



African MISSIONARY



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Five of the nineteen priests ordained in 2016 completed their studies in the SMA Nairobi Formation House where Fr John Dunne and Fr Anthony Kelly are part of the formation staff. They are Frs Pawel Gabrys (from Poland), Samson Adanu Ebute (Nigeria), John Ojonojima Akagwu (Nigeria), Soko Jean Tayoyo (Cote d'Ivoire) and Gerard d'Assis Houkpe (Central African Republic).

An SMA seminarian tastes mission life for the first time



Samuel Ibe is a Nigerian SMA seminarian now doing his Spiritual Year programme in Calavi, Benin. Here he shares with us his experience of helping in a parish in Kontagora Vicariate in Nigeria. Kontagora is just over half the size of Ireland with an estimated population of 2 million. The Catholic population is less than 5% with 32 priests and 40 or so Sisters to care for them over this vast area.

SMA seminarians look forward to their 'in-the-field' experience of working in a particular

mission, either during holidays or during their Stage [pastoral] Year. Many are sent to urban or semi-urban areas while some are sent to work with SMA priests in more remote places. In the seminary we study about what mission life is about; we chat with missionaries who have spent many years on mission and who, through their sharing, ignite a flame in us to follow in their steps. Mine was kindled too and in July 2013 I spent some time in Kontagora Vicariate. Much of Kontagora is a 'Primary Evangelization area', i.e. the people are hearing about Jesus Christ for the first time.

Society of African Missions (SMA)

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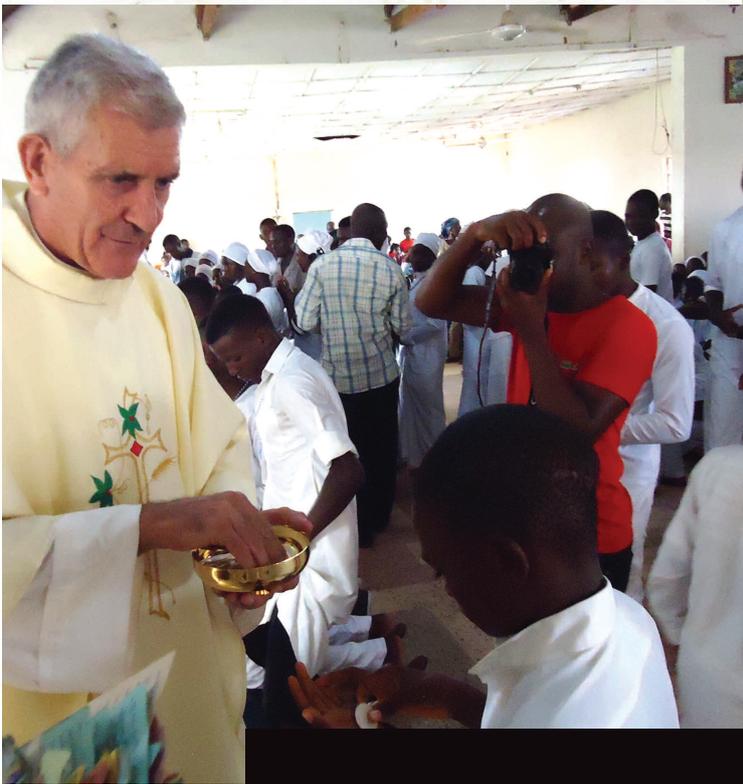
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It took five hours to travel from Ibadan to Ilorin in Kwara State, arriving at the Holy Family SMA parish at Gaa-Akanbi where Fr Phonsie Flatley SMA [from Kinvara, Co. Galway] welcomed me. After some food I travelled on to Guffanti, a small rural community to the north-west.

This trip took a further six hours and we gradually moved from Yorubaland to an area where many Fulani and Hausa people [many of whom are Muslims] live. I was sitting next to two women whom I took to be Hausa and Muslim. But when I heard one address the other as Christiana I realized that they were Christians. That was just the first learning experience for me. I arrived in Guffanti village late that evening and a group of children I again presumed to be Muslims [because of their clothing and facial features] rushed to help carry my bag to the Mission House. But, again, I learnt over the coming weeks that many of them too were Christians. As I visited different 'churches' I saw that we had not only some Fulanis and Hausas attending church but also Kamberis and Gungawas, the original native people of the land. When the Fulanis arrived in this part of Nigeria they tried to spread Islam but with limited success. Over the past 50 years or so many of the local people have converted to Christianity through the work of the Irish and French SMA priests. Part of the reason for this was that the Catholic missionaries learnt and spoke the local language whereas the Fulanis spoke in Hausa, a language seen by the locals as 'foreign'. These were the people I lived with for my pastoral training.

