

SONGHAÏ INTERNATIONAL Newsletter



SONGHAÏ INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER Special Kairos Edition

INTRODUCTION TO SONGHAÏ

Dear friends of Songhaï,

There have been some wonderful things happening at Songhaï recently. In December 2025, there were three celebrations.

First, the launch of Father Nzamujo's new book. He tells the story of how Songhaï began in 1984 and how it has grown over the years. But this book is far more than a historical account. It is a book about building a new African society — one that is resilient, dignified, and sustainable. It proposes a new vision of authentic African development, rooted in people, land, culture, and responsibility. Alongside it is a companion book — a practical guide — that shows how this vision can be applied in real life. It asks the essential questions: with whom, with what, and how can this transformation happen? Above all, it focuses on educating Africa's youth for independence — not by copying failed economic models, but by equipping young people with entrepreneurial skills, digital knowledge, and sound economic thinking, so that wealth can be created in Africa, by Africans, for their own communities. It also shows how to restore the land instead of destroying it, and how to use solar energy and biogas rather than exhausting the earth's resources. I know that I have seen only a small part of this vast continent. But I can say this with conviction: in visiting Songhaï, I have experienced the very best of Africa. Here, I have seen what Africa's future can be.

We also celebrated the 40th anniversary of Songhaï itself. Forty years of vision, hard work, and excellence. And this journey continues, as Songhaï enters a new phase — Songhaï 2.0 — ready to meet the challenges of a modern era. From just a few acres of swamp land, Songhaï has expanded into more than 50 projects across Africa and has trained over 30,000 young people. With its focus on people, integrity, and

community, Songhaï represents the future. The era of greed and unchecked resource exploitation is ending. Songhaï is the future. And with the creation of its Leadership Academy, it has laid a strong foundation to sustain and expand its work for another forty years — and beyond.

The third celebration marks the 50th anniversary of Father Nzamujo's ordination as a Dominican priest. Without his education, training in biology, engineering, and economics, and his brave decision to return to Africa in 1984, Songhaï would never have come into existence. For Father Nzamujo, the needs of others — whether strangers, family, or friends — have always mattered more than material comfort or personal ambition. He took seriously the two greatest



commandments: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. His life has been built on faith: faith in God, faith in the sacredness of the earth entrusted to us, and faith in the dignity and worth of every person as a child of God. Without that faith, he could never have overcome the many obstacles and setbacks along the way. Initially, Songhaï was difficult for many to accept. Many projects had failed because they imposed external models and underestimated the people they aimed to help. But Father Nzamujo persisted. He believed strongly that Africa could rise and claim its rightful place in the world. And his perseverance paid off. People saw that he wouldn't give up. This strength came from his faith in God — and from his faith in his people.

Although these celebrations may appear separate, they are, in reality, one single celebration: a tribute to how one person, guided by faith and vision, can help change the world — and join with thousands of others to forge a new path toward a better future, for Africa and for generations to come.

----Mrs. Susan Mattern

A Kairos of Grace, Vision, and Responsibility

50 Years of Priesthood · 40 Years of Songhaï · Launch of

Africa: Now Is Our Time

*“In old age they still bear fruit; they are full of sap and remain green.”
(Psalm 92)*

December 2025 marked a **rare convergence of meaning**—a *kairos* in the fullest sense of the word. At Songhaï, in Porto-Novo and far beyond, three inseparable milestones were celebrated:

- **Fifty years of priestly ordination,**
- **Forty years of the Songhaï journey,**
- **The launch of the twin books *Africa: Now Is Our Time (L'Heure a sonné)*.**

These were not parallel commemorations. They formed **one single story**—a story of vocation, fidelity, and responsibility unfolding across time, and now entrusted anew to the future.

Born of Fidelity: A Life Entrusted to Life

The celebrations opened where they rightly belong: **within the Church**, where vocation finds its source and measure.

The homily delivered on December 21 recalled a foundational truth: **God is faithful**—faithful in calling, faithful in protecting life, faithful in sustaining a mission that begins in fragility and matures through perseverance.

The narrative of a mother who chose life against fear and medical pressure became more than biography. It became **theology**. From that original “yes” flows a lifelong conviction:

- **Life is sacred.**
- **Creation is not an extraction zone.**
- **Human dignity is never negotiable.**

Songhaï would later become the **social, economic, and ecological incarnation** of this conviction.



