



Mission work in Togo during the Covid-19 pandemic



Fr Silvano Galli is an Italian-born SMA priest working for many years in Sokodé diocese, Togo, West Africa. He tells us how his priestly ministry has been affected by COVID-19. *"We are confined, no more Sunday and weekday Masses. So no more collections on Sunday. We used to have two: one for our missions and one for the church. For two months we have not received any donations and we must continue to live in addition to maintaining the fixed costs".*

"Here in Sokodé, too, we are all under control since the epidemic spread from a Centre in Kuvon village, on the outskirts of the city. The Centre, which has accommodation for visitors, is a well-known place for animist religious practices". This international Centre is described as a spirituality centre by its owners. A recent meeting brought some participants from the USA and Canada. *"Some foreign guests were infected with coronavirus and were transferred to Lomé, where around 180 participants of the meeting were tested".*

He quotes the Centre Director who emphasized that *"apart from the already known case, who was a Togolese, the entire community was subjected to controls and was negative".* However, they were all quarantined. *"With the grace of God, whom we all implore, the*

coronavirus will quickly end in Sokodé. We hope that soon everyone will be able to resume their normal activities calmly".

Meanwhile, in Sokodé, in addition to the nationwide preventive measures, there is a curfew from 8pm to 6am. *"The problem of domestic isolation is a little more complicated",* Father Silvano emphasizes. *"The government has promised monthly aid of 12,500 francs (€20) for women over the next three months and 10,500 francs for men. In order to receive the grant, one has to present an electoral ID. However, some are already saying that if they continue to be locked up, they may die of starvation rather than coronavirus".* But not everyone will be able to access this money and so Fr Galli must try to assist the needy from his limited resources and assistance he hopes to receive from the SMA.

Fr Galli emphasised *"the people here live thanks to their daily work. If they are not allowed to go to the fields, if they cannot go to the market, they will not survive. But here everyone is used to fighting and living with death every day and have a smile on their face even in tragic situations".* (With thanks to Agenzia Fides, Vatican City)

FOA respond to COVID-19



Tsholofelo Community member, Basetsana, meets the FOA 100 km challenge.

The Friends of Africa (FOA) was founded by Fr Anthony Kelly SMA and a number of young men who used attend the SMA Summer Camp in Dromantine, Newry. Since 1998, the FOA has been sending teams of volunteers (on average 18 - 22 years old) to South Africa, Zambia and Tanzania to work alongside SMA priests and other missionary and community groups. Over 650 volunteers from across the North of Ireland have spent time working and living with people who live in some of the poorest villages and townships in Africa. Ciaran McShane from Friends of Africa - Small Steps Together explains how 2020 is a very different year for the charity.

"Everyone in FOA was very excited about our 2020 programme and all our volunteers had undertaken their accredited youth work training which is the focus of our work in Africa. When we were faced with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic we took the decision to postpone all out international work planned for June, July & August in order to safeguard our volunteers and the communities we work with in Africa. This was not an easy decision to make as months and months of training, fundraising and

planning with our partners had already been done but integrity, solidarity and the common good are important values which are central to our mission.

Once we began to understand how the virus works and the effect it was having in Europe we began to fear for the people and communities we work with across Africa. How can you implement social distancing when you live in a squatter camp with 10,000 other people? How can you practice proper hygiene when you have no access to running water? How can you stay at home and stay safe when you live hand to mouth and no work means no food on the table that evening? This is the sad but true reality for hundreds of millions of people across the continent whose lives were already difficult because of poverty and inequalities made worse by the corona virus.

Our members being aware of this reality decided that the one thing we can't do is nothing and so our thoughts and energies went into coming up with ways to support our partners and the communities they work with from Ireland. Our first response was to launch an Appeal to financially support projects in South Africa and Ghana.