Guffanti parish presents many challenges with more than 50 outstations and only two SMA priests to care for them. This is the reality and the challenge facing those working in Primary Evangelization areas. Fr. William Joseph [from India] was Parish Priest, assisted by Fr. Emile Appraboe [from Ivory Coast]. However, Fr. William was also caring for another parish during the absence of its priest on leave. So I and Fr Emile, for whom English was his third language [after his own language and French] and who was now learning a fourth [Kamberi], were left to take care of the mission. Our daily schedule obliged us to visit different outstations every day, except on Mondays. This was the only way to cover the parish. Many evenings Fr Emile and I went to the Church groundnut and maize farm to tend our vegetable garden. The people were very hospitable and always joyful whenever they met us. But their poverty was evident and disturbing. Very few could speak English. Many pupils were taught English through Hausa. Others had never been to school. The pupils in primary school opposite the parish church sat in the open for lessons as cars sped past on the dusty road.

My experience was full of adventure. During the wet season we often got stuck on muddy roads while travelling to remote villages. I had no contact with the outside world as there were no mobile networks. I saw camels, met new friends, visited the sick, held services in very simple 'churches'. I once had to hold a service under a tree as there was no church in that village.



Fr Mark Monaghan SMA from Omagh, Co Tyrone, has spent more than 40 years as a missionary in Nigeria. Here he is distributing Holy Communion at a First Holy Communion Mass.

There were times when I both felt out of place, out of the world and sometimes fed up! These were challenging times for me.

The OLA Sisters run a Health Clinic, a Primary and a Secondary school in Papiri, about nine miles from Guffanti. Both schools are the result of the work of Fr Donall Ó'Catháin SMA [from Cork City] with the financial assistance of many groups in Ireland, including several Apostolic Work groups, An Garda Síochána, Electric Aid, some schools in Northern Ireland etc. We are deeply grateful for all their support in helping to bring education to the people of Kontagora. The work of the OLA Sisters shows that the Good News is not confined to the spiritual realm but also addresses some of the people's other needs, particularly in health and education. At the end of my time in Guffanti I was grateful for such a wonderful experience.

All in all my pastoral training in Kontagora was challenging and eye-opening. Despite initial difficulties of adjusting to a new culture, etc I was happy to be there. I now understand the difficulties there are in accessing remote communities and the huge shortage of priests to meet their needs. Please pray that many more young men will respond to the call of the Lord to be missionary priests.

Samuel Chiderah Ibe

FROM MISSION IN AFRICA TO MISSION IN SCOTLAND

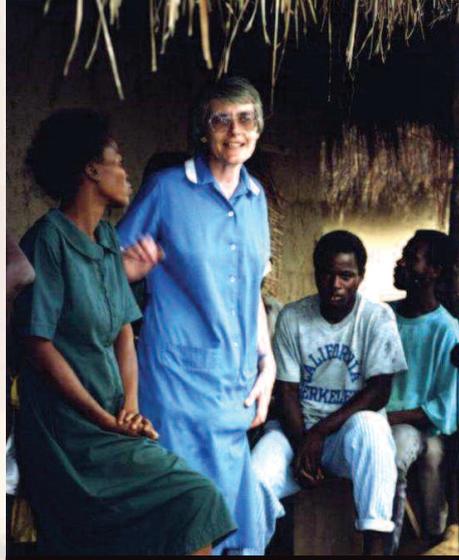
Monika Kettlehut [now Manser], a member of the Volunteer Missionary Movement [VMM], writes on the effect working with the OLA Sisters had on her in the early 1980's and how it has changed her life to this day. This is Part One of a two-part article on Monika's life.

As a young 25 year old in 1981, going out to work in a rural missionary hospital in Nigeria, little did I know how much the OLA Sisters would influence my life, not just my career but also my sense of mission and ministry.

My attraction to the Foreign Missions began at a young age when priests and nuns came to visit our school with stories of life in African mission hospitals and schools. For me, as a child, these missionary priests and nuns had a spirit of adventure – “to boldly go where no-one has gone before” – to quote my favourite programme of the time. I was captivated by these stories and the pictures of smiling children gave me a yearning to go to Africa and work there. After qualifying as a Laboratory Technician I was accepted by the VMM and, in November 1981, I left my mother, father and six sisters in Glasgow, and travelling with Winnie, another volunteer, I made my way to Bacita, Kwara State, Nigeria. There I was assigned to the Laboratory of St Brendan's Hospital, a rural missionary hospital run by the OLA Sisters.

