

# AFRICAN LINK

Newsletter of SMA Laity groups



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

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## SMA LAITY COMMISSION CONVENED

At the Irish Provincial Assembly in July 2013, the Society of African Missions made a commitment to become more “open and inclusive”. One of the ways of achieving this was considered to be promoting fuller and more meaningful participation of lay people in the life and work of the Society. A series of aims and goals were agreed to try to further this commitment. One of these was the establishment of a Commission comprised jointly of lay people and SMAs to consider how this new engagement might be achieved.

Fr Maurice Henry, SMA Provincial Councillor convened the inaugural meeting of the Commission on Saturday 18 January in the SMA house on Ranelagh Road in Dublin. The Commission is the first of its kind in the history of the Irish Province

The 13 members of the Commission (6 women and 7 men) are drawn from all over Ireland and are involved with SMA in a variety of ways: some are members of SMA parishes or laity groups or have other longstanding connections with SMA; some are SMA priests and some are OLA sisters (whose congregation was founded by the first Superior General of the SMA, Fr Augustine Planque).

While the work of the Commission is at very early and formative stages there is a determination within the group to grapple with the variety of issues which affect the relationship between the laity and the SMA. All are committed to making a difference in the way the SMA relates its mission and message to the changing face of Africa. First, however it has to come terms with the changing face of the Church in Ireland.

The laity in Ireland are essential in making the SMA more fit-for-purpose in fulfilling its mission both in Ireland and in Africa. The SMA mission needs to move forward working from a stronger laity-driven base in order to survive and part of the work of the Commission will be to identify ways in which this laity-driven base can be nurtured and developed. The Commission members understand that its task is a challenging one which demands faith, personal witness and courage but this is the essence of the missionary spirit.

The SMA and the Laity Commission have chosen a new and uncertain road to walk but “the journey of a thousand mile begins with the first step”. (Lao Tzu, 570-490 BC).



*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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## OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY & ST PATRICK'S PARISH, WALTHAMSTOW, LONDON

It may come as a surprise for some SMA supporters to learn that the SMA Irish Province also includes the Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary and St Patrick, which is located on Blackhorse Road, in the north east London borough of Walthamstow.

Fr John Brown SMA, originally from Carrickmore, Co Tyrone, has been Parish Priest there since 2007. Fr John spent almost 30 years in Nigeria before returning to work in Ireland and England in 1999. He is assisted by Fr Kevin Conway SMA from Donemana, Co Tyrone who was ordained in 2011, and spent a period of time in Walthamstow as a deacon prior to his ordination.

The parish community in Walthamstow is made up of a number of different ethnic groups and cultures including, African, Caribbean, Filipino, Asian, Tamil, Polish, English and Irish and this diversity in cultures ensures that the liturgies are colourful, vibrant and full of song. In addition to the traditional schedule of Masses, Mass is celebrated each Sunday for the Polish community by a priest from a nearby parish and regular Tamil liturgies are also celebrated. Several groups are involved in providing the music for the liturgies including a number of musicians and a folk group.

A wide range of parish-based activities are ongoing throughout the year such as the provision of shelter for homeless people one night a week from January to March in conjunction with the other Christian

churches in the area. Other activities include the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, El Shaddai Charismatic Prayer and Worship group,, a parish based, lay-led sacramental preparation programme for First Holy Communion candidates and a parish based sacramental preparation programme for Confirmation which is led by Fr Kevin, assisted by a number of lay parishioners. Both sets of candidates regularly participate in Sunday liturgies during the preparation period. There is also a Parish Pastoral Council which meets regularly to assist Fr John and Fr Kevin with the work which is ongoing within the parish.

While part of Brentwood, Diocese, the Parish's association with SMA goes back to its foundation. Frenchman Fr Theophilus Borer, Parish Priest for almost 30 years in the early days of the parish, became a priest for the Diocese of Westminster in 1905. He was, however, originally ordained as a member of the Society of African Missions, (SMA).



**Following the Annual Area meetings** for the Head Sponsor of the Family Vocations Crusade last September, the Head Sponsors in each area were invited to gather together in small localised groups to get to know one another and to consider the various issues which arise as they begin to create local support networks to strengthen FVC. They were also invited to identify what they consider to be the main issues for the future of FVC in a dramatically different climate

## NEW FVC HEAD SPONSOR GROUP MEETINGS BEGIN

to the one in which it originated. Meetings have now taken place in South West Armagh (Ballymacnab), North West Armagh (Portadown) and Belfast (see photo to left.) Over the coming weeks many meetings will take place in various parts of the country starting with Derry. There will be 42 of these groups in total. What is clear from these meetings is that there is a real commitment to SMA and to assisting the young priests in formation in Africa, India and the Philippines. There is also a desire and determination to make FVC relevant for future generations here in Ireland.

The FVC Spring Retreat takes place in Dromantine on May 2-4, when the grounds around the house will provide beautiful walks for reflection and prayer. Please contact the conference centre on (028) 3082 1964 for bookings.