FOA member Shauna O'Neill who has worked in SMA parishes in South Africa came up with the idea of running 10 kilometers a day for 10 days, i.e. 100kms to raise funds for our appeal. Shauna, who is studying to be a social worker, understood just how devastating the virus will be in communities like the ones she knew in South Africa and knowing how privileged we are in Ireland, felt we had to do more. As always our members took up this daunting challenge without much convincing and over 80 people signed up to the challenge which started on Saturday, 18th April, and has already raised over £33,000. Our 10x10 challenge was taken up by FOA members living in Thailand, Australia & New Zealand as well as by our partners in Ghana and South Africa. This expression of solidarity is keeping us all going and reminds us that no matter how difficult it is for us here, living in poverty makes this virus much more deadly. This money will be sent out to our partners as small grants for them to do what they can to support the poorest of the poor as they do all they can to get through the virus.

We also produced a public health poster which we translated into local languages to help the parishes and communities to get the message about how the virus is spread. Like all new viruses there was a lot of misinformation and this has the potential to do as much damage as the virus itself.

In Ghana youth leaders went on local radio stations to remind young people of their responsibility in this and to play their part in flattening the curve.

We are also fearful for the secondary impact this pandemic will have on communities when people are unable to feed themselves or their children, less money coming into already poor households and more children out of education.

Friends of Africa won't be travelling to any of our partner countries this summer. This is a sad reality as so much happens when young Irish and young African people meet as equals and work on community projects together, but we are incredibly proud of our members for stepping up to the challenge of continuing to be a friend to Africa at this time of great need and to keep reminding everyone at home that this is a global epidemic that needs a global response.

For more information on the FOA go to www.friendsafrica.org.uk/ You'll find them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FriendsOfAfrica



De La Salle Brother Joseph Kiely, from Galway, with members of the Tsholofelo (Hope) Community in Phokeng, South Africa. This mixed community works with the most abandoned in the squatter camps around the Platinum Mines in the North-West Province of South Africa.

Omagh-born SMA missionary celebrates 50 years in Nigeria



Fr Peter McCawille has spent more than 34 years working in Nigeria, in parish work in the diocese of Ilorin and the Archdiocese of Benin City as well as founding Director of the Family Vocations Movement. He is now working in the SMA House in Abuja and assisting in local parishes at weekends. Here he writes about the 50th Jubilee celebration of fellow-Tyrone SMA, Fr Mark Monaghan.

Last December, Fr Mark Monaghan, a native of Omagh, Co. Tyrone, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination in St Simon's parish in Kaduna Archdiocese, Nigeria. This Jubilee was a gloriously joyous occasion with the parishioners and others honouring their priest and friend who has dedicated his life to preaching the Gospel in Africa.

Mark is the fourth child in a family of 5 boys and 3 girls. A brother, Danny, is also an SMA priest – in charge of St Joseph's SMA parish, Lagos and a sister Ellen is a member of the Sisters of Mercy.

His interest in being a missionary in Africa was encouraged by three young men in the area who were studying with the SMA – James and Brian O'Kane and the late Vincent O'Neill. As a result, he and a neighbour, Cathal McKenna, enrolled in the one-year SMA Spiritual Year in Kilcolgan, Co Galway. After gaining a BA degree at UCC he completed his studies in Dromantine College, Newry, Co Down. He was ordained, along with 19 classmates, in St. Colman's Cathedral, Newry, on 19 December 1969.

In July 1970, he set sail for Lagos, Nigeria on the HMV Aureol, a passenger liner that took 2 weeks to complete the voyage, stopping on the way at Las Palmas, Canary Islands and Freetown, Sierra Leone (to visit the grave of the SMA Founder, Bishop de Brésillac who died there in 1859, after just six weeks in Africa).

Apart from seven years (1980-1987) on the staff of SMA Formation House, Maynooth, Mark has spent all his priestly life in Nigeria, working for many years in education and for the past 32 years in fulltime parish ministry. His Golden Jubilee celebrations happily coincided with the blessing and dedication of the impressive St. Simon's Church, the construction of which Mark has been actively involved in over the past five years. He took up residence at St. Simon's in 2004 and a few years ago decided with the encouragement of the parishioners to embark on an ambitious project to replace the old church which was no longer able to comfortably accommodate the

teeming Catholic population of the area. Today there are 2 Masses on Sundays with overflowing congregations. It may also be of interest to note that following those 2 Masses which each last for 2-3 hours Fr Mark, now approaching his 75th year, celebrates a third Mass in another 'outstation' church which in time will also become a parish.

