



Missionaries: People of selflessness and zeal



Fr Dónall baptising an adult and child in Papiri.

This is the second part of the article written by the former Editor of the African Missionary, Fr Tomás Walsh SMA (Cork City). He recounts his latest visit to Nigeria to check on the different development projects funded by the SMA through its vast network of supporters and also by Irish Aid. In this part he writes about the different places and projects he visited in Kontagora Apostolic Vicariate. Since Fr Tom's visit to Kontagora, Bishop Tim Carroll has resigned for health reasons. At present Very Rev Fr Dan McCauley SMA (from Strabane, Co Tyrone) is leading a dedicated team of priests, religious, Catechists and lay people until a successor to Bishop Carroll is appointed.

Tungun Gero

From Kontagora Town I made the journey south to Tungun Gero, about two hours drive, over very poor roads. This remote area is home to Fr Billy Sheridan (Newport, Mayo). His parish is vast, consisting of small village communities enthusiastic about their Catholic faith. As in several missions in this part of Nigeria, electricity is provided through the



Maurice Fitzpatrick from St Mary's Girls' High School, Newry with Sr Paulina OLA, Headmistress of St Mary's Primary School, Papiri. Both schools are twinned under an arrangement funded by the British Council. Maurice was asked by the Council to make an assessment on the School. In it, he informed the Council that the Primary School is a 'centre of educational excellence'.
Photo: Rowan Hand

use of solar panels so we were able to talk long after the darkness came down (6.30pm or thereabouts).

A large part of Fr Billy's ministry is integral human development - in 2009 he and his team of local builders constructed over sixty wells in different villages providing, for the first time, clean drinking water to large numbers of people. Training teams in well digging, organising local communities in well-maintenance, establishing a Primary Health Centre as well as running the pastoral programme for diverse communities is the lifework of this dedicated missionary. It is clear that the presence of Fr Billy has brought transformation and liberation to the people he serves.

Many of the major roads in this part of Nigeria have been damaged by the over-laden oil tankers making their way to the cities and towns further north. After Tungun Gero I took the five-hour journey that would bring me to Fr Dónall O'Catháin (Cork City) at Shafashi.

Shafashi

It too is in a very remote and under developed area. For almost twenty years Dónall has been bringing the Good News and human development to the Kamberi people. This semi-nomadic tribal people accept Christianity and formal education with zeal and enthusiasm. Dónall's ministry is as varied as his parish is vast. Constructing small church buildings, forming leaders, administering the Sacraments, organising adult literacy courses, training well-digging teams and building a large primary school for children are the fruits of a missionary deeply in tune with the mind of Jesus Christ. As the Kamberi people adapt to Christianity and education Dónall is keenly aware that authentic Christianity does not destroy the local culture. True Christianity illuminates what is right and good in a culture, seeks to preserve it and, at the same time, change those things that need to be changed. There is a very strong link between Shafashi parish and the people of Ireland, particularly through the work of Mr Rowan Hand and supporters in Co Down and further afield.

At morning assembly in one school (Papiri), the message was the same as it was from the children of the schools visited earlier – “Please thank the Irish people for having sent Fr Dónall to them and for the financial contributions that have brought transformation and hope to the lives of huge numbers in the Shafashi area”.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles have two communities in the area, staffed by Irish and Nigerian OLA Sisters. They run the Papiri primary school as well as two permanent Primary Health clinics. Most days the ‘Mobile Clinic’ visits outlying villages to treat the sick, conduct ante-natal and vaccination programmes.

After three days travelling around with Dónall I headed back to Abuja. My six hour trip, over bumpy roads, was somehow made more tolerable in the new realisation that these burdens and deprivations are endured all the time by the people and missionaries who live in these isolated areas.