Songhai: From Fragile Beginnings to Living Witness

Forty years ago, Songhai was not conceived as a project, a model, or an institution.

It was born as **an act of faith**—a refusal to accept hunger, unemployment, ecological degradation, and loss of dignity as destiny.

As recalled in the Thanksgiving Statement, Songhai stands today not because of one individual, but because **Providence never ceased to send companions**: women and men, young people, partners, friends, and institutions who refused resignation.

Over time, Songhai grew into a **living ecosystem**, where:

- soil teaches humility,
- work becomes pedagogy,
- technology serves life,
- and faith takes institutional form.

Songhai has never claimed perfection—only **fidelity**.

A Journey of Grace and Integration

At the heart of these celebrations stood a deeper synthesis:

a life shaped by integration rather than fragmentation.

As articulated in *A Journey of Grace and Integration*, priesthood here is not withdrawal from the world, but **co-creation with God within history**. Rooted in the Dominican tradition and illuminated by the thought of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**, this journey affirms that:

- contemplation without incarnation is incomplete,
- knowledge without service becomes distortion,
- and grace that does not enter systems remains sterile.

From this vision emerged the **CSEM(SE)² Nexus—Carbon, Silicon, Electro-Mechanical energy, Sustainable systems, Social and Spiritual Ecology**—a new grammar for **sanctifying the systems that shape civilization**.

Here, faith becomes **design**, grace becomes **governance**, and *Veritas* becomes **civilization**.

Mind, Body, and Soil: The Trinity of Regeneration

Songhai's theology is written in the soil. Agriculture is not merely production; it is **communion**. The soil teaches circularity, cooperation, and regeneration.

From this lived wisdom emerges the **Trinity of Regeneration**:

- **Mind** — contemplative intelligence reading creation as Scripture,
- **Body** — disciplined action translating insight into transformation,
- **Soil** — the maternal matrix where life is reconciled and renewed.

To till the soil responsibly is to preach the Gospel with one's hands.

To organize its fruits wisely is to incarnate the Kingdom in daily life.

The Twin Books: Vision and Praxis—Two Wings of One Flight

The launch of *Africa: Now Is Our Time* did not conclude a chapter.

It **opened a mandate**.

As the Author's Declaration makes clear, the books are deliberately conceived as **twins**—two movements of one journey:

1. Kyros —Africa, Our Time Has Come

A call to rebuild Africa's *imaginaire*—its worldview, epistemology, and sense of agency.

No society is renewed by copying models forged elsewhere. A new future requires a **new consciousness**.

2. The Midwives of the Future

A practical grammar of transformation, distilled from forty years of Songhai experience.

It insists that the most decisive capital is **the human person**—formed, disciplined, spiritually awake, ecologically literate, and socially rooted.

Vision without practice is illusion. Practice without vision is confusion. Regeneration requires **both wings**.

Forming Human Beings in a Disoriented World

One of the strongest undercurrents of the celebrations was the urgency of **formation**.

Raising Grounded Human Beings in a Disoriented World reminds us that the future does not belong to us—it is **entrusted** to us.

In a culture of distraction, consumerism, and instant gratification, children learn not from speeches, but from **coherence**. True development requires limits, discipline, rootedness, and interior life.

Songhai's pedagogy—linking work, food, soil, technology, and spirituality—stands as a quiet yet firm resistance to the erosion of meaning. It proposes **stewardship rather than accumulation, responsibility rather than entitlement**.

The Traitors' Circle: A Necessary Counter-Culture

The deepest horizon of this kairos is articulated in *The Traitors' Circle*.

The crisis of our time is not merely political. It is **anthropological and economic**.

An extractive system is shaping a distorted humanity:

- consumers instead of contributors,
- competitors instead of cooperators,
- crowds instead of persons.

Against this drift, the “Traitors' Circle” names women and men who refuse to absolutize power, markets, or ideology—a **Pauline and Teilhardian resistance** rooted in conscience, dignity, and regeneration.

They are called traitors because they cannot be owned.

Like the **Clapham Circle of William Wilberforce**, they do not seize power

They **re-align the moral compass of history by building alternatives**.

Songhai belongs to this lineage:

a Christianity that does not bless systems, but **converts them**.

