



## A year in Calavi, Republic of Benin

Fr Paul Chataigné SMA celebrated 50 years of priestly service last year. Of French origin, Fr Paul has served the SMA in France, Italy and several African countries. He has served on the Lyons (France) Provincial Council and was also a member of the SMA General Council in Rome. His final missionary appointment was as part of the SMA Formation team in Calavi. Here he tells us of his time there.

### Candidates and formators for mission

On 1 October, 2016, the Marion de Brésillac International Centre at Calavi (Benin Republic) welcomed 35 young men to begin their 9-month Spiritual Year programme. Aged from 26 to 29 years they came from India and 8 African countries (Benin, Ivory Coast, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Togo and Zambia). Their 5 formators are equally international in character: Fr Hervé Yepié, the Superior, and Fr Luc Kouakou Ndah (both from Ivory Coast), Fr Raja Lourdasamy (India), Fr Filippo Drogo (Italy) and myself.

After several years of formation (Introductory programme, Philosophy or Degree studies) in their home countries they came here for an experience of living in an international community. They have classes in spiritual and human development. They also learn more about the history and aims of the Society of African Missions (SMA) founded by Bishop de Brésillac on 8 December 1856 (he died in Sierra Leone on 25 June 1859, just six weeks after arriving in Africa). Living with other nationalities presents challenges for each one, coming with their own backgrounds, cultures and local languages. In Calavi they will communicate through the two official SMA languages: English and French.

On 25 June 2017, twenty-five of the original group became temporary members of the Society. Each one is now on a Pastoral Year (Stage) working in a parish with an experienced SMA priest, learning the challenges, joys and difficulties of mission life in Africa today. After priestly ordination they will preach the Good News of Jesus Christ among Africans and peoples of African origin.

### Novitiate / Spiritual Year, Yesterday and Today

During the 25 June ceremony we also celebrated my 50th anniversary as an SMA missionary, in Africa and Europe. It was also

an opportunity to give thanks to God for these past three years service in Calavi, accompanying young men who want to dedicate their lives to God. I reflected on the extraordinary improvement in our missionary training over the past half century. I recalled my first oath in the Society, on 25 June 1961 at Chanly, Belgium, along with classmates from France, Italy, Netherlands and Spain. At that time our formators were all French and we spoke of 'Novitiate'



The Chapel in Calavi.

rather than Spiritual Year. It was modelled on a monastic lifestyle: manual work, intellectual formation, community and personal prayers.

It is almost the same in Calavi but here we have not only an international flavour but also intercontinental. Here in Calavi the programme was enriched by the various contributions from missionary priests, Sisters, lay men and women. And there was a lot more 'interaction' and discussion in such classes. An important place is given to the deepening of one's self-knowledge as well as





Fr Raja blesses palms before the Palm Sunday procession in a Calavi outstation church.

how we interact in our relationships. Aspects of Psychology and Human Development presentations assist in this awareness building.

### Strong ties that last

How we train our seminarians is the fruit of years of reflection and draws on the experience of both SMA missionaries and seminarians as well as the world in which we will live and work. We invite our seminarians to be open to the world and the various needs of mission and how to respond to them. The SMA Formation Charter outlines the why and the how of SMA formation. It aims at helping the seminarian to develop a strong and lasting personal and communitarian spiritual life centered on Jesus Christ living in us and within the church and people to whom he will be sent after ordination.

Every year at the end of this intensive Calavi formation, I am always amazed at how strong are the ties they have formed, though they were total strangers nine months previously. They seemed to have lived an unforgettable personal and community experience. During my years in France I also noticed the strong tie among our young SMA confreres (from Africa and India). Whenever they meet they always recall their Calavi years with good memories as something exceptional in their lives despite the years of separation. It is wonderful to see.

It was also good to note that the International Spiritual Year experience is original and unique compared to the three or four years they will spend in other SMA Formation Houses / seminaries when they will have a huge diversity of non-SMA lecturers etc. with a greater emphasis on academic formation. They are still expected to continue their 'inner' journey, the continuous call to know oneself and the One that calls us. There is also the continuing challenge of speaking French and English.

Of course, even after ordination, all SMAs must continue that inner journey, deepening our personal relationship with the Lord and, filled with the grace of that relationship, going out to preach the Good News to the people we are called to serve.