Abuja

My last two days at Abuja gave me some time to meet up again with people among whom I had worked for many years. It was a moving experience indeed to meet up with those who were so much part of my life during that time. In the best of times life is a struggle for many Nigerians. Today, with so many economic and other problems, they struggle everyday for their basic necessities – to pay medical bills, school fees, or eat more than once a day. And yet despite the harshness of their lives they still laugh, remain hopeful, and are grateful to God for their own existence and for the ones who come among them as strangers and who become their friends.

My overall impression from my visit was that I had the privilege to meet many people, who though not having all the mod-cons we are used to, still live fulfilled and contented lives.

They reach out to others who are in need, sharing what little they have with the less fortunate. I saw the extraordinary contribution our SMA priests make towards building up human solidarity and communion among the different groups of people who inhabit our world. To one and all I say: Thank You!



A typical market scene in western Nigeria: on display are tomatoes, red peppers, beans, cassava, rice as well as 'sweeping brushes'. And if you need ice water - it's for sale too!

November - Pray for the Dead

“We have loved them in life, let us not forget them in death.” (St Monica).

We invite you to join with us in praying for all our dead during the Month of the Holy Souls.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn them away.” (Jn 6:37)

A return to Zambia

Fr Michael Igoe (from Athlone Co. Westmeath) was ordained in 1956. He served in Nigeria before moving to Zambia in 1973, as part of the first team of SMA missionaries in that country. He served in Ndola diocese until 2004. Then, once again, he was asked to be part of a new initiative in Zambia. Along with Fr Paddy Barry he began to work in Chainda parish, in the capital city Lusaka. Now back in Ireland, Fr Michael recently visited his 'old' parish to see the changes and to greet many of the people he knew there.

Earlier this year I returned to Zambia for a visit. I was fortunate that Fr Paddy Barry (from Cork City) was returning to Lusaka on the same flight which made it easier for me at Heathrow Airport in London. I had to go from Terminal One to Five. This entailed a lot of walking, going up and down escalators, train, bus, security checks etc. – you need at least three hours to do the Transfers without pressure.

London to Lusaka is about a 10 hr. flight. We arrived at 6.15 in the morning, with the temperature about 25C – it's the end of the rainy season. Immigration & Customs formalities were efficiently dealt with. In the Arrivals Hall was Fr Jim O'Kane SMA (Omagh, Tyrone) who took us on the 10 minute drive to the SMA House. There we were happy to meet the third member of the SMA team in Lusaka: Fr Laurence Ongoma SMA, from Kenya. I also renewed my acquaintance with my former Cook, Angela.

The rest of the week was spent visiting the parish. In Lusaka the SMA has the care of two parishes: Chainda and Ibex Hill.

Chainda is the main parish, with a huge population living in the area. It is on the eastern side of the city. Since 2004 it has been in the care of SMA priests, having been handed on to us by the Jesuits who ran it as an outstation from their parish in Chelston. When Paddy Barry and I went there in 2004 we had to learn a new language, ChiNyanja. It is widely spoken in the Lusaka area as well as in Malawi and Mozambique. As it is 'related' to the Chibemba language, which I already knew from my years in Ndola diocese, further north, it was a little easier for me than for Paddy. He

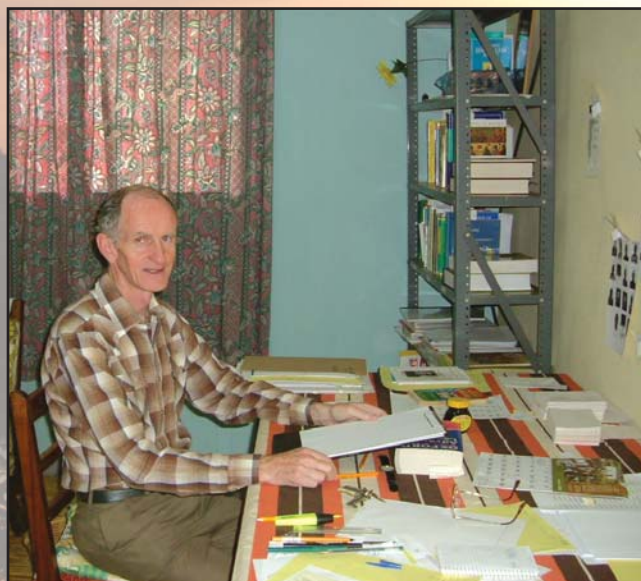
would have been familiar with the Yoruba language in Nigeria where he worked before coming to Zambia.

