



African MISSIONARY



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Bishop Kukah is pictured with Fr Edward Muge SMA, Rector of the SMA House of Studies, Ibadan, Nigeria which celebrates its Silver Jubilee this year.

The SMA and I...

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto diocese, Nigeria, is internationally known for his membership of several important Government Commissions and for his unstinting efforts to foster good relations between Muslims and Christians. This edited article is taken from the SMA House of Studies Silver Jubilee booklet, 2015.

It is difficult for me to know really where to start except to first make two confessions. The first, second and third white men I saw were priests. The first, second and third white women I saw were nuns. I came to the conclusion that all white men and women were priests and nuns. My little mind had not opened up to the fact that there was much life outside my little village and our neighbours. The Igbos and other ethnic groups were a distant echo because we had only the Adar, Bajju, Jaba, or Katafs nearest to us. Even then, we faintly heard about these tribes largely when one of their women arrived as a new bride or when we met at the markets. My village was too remote and too small to merit more than the annual visit of the Priest [who was always

called 'Fada'], an event we looked forward to. We often had to go to the next village to collect Fada's belongings, made up of a Mass box, another box carrying food and so on.

The much desired privilege of carrying Fada's belongings from the next village passed us by because we were too young. I recall pleading and pleading endlessly for our much bigger and stronger cousins to let us carry any of the items just briefly, but we were often considered too young to both share in this blessing or be trusted to carry these items.

My real big break of meeting Fada face to face came on the day we were to be interviewed for baptism. About 40 of us I think had travelled almost 10 kilometres or so to the main parish to be interviewed for both Baptism and later on, Confirmation. I was the youngest of the whole lot. However, our Catechism teacher seemed very fond of me. He considered me his best student because he often handed the class to me whenever he had to be away. I had succeeded in memorizing the catechism and he was therefore very proud of me.

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So, when we got to the venue, we were all seated under a tree. He instructed us on how to conduct ourselves and avoid panicking. We learnt how to greet Fada, how low to bow and so on. We were to listen very attentively to the question and try not to panic. We all seemed fully set. Once Fada was ready our Catechist, Malachy, called on me to step up. He was convinced that I would so impress the priest that the job of others would be made very easy. He also wanted to show how hard he had worked. But it didn't work out as planned! I was so shocked by Fada's dentures, which he had taken out of his mouth, that I was unable to answer his questions.

A successful baptism led to being a Mass server and the rest as they say, is history.

Most of my life in Primary school was under the late Fr. John Glackin, a great and loving gentleman. Next was Fr. Eric White, another extraordinarily nice man. His car was the sign of vehicular life when I was growing up. As children, once we knew he was travelling, we would go and hide in the grass by the road side. We knew those areas where he had to slow down because of the road and that was where we waited. As soon as he slowed down, we jumped into the pickup van and rode as far as we could manage. It seemed he himself derived pleasure from these actions. We would ride for five or more kilometres, and not knowing where Fada was going, we would drop off and start a long journey on foot back home. Of course we rewarded him with the enthusiastic struggles to wash the car!

Then with the seminary came maturity and other developments. In St. Joseph's Minor seminary in Zaria, I still came under the influence of the SMA Fathers. It was only in St. Augustine's Major seminary in Jos that I came under the Augustinian Fathers and began to understand that there were other Missionary Congregations. The first one I had heard of after the SMA was the Jesuits. I began to nurse the idea of joining the Jesuits because I heard that they were rather studious, something that caught my attention. Sadly, there were no Jesuits anywhere within reach, so I buried the thought. Unfortunately, the SMA did not create the impression that a black man could join them. What is more, there were none in sight. In Kaduna as a young priest, the SMAs were everywhere. *[Due to their commitment to founding a local church the SMA always encouraged young men to join their home diocese. Only in 1983 did the Society begin accepting Africans as most dioceses where they worked had many local priests and it was felt that the SMA should now help young Africans, who wanted to be missionaries, to do so. Thank God the Society now has more than 160 priests from 14 African countries. – Editor]*

I worked in St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Kakuri, with the late Fr.



