A Transition Year experience in South Africa

Fr Pierluigi Maccalli SMA
Fr Pierluigi Maccalli SMA, a member of the Italian Province, was abducted from his mission in Bomoanga, in the Niger Republic, on 17 September 2018, where he has been a missionary for ten years. Before that he served in the Ivory Coast. He continues to be held in captivity, his exact whereabouts unknown. Please continue to pray for Fr Maccalli’s speedy and safe release.

Sean Walsh is a secondary school pupil in Co Cork. An uncle, Fr Martin Walsh, is an SMA priest ministering in South Africa. As part of his Transition Year (2017-2018), Sean decided to spend some time with his uncle. This is the second part of an article Sean wrote for the African missionary magazine recording some of his impressions of that visit.

Whenever problems arise in the village, the people themselves will sort it out as the local police might not be interested in the journey to Sesobe, up to three or more hours in some cases. Corruption is a fact of life in South Africa [as it is in most countries, not just African ones]. Millions of South African Rand (the local currency) regularly disappear without a trace.

South Africa has many languages. Fr Martin and the black population speak Tswana. Whenever Fr Martin interacts with the police he’ll speak to them in Tswana. This astonishes them as they are not used to foreigners able and willing to speak their local language. Even going about my daily life in Sesobe I found that the people were very accepting of me as I greeted them in Tswana. During my eight weeks I tried my best to learn as much of the language as I could. The villagers appreciated that I was trying to understand their culture and was making an effort with the language. If I had made no effort to speak Tswana the people would have noticed it and I’m told that I would have been treated very differently.

Zeerust is the nearest shopping town to Sesobe. Fr Martin was the Parish priest there before moving to Sesobe. Whenever we travelled there we always met some people who recognised him and wanted to have a chat with him. I was amazed at this as Zeerust is a big town and there were several other parishes which Fr Martin looked after at the same time so he must have had an impact if so many people remembered him.

One day in Zeerust when we were getting groceries everybody suddenly went to the tills or dropped their shopping and left the shop. We had no idea what was happening. We were the last people in the shop until the staff, who were also leaving, asked us to go as there was a riot sweeping through the town and it was not safe to stay there. We left the shop empty handed and headed straight for the carpark. Eventually, after avoiding the main streets, we got to the main road and headed for home. The rioters had smashed shop windows and burnt down buildings along the main street.

They have another reason to be destructive during their protests. Unemployment is high and can also
cause protest marches which the police will put down by all necessary means.

On several occasions we passed by the different mines in the area. One of them was the scene of the Marikana massacre when 47 were killed after several days of clashes between miners and police officers. South Africa is a very unequal country. There are a few extremely rich people, many of whom made their money from the gold and platinum mines. The vast majority have little or nothing to live on. Many politicians have vested interests in businesses and they use their political power to bring in legislation to increase their profits.

Funerals

Without wanting to sound insensitive, the highlight of my trip was attending a village funeral. South Africans go to funerals to celebrate the life of the deceased member of the community. They sing nonstop from the beginning of the Funeral Mass to the end of celebrations, which takes place at the home of the deceased with the burial in the local compound. Everybody visits the home of the deceased after the Funeral Mass. With possibly hundreds of people visiting, feeding them all is a challenge as there are not many shops to run to in order to buy what is needed at short notice. The close family gather up what money they can and go out and buy a cow for the funeral. This would feed many people and is a final show of respect for the deceased person as a cow is seen as extremely important in having one slaughtered for you is a huge honour. Towards the end of the week, typically on Fridays, you’d see single cows in trailers being delivered by farmers, most likely indicating that it was going to be slaughtered in the coming days for a funeral celebration.

The most important men in the family slaughter the cow, trying their best to kill it swiftly and with the least pain possible. The animal is then skinned and the meat is cut up into pieces which are brought to the pot for cooking. Within an hour the meat has gone from breathing in the trailer to boiling in the pots, absolutely no wastage only the head. The skin I am told was traditionally used to make rope and clothes but now is used for decoration.

