

AFRICAN LINK

Newsletter of SMA Laity groups



Society of African Missions, Dromantine, Glen Road, Newry, Co Down.

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Christmas Message from the Provincial Leader

Some time ago I came across a striking reflection written by well-known American theologian, Walter Burghardt. He was speaking of the phenomenon known as “The New Age Movement”, to which many people in the Western World are now looking for answers to their questions about life and its meaning. For him, the popularity of this movement is evidence of a profound longing, ‘deep within the human heart, for something more than the material, beyond what our eyes can see., our ears hear, our fingers touch.’ However, we are not waiting for this New Age to arrive. As Burghardt points out, it came ‘more than 2000 years ago. It was born in the little town of Bethlehem, came to birth in a God-man who actually told us, through tears and sweat and blood, what we are doing here, where we came from and

where we’re going’ (*To Christ I Look—Homilies at Twilight P26*)

As we recall and celebrate the birth of Christ, we are challenged to listen to the answer God has given to our constant quest for the meaning and purpose of our lives—an answer carved in the flesh of his only Son. Put simply, the answer is this: that Love (God) is our origin, Love (God) is our destiny and a life of living service of others is our essential vocation. As we sing the ‘Adeste fideles’ and worship the God who smiles at us through the eyes of a helpless and totally dependent infant, may our hearts be touched and our lives transformed by the gift of His Love.

Wishing you joy and peace this Christmas and always!

*Michael McCabe SMA
Provincial Leader*



The SMA logo shows a map of Africa and three doves symbolizing Faith, Hope and Charity, the last words of SMA founder, Bishop de Marion Bresillac. December 2nd 2013 was the 200th anniversary of his birth in Castelnaudry, France.



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MY MISSION IN NIGERIA—FR DOMINIC

Shafaci is located in Niger State, in Borgu Local Government, around 175 kms away from the Kanji Dam. The parish is under the Vicariate of Kontagora, one of the places in Nigeria where primary evangelization is still effective and being actualized mainly by the SMAs. In this parish we are mainly working with the Gamberis who are basically farmers and occupy the most part of the Borgu Land. We have 129 outstations with 29 Catechists and over 100 service leaders. The main activities of the parish run from November until June because during the rainy season the parish becomes almost inactive due to rain and the parish is almost cut off from the main villages. Some of the activities that we do in the parish are well-digging, clinic, education etc. Some of the pastoral activities include Literacy programme/Catechesis, visitation, building of churches etc.

The aim of the well digging project is provide portable water to rural communities in the vicariate of Kontagora. This project entails training a well-digging community consisting of 3 members, a team leader and two others. They are also responsible in enlightening the community that is in need of a well on ways of maintaining the well and keeping the well clean and to teach them also of the importance of a clean environment to keep away most diseases like malaria, diarrhea and others. Despite some available aid the parish is responsible for many aspects of the project including transporting the well-digging teams from

Kontagora to the communities that are in need of a well and rehabilitation of wells/ training of the communities regarding maintenance of wells that the communities get.

Early one Sunday morning I was awoken by the voices of people outside my door. They told me our church was burnt down by some Muslim group in our town.

When we went there with the people we saw how the church was completely destroyed and burnt down. What should I say to the people that would console them? What I told them was "What was destroyed was just a building but the real church was standing in front of me."

But the real community living amidst all of the challenges is the team spirit. Training lay church leaders is the main ministry of mission. Teaching them to raise voices for themselves, enlightening them to be more aware of their rights, teaching them the real values of education and their moral authority are part of gospel values without which the teaching would be preaching to somebody who is hungry. The gospel has to be preached amidst the challenges. The mission needs to continue and that mission needs to transform the lives of the people.

Fr Dominic sent the above article to us having returned to his parish in Nigeria after his visit to Ireland in September. Many of our FVC members met him at the annual Head Sponsors meetings around the country. We ask you to keep him in your prayers.



Some of those who attended the SMALA Retreat Day with Frs John Denvir and Cathal Mc Kenna

SMALA ADVENT RETREAT DAY

Every Advent, SMALA members gather in Dromantine for a Retreat day, an opportunity to reflect and pray together as well as to renew their commitments as members of the SMA Lay Association. The morning session was spent listening to reflections and thoughts from their Chaplain, Fr Mossie Kelleher, while in the afternoon, those attending watched a presentation by Friends of Africa which outlined the various projects with which FOA are actively involved and some of the ways in which they hope to develop their work. During the celebration of the Eucharist which brought the day to a close, all SMALA members promised to live the Christian life more deeply and to develop a broader vision of the mission of each Christian in the world as well as supporting the African mission.

There was also an impromptu celebration for Fr Mossie's Golden Jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood, much to his surprise—and delight.





FRIENDS OF AFRICA (FOA)

On October 12, Friends of Africa hosted a 15th Anniversary celebration in Dromantine and many former volunteers and members joined the current FoA's to hear about the work that has been done and their hopes and dreams for the future. After Mass celebrated by the FoA chaplain, Fr Kevin Mulhern SMA, there were presentations about the various areas of FoA work as well as a meal and the chance to socialize.