For the next two years I worked alongside Sisters Dolores Kearney (Matron, from Donemana, Co Tyrone), Liguori Smiddy (Midleton, Cork) and Eithna Synott (Doctor, Gilford, Co Down). Other VMMs were working there as Nurses. By examining clinical specimens from patients, I diagnosed a wide range of Tropical diseases ranging from malaria to intestinal parasites as well as pathologies like sickle cell anaemia. I encountered many ill patients with diseases not encountered in the UK. I can recall one little boy with a swollen abdomen who came into the laboratory for tests. He passed 159 live adult Ascaris worms - thus the reason for the swollen abdomen!

During my two years I experienced the work in other OLA clinics: in Papiri, in Ibadan as well as clinics run by the Notre Dame Sisters in Oro and Osi.



Sr Dolores Kearney OLA at a rural clinic

However it was not only my work in the laboratory that would shape my life but also experiencing God's love through dedicated SMA priests, particularly Fr Gerry Murray [from Dublin], and many OLA Sisters who served the people by administering the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. During these two years I witnessed many miracles, patients who would have died if it hadn't been for the intercession of prayer. Nigeria also taught me about the role of the laity in parish life. This was a truly novel experience for me,

seeing lay people undertaking ministries that were usually the responsibility of the priests and nuns back in Glasgow e.g. leading liturgical services on Sundays and weekdays, distributing Holy Communion, carrying out funerals etc.

All too soon, my two year term in Nigeria was over and I returned to Glasgow. Career wise, my experience in Nigeria was advantageous in that I was employed in Stobhill hospital which also housed the Scottish Parasitology Reference Laboratory and I was able to put my love of Tropical Diseases to good use.

Spiritually, I felt I had not matured much. The teachings of Vatican II – regarding the role of Laity in the Church – were slow to take root in my home parish. However, the flame of spirituality was always kept alive through my friendship with Sr Dolores and visiting her regularly. I then went out to work in Germany for two years where I met my husband to be. In 1991, when he was posted back to London, I got the job of my dreams in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London.

For the next 24 years I was teaching and advising laboratories all over the UK and overseas on how to diagnose parasites in clinical specimens. But where could I get appropriate specimens containing a wide range of parasites for teaching? The answer was obvious - Sr Dolores Kearney OLA.



MISSIONARY AND LAITY



Catholic Hospital, Oke Offa, Nigeria in the mid 1950s with Bishop Richard Finn SMA, Government Officials, Hospital Staff and Sr. Geraldine OLA.

and the OLA was working with lay people to promote human development and social justice. This was achieved through schools, hospitals, clinics and development projects focusing on skills-training, health, clean water and agriculture. They built and ran teacher training colleges and Schools of Nursing. All of these activities, motivated by faith, were “right and just” because they promoted the human dignity that is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching.

In this missionary work the Good News of the Gospel was converted into practical action that met people’s spiritual, physical and intellectual needs. This allowed them both to improve their lives and also to become the People of God, responsible for their own faith and church communities.

In these endeavours whether church building, healthcare, education or community development the Missionary and the people WORKED TOGETHER; no other approach would have been realistic or practical.

Partnership with Laity

The need for greater lay participation in the Church and the need for faith to be witnessed through social justice are things we hear more about in recent years. This is because there are fewer priests and also because the society and world we live in is going through a period marked by great injustice due to inequality, war and climate change.

In response, the SMA wants to encourage a much greater lay presence and participation in its work and it also wants to develop and increase work for justice, especially in Ireland.

The participation of lay people in the work of the SMA is not a new idea. The vision of the SMA Founder, Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, that the SMA be a “Society of clergy and lay people” has guided generations of SMA missionaries in Africa who trained catechists, lay preachers and leaders to undertake key roles in organising and in ministering to their own faith communities. Parish Councils and lay leaders were the norm in SMA run parishes in Africa, long before they came to Ireland. SMA’s encouraged local people to take responsibility for their own faith and their own church.

As well as building up church communities, another focus of the missionary work of the SMA

Learning from Experience

The approach of the missionary working with lay people is still practical and valid today, not only in Africa, where the Church is vibrant and thriving but also here in Ireland where, in contrast, the Church is in decline in terms of the number of people practising their faith and of clergy to minister to them.