I was honoured to be allowed to stand with the men who were butchering the cow as they had accepted me as they saw that I had accepted them. I saw many “less important” men told to go away from the cow and children were berated if they attempted to get close. Women were completely banned from being near the cow whether it was alive or dead, they had to go to the other side of the property and prepare the vegetables etc.

Fr Martin warned me about taking photos of the people. They believed that if somebody took a photo of them then the photographer would be able to manipulate them and control their spirit through the picture. I avoided taking pictures with people in them unless they agreed but at the cow slaughtering for the funeral the main butcher – the most important man there – invited me to photograph the proceedings. Taking pictures must be very unusual there as for weeks after that people would joke with me about taking pictures at the slaughtering.

here hold rain in a very high regard as water shortages can be a problem. People would often exclaim “pula” during a conversation which might seem a bit random but it means to rejoice in the fact that the rain has come.

Stranded bus

On several occasions I met with Fr Noel Gillespie SMA. He is the SMA priest living closest to Fr Martin’s parish. Fr Noel, who was stationed in Sesobe before Fr Martin, is very knowledgeable on the town and has written a book on it, outlining the history of the people and where they came from. He has a great love for the country and its people. Fr Noel visited several times and through those visits I learned a great deal about the village and its history.

Going to South Africa to see what Fr Martin was doing was well worth it as I had the time in transition year and I might not get the chance again to do anything like that once I return to school. The country has magnificent natural beauty, its landscapes providing the natural habitats for a wide variety of animals which in Ireland we can only view in a Zoo. The climate can be extreme and water is precious. As soon as the rain comes, everything including the people are refreshed. I have seen a huge divide in the people between the “haves” and the “have nots” in South Africa. Some villages do not have enough clean water to drink, while a select few are very prosperous. This situation obviously causes friction and is difficult to manage. The wealthy minority want to hold onto their personal wealth while the poorer majority want to make a living.

Nkosi Sikelel’Afrïka
God Bless Africa
During these past few years we have heard a lot in our daily news about the Middle East. ISIS, the extremist Sunni Islamic group, has wreaked havoc in parts of Syria and Iraq. They justify their war and activities with verses of the Qur’an. They insist on establishing Sharia law in the areas they control.

What is the Qur’an and where does the Sharia come from? Perhaps a short note on these two concepts might be helpful in seeing the perspective of the followers of Islam – Muslims – and how they derive their views on how society should be organized and based.

The Qur’an: Islam regards the Qur’an as the literal word of God / Allah. According to Islamic belief, this holy book was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel (Jibril in Arabic). In Christian tradition Gabriel is the messenger of God as he is in Islamic tradition.

Muhammad used to go outside the city of Mecca to meditate. While doing this he began to receive revelations (while he was in both cities of Mecca and Medina), beginning in 609 AD until his death in 632 AD. As Muhammad was illiterate, several of his companions wrote down (or memorized) these revelations. It was only after his death that the Qur’an was compiled by the Caliph Uthman into the book we have today.

The Qur’an is seen as the actual word of Allah by Muslims. It is regarded as a guidance for humankind. Not even a word can be changed and it must be kept uncorrupted and in Arabic. It cannot be translated but we can have ‘interpretations’ in various languages. It is divided into 114 chapters and each chapter is divided into verses. Pious Muslims often learn the Qur’an by heart.

The Sharia: This is the codification of Muslim law done during the early centuries of Islam. It is based on what has been revealed by Allah in the Qur’an plus the Hadith. The Hadith is a careful authentication of the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad as passed on by those companions closest to him. Both sources are used to codify a law system for the Islamic community. Like our own penal system it has laws for every aspect of society, from family law to criminal law, etc.

Interpretations of the Sharia by groups can vary a lot. ISIS uses it to impose a strict way of life as does the Kingdom of Sa’udi Arabia and other very conservative Islamic regimes. It has liberal interpretations as well (such as in Tunisia) but these tend to be lost sight of as extremists hit our news more dramatically.