As we celebrate Christmas today, we, at Songhai, bring you this crucial piece on parenting, because it is imperative that we become good and very responsible human beings. Read, digest, live and share

Parenting, Work, and Human Dignity Raising Grounded Human Beings in a Disoriented World

The Future Does Not Belong to Us: It Is Entrusted

Watching children—full of life, curiosity, and energy—is always a moment of quiet joy. In their faces, gestures, and spontaneous interactions, one can already sense the promise of continuity: the next generation stepping forward, still unformed, still open, still hopeful, overflowing with potentials but also vulnerability and fragility. Moments like these remind us of a fundamental truth: history is not merely inherited; it is entrusted. The future does not belong to us—it is placed in our hands. We are its stewards. The essential question is therefore not whether we care about children, but **how we are embracing the responsibility that comes with caring for them**.

We are, in a very real sense, the midwives of the future. And genuine joy always summons responsibility. When we look honestly at the world into which children and young people are growing—especially in Africa—we cannot avoid asking difficult but necessary questions.

We are living in a time when shallow value systems, reinforced by passive consumerism, instant gratification,

A Celebration That Sends Us Forth

These days ended not in applause, but in **silence**—a silence charged with responsibility.

As the Thanksgiving prayer affirmed, what was celebrated must now become **daily choices**, long after ceremonies fade.

This was not a retrospective celebration.

It was a **sending forth**.

Africa will not rise by imitation.

Africa will rise by **regeneration**.

The books are seeds.

Songhai is a field.

The future remains entrusted.

**With gratitude, responsibility, and hope,
Songhai International**

Porto-Novo · Africa · The World

and a growing sense of entitlement disconnected from responsibility, are steadily eroding the inner foundations of young people. What is being consumed today is not only food, images, and entertainment; it is meaning, attention, moral imagination, and direction.

Much of this erosion is subtle. It does not arrive as violence, but as distraction. It does not announce itself as danger; it presents itself as convenience.

At times, one hears young people describe “success” almost exclusively in terms of visible possessions—cars, gadgets, lifestyle, apparent ease. Such remarks are not offensive in themselves; they are revealing. They expose how deeply distorted our collective understanding of success has become under the pressure of a consumerist imagination. Resources intended for service, stewardship, and the common good are easily misread as signs of personal enrichment.

This distortion becomes even more troubling when institutions dedicated to formation, work, and social transformation are perceived primarily as places of benefit distribution rather than as communities of responsibility, effort, and contribution.

Yet one is not enriched by constantly taking and receiving. True enrichment comes through giving, serving, and participating in something larger than oneself. It is at this point that a deeper compass must be

Evangelical Poverty — A Vow of Creative Generativity

Evangelical poverty is not deprivation. It is consecrated creativity—the sacred art of transforming scarcity into stewardship, and dependence into generativity.

True evangelical poverty circulates life like blood, sustaining mission through prudence, design, and disciplined generosity.

It is the economy of the bees: labor offered for the hive, pollination given freely to the world.

It is the governance of grace: every gift received in order to be given, every resource multiplied by wisdom, every act of restraint transfigured into an act of creation.

This poverty does not flee the world; it redeems it.

It re-enchants economies.

It transforms wealth into communion.

It converts management into stewardship ordered toward the common good.

It is the vow that refuses stagnation and insists on circulation—

the vow that keeps the flame alive through the long night of history.

True Parenting Today

In this light, the recent decision by Australia to drastically restrict access to certain internet platforms for youths under sixteen is deeply instructive. It is not the reflex of a fearful society, but the sober recognition—after long observation—that digital environments are not neutral. These platforms actively shape desire. They normalize superficial success, reward exhibitionism, flatten complexity, and gradually detach young people from effort, patience, silence, and interior life. Long before the intellect learns how to resist, the soul is already being formed—or deformed.

Africa, unfortunately, is absorbing the worst of these influences without the necessary protective buffers: strong institutions, coherent educational frameworks, and stable family cultures capable of filtering, interpreting, and contextualizing what children are exposed to.

True parenting today cannot be reduced to feeding

children and equipping them with digital tools while granting unlimited access to the internet. Even the food provided to children raises serious questions—food increasingly poor in nutritional quality, disconnected from land, season, and culture, feeding bodies without truly nourishing them. When poor food is combined with excessive screen exposure, the result is not development but depletion—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We cannot reasonably expect responsible, resilient, and well-rounded adults to emerge from an environment that offers:

- consumption without production,
- rights without duties,
- stimulation without meaning,
- connectivity without belonging.