A palpable spirit of enthusiasm and love (it was in many ways a wonderfully wholesome dress-rehearsal for St. Valentine's Day) pervaded the church compound from early morning as the parishioners trekked in to erect the canopies and assemble the chairs to accommodate the expected overflow attendance. A huge team of volunteers was already in place from the previous evening, working through the night to prepare food for everyone. Hospitality is at the heart of Church life here in Nigeria.

The Chief Celebrant was the Archbishop of Kaduna, Dr. Matthew Man'oso Ndagoso who entered fully into the spirit of the occasion with his relaxed and jovial manner. In the course of his address he expressed his admiration for the herculean efforts of a host of SMA missionaries who have laboured all over Nigeria for well over a hundred years, singling out Fr Mark on this occasion for the enormous contribution he has made in different places. The homily was delivered by Fr Claude Nikpi, SMA, a native of Côte d'Ivoire and parish priest at St. Andrew's SMA parish in Benin City.

It is also important to acknowledge that Mark's younger brother, Fr Danny, has also been equally active as a SMA missionary in Nigeria since 1975 and is currently ministering in an even more heavily populated parish in the Archdiocese of Lagos. Between them they have accumulated almost 100 years of active missionary service. When home on holidays both priests help out in the parishes around the Omagh area. We rejoice with both of them and their family as Fr Mark marks this memorable milestone in his missionary life. Ad multos et faustos annos!

Peter McCawille, SMA - Valentine's Day, 2020



Fr Danny Monaghan SMA, Archbishop Ndagoso, Fr Mark and Fr Peter McCawille SMA.



Sr Celestina Ikpeni
(from Nigeria), with
OLA Tanzanian
postulants Carolina
and Anita in OLA
Convent, Mwanza.

OLA Sisters and Covid-19

The OLA Sisters work and live in some of the most under resourced areas of the world. Many of them work in the medical field.

In Tanzania alone there are 1.6 million people living with HIV and the luxury of self-isolation and physical distancing adopted by some societies is simply not possible. Many families share a single room. Basic hygiene is also a problem, with large areas not having access to running water.

But the real concern is the spread of the Coronavirus in Dar es Salaam. This city is densely populated, being the second fastest growing city in Africa and eleventh fastest growing in the world.

While many other African countries have imposed some of the most restrictive lockdowns in the world, the Tanzanian government says it is not planning to introduce a lockdown. The country has suspended international passenger flights and closed schools and universities, but in the words of the deputy Health Minister, Faustine Ndugulile, *"When you look at the dynamics, most Tanzanians live from hand to mouth – they have to leave their households in order to survive. So when you go for a total lockdown it means some will instead die of hunger."*

Sister Celestina OLA is living and working in Mwanza. She expressed concern about the impact of the virus in the region, explaining that while the government is encouraging social distancing and the washing of hands, it's not always easy for the people to abide as many do not have access to soap. *"For Lent, our Mwanza OLA Community bought soap for the people,"* she said.

She went on to explain some of the measures put in place. While there is no total lockdown and people are still free to move around and go to church, large gatherings have been cancelled. Social distancing is being practised in the villages and towns and there are basic facilities for washing hands in the shops and the markets.

The OLA community is currently using old clothing to sew masks for distribution. They continue to have Prayers at 3pm and to attend daily Mass, adhering to strict social distancing protocols. Mass is offered each day for those affected by the virus. Many parishioners stand and listen to the Mass from outside the Church.

Africa and the World

UNPRECEDENTED SPECIES EXTINCTION RATES ACCELERATING

Transformative changes needed to restore and protect nature



Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history, and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely. This is the stark warning in a new landmark report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

"The overwhelming evidence of the IPBES Global Assessment, from a wide range of different fields of knowledge, presents an ominous picture," said IPBES Chair, Sir Robert Watson. "The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide."

