

# AFRICAN LINK

NEWSLETTER OF SMA LAITY GROUPS

Society of African Missions, Dromantine, Glen Road,  
Newry, Co Down, BT34 1RH.



## SPECIAL ISSUE: JUSTICE, PEACE & THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

This edition of African Link is focused on Justice and includes a report on the SMA Summer School recently held in Dromantine and of a project for homeless people in Walthamstow, London.

The SMA logo above shows a map of Africa and three doves symbolizing Faith, Hope and Charity, the last words of SMA founder, Bishop de Marion Bresillac. The SMA was founded on December 8, 1856 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fourviere, France.

**The SMA Summer School**, organised by the SMA Justice Committee began in Dromantine on Saturday 4 July, a landmark event as the first Summer School open to non-SMAs. Participating were some members of the laity groups associated with SMA, and lay people and clergy from the surrounding dioceses, some of whom are also involved in Justice and Peace. The three-day event borrowed its theme "Living Faith means Living Justly" from a programme developed by the SMA Justice Office, the presentation of which opened proceedings. A comprehensive programme deepening our understanding of the relationship between faith and justice and highlighting Catholic Social Teaching, it has already been delivered in Cork, Limerick and Tipperary.

Gerry Forde, SMA Justice Office and Bishop Patrick Harrington SMA have delivered the programme on about 20 occasions, in one-day, weekend and four-week formats and have developed modules on a range of issues including Care of Creation and Climate Justice, Human Trafficking, Human Rights and Muslim-Christian dialogue to complement the core programme. Each session included reflection, discussion and feedback on key questions and the day concluded with the module on Care for Creation and Climate Justice. It is hoped the programme will be delivered at Dromantine in the Autumn.

LIVING  
FAITH  
MEANS  
LIVING  
JUSTLY

A  
programme on  
Catholic Social Teaching



SMA Justice Office, African Missions Wilton, Cork



## AFRICAN LINK

## DAY TWO

The first session on Day Two of the Summer School, *“A new Life in Ireland: Cultural and Structural Challenges Facing Africans”* was a presentation by **Salome Mbugua**, a Kenyan woman who is married and living in Ireland. Salome, (pictured with Séan Healy SMA who facilitated the event), was the founder and CEO of **AkiDwa**, (Swahili for sisterhood), an African women’s network, up until last year and has been instrumental in supporting and empowering African women in Ireland for the past 15 years. She spoke of the enormous changes in



Ireland in that time and how it has become a truly multicultural society with immigrants accounting for 12% of the population and almost 55,000 Africans, mostly Nigerians, among them. She challenged the way the media reinforces the stereotype of Africans, creating a negative view of Africans, and identified a lack of capacity within the existing structures to provide support services which are culturally appropriate to the needs of all those accessing them. She spoke specifically of a lack of culturally appropriate communication and support in situations of trauma and crisis. She is now involved with **Wezesha**, a consultancy which is working specifically with the African diaspora to identify ways of using their extensive skills and education to address the ongoing problems of armed conflict, poverty and violence in places like Democratic Republic of Congo. She challenged the Church in Ireland to assume a role in promoting integration and equal treatment for all, in supporting human rights campaigns for access to third level education for those in Direct Provision, in promoting mediation and reconciliation and most of all in preaching peace, love, unity and respect for all people, who are equal in the eyes of God.

The first presentation on Sunday afternoon, *“Social Justice, Faith and the Public Square”* was given by **Baroness Nuala O’Loan** (pictured below with Séan Healy SMA, Social Justice Ireland and Maurice Henry, SMA Provincial Councillor).



A former law lecturer and the first Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Baroness O’Loan began by acknowledging the tradition and work of the SMAs in Africa and how that has been a witness to the values of Justice and the Common Good.

She reflected on her challenging experiences in the political environment in Northern Ireland, and legislating in the House of Lords, as well as three years spent in Kenya as lay missionaries with her husband Declan. She also spoke of her visits to Timor L’Este as a Special Envoy for the Irish government, of meeting young displaced women in the Middle East

and of the struggle to encourage Ugandan legislators to move away from the use of the death penalty in favour of alternative forms of sentencing.

She spoke of how she feared to touch the lepers she encountered in Kenya despite the compassion she felt towards them; of the ways in which people become outcasts in their own society and how we fear to engage with the homeless, those in prison, those who have addictions, the mentally ill and those who are housebound. She suggested that these are the “public squares” within each life in which people are called to act with faith and justice, basing their actions and choices on their relationship with and belief in God and that faith must be lived in the world and among the people encountered there. But she warned that it is not enough to feel shock or pain at the plight of the poor; “faith”, she said, “is not an intellectual exercise but ***gives purpose to our lives, even if others denigrate our beliefs, or even when they regard us and our beliefs as irrelevant.*** We are actually called to be evangelisers to those who see us thus – to be a light to the world! “

The third presentation on Sunday was from Ronan Scully, Area Manger of **Self-Africa Help**. Ronan who spoke to the Summer School participants on the theme of **“Empowerment and Self Sufficiency for Africa—with reference to key justice issues,”** has been involved in development work for many years and has travelled extensively in Africa developing and supporting projects aimed at giving local people “A leg-up rather than a hand-out”. Self Help Africa was founded in 1984 as a result of the Ethiopian famine and



merged with Gorta, the Irish charity in 2014. The organisation is currently assisting 435,000 families in Ethiopia with small loans and credit to develop sustainable livelihoods and businesses. Ronan stressed the importance of an approach that is partnership and relationship based in identifying the needs of a local area and in developing the appropriate response; this has encouraged the use of locally –based field staff who are themselves African. He also outlined the emphasis that has been placed on the empowerment of women, through the provision of local wells and other basic resources. Such developments make it easier for girls to complete their education, which has a positive long term impact on their expectations and quality of life.