Fr Jim has built a magnificent hall measuring about 36mx30m. Two Masses are celebrated in it each Sunday with a very large attendance. The previously existing church building was inadequate for the numbers attending services.

Ibex Hill (St Agnes' Church) is a more recent parish and is smaller than Chainda. Nor is it as heavily populated but, like all the outskirts of Lusaka, it will develop in due course. The people here have built an octagonal shaped church. More than 350 people attend Mass there each Sunday.

The entire Church in Lusaka is involved with the care of those living with HIV/Aids and their families. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that at least 20% of the Lusaka adult population have the virus. Both parishes provide a Home-based programme of Care to more than 400 sufferers, such as the distribution of food and retro-viral drugs. They are also assisting 270 AIDS orphans to attend school in the area.

I enjoyed my brief visit, meeting other SMA priests and seminarians, as well as many people from the parishes I worked in - both in Ndola and Lusaka. My memories of Zambia are of a faith-filled people who, despite many difficulties, still have time for God and for one another.



Fr Michael O'Shea (Cork City) in his study at Mpima seminary, Zambia

First impressions...

Fr Tom McNamara SMA (from Ballintemple, Cork City) was ordained in 1973. His first mission appointment was to the north of Nigeria. After completing his assignment there he has also served the Society in several other posts: Preaching about the missions in parishes around Ireland, curate in the SMA parish in London as well as Spiritual Direction and Counselling. In 2009, Fr Tom was asked to return to Africa – to the SMA House of Studies in Nairobi as part of the Formation staff there. Here are some of his initial impressions.



Fr Tom McNamara (left) with the Formation House staff, Nairobi. From the right they are Frs Michael McCabe, A Valantheen, Albert Kouame (Superior), Waclaw Dominik.

Having come to Kenya eight months ago I am still in the observing mode. On arriving in Nairobi I was surprised to see how different Kenya is from the North of Nigeria where I formerly worked. English and Kiswahili are the national languages of Kenya, a country that is made up of many different ethnic groups. I was very impressed with the city centre of Nairobi. Many buses of various types and description run frequently to and from the centre. However, the roads are narrow and the recent rains cause the potholes to get worse day by day and so making travel more difficult.

The heavy rains help to make the area green with plenty of vegetation. It is interesting to see the coffee farms and the flowers and plants for sale at the side of the road. The export of flowers to Europe is a big commercial concern which unfortunately was greatly affected by the recent cancellation of flights in Europe due to the ash cloud.

In our SMA House of Studies there are 40 students and five staff members from 14 different countries of Africa, Europe and Asia. This SMA community is truly an international family and all members have the intention of "working in Africa or with people of African origin". Our students attend Consolata College (for Philosophy) and Tangaza College (for Theology). 'Tangaza' is a Swahili word that means 'to proclaim'.

Many other religious groups have Formation Houses in this area which is approximately eighteen kilometres from the city centre of Nairobi. The film - Out of Africa - a story of the work of Karen Blixen, is based on life in this area where we live, which is now called after her. It has an agreeable climate and while there are mosquitoes we are blessed that we do not have malaria.

Pope John Paul II often proclaimed that the best way to

proclaim or teach is by example. In Kenya as in many African countries there is a great divide between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots'. Not far from us is Kibera, a slum that is regarded as one of the worst in Africa.