Both the Qua’an and Sharia are pivotal to Islam. They are the basis of any understanding of this religion. Since there is no central religious authority in Islam, they can be interpreted in many ways and to the advantage of particular groups.

Fr Jarlath Walsh SMA
FVC CELEBRATES 60

FVC Diamond Jubilee
The Family Vocations Community (aka Family Vocations Crusade), founded in 1959, has been an essential part of our missionary work, making an immense contribution to the education and training of SMA missionaries both in Ireland and throughout the world. In this article Fr Tom Curran SMA describes the history and growth of the FVC.

Beginnings

Dromantine, Newry, was where it all began. Since 1926, the SMA trained their seminarians there for missionary work in Egypt and west Africa. In 1959, Dromantine had more than 70 seminarians and the Superior, Fr John-Joe Conlon SMA, was forever seeking ways to finance the running of the seminary, particularly with local support, which up to then was non-existent. To run the seminary, Fr Conlon had to rely on money sent from our SMA Irish headquarters in Cork.

Tommy McKenna with Fr Con Murphy
involved in Dromantine and Dromantine had
to become better known.

Sponsoring Movement

In 1959 it was estimated that it cost £100 per year to maintain a student in the seminary. If a group of people decided to “sponsor” a student for one year by contributing £100 it would go a long way towards realistically helping Dromantine. And if they would agree to make the contribution for 7 years it would have contributed to the education and training of a missionary throughout his course of studies. So groups of ten to twenty people were formed who agreed to make this commitment. And the rest, as they say, is history!

The group members were called Sponsors and the group leader was the Head Sponsor. The system was then called the Dromantine Sponsoring Movement. At the end of the 7 years the Sponsors were invited to Dromantine to meet the newly-ordained priest(s) they had sponsored. Now, if the groups could be multiplied, they could provide the means to educate more students. This basic methodology has continued until today, except that the 7 years became 8 years.

The first group was from Tommy’s family and close friends. It was something very new to be so closely involved with priests and their training. There was a traditional barrier between priest and laity. Many were sceptical. But many others were enthusiastic.

Contacts were made. And these contacts made new contacts and the movement gathered momentum. As each new Sponsor was enrolled, Fr John-Joe wrote them a personal message of welcome and invited them to come to visit Dromantine. Tommy would bring small groups to Dromantine to meet the priests on the staff. Many had never before been inside a seminary. These visits helped people to be “converted” to become supporters.

By the end of 1959, Sponsor Groups contributed £500. Meanwhile, Willy Marley had organised supporters in Newry thus expanding the Movement beyond Belfast.

In 1960, the continuing expansion reached Ardglass, Portadown and Lurgan through Marie Bell, John Lappin, Peter Mulligan, Hugh Murtagh and others.

Sponsors’ Day

In 1961, Fr John-Joe invited all the Sponsors to Dromantine to meet the priests and the students as a means of expanding the movement and to better acquaint people with Dromantine. 200 people attended this event on the first Sunday in June which was called Sponsors’ Day and became an annual event. Fr Andy Anglin SMA became the first full-time Director of the Movement. As meetings were arranged in various places, Fr Andy and Tommy would explain the Movement and this led to the forming of more and more groups. Contact people were identified in various areas who pointed out prospective Head Sponsors and frequently before a meeting.
ended a sponsor attending would decide to form another group. And so the movement spread to Letterkenny, Omagh and Ballygawley.

In 1964 a Head Sponsors meeting was held in Dromantine to enable them to know one another, to share common problems and to help them become personally involved in Dromantine. Some of them formed the nucleus for what was to become the Dromantine Open Day committee which replaced the Sponsors Day at which the numbers attending had greatly increased and knowledge of Dromantine was spreading.

