parallel path to adapt to the states of life

Leaving as an international solidarity volunteer (ISV) for two years is possible at any age. However, when we reach retirement age, if the children have mostly left the nest, it is a support of another form that is put in place for them, to which is added the role and the mission of the grandparents with grandchildren. Many reasons can create a tension between the availability for the mission, made possible by retirement, and the role and the support to be given to one's children and grandchildren ...

Giving two full years of your life in this context can be complicated. It can be tricky to leave loved ones behind and set off, even if it is to serve the poorest and to live the life-changing experience of mission. Still, it's often not the desire that is lacking. The missionary fire is there! So how can we respond to this desire for mission, commitment and sense that many young retirees carry in them? This is what guided us in developing the «retirees» mission: a journey that combines together long-term commitment, fidelity and perseverance in the mission, and a certain flexibility in terms of departure.

This new mission formula is intended for young retirees. They are sent on field mis-

sions for 4 to 6 months per year for at least four consecutive years in the service of the same partner, in the same country. This long-term commitment fits well with our vision, our desire to help developing countries over the long term.

The first volunteers to take this other path of mission were sent in 2020. Serge and Christine left as a couple to Rwanda as teachers. Marie-Caroline and François began to invest in supporting young women in Thailand. Armelle works on alphabetization in the Ivory Coast.

In her letter of departure, she answers a question that all volunteers ask themselves before leaving: «Why this departure? So that this new stage of my life bears fruit, thus putting my experience and my skills at the service of the most disadvantaged. So that it contributes, in the greatest humility, to the development of a country in the South. «

A few months later, in her mission report, she made the same observations as the volunteers on the classical way: "I remember that when I arrived, I very quickly wanted to 'do', to enter a performance logic ("4 months is not enough time to act..."). I had a feeling of wasting time, and this slowness of things to fall into place annoyed me. What a lack of patience! Today, I realize that this time was necessary for me to put on the habit of «useless servant.» My presence, more than my actions, what if that was the most important? «

Our mission volunteers who are retirees have had their first period in the field and are preparing to leave at the beginning of the new year.



The experience is conclusive and positive.

However, this new formula is not the rule. We see it rather as an alternative form to adjust to the different states of life of young retirees. The door to the regular "VSI missions" is still open. Our goal is not to replace it, but to allow a choice of the way that's the best adapted to each situation that enables to answer the calls for mission of retirees.



Armelle ◊ Mission Abidjan (IVORY COAST)