



You are a Missionary



For over 130 years the Irish Province of SMA has had the active support of lay people in its missionary work. This generous support has taken various forms and continues today with thousands involved in various aspects of the SMA mission: training students for the priesthood through the FVC, Mission boxes, the SMA Lay Association, using our Mission Association cards for special occasions, Friends of Africa and employment in the SMA communities.

Despite this close involvement with the SMA and its mission such people are not included in the general understanding of what it is to be a missionary. Or, more importantly, what title would they claim for themselves?

Despite our rich tradition of producing and supporting missionaries the vocation of each person to be missionary in their own time and place is not one that has been widely promoted or encouraged.

Most of us understand the word "missionary" as applying to a priest, brother or religious sister who leave their home country to proclaim the Good News of God's Love in Africa, South America and Asia. Since Vatican II, lay people are also included in this overarching title of 'missionary'. But the impression is still widely held that mission means leaving one's family, one's home and one's country and travelling to foreign lands. This is not so!

Each baptised person is called to be missionary, through their anointing in the sacrament of Baptism. In Baptism you are called to "go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News". Nowhere does the official Church teach that being a missionary applies only to priests, brothers and religious. Nor is it written that the work of spreading the Gospel is only to be done in distant lands.

More than fifty years ago, Vatican II said that all the baptised had a right and duty to participate more fully in the life of the Church, when it spoke of the Church as "the whole people of God".

Sadly this vision of a more active and fully participative Church has not been realised. Many missionaries experience and promote the engagement of all the people of God in their parishes. But the reality they encounter when they return to Ireland is often very different, though there are some parishes where the vision of Vatican II is promoted.



Fr John Gallagher SMA baptising in Moita Bwawani, Tanzania

Despite our rich tradition of producing and supporting missionaries the vocation of each person to be missionary in their own time and place is not one that has been widely promoted or encouraged. Yet it is a heritage in which we all share from our earliest days, and which many people exhibit throughout their lives in the smallest and simplest ways. Most of us know people who reach out to those in need, through their involvement in St Vincent de Paul, Meals-on-wheels, various addiction support networks, peace and justice groups, bereavement and relationship counselling, Faith Friends, welcoming ministries, liturgy groups, youth networks as



well as many other voluntary and charitable groups. Do we think of those people as missionary? Do they think of themselves as missionary? The answer to both questions is almost certainly "no". **Yet they are missionary in every sense of the word**, going out from their own lives, their own place and reaching out to those in need, offering them comfort, support and friendship, bringing them God's message of love and compassion, sometimes in very practical ways. Most of us know someone who visits an elderly neighbour, who

**Let us become
agents of God's
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through which God
can water the earth,
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justice and peace flourish.**

Pope Francis

does the shopping for someone who is housebound or ill, who reaches out to the new family in the street whose first language is not English. Think of the times you yourself have lifted the phone to speak to someone who missed a meeting, or a social occasion through illness; when you offered a lift to someone; when you prayed for someone's special intention, or remembered those because they were struggling in some way. Such actions are often so subtly weaved into the everyday fabric of our lives that we don't think about them; we certainly don't make a fuss about them since they are little more than acts of humanity and decency in the course of ordinary life.

But these are also acts of mission, of reaching out beyond ourselves to others in need and of bearing witness to the message and the values of the Gospel, even if that is not our intention or motivation. These ordinary acts of kindness are a means of sharing the Good News of God's compassion and love, even though there may be no reference to God or questions of faith during any contact or conversation. **These are examples of how ordinary people are missionary in their own lives and their own places, people like you.** You are already missionary by your Baptism, but you manifest this by the ways you reach out to others and by your witness to the Good News of God's love for all living beings. You are also missionary by virtue of your part in the work of the SMA, in your support of and your commitment to the mission in Africa; the only difference is that your mission field is your own home, your own community, your own town.

Dympna Mallon, SMA Laity Coordinator

The call to mission does not belong only to those called to priesthood or consecrated life, to those who travel abroad or live extraordinary lives. The call to mission is a call to each one of us, to be answered as our lives and circumstances permit, but to answer it nonetheless. So, if the question is asked "who are the missionaries of today?", the answer is "You".