The first Friends of Africa volunteers, (Quintin O'Kane, Tony McCloskey, Kevin McDonagh, Brian Higgins and Angela Dougan) went to Zambia in 1999 to Frs Fergus Conlon (RIP) and PJ Gormley in Ndola diocese. They were involved in education and counseling, night outreach, working with the homeless and street children as well as small business development. Since then 15 more Volunteers have gone to Zambia.

The current long term volunteer is Anita Mc Williams, who has been there since November 2012 and is overseeing the construction of the new pre-school facility in Twafwane.

Presentations were also made about the work done in South Africa by Bernie Connolly who spent 2 years in a school in Mogwase in Rustenberg diocese and established a school library there.

The development of the Short Term Volunteer (STV) programme in 2001 enabled 3rd level students to participate in a 6 week intensive block initially in Zambia and later including South Africa and Tanzania.

With continued interest from secondary level schools to link and work with FoA, there is huge potential for an ongoing contribution to improving the lives of the people of Africa. The future looks bright for FoA.



Pictured above are some of the current Core Group of Friends of Africa and the picture below shows founding members Quintin O'Kane, Phelim Gormley, Tony McCloskey & Rev Brian Fitzpatrick, (Deacon in Dromore)



INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR FR PÁDRAIG DEVINE

Fr Pádraig Devine SMA was recently honoured by the Caring Institute (USA) for his work in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. A founding member of Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (SCCRR) in Kenya, Fr Pádraig hails originally from Roscommon and has spent 25 years working in Tanzania and Kenya.

The Centre was established not just as a response to the regular outbreaks of violence in the areas in which he was working but also due to a recognition that in the creation of hospitals, schools and various social support structures, the church was simply dealing with the symptoms of the conflict rather than the causes of the violence themselves.

‘There was a real need to address the root causes. We got our vision very clear. We decided to insert ourselves in to the warring groups that were in conflict with each other. We aimed at training 120 influential opinion shapers within each community.

Fr Devine (below) at the awards ceremony with former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell



We dealt with tribal elders and the chiefs and we gained their trust’, explained Fr Pádraig. Working with him in The Shalom Centre is Fr Oliver Noonan SMA from Cork.

On his induction into the Caring Hall of Fame, on October 31 in Washington DC, Fr Pádraig joins former award winners such as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and last year's recipient, the Dalai Lama.



Christmas Fayre and Santa at Dromantine



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Final preparations are under-way for the first ever visit to Dromantine by Santa and his elves. He arrives on 18 December and leaves again on 21 and there are still some places available for the young and young at heart who want a chance to meet him in person. The Christmas Fayre will

run from 10am until 6pm on Saturday 21st and from 12 until 6pm on Sunday 22nd. With gifts, crafts, sweets and treats on sale, the chance to top up your Christmas Spirit and help African projects, why not come along and join us?

If you have any items for inclusion in the newsletter or if you know of anyone who would like to receive AFRICAN LINK, please get in touch with Dympna Mallon, SMA Laity Coordinator at SMA Dromantine, 96 Glen Road, Newry, Co Down, BT34 IRH, ph (028) 3082 1024, email: laity@sma.ie.

SMA FOUNDATION DAY

One of the most important days in the SMA calendar is December 8 when the founding of the SMA by Bishop Melchior de Marion Bresillac is celebrated. This year some of the communities in Ireland celebrated the founding of the Society on December 7 and some on December 9. The SMA which is now 157 years old had been established less than three years when Bishop de Bresillac himself set off for Sierra Leone along with 5 other members of the new congregation. Within 6 weeks, five of the missionaries were dead and the survivor returned home. The dream and vision of Bishop de Bresillac was realised thanks to the perseverance and commitment of Fr Augustine Planque who guided the SMA from its origins to become well-established as a missionary congregation. Despite the difficult beginnings, SMA now has about 900 members worldwide.



Basilica of Our Lady in Fourviere, France where Bishop Melchior de Bresillac founded the SMA on 8 December 1856.

SMA Parish in aid effort for Philippines



Fr Gus O'Driscoll SMA, Parish Priest in Good Shepherd parish, Manila whose parish has been sending aid trucks to some of the areas most badly hit by the recent Typhoon, wrote in a recent email: "Parishes continue the relief operation. Here in Good Shepherd Parish, and with SMA Philippines, we are focusing primarily on two parishes in the devastated places. The primary focus is the parish of Fr. German Patiga (curate in Good Shepherd Parish)– **Holy Family Parish**, Pawing, Palo, Leyte. The second is the home parish of one of our SMA seminarians, studying theology here in Manila – **Our Lady Queen of Angels Parish**, can-Avid, Eastern Samar".

As the needs of those who lost everything become more long term, there is ongoing need to provide food, clothing and medicines. A fund has been set up for donations to the aid effort which will go directly to SMA in the Philippines. See sma.ie for more information.