In their final report, or written articles in the ISY Newsletter, the 2016/2017 class expressed their surprise and joy often with originality. In fact one of them discovered God more in his work with the pigs, rabbits, poultry and sheep which we raise in the Centre for food and income. Others, during their Christmas and New Year holidays, sealed strong ties with the Bariba people to whom they were sent for an intense experience of living on their own in a village. Unfortunately communication was often a problem as some of the older villagers did not speak French (an official language in Benin Republic). Other candidates felt their desire to become missionaries was deepened through discovering and sharing the life of some lay missionaries (from Benin and France) in difficult areas, e.g. the Saint Camille Association (SCA) founded by Mr Grégoire Ahongbonon. Some SCA members live with the mental patients who formerly were surviving on the streets or were held in chains in their villages.

### Missionaries following the steps of Pope Paul VI and Pope Francis

With Pope Francis we discovered *'The Joy of the Gospel'* and together (seminarians and formators) we want to answer the call of Blessed Pope Paul VI, who said that the world will receive the Good News "from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world". (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975, #80).

Fr Paul Chataigné, SMA



# Three Holy Cities of Islam



Fr Jarlath Walsh explains the significance of three cities, held sacred by Muslims. Each is of crucial importance to Islam which might become apparent from this brief article.

**Mecca:** The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH – Peace and Blessings be Upon Him)

was born in the central Arabian trading city of Mecca (Makkah) in 570 AD. It had a square sacred shrine called the Kaaba. Islamic tradition states this was founded by Abraham as a house of the One God. By the time of Muhammad it had become a shrine full of statues of various local gods.

Islamic tradition tells us that Muhammad received his revelation from Allah via the Angel Jibril (Gabriel). This revelation professed a strict monotheism (one God). Therefore, he came in conflict with the merchant families of Mecca who began a period of persecution against him and his followers. In 622 both he and his followers fled, called the Hegira (Hijra), to a nearby settlement of Yatrib. The hijra became the starting date of the Islamic Calendar which we have today.

**Medina:** Muhammad and his followers arrived in Yatrib penniless as they had to leave their wealth behind them in Mecca when they fled. Over the next 8 years they followed in the local tradition of raiding their neighbours' caravans as well as building up their power base in Yatrib. They also engaged in various battles with the armies of Mecca. By 630 they were strong enough to attack and conquer Mecca and cleanse the Kaaba of the local deities and return it to the monotheism of Abraham. Today this is the central pivot of Islam and the hajj or pilgrimage which Muslims try to undertake once in a life time. The Prophet died in

Yatrib in 632. As Yatrib had given refuge to the prophet, the city of Yatrib became known as Madinat al Nabi (City of the Prophet) or Medina.

**Jerusalem:** Muslims believe that Muhammad had a vision. In it he was carried by a Buraq (horse with wings) from Mecca to Jerusalem (Israa), specifically to the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque today. From there he ascended to the heavens (Mi'raj) where (at various levels of the heavens) he encountered many of the prophets, including Jesus and Moses, before finally entering the presence of Allah. There he was given the injunction that he and his followers would pray five times a day. He then returned to his house in Mecca. Jerusalem remains a city of great spiritual importance to the faith of Islam and can help us understand the reaction of Palestinian Muslims today to any change in its status.



God, our Father,  
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,  
One family, in the Spirit of your love.

Bless us with the joy of love.

Make us patient and kind,  
gentle and generous,  
welcoming to those in need.  
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

Protect all families with your loving care,  
Especially those for whom we now pray:

[We pause and remember family members and others by name].

Increase our faith,  
Strengthen our hope,  
Keep us safe in your love,  
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.

This we ask, through Christ our Lord, Amen.





In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: "Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink." In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it's changed to:

## Plastic, Plastic Everywhere Its time to stop and think !!



There are many sources of pollution in our world but one - Plastic - is present in practically every place and in the life of almost every human being. In terms of man-made materials, no other exceeds plastic in the amount that is produced. We all use it and we need to be more careful.

It is true that some plastic products are essential in our day-to-day lives. However, others, such as single-use or disposable plastic products, are not essential and they are causing great damage. Plastic is cheap and versatile, it has allowed us to develop a disposable lifestyle or what Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'* refers to as, "a throwaway culture."

### Care For Our Common Home

When Pope Francis published his Encyclical Letter, "*Laudato Si'*" - on care for our common home" many people were surprised to read his words: ***"The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."*** Par 21. In these strong but true words, he refers to misuse, over use and waste of our world's resources and also to the damage that this is causing to our environment and to the health of all life on the planet. The earth ***"now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."*** Par 2.