John Lee. Fr. Edward O'Connor, a jovial and great guy, was the Parish Priest in Gidan Bako for my ordination. Unfortunately, none of the great men who baptized and nurtured me were at my ordination. While in Kaduna, I was the only Nigerian priest in the city. Most SMA priests were many years ahead of me and so it was not easy to establish close friendships. Perhaps the easiest

SMAs that I got on well with are John Haverty, Mick Waters and the

late Connie Griffin, alias Fr. Danjuma. Fr Haverty hosted me in his home. He and Mick were great, down-to-earth guys with whom we had some really fantastic and memorable times in the Gidan Bako parish axis. All in all, each and every one of the Irish SMA's I met were truly jolly good fellas.

In 1979 I went to England for studies. Lyonsdown Road, London would later become my second home away from Nigeria. I have the fondest of memories and recall that some of the young men whom I met when I landed there in 1979 are now big men as we say here in Nigeria (*meaning they held leadership posts in the Society - Editor*). They include Bob Morland, John Keane, Tom Ryan, Donal Fennessy and Pat McGuire among many others.

My closest friend in Lyonsdown Road would later be Mike McPartland with whom I shared N° 33 for quite some time in my days at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Mike was a great guy, great sympathizer of the Conservative Party who adored Margaret Thatcher perhaps due to his military background. (*Monsignor Michael McPartland is now Prefect Apostolic of the Falkland Islands - Editor*).



In 2011 Fr John Haverty SMA was conferred with a Traditional Chieftaincy title and celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Priestly Ordination in Kachia, Nigeria where he still ministers.

I look back with gratitude to God because were it not for the SMAs, I probably might be dead by now or who knows? They gave me and thousands of other youths from Southern Kaduna a great start and a great life.

To end, as I started, I actually got baptized that day. Here is how it went: I told the Catechist and my other colleagues about Fada's teeth. Sadly, no one among the other children confirmed my story perhaps because Fada did not play with his dentures again. With two more students to go, the Catechist called me and asked me to borrow someone's shirt and come back for the interview. I did and he introduced me as having come late. I went in, confident and ready to take on Fada, teeth or no teeth. I passed and was baptized! Don't question the validity of my baptism because this was all for a good cause.

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah

Community Gardens



Photograph by Dee Sewell, www.greensideup.ie

The Community Garden is not a new concept; the network of Community Gardens across Ireland has been expanding steadily for more than a decade and the gardens have been a successful model for engaging various groups, helping them to become more community focused as well as promoting the care and wellbeing of the earth and its natural resources.

The gardens are often developed on unused or neglected land and so improve the appearance of the area as well as bringing people together to produce fruit and vegetables and a stronger sense of community. They vary in size and in varieties of produce and can be found in the towns and cities as well as in more rural areas. They are a real example of what Pope Francis refers to in his Encyclical Letter – *Laudato Si* [On the care of our common home] – as the human responsibility to “*till and keep the garden of the world.*”

A well established example is the Tearmann garden in Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow, which Sister Mary Carmody started in 2005. It is self-sustaining with all profits from what they sell being reinvested in the garden; there is no waste and it produces its own organic compost; various

school and community groups participate and maintain their own beds; at harvest time, all cultures and ethnic groups in the area pick and prepare food according to their own traditions for a community food-tasting event.

The garden has facilitated Transition year students in projects to promote native species of plant and animal life, as well as providing focused activity for mental health support and active retired groups. It is also used by Scout, pre-school and primary school groups.

In Northern Ireland such gardens have played their part in cross-community relationship building and promoting peace and reconciliation, bringing together young people and adults from different traditions to encourage integration and cooperation across all boundaries and divisions. Developing gardens of this kind is a practical way to promote justice and peace through greater integration and community building, increased awareness of the need to care for Creation, and the message that the earth belongs to everyone and we all share the responsibility for its wellbeing. As Pope Francis says “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect to our Christian experience.”