THE SMA THUMBPRINT CAMPAIGN FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE



In Laudato 'Si, Pope Francis states that "the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of the poor" and "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more like an immense pile of filth."

As SMAs in Africa we see the closeness of people to nature, to the land and their awareness of God manifest in their lives arising from their respect for and intimacy with their natural environment. If the land was not protected and productive, then they had no future. When the land was despoiled, and unfit to grow crops, they moved on – no bank accounts to fall back on, no loans to tide them over, no government subsidies or grants to hope for. The vagaries of the weather conditions were always life challenges for poor people everywhere, but the climate patterns were and are matters of life and death, realities outside their control and comprehension. With the strong

evidence of Climate Change affecting their lives, their powerlessness is further compounded by a growing awareness of comfortable life-styles in distant places and of peoples unaware that they are unwittingly imposing poverty and destitution upon them.

Aware of our own complicity as collaborators in the disempowering of peoples of the developing world, we in the SMA recognized our part in the evolving deterioration of the African environmental conditions. **The SMA Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice** has emerged from such an awareness, as an effort to open Irish eyes to the

**Act for
Climate Justice**

**WE POLLUTE
- OTHERS PAY**

**IT'S TIME TO CHANGE
OUR WAYS**



SMA Justice Office,
African Missions, Wilton, Cork
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huge disparities that prevail between peoples of the same human family, disparities directly related to the phenomenon of Climate Change, and in the process, to create a space which acknowledges and supports the connection between faith and action.

Like our DNA, our thumbprint is unique. The Thumbprint Campaign, challenges our comfortable life-styles and way of thinking, asking **"can we do more to be our brothers / sisters keepers?"** By making their thumbprints and declaring the above pledge, individuals are invited to take responsibility for their sisters and brothers wherever they live. Essentially it calls for a conversion of heart and behaviour.

Launched at the SMA / OLA Pilgrimage to Knock in 2015, the SMA Justice and Laity Offices produced Campaign posters, visuals and pledge cards. We also had a stand at the National Ploughing Championships and have visited many schools and parishes spread far and wide, from Ballymena to Macroom, from Tuam to the SMA parish in Walthamstow, London, amassing more than nine thousand thumbprints on colourful posters, in the process. With its in-built faith dimension and African orientation, a forty-minute presentation has been developed for classroom delivery. The invitation to ordinary people to engage in a new dimension of our SMA mission by **"preaching the Gospel of Climate Justice"** became overwhelming for the limited number of persons equipped and available to deliver and meet the demand.

With increasing requests especially from "Green Flag" schools, more qualified and trained personnel were required to deliver the programme. Over fifty volunteers came forward to attend training sessions organised and conducted in Cork, Dublin, Newry, the Midlands and Claregalway.

Lord God, You made us stewards of creation, yet greed and misuse of resources are destroying the world you entrusted to us. Those who do least to cause climate change are unjustly suffering the most. They are without water, land, livelihoods and many are forced to leave their homes.

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 will affect 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 witness that I give to others. I make this prayer through Christ Our Lord.

Amen

PLACE THUMBPRINT HERE

John-Paul II Awards: When the Thumbprint Campaign was approved as a top-up for students aspiring to merit the John-Paul II Awards, the campaign moved up another level of accessibility for students, youths and the general public, with twenty-one dioceses in the country now signed up to the awards. In Derry diocese some six hundred students register annually for the Awards and some of them are opting to use the Thumbprint Campaign as their chosen top-up measure. In Tuam Archdiocese, twenty secondary school students want to get involved in the Thumbprint Campaign too.