**More plastic has been produced in the 17 years of this century, than in the entire one hundred years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Three hundred million tons of plastic is produced every year. Half of this enormous amount is used just once as wrapping, drinks bottles, carrier bags etc. and is then thrown away. Only 10% is recycled.**

Unlike other materials such as wood and paper, plastic does not biodegrade. We can throw it out in our bins but it never goes away. Instead, over time, it just breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces. It takes

### PLASTIC WASTE - Some Facts

In 2002 Ireland made history by becoming the first country in the world to introduce a plastic bag levy that reduced the use of plastic carrier bags by over 90 percent. Since then, the positive impact of this innovation has been wiped-out by our growing use of plastic packaging and bottles.

A survey in an Irish supermarket showed that 121 out of 139 fruit and vegetable items on sale were packaged in plastic. Most were wrapped in single-use, non-recyclable plastic. Ireland, according to recent Eurostat figures, is now the top producer of plastic waste in the European Union. We produce 134 pounds or 61 kilos of plastic waste per person every year. How did we get to this since we made such positive history back in 2002? Plastic in some form or other has been around for more than 100 years and the mass production of plastic goods began after



World War II. However, it was in the 1960's that technological advances allowed oil-based plastic to be produced cheaply enough for use in things such as disposable milk bottles. Since then there has been a steady growth in plastic production, but it is since the beginning of this century that the use of plastic has exploded world-wide. The figures here show that Ireland has not lagged behind.

Recently, scientists have begun to understand the full extent of plastic pollution and for the first time calculated the total amount produced. They are shocked by the results. 8.3 billion tons has been made and a staggering 6 billion tons of this has been dumped as rubbish. Scientists tell us that 80% of this waste is in landfill and the rest in the oceans or the environment. If we continue like this there will be 12 billion tons in landfills by 2050 and the plastic waste in our oceans will weigh more than all the fish it contains!! Scientists, like those from Galway University



between 10 and 20 years for a plastic bag to breakdown. Plastic waste ends up in landfill sites and, over the last few years, we have become increasingly aware that accumulated waste is clogging our oceans and seriously damaging marine life and habitats.

When this plastic breaks down into small-particles it is ingested by marine life entering the food chain and potentially ending up on our plate. Millions of marine animals and birds die from ingesting and choking on plastic. Recently, scientists from University College Galway found plastic in fish taken from 600 meters deep in the Atlantic Ocean. On land, plastic waste deposits harmful chemicals into our soil and groundwater causing death and illness to humans and wildlife.

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis also says; *"Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change"* Par 201. One area we need to change is in how we use plastic. This is an urgent task and a way of caring for the health of our world, its environment, flora, fauna and also its human life.

**Plastic is now an unavoidable part of our everyday life. How we use it matters. Clearly it is time to end our overuse of plastic in order to protect our world. This is important as a way of showing consideration for our environment, our neighbours and for future generations. It is also as Pope Francis tells us below, a way of living our faith.**

**"Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith."**

**Pope Francis, Laudato Si' 64**

mentioned above, are beginning to see the problem of plastic pollution as one that is much more serious than previously thought and they are even comparing it to climate change. Adding to their concerns is the fact that the rate of plastic production is increasing each year and that more than half of what is produced is for single use only.

The everyday convenience of plastic - wrapping, bottles, cutlery, cleanly wrapped vegetables and take-away food, things that we all have become used to, come at a cost. We now understand that this cost is much too high. Dealing with the problem of plastic pollution will take a global approach, it must involve governments and producers but, it must also involve us, our families and our individual lifestyle choices.

**Plastic, plastic everywhere - its time not only to think - its time to STOP!!**

## Things to Do

1. **Use reusable Bottles:** Worldwide over 480 billion plastic bottles were sold in 2016, roughly 20,000 every second. Stop buying them.
2. **Stop using Plastic Straws:** Hundreds of millions are thrown away every day!!
3. **Use reusable Shopping Bags:** Most of us do in Ireland but we can still do better. Ask for paper bags if a plastic one is offered.
4. **Boycott Micro-beads:** Found in some products, e.g. facial scrubs, toothpastes, body washes. One product can have up to 300,000 plastic micro-beads. Opt for products with natural exfoliants, like oatmeal or salt, instead. Micro-beads are a major ocean pollutant.
5. **Avoid Plastic Packaging:** Buy loose fruit and vegetables.
6. **Don't use Disposable Razors:** Billions of them are discarded every year.
7. **Give up Chewing Gum:** Its made of synthetic rubber, which is plastic. Worldwide, over 100,000 tons are discarded annually.
8. **Cook More:** Not only is it healthier, it also avoids use of throw-away containers and plastic cutlery.
9. **Buy a Keep Cup:** At present in Ireland, 99% of the disposable cups used by Coffee Shops are not recyclable. Globally one million of these cups end up being dumped every minute. Buy a reusable cup.
10. **Recycle properly:** Take the time and trouble to get to know, clean and separate plastics that can be recycled.