Summer Camps
In 1969 the Dromantine Summer Camp (now Camp Dromantine) was founded by Fathers Jim O’Kane, Céathach McKenna and Fergus Conlan (RIP). It was for the sons of Sponsors. As the club expanded the first SMA Holiday Camp was held in Dromantine and attended by 70 boys. These Camps continue to the present day, with separate camps for boys and for girls. Each Camp runs from Sunday to Friday. These are open to children of our Sponsors and others who want to attend. Contact dromantinecrafts@sma.ie

The FVC
1966 was the year Fr John-Joe launched the movement in Cork and subsequently in Dublin. In Dublin, Mr Harry Ledwidge spearheaded the FVC for some years. By 1969 the Sponsoring Movement was well and truly an all-Ireland affair. With so many families involved, there was the potential for vocations from within the movement. So the name was changed to the Family Vocations Crusade. The FVC had three essential elements:
- daily prayer for the missionary work of SMA
- support for training SMA missionaries,
- and the potential for vocations.

The FVC continued to expand and SMA Directors were appointed to organise it in each of the four Provinces and in Dublin.

Dromantine closes
In 1971, the SMA transferred its seminary to a purpose-built complex in Maynooth, with our seminarians attending St Patrick’s College, the National seminary. Dromantine remained a hub around which our Sponsors continued to sponsor our students in Maynooth. Open Days continued to attract visitors and Dromantine continued as a much-loved place for many.

Reaching Africa and Beyond
The FVC was founded to support the training of our SMA priests. When Irish vocations to the SMA began to decline in the 1990s, a new venture, the training of SMA missionaries from India, the Philippines, Poland and many African countries, gave a new impetus to the FVC. It broadened the vision of our sponsors to realise the catholicity of the Church and reach out to the wider world of mission. Since 1992 more than 350 SMA priests have been ordained, sponsored by the FVC to a great extent, nearly all from outside Ireland.

The declining number of Irish SMA has led to one more recent change. In 2016 we appointed a Zambian SMA priest, himself the beneficiary of SMA sponsors, as the FVC Director in Munster. Today, the contributions of FVC members are supporting the education and training of our missionaries in 15 African countries, India, Philippines and Poland.

I conclude this article by acknowledging and thanking our Head Sponsors and FVC Office staff. They are the vital contact points each FVC Director has to keep in contact with you. To them, and to all our SMA Sponsors, a sincere Thank You! May God bless you and yours always.
Two OLA Sisters were beatified on 8 December, 2018, in Oran, Algeria, along with 17 others, beatified as martyrs of that country. The Algerian government granted permission in April 2018 for the beatification to be celebrated on national soil after consultation with church authorities. In 1964, the two OLA Sisters established the Algiers School of Art in Belcourt, a deprived area of Algiers. They spent over three years training women and girls in sewing and embroidery, enabling them to support their families. Their very special handwork was renowned and sold widely.

Jeanne [Sr Angèle-Marie] Littlejohn, born in Tunis, entered the OLA in 1957 and made her first vows on 8 September 1959, before arriving in Bouzarea to aid in the running of an orphanage and boarding school for girls [1959 – 1964]. She then moved to Belcourt where she served until her death at 63 years of age.

Dénise [Bibiane] Leclerc, from France, entered the OLA on 4 March, 1959, and made her first vows on 8 March, 1961, prior to being sent to Constantine, Algeria, where she worked in a maternity ward. In 1964 she was sent to Algiers to assume charge of the Belcourt Center, assisting underprivileged students and adult women. She was 66 years of age when she was martyred.

Both Sisters [pictured] died after being shot in the back on 3 September, 1995, about 100 meters from their apartment as they returned from Mass that afternoon. Cardinal Angelo Becciu, Prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, presided at the Mass and beatification ceremony for six women and thirteen men who gave their lives “for the least, the sick and the men, women and young people of Algeria...

The 19 martyrs were killed during the 12 year-long armed conflict between the government and Islamic rebel groups. Tens of thousands of innocent Algerians also died in this conflict. As well as Sisters Angèle-Marie and Bibiane, the former bishop of Oran, Bishop Pierre Claverie, OP, two Augustinian Missionary Sisters, one member of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, one member of the Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart, a Marist brother, four White Fathers and seven Trappist monks [subjects of the film “Of Gods and Men”] were murdered for the faith between 8 May 1994 and 1 August 1996.