## FRIENDS OF AFRICA: ZAMBIA REPORT

**My name is Anita McWilliams** and I am the current long term volunteer with Friends of Africa based in Kitwe, Zambia.

I am a social worker from Draperstown, Co.Derry, but I have been based in Zambia since November 2012



and due to my love of the projects here I have just recently extended my stay until June 2014. Twafwane building project was started in 2006 by the SMA fathers in an effort to provide housing for individuals and families who were identified as among the most vulnerable in the area and a total of 64 houses have now been built. As the houses were allocated to those who were assessed as being most in need, the majority of those living within the community are ex street children who have been rehabilitated, double orphans living on their own or with elderly grandparents, and widows with children. Although there is already a high rate of HIV within the community, this is an area where the community needs further support. Many children whose parents have died from the illness have not yet been tested and because of the stigma involved with being HIV positive, individuals are scared to get tested. There are now around 200 children and approximately 50 teenagers living within the Twafwane community. Due to the background, family situations, and increased vulnerability of these young people, Friends of Africa realised that they would need additional support and guidance in order to help them have positive futures.

Education is invaluable in helping these children succeed in life, giving them opportunities to grow and develop along with their peers.

The vulnerable families within Twafwane have limited educational backgrounds and job opportunities so without the support and assistance which Friends of Africa offers, many children within the community would simply not be able to afford to go to school. Following a request from the residents of Twafwane, Ms Eileen Havern, the FOA volunteer in 2012, set up a pre-school for the younger children who were not yet attending school. I have continued this programme as we realised that when parents/grandparents were illiterate, children had no help and support with basic reading and writing skills. The pre-school also identified children old enough for basic school

(grade 1) but who for various reasons had never attended. In December 2012, 18 children attending the pre-school were identified as being the appropriate age to attend grade 1-some even up to 9 years old had never attended school. We secured school placements for these children and assisted with buying uniforms and shoes.

The children were then able to start grade 1 in January 2013

Although the pre-school is successful and appears to be bringing great enjoyment and learning to the children of Twafwane, the temporary accommodation we are currently using is a major problem. The dilapidated building is made from wooden planks and has a roof made from flour bags and bin liners. During the wet season the rain comes in so the small



wooden planks we use as desks and benches are usually wet for class. In addition to this, the current wooden pre-school is quite small for the number of children who attend (normally around 45) so frequently a lot of the children do not have a desk to lean on when they are trying to learn to write.

Thankfully, after a long wait, the local council have responded to Friends of Africa's requests and allocated us land on which to build a proper pre-school. We hope it will double as a community centre for the evenings/weekends so that the whole community can make use of the building. Plans have now been submitted and I have great hopes about what this pre-school and community centre will mean for the whole community when it is finally completed.

Friends of Africa fund other programmes within Twafwane community such as enterprise training and empowerment for the adults and a youth club for the teenagers to educate them on important issues like gender violence, HIV and alcohol/drug abuse, as well as providing them an opportunity to participate in sports and develop their music/art and drama talents.

Part 2 of Anita's report will be produced in the next edition of the "African Link"





## SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS

Dromantine  
96 Glen Road  
Newry  
Co Down BT34 IRH

Phone: 028 3082 1224/1964/ 1024  
Fax: 028 3082 1704  
E-mail: dromantinecards@sma.ie or  
laity@sma.ie

## SMA Pilgrimage to Knock

The annual SMA pilgrimage to Knock takes place on Saturday 24 May this year. It is the highlight of the year for FVC members and for the whole SMA family. Buses will travel from various parts of the country and details of the buses are available through the offices in any of the SMA houses. We look forward to seeing many familiar faces as well as some new ones for a colourful and multi-generational pilgrimage.



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.

## YEAR OF de MARION

**December 8 2013** marked the bi-centenary of the birth of Melchior de Marion Brésillac, founder of the **Society of African Missions**, and the beginning of a year dedicated to him by all international units of SMA. In recognition of the importance of the Founder's life and principles, each African Link during 2014 will highlight some aspect of his life and work.

Less than three years after he was ordained, Melchior was sent as a missionary priest to India. He had felt the call to be a missionary for several years but was highly valued by the local church and unable to secure his father's consent. As a member of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society, he finally left for Pondicherry in India in 1842, having written in his diary of his resolve: "to be a missionary from the bottom of my heart; to neglect nothing that will advance the work of God; to seize every opportunity at preaching the word of

God and to use every available means with all my strength, all my mind towards the training of a native clergy."

While he was in India, he became unhappy with the refusal of the European missionaries to respect and include the traditions of the local people, what is now called "inculturation". He sought to recruit and establish a local clergy regardless of the caste system, an integral part of Indian culture, to which he was very sensitive. This was an unpopular idea with the other missionary societies and with many members of the Foreign Missionary Society to which he belonged. Although by then a bishop, in 1853 he wrote to the Vatican offering his resignation and returned to Europe.



## JUSTICE SEMINARS IN WILTON, CORK



**Over the past six months** substantial work has been done in the SMA Justice Office researching and developing a programme of presentations. Under the general title of **Living Faith means Living Justly** the programme is aimed at the laity and at encouraging involvement in Social Justice issues. The first three sessions look at the concept of Justice in the Old Testament, the New Testament and in Church Teaching respectively. Together these three sessions make up the foundation of **Just Living**. Other sessions look at various Justice Issues from this foundational viewpoint i.e. applying the teaching of faith to the situation. So far the three foundation sessions have been delivered in two Parishes in Cork with the assistance of Bishop Patrick Harrington SMA. Each session lasts 35-45 minutes with time given for questions and discussion afterwards.