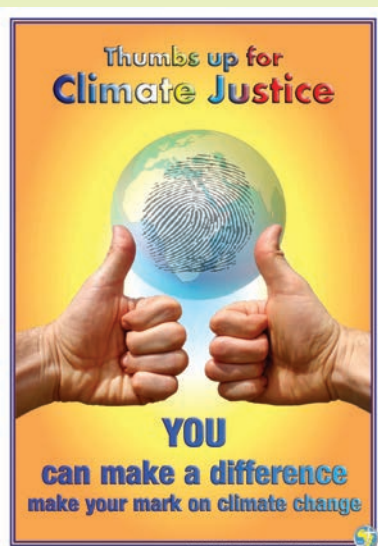


Beyond Ireland: SMA Lay Associates in Poland are also rolling out the campaign. This broad engagement requires more intensive training for volunteers to ensure a deeper understanding of the principles underlying the Campaign and authenticity in on-going presentations.

While it was initially conceived as an SMA project to implement a decision of our 2013 Provincial Assembly to reach out and engage with laity via a justice component, the Campaign has become a medium not only for highlighting the baptismal call of each person to take their place in the mission of the Church but also for communicating the great giftedness of creation and the connectedness of all people, caring for our all-embracing Climate since **"the Father causes His sun to rise on the bad as well as the good and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike."** (Matthew 5:45)

The Campaign which set out as one inviting a pledge through the mark of one's thumbprint, now offers a deepening of faith, a measure of catechesis and an awareness of the plight of the poor in developing countries all conveyed through the SMA Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice.

If you want further information on the Thumbprint Campaign contact us at justice@sma.ie or laity@sma.ie



Maurice Henry SMA



Dialogue with Muslims

Sr Kathleen McGarvey, OLA Provincial Leader, shares some thoughts on Dialogue with Muslims, particularly in the Irish context.

It is people who dialogue, not religion; we don't dialogue with Islam, but we dialogue with the people who follow the religion of Islam and they are called Muslims.



Why the Church asks us to dialogue with Muslims

About a sixth of the world's population today are Muslims. Not all Muslims are the same just as not all Christians are the same; Muslims come from many different nationalities, understand Islam differently and practice Islam differently. Most Muslims are good peace-loving people, with their joys and sorrows, trying to fend for their families, build communities and obey God.

Christians and Muslims believe in one God, who is merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth; God has spoken to us through the prophets, and both Muslims and Christians strive to obey God's will on earth. Muslims do not acknowledge Jesus as God, but they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, and they even call on her with devotion. They value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting. So, the Church asks all of us to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to promote together, for the benefit of all people, justice, peace and freedom.

Things that make dialogue with Muslims difficult

There are many reasons why dialogue with Muslims can be difficult today. Among these reasons are ignorance, fear, prejudices, and hurts from the past. The media today influences how we see immigrants, especially Muslims, as a danger. We have all heard so much, too much, anti-Islam, anti-Muslim rhetoric in recent times from political leaders in various parts of the world, especially in the USA and Europe. Unfortunately we also see a lot of public support for this kind of rhetoric. This kind of speech does

no good and in fact fuels Islamic radicalizations as well as unjust discrimination and leads to more violence.

A great injustice we do to Muslims is to see negative and aggressive voices, (such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and so on) which are given great media attention, as representing the true face of their religion. Of course this is neither true nor just.

Another obstacle to dialogue with Muslims is that we say that we will only show openness to Muslims if the same is shown towards Christians in Muslim-majority countries. We will only allow mosques here if churches are allowed in Saudi Arabia. We will not allow Muslim dress here unless Christian religious symbols are freely allowed in Muslim countries. Thus, we often set reciprocity as the condition for dialogue. We will do if you do; if we do you must do. But, reciprocity is not a Christian virtue: gratuity is. Jesus tells us that we must give without counting the cost.



How we might be involved in dialogue in Ireland

Of the seventy thousand Muslims in Ireland today, many have immigrated here from other parts of the world, and some are Irish who have become Muslims for some reason. Quite a few efforts are being made to help Muslims integrate into Irish society and also to help us understand one another and live together in peace. This is to be encouraged. In fact it is an active way of living out the values which both Christianity and Islam teach!