The OLA Sisters have been present in Algeria since the 1950’s with a community in Algiers and two communities in Oran. A fourth community – with Italian OLA Sisters – was in Henchya for some years but now there is just one OLA community in Mascara.

Fr Bonnamour, their Parish Priest in Belcourt, said at the time, “The Sisters were constantly aware of the possibility of being killed. They had no problem about death. Death did not frighten them. They had a living faith before death. They had served the locality so well that everyone loved and respected them. Even the Islamists would also say, ‘Sisters, pray for us’. They had a wonderful influence.” [taken from Christian Martyrs for a Muslim People by Martin McGee, OSB]

As we give thanks to God for the witness of the Algerian martyrs, we ask their intercession for an increased respect for all those engaged in the dialogue with followers of other religions, especially Islam.

“From Algeria, their beatification will be for the Church and the world, an impetus and a call from Algeria to build a world of peace and fraternity.”

Algerian Bishops Statement, September 2018
A little goes a long way...

During the year the SMA community in Blackrock Road, Cork, are invited to put their spare Euro coins into the ‘Community Mission Bottle’ from which small sums are given to our missionaries in Africa for “the poorest of the poor”. Fr Martin O’Farrell, from Nash’s Road, Cork, tells how €300 helped to change the direction of Mr John Lusaka’s life in Zambia.

I gave this money, equal to Zambian Kwacha K4,200, to help cover John’s fees to qualify for a Certificate in Teaching Methodology. On 7th September last, John was awarded a Certificate with a B-CREDIT. The total cost for the Course was K7,100. Without the Mission Bottle donation John would not have been able to complete his Certificate Courses that qualify him for a teaching post in a Technical School.

Why was 40 years old John selected for SMA assistance?

Born into a Catholic family he was sentenced in 2002 to 20 years imprisonment for the manslaughter of a relative in a family quarrel.

He served several years of his sentence in the Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison near Kabwe, 90 miles north of Lusaka. While there John was deeply influenced by the Kiltegan chaplain to the prison, Fr Benny Bohan SPS, who helped him grow in his appreciation of his Catholic faith. Due to his good behaviour he was transferred to Kamfinsa Correctional Facility.

It was there I first met him. He was one of the leading Catholic prisoners there and was careful in having everything in place for the weekly celebration of the Mass on Tuesday afternoons. He used his time inside well to up-grade his secondary school results and went on to pass Level Three Teveta Approved Examinations in Bricklaying & Plastering (May 2014) and in Carpentry & Joinery (May 2015). John was released from Kamfinsa in 2015, having served 13 years there.

John today is an active Catholic in his home Parish where he is Secretary of his Small Christian Community and a member of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association. He married in 2017.

With his Certificate in Teaching Methodology qualification and his technical skills, John is in a better place to live a fuller and law abiding life in his local community.

(John Lusaka is not the real name of the prisoner we helped. We have changed it to respect his privacy.)
Irish OLA Sisters elect new Leadership team

With Mary the mother of Jesus

OLA Sisters Marie Lee (from Dublin), Kathleen McGarvey (Falcarragh, Co Donegal - Provincial Leader) and Maura Cranney (Newry, Co Down) were elected in February to lead the Irish Province for the coming five years. We wish them every blessing in the coming years.

SMA PILGRIMAGE TO KNOCK - 25 MAY 2019

FVC - CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

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

INTERESTED IN A LIFE AS AN SMA MISSIONARY?...IN AFRICA?

For further information, contact Fr. Malachy Flanagan at vocations@sma.ie

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

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

Fr Romuald Barry (Cork City), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 73 years, died on 8 October 2018.
Fr Eamon Kelly (Athlone, Co. Roscommon), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 82 years, died on 29 November 2018.
Fr Michael Brady (Castlebar, Co Mayo), served in Nigeria, South Africa and Ireland, aged 76 years, on 17 February 2019.

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