Children do not learn values from speeches. They learn from lived examples—from coherence, from what adults choose to resist as much as from what they permit. They observe how adults relate to work, money, food, truth, silence, and one another. They absorb contradictions far more quickly than advice.

The real question, therefore, is not only **what are children becoming?**

It is also—and more fundamentally—**what kind of adults are we modeling before them?**

Authentic development, whether personal or societal, requires depth, discipline, limits, and rootedness. Without these, education is reduced to technical training, freedom collapses into impulse, and progress becomes an illusion.

And here, a difficult truth must be spoken clearly: **religious institutions, including churches, are also part of the problem.** Too often, they speak of salvation without formation, of faith without discipline, of blessing and prosperity without conversion of lifestyles. In doing so, they risk reinforcing the very superficiality they should be challenging.

True parenting—and true educational, social, and pastoral leadership—must once again dare to form consciences, shape character, and cultivate interior life. Without this courage, societies may continue to multiply activities, programs, and words, but they will fail in their most essential mission: **helping the next generation grow into grounded, responsible, and fully human beings.**



Africa essay 2026.

Mrs. Susan MATTERN
President, Songhai International



Susan and a baby goat...

“No, I'm not going on a safari,” I said wearily. It had to be the hundredth time I answered that question since I told people I was going to Africa. This past summer, I traveled to Benin, Africa, for the fourth time. The only people who didn't ask were my family and close friends, who knew I was going to an agricultural center called Songhai in Benin, where I would see chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, ostriches, fish, and possibly a crocodile, but no lions or giraffes.

Now, I have nothing against safaris or visiting Africa to see its magnificent animals, but there is so much more to this vast continent than elephants and giraffes.

When I was about 11 years old, growing up in St. Louis, some of my parents' friends took a two-week trip to Disneyland. They spent the whole time at the park, never bothering to see the museums, famous landmarks, or Hollywood! They didn't even visit the Pacific Ocean! I had never been to California, but even at that young age, I knew there had to be more there than Mickey Mouse and Goofy. I felt the same about Africa. I had never really been interested in traveling there just to see wild animals, and I knew there had to be more to it.

About fifteen years ago, I met Father Godfrey Nzamujo, a Nigerian priest. He is the founder and director of Songhai. He had been conducting research at UC Irvine in the mid-1980s, holding extensive graduate degrees while serving at a

parish in Orange County, California. When he learned about the devastating drought in Ethiopia, he knew he had to return to Africa and help his people. He went to Benin, where the government handed over degraded land to him, with little hope of success. He started an agricultural project in 1984 called Songhai, named after one of the great empires of West Africa in the 15th century.

Songhai is an agricultural center where they grow organic produce and raise goats, pigs, chickens, and cows. But it's much more than just a farm; it's a project that offers hope and skills to Africa's youth. The students who work and train there learn computer skills, economics, spirituality, ethics, and how to turn waste into wealth, as Nzamujo emphasizes. Songhai also helps students secure land and financial support after they complete their training.

Now, in this new year of 2026, despite initial skepticism from many, he has over fifty projects across Africa focused on reclaiming degraded land, growing crops organically, and creating jobs and economic opportunities for young people. He's trained more than 30,000 young men and women in agriculture and computer skills, empowering them to bring the Songhai method to their own countries. He invited me to visit Songhai, and I've had the chance to see the main project with him four summers in a row!

That first summer, Nzamujo had been visiting us in Los Angeles, and when we flew back together, Turkish Airlines lost some of our luggage. At the airport in Benin, we gave up waiting and just went on to Songhai. By the time we arrived, it was almost 1 am, and all I wanted was to sleep after the 22-hour flight. I fell into bed with all my clothes on. I'd worry about it in the morning.

When I woke up, I told him I needed a few blouses, pants, and a comb, just in case. He asked his housekeeper, Berenice, to take me shopping. Everyone in Benin speaks French except me. We picked out some clothes and then drove to a hair salon, where I unexpectedly got my hair done. All seven girls stood around me, smiling, talking, and watching. I think it was a lesson in styling a white person's hair. My hair is curly but not African curly. After they dried it, they handed me a mirror. I complimented them on their good work; they got excited and said many things in French, none of which I understood. All I really wanted was a comb!

That was one of the first times, but definitely not the last, when I realized I was a stranger in this country—a white girl from Los Angeles on the other side of the world. I came from a different culture, spoke a different language, had a different skin color, and very different hair.