Islam cannot be said to be "terrorist" because "a small minority misinterpret some of its sayings and killed people and terrorize the innocent. ...Let us say once more a firm and clear 'No!' to every form of violence, vengeance and hatred carried out

in the name of religion or in the name of God ...Together let us affirm the incompatibility of violence and faith, belief and hatred."

Address of Pope Francis to Muslim Leaders in Cairo, Egypt, April 28, 2017.

Today in our schools, hospitals, shops, universities and all public spaces in Ireland, we meet Muslims and people of other faiths every day. This is of course a very important form of dialogue as it is at that local level that we form opinions about people and label people, develop friendships or hurts, form prejudices or stereotypes and so on.

I am involved in the *Three Faiths Forum* in Dublin and in Cork and also in the *Sisters of Faith for Peace* based in Dublin. I've attended events in the Islamic Cultural centre in Clonskeagh and in the Mosque in Milltown and in Blanchardstown (all in Dublin). I've also been involved a little in Cork. Christians could consider getting involved with the Dublin City Interfaith Forum and the Lantern Centre in Synge Street. Such groups as I've mentioned welcome people of all faiths and help people grow in their understanding of the different faiths, including Christianity and Islam. There are other groups who are also seeking to promote dialogue and respect.

Attending meetings where Muslims and Christians address a particular topic (each from their own perspective) helps further mutual understanding and are opportunities to establish friendships; as well as of course allowing prejudices and concerns to be aired and addressed.

Important questions for us to consider, as individuals and as members of the Church, are: *Do Irish Muslims feel ostracized from their family and community? Do Muslims, of whatever origin, suffer torment of one kind or another as they walk our streets in Muslim dress? Do they feel the*



Sr Kathleen with participants attending a Cork Three Faiths Forum event organised to celebrate Earth Day, in April 2017.

brunt of prejudices? Is there anything I can do to help them feel more included, more accepted? Is there any way I could help others overcome their mutual prejudices and fears? Could my parish invite our Muslim neighbours to share a family day, a moment of prayer for peace, a discussion day?...

Conclusion

It is both very important and very enriching that we dialogue with Muslims. I hope this short article has offered you some insights into how you can contribute to this area of life today in a country where we boast of giving everyone a *Céad Míle Fáilte!*

What the Church Says

"The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator; in the first place among them are the Muslims together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

The Church, therefore, exhorts ... dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love."

Today in Ireland, our neighbour, the person we work with, those with whom our children go to school may be a Muslim. The statements above, from the Second Vatican Council, make it clear that dialogue and cooperation with them is part of our mission to love our neighbour. Yet, in opposition to what our faith teaches, there are some, who call themselves Muslim and Christian, who deliberately try to sow division between us. Recent terrorist attacks in Paris, London and Barcelona deliberately seek such division and reflect the extreme views of groups like Isis who resort to persecution, brutality and killing in the name of religion.

During his visit to Egypt Pope Francis rejected the use of violence in the name of religion. Later when addressing Egyptian Christians he said: *"true faith makes people more merciful, more honest and more humane"* and that *"the only fanaticism for a religious believer should be that of*

charity." Here in Ireland, when it comes to interaction between Muslims and Christians there is need for this charity. **The practical daily witness of mutual respect and cooperation is the best way of rejecting extremist attempts to sow division.**

In the last year or so we have seen biased and unacceptable behaviour. An assault on a Muslim Imam in Cork and damage deliberately done to a Mosque in Galway. Christian leaders, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Quaker rightly condemned these divisive attacks.

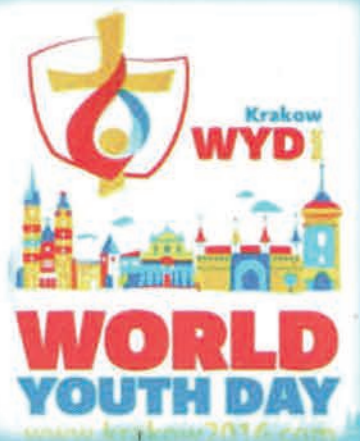
Extreme views do exist here in Ireland and we also hear them expressed through the international media. As Christians we must reject them. We must especially reject the temptation to blame all Muslims for the actions of few who hold and extreme and twisted views. *"To blame Muslims would be doing exactly what Isis wants and it is falling into the trap of Isis. I urge everyone to stand up against hatred ...Extremists are enemies of all of us, so therefore I am urging everyone to be united and all of us should stop any support of extremism."* These are the words of Shaykh Umar al-Qadri, a Muslim leader living here in Ireland. They express sentiments similar to those in the Church teaching below.