About IPBES: Often described as the "IPCC for biodiversity", IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body comprising more than 130 member Governments. Established by them in 2012, it provides policymakers with objective scientific assessments about the state of knowledge regarding the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems and the contributions they make to people, as well as the tools and methods to protect and sustainably use these vital natural assets. For more information about IPBES and its assessments visit www.ipbes.net

The Report also tells us that it is not too late to make a difference – but only if we start now at every level from local to global. *"Through 'transformative change', nature can still be conserved, restored and used sustainably – this is also key to meeting most other global goals. By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values."*

The report acknowledges that; *"Transformative change can expect opposition from those with interests vested in the status quo, but also that such opposition can be overcome for the broader public good."*

Most comprehensive assessment of its kind

The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is the most comprehensive ever completed. It is the first intergovernmental Report of its kind and introduces innovative ways of evaluating evidence.

Compiled by 145 expert authors from 50 countries, with inputs from another 310 contributing authors, the Report assesses changes over the past five decades, providing a comprehensive picture of the relationship between economic development pathways and their impacts on nature. It also offers a range of possible scenarios for the coming decades.

Based on the systematic review of about 15,000 scientific and government sources, the Report also draws (for the first time ever at this scale) on indigenous and local knowledge, particularly addressing issues relevant to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

"Biodiversity and nature's contributions to people are our common heritage and humanity's most important life-supporting 'safety net'. But our safety net is stretched almost to breaking point," said Prof. Sandra Díaz (Argentina), who co-chaired the Assessment. "The diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems, as well as many fundamental contributions we derive from nature, are declining fast, although we still have the means to ensure a sustainable future for people and the planet."

The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened. The picture is less clear for insect species, but available evidence supports a tentative estimate of 10% being threatened. At least 680 vertebrate species have been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9% of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least **1,000 more breeds still threatened**.

"Ecosystems, species, wild populations, local varieties and breeds of domesticated plants and animals are shrinking, deteriorating or vanishing. The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed," said Prof. Settele. "This loss is a direct result of human activity and constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world."

The Report notes that climate change may – over coming decades – surpass the impact of land and sea use change and other drivers.

To increase the policy-relevance of the Report, the assessment's authors have ranked the five direct drivers of change in nature with the largest relative global impacts so far. These culprits are, in descending order: (1) changes in land and sea use; (2) direct exploitation of organisms; (3) climate change; (4) pollution and (5) invasive alien species.

Despite progress to conserve nature, the Report also finds that global goals for conserving nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories. Goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors. Current negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards 80% (35 out of 44) of the assessed



targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, related to poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land. Loss of biodiversity is therefore shown to be not only an environmental issue, but also a developmental, economic, security, social and moral issue as well.

- Three-quarters of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. On average these trends have been less severe or avoided in areas held or managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.
- More than a third of the world's land surface and nearly 75% of freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production.
- The value of agricultural crop production has increased by about 300% since 1970, raw timber harvest has risen by 45% and approximately 60 billion tons of renewable and non-renewable resources are now extracted globally every year, having nearly doubled since 1980.
- Land degradation has reduced the productivity of 23% of the global land surface. Up to US\$577 billion in annual global crops are at risk from pollinator loss and 100-300 million people are at increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection.
- In 2015, 33% of marine fish stocks were being harvested at unsustainable levels; 60% were maximally sustainably fished, with just 7% harvested at levels lower than what can be sustainably fished.
- Urban areas have more than doubled since 1992.
- Plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980. 300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge and other wastes from industrial facilities are dumped annually into the world's waters, and fertilizers entering coastal ecosystems have produced more than 400 ocean 'dead zones', totalling more than 245,000 km² - a combined area greater than that of the United Kingdom.

- Negative trends in nature will continue to 2050 and beyond in all of the policy scenarios explored in the Report, except those that include transformative change – due to the projected impacts of increasing land-use change, exploitation of organisms and climate change, although with significant differences between regions.