**DAY THREE** The final day of the Summer School featured a presentation by **Fr Peter McVerry SJ** (pictured below) who addressed the participants on **“Motivating and Maintaining Engagement for Justice”**.

Drawing on his own experience working with those on the margins and fringes of society, and couched in scriptural references, he suggested that as followers of Jesus we are charged with promoting the mission of Jesus and that key to this is the spirituality of the Gospels, to which justice is intrinsic. Considering the images of God embedded in Scripture, he drew a distinction between the God of the Law so much associated with the Old Testament, as one who excludes the sinner, and the God of whom Jesus spoke as a God of Compassion. He suggested that young people who reject the traditional approach of the Church are in fact the prophets of our time, challenging the institution to reflect and practice the Gospel values more effectively rather than rules and regulations.

Comparing the Kingdom of Caesar and the Kingdom of God, he outlined the mission of Jesus to not only tell of the coming Kingdom but to make it a reality through his outreach, inclusion and healing of outcasts and the poor. Being so immersed in poverty and pain was, for Jesus, a connection with the real and concrete suffering of the people of His time; Peter proposed that the challenge for us is to do the same. Jesus didn't just preach the good news of the compassion of God, He practised it too; those



people wanted and needed to hear good news and the ministry of Jesus helped them to believe in it, even after His death. Illustrating the early Christian communities as typified by radical solidarity and radical inclusiveness, he suggested that what unites us as Christians is not the following of rules but our commitment to bringing to fulfilment a dream of love, justice and dignity for all people, and that such a dream can only be realised through the total self-giving and radical selflessness of those whose passion is compassion.



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### JUSTICE IN WALTHAMSTOW

*The parish of St Patrick's in Walthamstow is a vibrant, multi-cultural parish in North-east London and has been in the care of the SMA for many years. In this article, Ann Shean, a parishioner, speaks about her experience as part of a parish team of volunteers providing shelter for homeless people in the area:*

There seems to be a big problem with homelessness in our borough of Walthamstow; you don't have to look too far to see that for yourself. Our streets are providing a 'home' for many people, different nationalities, male and female, all different ages. Walthamstow bus station is particularly a popular spot for homeless people; it has washing facilities and shelter. I know a few homeless people who sadly have

to use it on a regular basis. The Christian Kitchens (a local charity) provide a hot meal for the homeless; sometimes up to sixty people will be fed, every evening all year round. I volunteer with others from St Patrick's parish, working closely with our neighbours, the Baptist Church, providing an evening meal, a warm and safe place for them to sleep on Friday evenings, and a cooked breakfast on Saturday mornings. Fortunately our guests have somewhere to stay between November and March with different churches providing shelter each evening.

We have around thirty guests on a Friday evening; 24 guests sleep over at the Baptist Church and I take six to St Patrick's parish hall after they have all had their meal. Our guests are of different nationalities, but many are eastern European and without wanting to stereotype them, they do seem to be struggling with alcohol. All our guests are checked before they come into the hall but sometimes the effect of alcohol comes into the hall with them. This year I have noticed that they seem more broken inside than our guests from last year's stay; they seem to be on edge and scared to let the volunteers come close to them but that only makes us more determined to make their stay with us as enjoyable as possible.

It has taken nearly two months staying with us for our guests to start to trust me, confide in me and share their journey with me. Some are very open and really do enjoy sharing, and you do sense how grateful they are to have a warm bed and good home cooked food, all things that I can take for granted!

You really do have to admire their determination and strength to carry on and not give up. We have guests of all different ages. The youngest is only nineteen and the eldest is seventy three. We have five women guests, and the rest are male. It was sad to see a mother and son there together, both struggling badly with alcohol; but they are so protective of each other, their shared love shines out to others. Unfortunately it is a relationship some parents don't have naturally with their own children and seeing their love and strength for each other helps you carry on.

The other volunteers have also mentioned how much they enjoy their time spent with our guests and apart from just volunteering, you really do start to appreciate everything about your own life and how fortunate we all are. It's only twelve hours on a Friday and yet it is probably one of the most fulfilling experiences you will ever have. This is now the third year that St Patrick's have been involved. Like the Baptist Church, we have been providing shelter since January and I dread to think what would happen to the thirty guests we see every week, if they didn't have somewhere safe and warm to stay; it's just a shame it has to end in March.