"The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. ... this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" , and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with allso that they may truly be children of the Father who is in heaven."

cf Nostra Aetate, 1965, Par 5 (Second Vatican Council)

SMA at WORLD YOUTH Day 2016: Krakow, Poland

By: Fr. Christopher Lumagbas, SMA



Grateful to the Church of Tanzania, I, an SMA Filipino Priest was invited by SMA Tanzania region with other 16 youth from different SMA missionary parishes to participate in the 31st World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,' is the theme of the event, which reinforces the spirit of the celebration of the jubilee year of mercy.

I am grateful and privileged to take part in this international meeting of youth from all over the world who gathered together to experience the great community of the universal church, to listen to the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance and to have a joyfully proclamation and profession of our faith in Jesus Christ.

To flesh out the experience in few words: the group was very grateful of the warm welcome and

accommodation from our SMA Poland district in formation together with their SMA lay missionaries counterparts and to the families who hosted us in different parishes we visited.

The presence of other SMA members and OLA sisters coming from Europe, America and Africa made the group into one family gathering. The welcoming ceremony of Pope Francis, the prayer vigil and the closing Mass at Krakow's Blonia park, with an area of 48 hectares, wherein almost a million participants gathered and prayed together highlighted the entire world youth day event.

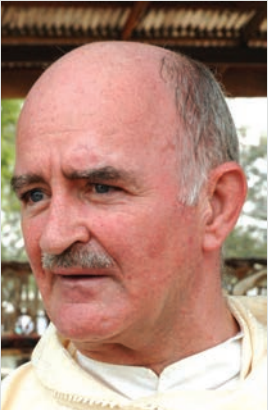
Another event that amazed the group was the pilgrimage to Czestochowa, the home of the Black Madonna, the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary. Along with other pilgrims, the group was able to journey for 6 days, 152 kilometers by foot. We were amazed and grateful to the generosity and hospitality of the various families in every stop-over during the night, who welcomed us into their homes to lay down our tired bodies.

The group was also privileged to visit some religious and historical pilgrimage sites; the house now museum of/and the church where St. Pope John Paul II was baptized, the shrine of the Divine Mercy, the Auschwitz-the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp, wherein three million people were killed, considered one of the stations of the cross of humanity, and many other places like coal and salt mines that serve as heritage of Polish people.

With grateful heart, renewed spirit, the group came back to Tanzania safe and blessed bringing a life-time "youthful" experience of faith.



Various Divisions in Islam



Attacks in recent years in many parts of Europe misrepresent the true face of Islam. Extremists claim that they are acting on behalf of God. This article gives some background about Islam and its present situation.

When its founder, the Prophet Mohammed, died in 632 AD, Islam divided into two basic groups – the Shi'ia and the Sunni.

The Shi'ia wanted Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law [Ali] to lead Islam, maintaining the family link with the Prophet. But the majority of believers, the Sunni, insisted that Islam's leader should be elected on merit and faith. The Sunni group prevailed and today the vast majority of Muslims are Sunnis. Members of the smaller group are known as Shi'ites. Friction between both groups has continued down the centuries.



From 680 AD onwards the Shi'ite branch began to organise itself into a strong hierarchical structure. Today, Iran follows the main Shi'ite branch of Islam.

Meanwhile the Sunni branch, being the majority, ruled the Islamic community while the Shi'ites were often oppressed and persecuted. This division and deep hatred between these two groups has manifested itself throughout Islamic history. In our days it has reared its face again in the civil wars of Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.