The Way Forward

The Report also presents a wide range of illustrative actions for sustainability and pathways for achieving them across and between sectors such as agriculture, forestry, marine systems, freshwater systems, urban areas, energy, finance and many others. It highlights the importance of, among others, adopting integrated management and cross-sectoral approaches that take into account the trade-offs of food and energy production, infrastructure, freshwater and coastal management, and biodiversity conservation.

Also identified as a key element of more sustainable future policies is the evolution of global financial and economic systems to build a global sustainable economy, steering away from the current limited paradigm of economic growth.

(Source: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>)

Photo acknowledgements

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LAUDATO SI' - 5th Anniversary

June 2020 marks the 5th Anniversary of Laudato Si - on care for our common home.

Since publication in 2015 it has had a sustained and growing impact both within and outside the Catholic Church. Addressed to *"every person on the planet,"* it appeals to all to respond to *"the urgent challenge to protect our common home"*, which *"includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development"* (LS13). *"All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care for Creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents."* (LS14)

Impact of the Encyclical

Laudato Si' has contributed to the evolving dialogue around climate change and climate justice over the past five years. It has, through its call for *integral development* and an *integral ecology* brought a human and inclusive focus that a purely scientific or environmental approach lacks.

In linking care for the environment with care for human dignity, through its concern for the poorest and for future generations, the Encyclical has hammered home the point that *"everything is connected"* in our common home.

Therefore, overcoming the global problems of Climate Change and Pollution cannot succeed unless we heed both *"the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."*



Growth in Awareness

Since 2015 there have been great and positive changes in terms of the global awareness of climate change, the general acceptance of its reality and of the need for action to mitigate its effects. Back then, climate change was often denied or perceived as something that happens far away or in the distant future. Now, due to the increase in extreme weather events and climate related natural disasters all around the world, climate change has come to be understood more as a present and urgent reality.

There has also been a growth of activism calling for governments to lead mitigation action and to implement policies that promote climate justice. Laudato Si' has played a significant part in motivating this. As a result, but to very varying degrees, Governments are beginning to respond. In most cases however, the strategies and targets being adopted to reduce carbon emissions are too slow and do not go far enough.

"Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change."

(LS202)

Ireland is lagging far behind other European countries and will not achieve its stated targets, even with the temporary climate change improvement due to the COVID-19 'shutdown'.

When we resume 'normal living' it is likely most people / industries will return to their former ways of doing things and, once again, resume harmful activities.

Public dissatisfaction with Ireland's poor response to climate change has found expression in protests such as **Fridays for Future**, a growth in climate justice advocacy by green groups and a significant increase in support for environmentalists at the ballot box during the 2020 General Election.

Covid-19

The advent of the **COVID-19** pandemic has had a massive negative affect on our world in terms of the loss of human life, livelihoods and economic cost. It has also brought previously unimaginable societal change. Efforts to respond to it have proved that we can get by without the wasteful level of consumption generated by our individualistic and throwaway lifestyles. The pandemic has also brought home the reality that cataclysmic and world-changing events can actually happen. In addition, any belief that our scientifically-advanced and sophisticated world would come up with some sort of immediate solution to solve our problems has been blown away.

The changes brought about by **COVID-19** have carried us in the direction of less individualism, less consumption and less self-centred greed. Instead, a greater social awareness, solidarity and the promotion of the common good have been at the centre of efforts to contain and combat the disease. These are proving to be the most effective means of controlling **COVID-19**. We can only hope that these altruistic and more socially-conscious and positive changes continue into the future.

While the scourge of **COVID-19** is the focus of attention now, climate change is also a reality we must not ignore. Responding to it requires a level of change unthinkable up to now - for example, governments making radical policy changes about finance, transport, production and the way businesses are run, changes in how people live, where personal freedoms and choices give way to a focus on what is good for the community. In responding to the pandemic, decisions and changes like these have already been made. The unthinkable has, albeit due to a forced and urgent need, become thinkable and necessary.





While COVID-19 itself can never be said to be a good thing or in any way welcome, the willingness to embrace change in order to deal with it surely is.

As individuals, families and communities we need to continue to live in the way that the response to Covid-19 has pointed us, i.e. being more conscious of the needs of others, of other communities and future generations. The door to making such changes has been opened in this time of Covid-19. The pandemic will end. Hopefully our openness to change will continue.