I seemed to be the only white person within hundreds of miles. Everyone was kind and accepting, even though I was most definitely a minority of one! The children were simply curious. I had the frightening experience of driving with

goats wandering on the road, seeing motorcycles everywhere with no marked lanes, and once a newborn calf peeked its head into our Zoom meeting before being hurriedly taken back to its mother.

I felt honored to be part of their world, even if only briefly. I was deeply curious and fascinated by their lives, so different from mine, yet they are doing things the rest of the world still needs to accomplish. They promote solar power and restore land damaged by pesticides. They are reclaiming their land, ravaged by the greed of other nations. And with Songhai, they are replenishing the land instead of destroying it.

People are very similar to each other. They worry about their future, relationships, children, parents, whether they will have a job after training, their health, money, and other common concerns that people around the world share. The few sermons I heard Father Nzamujo preach in English were impactful to everyone, not just Africans. He emphasized caring for others, loving your neighbor, and avoiding greed — one week he talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan, helping a stranger, an immigrant. It is highly relevant today in our country, and I wish I had recorded it for all those who don't value our immigrant population.

I realize that most people visit Africa on a tour or a safari. Most aren't as lucky as I am to have a friend there. Africa is often seen as just a large country. An adult recently asked me, when I mentioned I was traveling to Benin, "Africa has countries?" I was speechless. Many people don't understand how huge the continent is, stretching from the pyramids of Egypt across tropical forests near the Equator, the Sahara Desert, the Congo, and South Africa. The entire North American continent could fit into Africa, with room to spare.

I've traveled across Europe before and enjoyed seeing the stunning sights in London, Paris, and Istanbul. But visiting Songhai opened my eyes to an entirely new world, not just a place for shopping and sightseeing with other elderly travelers. I felt like I became part of Songhai's world as much as possible in just a few weeks—meeting local families, seeing them at work and at home, and becoming part of a larger story of genuine growth and coming of age in Africa.

I've had the privilege of eating baobab ice cream, fufu, and delicious pineapple. All our food came from the earth, free of pesticides and chemicals, and it was delicious. I've traveled over dusty, rutted roads and new highways, witnessing both severe poverty and mansions behind locked gates and walls. I carefully drove my friend's car to avoid motorcycles and goats on the road, but I never saw a single giraffe or monkey.

I've met people from all walks of life—dignitaries from many African nations, ambassadors, and visitors from around the world who have heard of Songhai. I've seen firsthand the focus on training women—now over 70% of the trainees—and have witnessed how vital this is in the developing world. There are streams of visitors who come to Songhai every day to see the incredible work that has been done, not just at the original center in Benin, but in over 50 projects across the continent. More land is being acquired as people are being trained for the future. He has also established a Leadership Academy, where he works with individuals who will succeed him and continue his work for future generations.

Although I have a unique perspective on Africa, I still don't know much about it. Africa is vast, with a diverse range of cultures, levels of poverty and wealth, ancient traditions, and modern skyscrapers that could keep someone exploring for a lifetime.

Our media and educational systems do a disservice to Africa by only highlighting poverty, famine, and conflict. Our news outlets mainly focus on our own countries and Europe. I understand the need to stay informed about our own affairs, but we hear far too little about what's happening elsewhere in the world. We often overlook Africa's recent successes in education, technology, and economic growth. Instead, we primarily hear about violence and conflict, and we keep donating outdated goods that we no longer need, imagining many of their people still living in mud huts, despite the presence of solar and biogas units powering their cities and farms. We're often surprised by photos of Africa's large cities, featuring skyscrapers that rival those of New York and Chicago. I was particularly shocked to learn that Luanda, Angola's capital, was the world's most expensive city in 2015. I would never have guessed that—I thought for sure it would have been New York, Singapore, Los Angeles, Tokyo, or another major city.

However, Africa is the future—our future—and it is rising, asserting its rightful place in the world, even though we may be sadly unaware of it.

I'm sure that Songhai isn't the only project in Africa leading the way, but I know it's one of the most significant. Nzamujo has highlighted integrity, honesty, and excellence, as well as the most valuable resource: the people who will embody these qualities and incorporate them into everything they do.

No, I didn't go on a safari, and even though my apartment at Songhai was right next to the ostrich enclosure, that was as close as I came to any wild animals while I was there. They can run really fast! And they aren't very friendly. I finally saw the crocodile on my fourth visit. He came out of his pond to meet me and was basking in the sun for one afternoon. Those were my wild animals!

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