Even though there has been a turning away from formal religion and the institutional Church; there are many who care about justice and rights, about protecting the weak and those with no voice, and about caring for the earth. There are still many who, in the words of the encyclical *Laudato Si*, “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” The SMA wishes to work alongside and in partnership with such people.

Lay people have always been the bedrock of the SMA’s mission through providing financial support for SMA missionaries in Africa. This support continues and has allowed the church and social development work described here to take place. It is still essential in nurturing the education and training of the growing number of



Fr Denis Donovan SMA & Fr John Donnelly SMA at Akwanga primary school near Jos, Nigeria, in the 1940’s.

The SMA Founder, Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac saw the provision of education as a key element in the SMA’s work.

In 1859, writing from Dakar, while on his way to Sierra Leone he declared that: “***Schools would be indispensable for the success of SMA missionary endeavours.***” Although he died of Yellow Fever a month later, those who succeeded him ensured that schools were at the centre of their mission apostolate in West Africa.

For example, in Ibadan Diocese, Nigeria fifty-six primary schools were opened in the twenty-two years between 1952 and 1974. This commitment to education was replicated in all the other dioceses and countries where SMA’s and OLA Sisters worked. Secondary Schools were also built and run as were Teacher Training Colleges. The SMA and the OLA have made an enormous contribution to education and therefore to human well-being and development in Africa.



SMA Missionaries from Africa, India and other parts of the world who continue the work begun by Irish SMA's.

A New Beginning

But a new response to the signs of our times is needed. Learning from its missionary experience, the SMA wishes to be open, in new and creative ways, to accompanying interested lay people in witnessing to their faith by working for the justice that is central to the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. In Africa this, as the photos here show, meant generations of SMA and OLA missionaries building schools, colleges, wells and hospitals as well as churches. Today the situation is different, but we still want to work with lay people and to share with them the mission "to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

To this end the SMA through its Parishes, Houses and Communities in Ireland will train, facilitate and support groups of lay people who wish to engage in activities that promote social justice. Over the last year the areas of **Climate Justice** and **Welcoming the Stranger** have been identified as priorities. At the same time the SMA has adopted an Ecology Policy to promote more ecologically sound practices in our houses and parishes. Additionally a faith development programme for lay people will be piloted at two SMA houses this Autumn and training in Church Social Teaching is also available through the SMA's **Living Faith Means Living Justly** programme.

Two SMA parishes, Wilton in Cork and Walthamstow in London have decided to become 'Eco-parishes' through the Eco-Congregation scheme in Ireland and the CAFOD scheme in England. Led by lay people these initiatives will raise awareness across the parish of the need to live more harmoniously with creation and allow the various skills and talents which exist in the parish community to be used in practical tasks, outreach and awareness raising. The same potential exists in the **Community Garden** projects which are being encouraged in SMA Houses. Through these projects, there is the scope to reach-out to and involve the wider community in taking greater care of creation.

The SMA **Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice** invites people to make better choices in how they use gas, electricity, coal, oil, about the food they buy and waste and about the water which is polluted or wasted by how they live. The Campaign asks people to see their actions as connected to both climate change and the impact it has on the poorest people in the world and then to respond in a just and Christian way. The SMA will recruit, train and provide resources for volunteers who wish to participate in the delivery of the Campaign in schools and parishes. In doing so this volunteers will be missionary in a new way, here in Ireland, on a



Well digging, a common scene in every parish where SMAs worked in West Africa. (1970's)

matter of social and environmental justice, which has great significance to people in Africa and for future generations.

In these ways we hope that groups of people attached to SMA Houses and parishes will be formed and that they will respond to the signs of the times in their own areas perhaps by addressing local issues of injustice, by campaigning on global issues such as climate justice and migration and by showing and spreading the example of caring for creation.

Pope Francis said that the task of proclaiming the Gospel and its message of justice "is not reserved to some 'mission professionals, but should be the profound aspiration of all lay faithful who are called to evangelise by virtue of their baptism." He also said: "None of us can think we are exempt from concerns for the poor and for social justice."

The SMA wishes to do all it can to assist lay people to fulfil this task and to show this concern.

We also believe that the laity are indispensable for the success of SMA missionary endeavours.