Everything is connected.

Climate Justice and Faith

Five years' on, the call of **Laudato Si'** to heed the *Cry of the Earth* and the *Cry of the Poor* is even more urgent. The effects of global warming are becoming more evident in extreme weather events. Added to this experience the science and understanding of climate change has also advanced in the period. This has revealed even more evidence supporting the need for immediate change and greater action for climate change mitigation.

At its core, global climate change - caused by the pollution of our world - is about the future of God's creation and the future of the one human family that depends on it. Climate Justice is then about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment.

For Christians, care for creation is not just a *fashionable concept*, it is a *requirement of our faith*. In **Laudato Si'** Pope Francis says, "*Living our vocation to be protectors of God's creation is essential It is not an option or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.*" (LS 217). He states this message even more clearly, when he speaks of the Christian duty to creation as being "*an essential part of faith.*" (LS 64).

Climate change is largely the result of human action but its mitigation through action for climate justice is, **Laudato Si' tells us, an act of faith.**

The integrated approach of linking human development and the environment is central to the Encyclical. It emphasises that our world is facing both an environmental and social crisis. Pope Francis condemns humanity's treatment of the environment,

blaming "*unfettered greed*" for the pollution and global warming that is turning our world into "*a pile of filth*" and, at the same time, creating a very unequal world in which the rich consume a disproportionate amount of the world's resources to the detriment of the poor and future generations.

In **Laudato Si'** environmental degradation is linked directly to poverty and the consequent lack of human dignity suffered by many. The abuse of the natural world has the greatest effect on the poorest and on those in the developing world. Any solution demands an integrated approach that includes restoring human dignity (by combating poverty) and protecting nature.

Eighty percent of the world's resources are used by just twenty percent of the world's population. We in Ireland are part of that twenty percent.

A year after **Laudato Si' was published, world leaders signed the 2016 Paris Climate Change Agreement.** This was seen as a watershed moment indicating that, at last, world leaders and nations were taking climate action seriously.

Sadly, since then, in spite of the best efforts of some countries, others - especially some of the world's largest producers of carbon emissions - have reneged or refused to be bound by the terms of the agreement. As a result, the collective level of change will not be enough to meet the global carbon reduction targets set.

World events have also intervened. Brexit, wars, migration and now the global **COVID-19** pandemic have diverted attention and resources away for addressing Climate Change. Five years on, **Laudato Si'** reminds us that **actively caring** is central to living faith - caring for creation and at the same time caring for the poorest. It is a call to all who believe to act and live in a way that promotes climate justice.

Laudato Si' is addressed to all: individuals, politicians, leaders, members of particular groups or nationalities. **In essence, it calls for change - changes in production, in our personal lives, in our communities, in countries across the world. It calls us to act in ways that serve the common good.**

"A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

Everything is connected."



Iran and the Middle East

We read and hear on a weekly basis how Iran is being condemned by either the USA or Israel plus other Arab countries in the region. Perhaps we wonder how this large country in the Middle East has become such a hated country by so many nations.

There are two elements we must understand about Iran. Firstly, it is not an Arab country. The people are Iranian / Persians and have had a distinct culture of their own for over 3,000 years. They are mentioned in the Bible. Secondly, it follows the Shi'ite strain of Islam. I mentioned in a previous article how Islam split in two parts (the Sunni and the Shi'ite) and how they intensely dislike each other.

In the Middle East, USA supports Israel through financial support, arms credits and through diplomacy. This unconditional support comes because the US Jewish lobby has organized itself among US voters (both Democrat and Republican) in Congress.

Israel has never acknowledged that it has developed an atomic bomb however much the evidence is fairly conclusive of this fact. It has been used as an unspoken deterrent to Israel's neighbours. Consequently, neither Israel nor the US want any other country in this volatile area of the world to possess one either. Israel is regarded as a reliable ally by the West and so it is 'permitted' to possess one but no other country is given the same leeway.