Dympna Mallon, SMA Laity Coordinator – laity@sma.ie

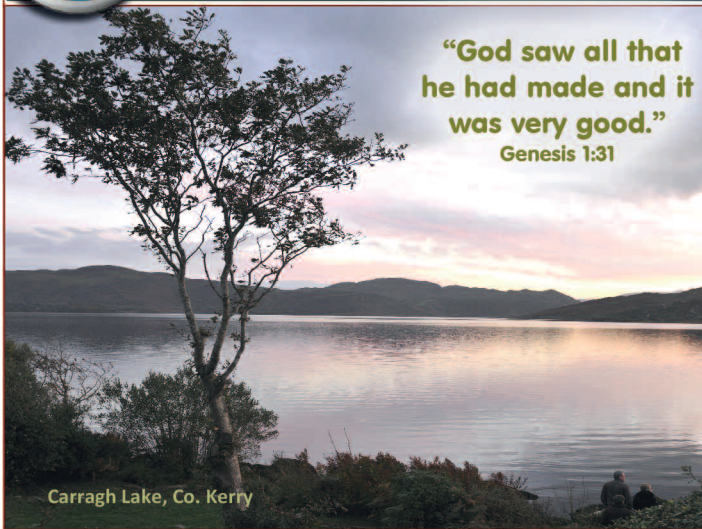


Photograph by Ciaran Burke, www.earthtouchproject.com



Ireland

CLIMATE J



"God saw all that he had made and it was very good."
Genesis 1:31

Carragh Lake, Co. Kerry

Be good Stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10

As Christians we believe that God made the world and entrusted us to care for it. This world is the place in which we come to know, love and serve Him through loving our neighbour and by following the example of Jesus Christ. Climate Change shows that human beings are failing in the task of caring for God's creation.

We live in what Pope Francis has called a "throwaway culture." Many people act as though the world is something to use and exploit. The world's resources are being misused, especially by those of us living in the industrialised world. Carbon emissions, generated by our energy use, are the main cause of the climate change that is damaging the earth.

The great injustice of climate change is that it is those who do least to cause it are suffering the most. In Africa and Asia millions have lost homes, land and livelihoods to encroaching deserts and seas. **We pollute but others pay the price.** This is a great injustice and a failure to love our neighbour that we as Christians cannot ignore.

Ireland ranks among the highest greenhouse gas producers in the world. The energy used by each Irish person produces 100 times more carbon emissions than an African does. This is excessive and unjust. We are contributing to the climate change that is already having a devastating effect on the poorest and which is destroying the environment we leave for future generations.



We pollute but others pay the price.

Caring for Creation is a matter of justice and part of our Christian calling. This is clear from the Bible and from Church teaching. But now, as never before, believers are called on to take greater care of creation. **We can make a difference!** In our homes and places of work we make daily choices about using electricity, gas, petrol, oil and about buying food and other goods that require energy to produce, to run and eventually to dispose of. If we make better choices about energy use, then each individual's efforts, however small, will collectively make a big impact on climate change.

The worst thing I can do is to say that I can make no difference. **Being Christian is all about making our individual response to God's call. We must individually, know, love and serve him by loving our neighbour and by caring for creation.** This is a call to action. Our actions and the individual choices we make matter.

Turning off the switch, saving water, reducing waste are caring acts. They are also acts of justice and love. They connect us in a positive way to those who live far away, to those who will come after us and to the God who made us.

Lord, may we know, love and serve you; may we be instruments of justice and peace and may we be good stewards of your manifold grace.

Pray for Climate Justice

1 November has been set aside as INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE Christians throughout the world will take part in this global prayer event which will focus on praying for the success of the UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Paris from 30 Nov – 11 Dec.

Its aim is to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, from all the nations of the world, to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

The SMA will mark this day by having special Prayers in all SMA communities and Parishes in Ireland.