Often it is difficult to work with people from a culture different from our own. But our mission is to promote the family of God and working for his Kingdom is of the utmost importance. Karen Blixen is an inspiration in that she worked so hard for 'her people' to educate them and to obtain land for them. In the end she left for Europe with very little success. Lack of success is often the story of a missionary but as there is now a town and area named after Karen, a missionary also hopes that the seeds they sow today may bear fruit in generations to come.

This was the hope and work of Edel Quinn (1907 – 1944) who came to Kenya as a Legion of Mary envoy in 1936 and who is buried in Nairobi. It was also the hope of Fr. John Hannon SMA, and other missionaries, who were murdered in Kenya in recent years. I also draw inspiration from the work of the Daughters of Charity 'Dream Centre' across the road from our house. This centre caters for HIV/AIDS victims by providing medicine, food and counselling.

I look at these many examples of inspiration and with our students look to the future with hope. On 8 May 2010 Bishop Patrick Harrington SMA (Castletownbere, Cork) ordained six of our students to the Diaconate. The vibrancy, joy, and enthusiasm of these young men helped all of us to raise our hearts and voices in thanksgiving. We renewed our commitment to mission and we gave special prayerful thanks for our SMA friends and benefactors who support us and help us to continue our work.



Sister Peter (Teresa) Coyle OLA

26 March 1916 – 23 January 2010

Teresa Josephine Coyle was born in Killybrone, Co Monaghan, on 26 March 1916. She entered Ardfoyle on 15 August 1935, and the following year was given the name Sr Peter. In 1947 Sr Peter was one of an OLA team that pioneered the setting up of the first girls' secondary grammar school in Northern Nigeria. From 1952 to 1960 she served in the OLA Training College in Cape Coast, Ghana. From 1960 to 1974 Sr Peter returned to education work in Nigeria. These were years of huge expansion in education in Nigeria, and Sr Peter gave sterling service both as a teacher and administrator.

After three years teaching in London (1974 – 1977) Sr Peter volunteered to be part of a French-speaking OLA community running an Orphanage in Bethlehem. Here, she helped the community and taught English in the University of Bethlehem. In 1990 she returned to the OLA Convent in Rostrevor, which was then a Retreat and Conference Centre. Here she gloried in the ecumenical mix and variety of individuals and groups who visited the house. Her daily work schedule included translation from French into English for the Province, particularly "The Fortitude and Faith of an Apostle" – the English version of the life of our Founder Father Planque.

Peter was an avid reader of religious articles, open for discussion but never forcing her opinion on anyone. Those who knew her will remember her unflinching search for truth, and her enduring faith in times of change and challenge. Despite her deafness, she took her turn leading the Divine Office and reading the Word of God during the Eucharist.

When receiving visitors, her delight was obvious – and her deafness seemed to disappear. She loved the occasional outing, enjoyed sharing a meal out, and was lively company.

Peter was a woman with her feet firmly on the ground, her heart in Heaven, and her head struggling to unite the two.

Edited from an Obituary prepared by Sr Eithna Synnott OLA



Sr. Mary David (Mary) McSavage

19 October 1912 – 14 May 2010

Sr Mary David passed away unexpectedly on 14 May 2010, having been discharged from hospital a few days previously. Her burial was on Ascension Sunday.

Sr Mary David, Miss McSavage to those of us who knew her before she entered the OLA, was born in Scotland to Lithuanian parents in October 1912, the 3rd in a family of six. The family came there to escape the Russians and the Nazi occupation of their country. Their real name was Mickevitz, and on coming to Scotland they opted for the surname which was closest to that phonetically - McSavage. After 20 years as a teacher, Mary became a lay missionary teacher at St Agnes' Training College, Lagos, Nigeria in 1959.

Miss McSavage's commitment and witness in the College were unsurpassed. A much travelled and generous lady, she gave her all to the students. The students' lesson notes had to be perfect and their corrections done exactly. The examiner from the UK said he never saw a higher standard of Lesson Notes in the UK. The students appreciated the high standard that Miss McS demanded.