There is another element to this struggle – the element of regional dominance. Iran has exported its revolution since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. It does this through its petrol dollars which are used to support Shi'ism throughout the region. USA unwittingly played a major part in this through the overthrow of the Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein. When Iraqi elections were held the oppressed Shi'ia majority gained control of the government.

Syria has been ruled by what is regarded as a strange Shi'ia faction since 1971. With the civil war intensifying there and with Lebanese Shi'ia Hezbollah support (and arms from Iran) Iranian influence extends all the way to Lebanon and now to the Houthis of Yemen. This has encircled the mainly Arab Sunni strongholds of Sa'udi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Sa'udi Arabia has gained strong support from the US as its extremist views have been moderated under the Crown Prince (and de facto ruler of Sa'udi Arabia) Mohammed bin Salman. Their expenditure on arms is the highest per capita in the world. It has now even begun to secretly support Israel as a bulwark against Iran and Shi'ism.

With such regional and religious differences, with world powers playing a major role there and the sale of arms by the US, Europe and Russia to all parties, a regional showdown of some type is probably inevitable.

Jarlath Walsh SMA



I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7)

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

Sr John Vianney Cosgrove (Foxford, Co. Mayo) served in Nigeria, Ghana, England and Ireland, died on 15 September 2019, aged 91 years.

Sr Eugenius Colbert (Dungourney, Co. Cork) served in Ghana, Nigeria and Ireland, died on 22 March 2020, aged 97 years.

Fr Paddy (PJ) Kelly (Lawrencetown, Co. Galway), served in Nigeria, Tanzania and Ireland, died on 14 January 2020, aged 65 years.

Fr Francis E Furey (Derry City), served in Nigeria, Italy and Ireland, died on 30 January 2020, aged 77 years.

Fr Terry Gunn (Cork City), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 10 February 2020, aged 84 years.

Fr Michael Morgan-Evans (Cashel, Co. Tipperary), served in Nigeria, Italy, England, Australia and Ireland, died on 22 February 2020, aged 88 years.

Fr James O'Hea (Lisavaird, Co. Cork), served in Nigeria, died on 17 March 2020, aged 92 years.

Fr John McCormack (Roundfort, Co. Mayo), served in Liberia, Philippines and Ireland, died on 24 March 2020, aged 75 years.

Fr Patrick Jennings (Castlewellan, Co. Down), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 5 April 2020, aged 95 years.

Fr Dan O'Brien (Cork City), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 7 April 2020, aged 74 years.

Fr Brendan Dunning (Clonown, Co. Roscommon), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 13 April 2020, aged 76 years.

Fr John Clancy (Mullagh, Co. Clare), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 18 April 2020, aged 88 years.

Fr Seán Kilbane (Mountbellew, Co. Galway), served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 3 May 2020, aged 88 years.

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



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

For further information, contact
Fr. Anthony Kelly at
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The Apostolic Nuncio, H E Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, celebrated Mass with the SMA community in the SMA House, Blackrock Road, Cork on 9 December 2019 to mark the 163rd Anniversary of the foundation of the SMA by Bishop Marion de Br sillac in Lyons, France. Archbishop Okolo is pictured with the SMA Provincial Leader, Fr Malachy Flanagan (on left) and the Vice Provincial Leader, Fr Eamonn Finnegan.



ONLINE DONATIONS

You may send money, at no additional cost, for our Missionary Work, Family Vocations Community (FVC), MissionAssociation Cards etc. using our **Donate Online** facility on the www.sma.ie homepage.

Mass via Webcam

During these Covid times many parishes are using Webcam to allow people to 'attend' daily / Sunday Mass.

Join us for 10am Mass (Blackrock Road and Wilton), 5.35pm (Wilton) or Walthamstow (check site for Mass times)

Go to www.sma.ie and scroll down the page to Parish Webcams and click on the church of your choice.

Covid 19 and the SMA

Due to the pandemic we were forced to cancel several SMA events this year:

Knock Pilgrimage (May), **SMA Summer School** (June), **SMA Camp in Dromantine** (July) as well as the **Family Fun Days** in Claregalway and Dromantine. Please God, 2021 will see their return, bigger and better!

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