If you are interested in volunteering and training to present the Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice email: climate.volunteer@sma.ie

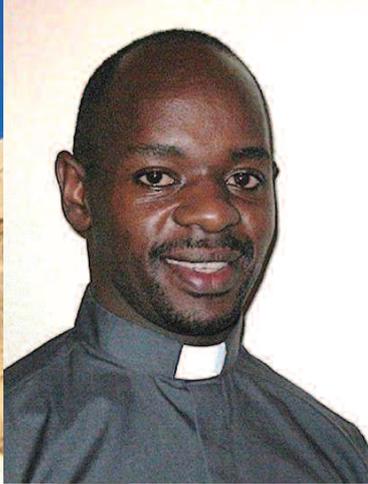


LEFT: Fr Dan McCauley SMA & Sr Roisin Cox OLA at the Catholic Hospital, Bacita, Nigeria (1990s).

RIGHT: A primary school run by the OLA Sisters in Bauchi, Nigeria - today.



A new venture in Egypt



Egypt, one of our earliest mission fields, has an estimated population of 95 million. About 10% are Christians, of which the majority are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Christian population dates right back to the time of

Christ. The Catholic Church is about 200,000 believers, spread over seven distinct rites: the Coptic Catholic Church being the largest and led by the Patriarch of Alexandria. The largest concentration of Coptic Catholics is in Upper Egypt gathered into seven dioceses. There is a small number of Roman Catholics in the country.

Though the SMA first went to Egypt in the late 19th century there was little contact with the Coptic Catholic Church until the arrival of a Dutch SMA priest, Fr Jakob Muysier, in 1920. He was ordained in that Church in 1921 and began his missionary work in Zagazig city. He built a typical Coptic church named after Saint Pachomius in the city of Faqus. Several other SMA missionaries followed in his footsteps, from France, Holland and Ireland. Fr Gerard Viaud was the last non-Egyptian SMA priest to serve there, returning to France in 2009. Today our one Egyptian Coptic Catholic priest, Fr Farid Ibrahim SMA, is working with immigrants in France.

In recent years the SMA has been reconnecting with the Coptic Church especially in Upper Egypt. Some of our seminarians – who do part of their training [Stage] in Egypt – are sent to spend three to four months with Coptic priests. Consequently the Bishop of Sohag diocese has asked the Society to establish a mission in his diocese. We are now in the process of preparing for this, intending to

establish our presence in Tahta, which is a bustling city south of Cairo. It has three Coptic priests to care for five parishes. SMA Fathers Fr Jean-Paul Silué [from Ivory Coast] and Fr Wilson Kodavantikanti [India] are currently polishing their Arabic and initiation into the Coptic rite. Fr Silué was ordained in Egypt in 2013.

The SMA is the only male missionary institute in Sohag diocese. For the first year or so our priests will be accompanied by two experienced local Coptic priests. Eventually the SMA intends to have four priests forming a community and involved in many diocesan activities in Tahta.

We are in need of financial support to help fund this new missionary outreach with the Coptic Catholic Church which, despite challenges, is still thriving in the south of Egypt and is much in need of a missionary presence.

Fr Robbin Kamemba SMA, from Kenya, is the Community Leader in Egypt. The other four priests come from Ivory Coast, India, Nigeria and Poland. Three seminarians joined them this year for their Stage Pastoral year.

We care for St Marc's parish, Choubra [Cairo] and the Basilica in Heliopolis and are also involved in various social actions including care of the elderly and prisoners.

We also run a school for 50 young people with special needs [Club du Bonheur]. They attend each weekday from 8.30am till noon, engaging in activities to help develop certain skills. A team of 8 trained teachers look after the pupils. There is no cost to the families concerned and so the parish [and the SMA] must meet all expenses.



Coimbatore diocese is nearly the size of Ireland with five principal languages: Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and English. The city of Coimbatore – often styled as the Jewel of Tamil Nadu – is now a bustling city with a huge amount of IT and Textile industries.

SMA India continues to grow

The Indian connection with the SMA can trace its roots right back to the days before the Society even existed. The SMA Founder, Bishop deBrésillac, was a missionary and later the first bishop of Coimbatore [in 1845] in Tamil Nadu State, south India. Due to an inability to convince the other bishops of the need for a local clergy and other difficulties in India he resigned as bishop, aged 42 years. Following his return to France he founded the Society of African Missions on 8 December 1856. Thus came to an end the 'Indian connection'... until the 1980's when the Society began recruiting and training young men from south India for missionary priesthood.