She was a spiritual woman, at the chapel door every morning as soon as it was open. Daily Mass and Morning and Evening Prayer with the aid of the Bible were a must for her.

In 1962 Miss McSavage entered the OLA as a Postulant. Her first appointment as an OLA Sister was to teach in Ho, Ghana. Further appointments saw her serve in Ireland, Lebanon, Egypt and the OLA Generalate in Rome. Finally, in 1987 Sr Mary David returned to OLA Ardfoyle to take charge of the New Library project in Ardfoyle as well as doing translation work for the international OLA.

Eventually came time for her to move to the Infirmary. Though now suffering from diminished hearing and mobility, she continued to enjoy her newspaper - especially the holiday advertisements. Her long travels over, she is at home at last, all longings fulfilled.

Edited from an Obituary prepared by Sr Nora Culleton OLA

MASUMBWE CHILDREN'S HOME, TANZANIA NEEDS YOUR HELP

Six years ago Fr Tony Gill (from Dublin) established a new parish at Masumbwe, Tanzania. With Fr Patrick Agbodi SMA (from Nigeria) they found that many children here had lost both parents because of AIDS and other illnesses. In the whole district there was no orphanage. In agreement with other religious groups it was decided that something should be done about the matter. The children needed to be taken off the streets and given an opportunity to attend school regularly.

A man who had been building a guest house but was unable to finish it offered us the site. Near to a primary school we

began our Hostel, with ten children. Today we have twenty-six. Mrs Sabina Joseph is the Matron and she, with the local staff, cares for the children who come from different churches. They are referred to us by the Local Government Office. Overseeing the administration of the project is a multid denominational committee. The Chairperson of our Committee is a Tanzanian Nurse.

We have an adjoining plot of 2 acres where we grow maize and sweet potatoes for our needs. The different churches also donate food when possible, as does the Local Government. On average, in addition to what we grow, it costs us €25 per day to feed the orphans. Our total budget for the year – to cover school fees, medical care, clothing, food, water etc – is €15,266.



Sr. Dominica Geary OLA

3 March 1910 – 26 March 2010

On 3 March 2010 Sr Dominica Geary celebrated her 100th Birthday, the first Irish OLA to reach her centenary. Though already in failing health it was a wonderful day, surrounded by members of her family and OLA Sisters.

Afterwards, Sr. Dominica, happy but tired, was taken from the Dining Room for the last time. Dom, as she was affectionately called, knew she hadn't long to live now, and prayed to God to take her soon. On 26 March she passed away, in perfect peace, with members of her family and others at her bedside. The tears of her two surviving brothers were lonely ones this time "We can't believe she's gone. We'll miss her and our visits to Ardfoyle" they said.

Born in Gortroe near Youghal on 3 March 1910, one of a family of twelve, her mother was a woman of wonderful devotion and prayer. After her Profession in 1932 Sr Dominica went to work in Benin City diocese, Nigeria. For thirty-six years she taught and administered schools. At that time, education of young girls was not popular with parents, because they felt deprived of farm and domestic help and above all of the dowry for young girls. The Sisters succeeded in persuading many parents to let their girls go to school, and the numbers of pupils increased. Sr Dominica was an excellent teacher, articulate and competent. As school manager, she maintained high standards.

Her main aim was the advancement of women in every area of life. Her greatest joy was to see young African women becoming OLA Sisters.

In 1968 Dominica moved to the OLA community in Leigh, England, where, for the next twenty years she did parish work, visiting families in four parishes. In 1989 she returned to Ardfoyle.

All were edified by her commitment to Morning Prayer, the daily Rosary, and daily attendance at Mass even on the cold winter mornings. Sr. Dominica talked a lot to God; she often spoke of God's great love and blessings for all of us. In her long life, both at home and far away, she enjoyed those blessings.