Join us in prayer, from your home or wherever your are, at 7.30 pm on Saturday 1 November.

Together we will pray that world leaders attending the Conference will reach a meaningful treaty and that we as individuals and communities will act for climate justice by showing greater care for creation in our daily lives.

See www.sma.ie for more information.

Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice

In order to encourage action for Climate Justice the SMA has initiated this Campaign which is being used at all SMA events and in all SMA Houses during 2015. It asks individuals to promise or pledge to be better stewards of God's creation. People are asked to promise to take greater care of their own environment where they work or live and to use energy, food and other everyday materials more carefully.

Putting a thumbprint on a Pledge Sheet is the sign of this commitment and all who do so also put their thumbprint on a Card which they keep as a reminder of the promise they have made. The Card has the pledge text on one side and practical suggestions on simple actions to care for the environment on the other side. For example: turn off the lights when you leave a room, switch off and unplug TV's, chargers when not in use.

Your Thumbprint is something unique, something that identifies you from all others in the world. The contribution you can make to Climate Justice is just as unique because only you can make it.

If we all do a little it will add up to a lot.

Thumbprint Campaign Pledge

Lord God, I pledge to take greater care of my environment, to do what I can in my own home and place. I pledge to use your gifts wisely and carefully, mindful that what I do today is affecting our world, the lives of others far away and generations yet to be born.

I place my thumbprint here as a sign of this pledge and I ask you for the strength to put it into action in my life and in the example that I give to others.

I make this prayer through Christ Our Lord.

Amen



Pope Francis Speaks

The new Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, seeks to address the "urgent challenge to protect our common home.... to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development." No. 13

Laudato Si comes at a critical time in history when the ecological crisis of climate change goes hand-in-hand with the spread of social injustice. The encyclical insists that measures to deal with Climate Change must also include establishing the common good and showing human solidarity. "A true ecological approach must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." No. 49

This encyclical is, as the extracts below show, as much about social justice as it is about the environment.

This sister [our common home - the Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. No. 2

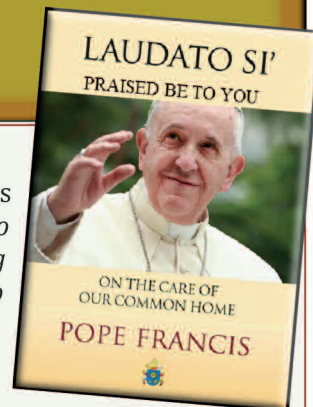
The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth...These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture. No. 21

We are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system... Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. No. 23

Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. No. 25

*If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment **Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.*** No. 64

Laudato Si, Rome, June 2015



Dromantine Open Day - Caoimhe and Eavann Mallon with Pledge Sheet



Lorenzo and Fabio McGarry make their mark for Climate Justice



THE SEED THAT WAS SOWN...

Bishop Bulus Yohanna, Vicar Apostolic of Kontagora, Nigeria, with Mass boxes gifted to him by the Dromore

of local, SMA and Kiltegan priests. In 2012, Bishop Carroll handed over to the first priest from the Kamberi people, Bishop Bulus Yohanna.

Apostolic Workers for two priests-elect, both from Zuru, one of the first parishes established by SMA priests. The Ordination is planned for November 2015.

Today just over 3% of the population are Catholic [50,000] in an area half the size of Ireland with 28 priests [including 8 SMAs and 2 Salesians]. With that figure Ireland would not have one priest for each county!

SMA priests were visiting the Zuru area from 1941, coming from the railway town of Minna. The priests established Catholic missions along the route and set up outstations in the interior. In 1952 the Kontagora / Zuru District was established as a separate Mission area with Fr William Byrne SMA in charge. In April 1953 an eight-acre parcel of land was acquired for a permanent Catholic Mission. Fr Danny Watson SMA built the Mission House. Of the estimated population of 140,000, about one third were Muslim and the rest were pagans. There were about 50 Catholics and 200 other Christians. Only nineteen of the fifty Catholics were from the area, the rest were from other parts of Nigeria.