Since the first Indian SMA Ordinations in 1993, the Society has seen a steady growth in the number of Indian priests and seminarians. Last year we had five ordinations to the priesthood and, in 2016, three more. At present we have 49 Indian SMA priests, many on mission in Kenya, Nigeria, Niger Republic and Tanzania. Fr Arokiya George was ordained in his home parish of Our Lady of Dolours in Mettupatti, Dindigul in April by Bishop Jude Paul Raj of Palayamkottai diocese. The ceremony took place in the large recently-renovated 19th century church, but many could not get inside due to the large turnout of people.

Our photo shows the 'Aarathi', a welcoming ceremony of the Tamil culture. Before the Mass the faithful welcomed the bishop and the priests as well as the priest-elect, Fr George, and his family and other invitees. They, in turn, then did the same to the

people gathered inside and outside, inviting them to participate in a joyful way in the ceremony.

The following morning Fr George offered his First Mass in the Parish church. Mettupatti has an SMA Sponsoring group [similar to the Family Vocations Crusade in Ireland which sponsors the education of young men for the priesthood]. This group organised the Ordination and First Mass and the celebrations afterwards.

Fr George is the 49th Indian SMA priest and the 3rd to be ordained from this parish – surely a sign of the vibrancy of the SMA Sponsoring movement in that area. The other two SMA priests are Fr Dharmu Henry Daniel (working in Kenya) and Fr Dominic Sugaraj (Vocations Director, India). Fr George is now working with 3 other Indian SMA priests on mission in Niger Republic.



**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.

Life after 'retirement'



Ela and Zbyszek Jęczmyk are a Polish couple who, after their official retirement in Poland, decided to continue using their skills in a voluntary capacity in their home town of Laski, near Warsaw. Married since 1973 they have three children and nine grandchildren.

After completing University studies at Lublin Catholic University in 1975 both began work at the Special Centre for children with a visual impairment in Laski and this has been their life's work for more than 35 years.

As well as caring for children with a visual impairment and other Special needs, Ela was also a primary school teacher. Her husband, Zbyszek, has been teaching the children how, though visually impaired, they can manage their 'space' and how to move around independently, using a special stick for this purpose.

Seven years ago they began using their skills to help those who lost their sight as adults, particularly the elderly. For the past three years they are spending time in Ukraine as volunteers, helping with the rehabilitation of children with a visual impairment in addition to a physical disability. They also spend some time teaching the parents how they might stimulate the proper development of their particular child.

Last August Zbyszek and Ela jetted off to Tanzania to begin working with visually impaired children at the Buhangija Centre, near Shinyanga.

Before heading for Africa, they were welcome visitors at the SMA House in Wilton, Cork where they spent some weeks improving their English. "In Wilton we experienced fantastic hospitality and welcome and will cherish unforgettable

moments spent in that community. The priests shared about their own missionary experience and gave us some advice. Without a doubt all of these will be very useful during our ministry in Africa," were their comments as they left Ireland in June.

In Tanzania, they will work with the SMA Regional Superior, Fr Janusz Machota, who is also from Poland, and they will be part of an SMA team which counts twelve nationalities in it, lay people and priests, including Fr John Kilcoyne and Fr Michael McKee. We wish Ela and Zbyszek every blessing as they embark on a new chapter in their lives together.



Four SMA priests and 16 young Tanzanians attended the World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland. Our picture shows Fathers Josephat Nzioka [Kenya], Cyril Imohiosen [Nigeria], Christopher Lumagbas [Philippines] and Prabu [India].

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.

Sr Elizabeth Hayes (Ballyneale, Co. Limerick), served in Nigeria, England and Ireland, aged 96 years, on 4 June 2016.

Fr Jeremiah (Derry) O'Connell (Cork City), served in Nigeria, aged 84 years on 17 August.

Sr Dolores (Catherine Patricia) Davis (Skreen, Co. Sligo), served in Ghana, Nigeria and Ireland, aged 96 years, on 18 August.

Fr Daniel O'Neill (Oristown, Navan, Co Meath), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 78 years on 27 August.

Sr Deanna (Katherine) Donohue (Portlaoise, Co Laois) served in Nigeria, England, Tanzania and Ireland, aged 73 years, on 31 August.

Fr Vincent Lawless (Kilconieron, Athenry, Co Galway), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 85 years, on 5 September 2016.

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



INTERESTED IN A LIFE AS AN SMA MISSIONARY? ...IN AFRICA?

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