Edited from an Obituary prepared by Sr. Nora Culleton OLA



Fr. Paul D'Arcy SMA

16 January 1945
– 27 April 2010

Paul and I were classmates, friends and confidants – true brothers – since we first met in our Novitiate group in

Cloughballymore, Co Galway in 1962. He was indeed a friend not only to me but to everyone. An unassuming, talented man who had much to give and was generous in the giving and outstanding in patience. This saintly gift I personally received in his attempts to introduce me to the game of golf, for which I will be eternally grateful.

Paul was a private individual, disliking any 'fuss' but appreciative when recognition was given. His final year in dealing so decisively and courageously with terminal cancer typified his approach to his priestly life and work. So much achieved in Africa, his abiding memory being his love for Shendam. He enjoyed the challenge of his time as a Parish Priest in England but most of all his commitment to the British Province and especially the Provincial Superior of the time, Fr Michael McPartland. His personal talents and human qualities were an example to all. His contributions to the Irish Province when appointed to posts in Cork and his management skills in the area of promotion and later as Secretary to the Provincial were always unassuming but professional. Most of all in becoming the person who is now with God.

A friend, a confidant who has taken his place among his heavenly confreres and family and who, I'm sure, will continue to be as caring for us now as he was yesterday.

Fr Tom Fenlon, SMA

Read a complete Obituary on Fr Paul at www.sma.ie

Near the original house we have built a hostel for older children who attend the secondary school (see picture). Costing €5,000 we had the generous help of the Knights of Columbanus in Navan, Co Meath as well as other donors in Ireland. It also contains a small library where they can study in the evening. As a result, five boys are able to attend the secondary school and will continue until they reach Form 4.

However, as the original building is no longer adequate (size, condition etc) we now need to build two additional dormitories. We plan to build two more dormitories – one for girls and one for boys – which will accommodate an additional 30 children. Our budget for one dormitory, including 14 beds and mattresses, comes to €5,800.

Should you want to help the children please forward your donations to the SMA Development Office, African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork. Many thanks for your kind support.



The block built for the Secondary School children, including Library.



SMA Superior General appointed as Bishop of Killaloe, Ireland

Pope Benedict XVI has appointed Fr Kieran O'Reilly, Superior General of the Society of African Missions (SMA) as Bishop of Killaloe. Fr O'Reilly succeeds Bishop Willie Walsh whose resignation was accepted on his reaching the age limit as laid down in Canon Law.

Kieran O'Reilly was born in Cork City in 1952, the first of five children born to Sean and Teresa O'Reilly. He attended the Presentation Brothers at Scoil and Coláiste Chríost Rí for his primary and secondary education. In 1970 he began his studies for the priesthood with the SMA and was ordained in 1978. Since then he has served in Liberia and Nigeria as well as undertaking Further Studies in Scripture in Rome. After six years on the Irish Provincial Council, Fr O'Reilly was elected as the SMA Vicar General in 1995. Since 2001, he has served as the SMA Superior General, based in Rome. With three years remaining in his term of office, Fr O'Reilly has now been called to a different ministry of service in the Church, as bishop of Killaloe.

His confreres in the SMA, both in Ireland and in other parts of the Society, wish him well in his new responsibility and assure him of our prayers.

Thank you for your support of our missionary work.
If you would like to support any of the missionaries you have read about in this Newsletter please send what you can to Fr Editor SMA, African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork indicating which project / missionary you want to help. Your full donation will be passed to the project concerned and you will receive an acknowledgement for it.

Let your goodness live on after you
(have inserted in your Will)

I, _____ will, devise and bequeath, the sum of _____ to the Provincial Superior of the Society of African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork, to be applied by him in his absolute discretion for the charitable purposes of the said Society.

CHRIST'S CALL

**To serve...
To proclaim...
To bring Good News...**

"TO BE MISSIONARY FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART"

- Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, Founder of SMA



**AFRICA STILL LONGS FOR GOD'S WORD.
WHY NOT JOIN US IN THE LORD'S SERVICE AS A
MISSIONARY?**

Contact the Vocations Director at any of our SMA Houses below

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