Fr Watson's report to the Irish Provincial Superior in May 1954 reads as follows: "Baptisms, marriages, deaths, etc.: Since April 1953 there have been 8 baptisms, 2 of which were baptisms in 'danger of death'... There has been one marriage with the dispensation from disparity of cult, of two of the natives of the district... Confirmations were done in November 1953 by Mons. McCarthy at which four, all natives of the District, were confirmed."

The last SMA in Zuru [and indeed in the entire Niger Province], Fr Seán Hayes, handed the parish over to the newly-arrived Kiltegan Fathers in 1963. It was then part of the Prefecture of Minna with Monsignor [later Bishop] Edmund Fitzgibbon SPS as Prefect Apostolic. In turn he handed over to the first Kataf priest, Fr Christopher Abba, who became the first bishop of Minna in 1973. When Kontagora Prefecture was created in 1996 this part of Minna diocese was assigned to the new Prefecture with Fr [later Bishop] Tim Carroll SMA leading a small band

Fr Billy Sheridan [pictured], from Newport, Co Mayo along with Fathers Dominic Anthuvan [SMA India] and Donall O'Catháin [Cork City] are heavily involved in the Vicariate well-digging programme to provide clean water in the villages. Three other SMAs who served in Kontagora have been appointed Bishops – Fr François Gnonhossou is now Bishop of Dassa-Zoumé, Benin Republic [see last issue for report on his Ordination]; Fr Nestor Nongo-Aziagbia is Bishop of Bossangoa in the Central African Republic and Fr Tim Carroll was the first Vicar Apostolic of Kontagora.

Prior to his appointment in 1996, Fr Tim had spent more than 25 years in the area involved in parish and translation work. The usual common language in the area was Hausa and some spoke English. Convinced that the only way to 'meet' the people was through their own language he devoted himself to this work, translating several parts of the Bible, the Mass and other sacraments into the local Kamberi language, one of several local languages of which he was a fluent speaker. One of Fr Tim's helpers was a young Mission boy whom Fr Tim sent to school, who became a priest and is now his successor as Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Bulus Yohanna! Glory and praise to God. Amen.



A Letter to our Founder

Bishop Melchior deMarion Brésillac was a missionary, and later bishop, in India for twelve years. Due to stiff resistance to his plan to have Indian clergy he resigned as Bishop of Coimbatore and returned to France. On 8 December 1856 he founded the Society of African Missions.

Less than three years later he was dead from Yellow Fever which he contracted after landing in Freetown, Sierra Leone. He had only been six weeks in Africa. But God sent His blessing on the fledgling Society and, today, we are more than 800 priests [172 Irish] at the service of the church in Africa.

In recent years, with declining numbers from Europe and America we are seeing enormous growth in our membership from Poland, Philippines, India and thirteen African countries.

As we approach the 159th anniversary of the foundation of the Society in Lyons, France, Fr Julieto Casapao SMA [from Philippines] shares with us a letter he 'sent' to Bishop deBrésillac.

Dear Bishop deBrésillac

Greetings from Tanzania, diocese of Shinyanga, Bugisi mission!

We are filled with gratitude to God for making you the spark of light in our lives. Your message of faith resounds continuously in the life of the Society, as it continues to live out the Christian spirit to proclaim the Good News of Christ to all nations. Facing different challenges in this present time, we continue to respond to the call of Christ the Good Shepherd who never abandons us in our struggles. God's voice guides us always and searches for us when we lose our way.

Being sent here to Tanzania, after mission assignments in Ghana and Philippines, I see something new in missionary life. Life is indeed full of surprises amidst various challenges. Discovering God's graciousness in the lives of His people brings special joy to me as a missionary.

Though alone in the parish at present, many people visit Bugisi Mission to serve in the schools and the OLA Clinic. They inspire me to remain steadfast in my missionary vocation, which is an expression of active communal faith.