See:  
[www.recyclinglistireland.ie](http://www.recyclinglistireland.ie)



# Preparing for the Tanzania of Tomorrow:

## OLA Mission Offers Helping Hand as Population Surges

Tanzania is located in the heart of East Africa. It borders Uganda and Kenya to the north; Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west; and Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia to the south.

Tanzania is best known for Mount Kilimanjaro, Lake Victoria and the Serengeti desert. However, this may soon change.

Tanzania is growing rapidly. From a population of 8 million in 1950, it now stands at 56 million people.

A recent UN report signalled that much of the world's future population growth will occur across the continent of Africa, with Tanzania's population projected to exceed 100 million people by 2050. This would make it one of the most populous countries on the continent. The rapid population growth is placing much demand on health and education services across Tanzania.



The OLA Sisters began a mission in Mwamapalala in May 1991. Two further missions opened in Bugisi [1994] and Mwanza [2005]. Their work centres on providing quality education and healthcare in rural areas with limited or no access to such services. As the population increases, so too are the numbers attending OLA education facilities and health clinics.

Universities across the land are helping form the leaders of tomorrow. Sr Cassie Hurley, a native of Midleton in county Cork and a trained counsellor, has been working at Saint Augustine's University of Tanzania (SAUT) in Mwanza since 2016. Numbers attending the university continue to grow with an increase from 11,000 in 2016 to 15,000 last year. Some students are living far away from home and can end up on hard times for different reasons.

Seeing this, the University Chaplain and Sr Cassie established an outreach programme for students to help improve student retention. Sr Cassie writes, "I'm privileged to journey with these students. We try to create an environment in which each person

feels safe, secure, seen, listened to and recognised. The rest always follows."



Sr Cassie paints a vivid picture of how we are all created in the image of God. Her enthusiasm for life is infectious and her reassuring tones are striking. "I worked at Cuan Mhuire [A treatment centre in Ireland for those with addictions] for many years. This is where I truly learned the value of every human being. Each one of us is created in the image and likeness of God. We are unique, original and unrepeatable. We are God's masterpiece, His work of art. We do our best to call forth the goodness of each person."



Sr Cassie and Sr Kathleen Costigan with some villagers

Sr Cassie finds the work at the university very rewarding. "This initiative at the university is life-giving for me. My deepest desire in life is to journey with those in search of hope. I feel I have the opportunity to fulfil this desire here on the shores of Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania."

As the country braces itself for the big demographic changes that lie ahead, there is no doubt that the leaders of tomorrow's Tanzania attending St Augustine's University are in safe hands with Sr Cassie.



# The SMA Missionary Family: Working for Africa in Ireland

In August 2018, the World Meeting of Families takes place in Ireland, a location apparently favoured in part by the rich missionary tradition of the Irish Church. That missionary tradition finds echoes in Pope Francis' call for a Church that is outward looking, going to the margins and witnessing to love and compassion, justice and mercy. In reality family life is the bedrock for those values, witnessing to God's love in the nuts and bolts of everyday life.

The Society of African Missions (SMA) is the heart of an extended Missionary Family whose members play a vital and active role as missionaries in their everyday lives here in Ireland. This family goes back to the earliest SMA presence in Ireland in 1878, and became more structured in 1959 with the formation of the FVC, now the Family Vocations Community. Its 14,000 members actively participate in spreading the Gospel, enabling the formation of missionary priests in and for Africa by contributing to their education, providing spiritual support and communicating with our SMA Houses of Formation in Africa, India, Philippines and Poland.



In addition to supporting SMA projects in Nigeria and Zambia, the SMA Lay Association (SMALA) is now committed to educating others about the struggles Albino people face and raising awareness of their discrimination in Tanzania. They are also fund-raising to support the building of a home for abandoned Albino children, allowing them to complete their education and eventually secure employment.

The Friends of Africa (FOA) is a young group of adults who have been actively engaged in mission for almost 20 years. In addition to providing financial support and other resources to SMA and other projects, FOA volunteers go to Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa each summer to work directly in mission activities. They also give their time and energy,



together with the Core Group of Dromantine Summer Camps, to introduce 500 girls and boys to the SMA mission and Africa during the school holidays.