The often quietist attitude of Shi'ite Islam gained great confidence with the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the Shi'ite Islamic Republic of Iran. The Shi'ites in both Lebanon and Iraq were no longer willing to take their place as second-class citizens, especially where they

were the majority. Often supported by Iran, they formed strong military groups such as the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq. In Iraq they were the majority and so won their first post-Saddam elections in a previously Sunni-controlled country. They now control many of the political institutions in the country.

When the Sunni ISIS invaded northern Iraq to establish their Caliphate, on taking Mosul they slaughtered about 1,500 soldiers. They were all Shi'ite recruits whom the ISIS group regarded as heretics. This historical hatred has reached new levels in these present conflicts.



Within Shi'ite Islam there are many sub-divisions, including the Ismaeli [led by the Aga Khan] and the Alawites. The Assad family are Alawites. Following a coup by Bashar al-

Assad's father in 1971, overthrowing the Sunni government, they now rule Syria with the support of many other minorities in the country. Hence the reason why Iran and Shi'ite militias / volunteers from Lebanon support Assad. The Sunni ISIS regard the Syrian regime as non-Islamic (or kafar).

Islam is proclaimed as a religion of peace. However, it has always had a strong element of violence in it in order to expand the land of Islam in the world. The Prophet himself advocated tolerance of Judaism and Christianity in particular. At the same time, other verses of the Qur'an can be interpreted as giving a mandate to Muslims to fight for their beliefs and the spread of their religion. Unfortunately, in history these groups often rear their heads and dominate some Islamic countries, especially if they feel their beliefs are being undermined and so being in danger.

Perhaps this short background to Islamic divisions might give you some idea behind the often vicious and genocidal actions of these groups in these civil wars. The Shi'ite militias are proving very effective, with arms and support from Iran, against ISIS. With the defeat of ISIS will the Sunni regimes in the Middle East allow the Shi'ites more rights? The militias are now in a position to demand them. This could lead to further confrontation in the future when 'peace' is restored.

Fr Jarlath Walsh SMA



25 seminarians completed their studies at the International Spiritual Year Centre at Calavi, Benin Republic when they took their First Oath of membership in the SMA on 25 June 2017.

They are now on a pastoral year programme (Stage) in different African countries. Living and working with SMA priests they will have a 'hands-on' experience of the challenges which our missionaries face every day. In August 2018 those who want to continue with the SMA will begin their theology studies at one of our seminaries in Africa (Ivory Coast, Nigeria or Kenya).

In 2017 the SMA ordained 21 priests, coming from nine African countries. Please remember them as they begin their first missionary journey as SMA priests as well as the young men following in their steps.



South African Regional Assembly

The SMA team met recently to evaluate their different mission apostolates and to make plans for the future. From the original Irish team in the 1990's we now have an international team of SMA priests from Ireland [6], Nigeria [6] and one each from Kenya, Togo and the Ivory Coast.

In the centre of the photo, wearing the white shirt, is the Regional Superior, Fr Pius Afiabor, from Nigeria who was re-elected to lead the team for a further mandate.

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

Please pray for our OLA and SMA missionaries and our deceased supporters.

Sr Nuala Harty (Rathcallan, Cork), served in Nigeria, USA, England, Italy and Ireland, aged 81 years, on 10 May 2017.

Fr Vincent Glennon (Taughmaconnell, Co Roscommon), served in Ghana, aged 70 years, on 25 June 2017.

Sr Eileen Healy (Milleens, Coolea, Co Cork), served in Nigeria, Scotland, England and Ireland, aged 80 years, on 28 June 2017.

Fr Frank Meehan (Lisduff, Ballindine, Co Mayo), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 88 years, on 18 August 2017

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

Remember the Missions in your Will

By remembering the SMA and OLA in your Will you can help the work of mission to continue after you.

I leave the sum of € to the Provincial Superior for the time being of the Society of African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork, for the purpose of the African Missions.

or

I leave the sum of € to the Provincial Superior for the time being of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, Ardfoy Convent, Ballintemple, Cork, for the purpose of the OLA Sisters.

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