This year is filled with blessings for Bugisi Mission as we will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation. Since the diocese is still waiting a new bishop*, the Diocesan Administrator will confer the sacrament. Parish leaders are also actively involved in preparing the Confirmation candidates. Sacraments give life to the church as one people of God and prepares the gradual growth of the faith in the life of the people.

Bugisi Mission has 30 church communities and celebrating the Holy Mass makes me one with people sharing in their happiness and hopes in God's promise. I am so grateful to our Regional Superior and his Council, fellow SMA's, lay missionaries and seminarians who are working in this vibrant SMA Region. I am blessed to be in this Region and to live in an international community sharing together the same missionary spirit.

I continue to receive fraternal support from the SMA in Philippines. My brother SMAs and supporters there encourage me to continue in my missionary journey. I am inspired by the collaboration of SMA supporters and mission partners in the work for the Church in Africa.

May we continue to live as a community of disciples. I pray for God's abundant grace for our community of witnesses in the Society of African Missions.

Truly,
Julieto Casapao, SMA

* Shinyanga now has a new bishop: Bishop Liberatus Sangu.





Oath of Membership on 25 June last in Calavi, Benin Republic.

Newly-ordained SMA Fathers Rayappa Gumala, Charles Jebamalai, John Arokiyadass, Vilsa Kodavatikanti and Ratchagar Anthonusamy at the Ordination ceremony of Fr Arokiyadass in his home parish in Dindigul diocese, India.



Newly-ordained SMA Fathers Rayappa Gumala, Charles Jebamalai, John Arokiyadass, Vilsa Kodavatikanti and Ratchagar Anthonusamy at the Ordination ceremony of Fr Arokiyadass in his home parish in Dindigul diocese, India.

The Society ordained 25 priests this year. Sounds great? But the SMA Superior General, Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll, when asked about this large number replied that he had requests for four times that amount in 2015. So lots of disappointment this year for those who failed to get a priest for their area. The harvest remains great! At the same time as seeing these 25 new priests beginning their priestly lives we also welcomed, into the formal start of their SMA training, 20 students who took their First Oath of Membership on 25 June last in Calavi, Benin Republic. Our picture shows some of them after their Oath ceremony. They are now in different parts of Africa for a pastoral year [Stage] where they will live and work alongside experienced SMA priests and learn what it means to be a missionary. If, at the end of their Stage, they still want to continue they will go back to one of our major seminaries to study Theology. The SMA Family Vocations Crusade [FVC] plays a huge part in meeting the costs of educating our 300 or so seminarians throughout the world. If you would like to know about how to sponsor a seminarian please contact your nearest SMA House for information [addresses below].



ONLINE DONATIONS

You may send money, at no additional cost, for our Missionary Work, Family Vocations Crusade (FVC), Mass Association Cards etc. using our Donate Online facility on the www.sma.ie homepage.

EIRCOCODES ARE HERE

With the introduction of Eircodes in the Republic it would be helpful to us to have them. Please take the time to check your address and complete it. Many thanks!

NIGER CHURCH REBUILDING

Thanks to the generosity of our African Missionary readers we have sent more than €16,000 to help in rebuilding one of the churches destroyed during the ant-Christian riots in January 2015. We thank you on behalf of both Archbishops and people of the Church in Niger.

The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God...

We commend the following SMA and OLA missionaries and our deceased supporters to your prayers.

Fr Bill Kennedy (Dublin), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 89 years on 18 May 2015.

Fr Patrick McGovern (Bawnboy, Swanlinbar, Co Cavan), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 85 years on 4 June 2015.

Sr Philippine [Mary Anne] Woulfe (Athea, Newcastle, Co Limerick), served in Nigeria, England and Ireland, aged 90 years on 5 July 2015.

Lord God, welcome our deceased SMA supporters, benefactors and missionaries, into the peace of your Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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