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Report on Restoration of St. Philomena Church and Honeymoon in Kaluapapa.

Diest, 5/09/09

by: Bert Kriekemans, Diest, Belgium

In early 1987 we heard about the intention of the Friends of Father Damien to restore the St. Philomena church in Kalawao (see enclosed letter from the Friends of Father Damien). We contacted the architect/consulting company in Honolulu who were involved in writing the specifications for the restoration works on the church.

The problem was that the wood was damaged by termites and the high humidity.

At that time we (at De Neef Construction Chemicals) had techniques available to restore wooden beams by the use of composites. By this means it was not necessary to replace the wooden beams, but the beams that Father Damien had place 100 years ago could be restored and strengthened. So the specifications were changed to incorporate this technique.

All the materials and the supervision for these repairs were donated by De Neef Construction Chemicals of Heist op den Berg , Belgium.

I traveled several times in the period of 1987 to 1989 to Kaluapapa to coordinate the works. During this period I became friend with Richard Marks, crusader for the rights of the patients and the preservation of Kaluapapa. He told me many stories about Father Damien and the early days at Kaluapapa. We could sit hours together in Father Damien's church and he would tell all the emotional stories.

In 1992 I went on honeymoon to Hawaii. I wanted my wife to experience the unbelievable sacrifices of Father Damien and meet Richards Marks.

Richards arranged that we could stay overnight in the "haunted house" next to the light house in Kaluapapa. He took us to Father Damien's church , the old ladies cove , the village, Rea's bar, etc. and indulged my wife in the stories of the early times at Kaulapapa.

With great pain in my heart, I heard that Richard passed away last year.

I like to thank Richard for his commitment.



Richard Marks