Across Ireland, a group of dedicated volunteers promote and collect Mission Boxes. The funds raised support the work of Irish SMA priests working in Africa. They travel around different parts of Ireland, visiting shops, garages, pubs etc. and collect, count and return the money to their local SMA House where it is forwarded to the SMA Headquarters in Cork for sending to different projects in Africa.

Promoters of SMA Mission Association Cards (MAC) are located throughout Ireland, providing many with access to cards for bereavement, thanksgiving, illness and various special intentions for their extended families and neighbours.

A source of contact and support, especially at times of great need, promoters simultaneously raise awareness of the work of the SMA.

Our Climate Volunteers are making a significant contribution to the promotion of climate justice by delivering a programme aimed at schools and parishes. Called the Thumbprint Campaign, it aims to make young and old aware of how what we do in Ireland has an impact on the peoples of Africa. With climate change and the increased pollution from industrialised countries like Ireland impacting directly on Africa, education and awareness raising on this issue is a vital part of the SMA mission.

Each aspect of the SMA Missionary Family is engaged in its own area of work; each is greatly valued and appreciated. But the value and strength of each piece is further enhanced by the shared focus on, and commitment to, Africa. The impact of so much giving and caring is greater because of the combined activity of women and men who may never go to Africa, but who constitute the SMA Missionary Family, witnessing to the call to be missionary everyday in their lives, in their homes and communities.

**Would you like to know more about any of our different activities? Contact your local SMA House (addresses on the back page).**

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

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

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

**Fr John Travers** (Cookstown, Co. Armagh), served in Nigeria, England and Ireland, aged 91 years, on 2 October 2017.

**Sr Marian Hankard** (Bartlemy, Rathcormac, Co. Cork), served in England, Ghana, Nigeria and Ireland, aged 86 years, on 27 December 2017.

**Br Tom Fitzgerald** (Cahircullibeen, Ballydavid, Co. Kerry), served in Ireland and Nigeria, aged 99 years, on 1 February 2018.

**Sr Eileen Wall** (Shandangan, Carrigadrohid, Co. Cork), served in Ghana, Nigeria, England and Ireland, aged 92 years, on 9 March 2018.

**Fr Adam Bartkowicz** (Tarnow, Poland), served in Tanzania, aged 34 years, on 20 March 2018.

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



## ONLINE DONATIONS

You may send money, at no additional cost, for our Missionary Work, Family Vocations Crusade (FVC), Missionary Association Cards etc. using our **Donate Online** facility on the [www.sma.ie](http://www.sma.ie) homepage.

### SMA PILGRIMAGE TO KNOCK - 26 MAY 2018



### We are a Missionary Family

Come and join us as we conclude our annual Novena in honour of Our Lady.

Ceremonies begin at 12 noon  
Rosary Procession, Stations of the Cross, Confessions

Mass and the Anointing of the Sick at 3pm

**Contact your local SMA House  
for Pilgrimage Bus details**

# CHRIST'S CALL

To serve...

To proclaim...

To bring Good News...

**AFRICA STILL LONGS FOR GOD'S WORD.  
WHY NOT JOIN US IN THE LORD'S SERVICE  
AS A MISSIONARY**



**"TO BE MISSIONARY WITH ALL MY HEART"**

- Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, Founder of SMA

**Contact the Vocations Director at  
[vocations@sma.ie](mailto:vocations@sma.ie)**

African Missions (SMA)  
Blackrock Road. T12 TD54  
**Cork**  
021 429 2871  
[sma.blackrock@sma.ie](mailto:sma.blackrock@sma.ie)

African Missions (SMA)  
Wilton. T12 KR23  
**Cork**  
021 454 1069  
[sma.wilton@sma.ie](mailto:sma.wilton@sma.ie)

African Missions (SMA)  
Dromantine BT34 1RH  
**Newry**  
028 3082 1224  
[sma.dromantine@sma.ie](mailto:sma.dromantine@sma.ie)

African Missions (SMA)  
Claregalway H91 YK64  
**Co Galway**  
091 798 880  
[sma.claregalway@sma.ie](mailto:sma.claregalway@sma.ie)

African Missions (SMA)  
81 Ranelagh Road. D06 WT10  
**Dublin 6**  
01 496 8162  
[sma.dublin@sma.ie](mailto:sma.dublin@sma.ie)