

Faith over Fear in the face of Covid-19

Sr Regina Opoku, OLA



The Covid-19 pandemic led to many restrictions in Tanzania – travel, gatherings, education, social distancing etc. Days of prayer and fasting were ordered by the late President Magufuli (died 17 March this year) to fight the “satanic visitor.” Despite not experiencing a total lockdown, the atmosphere was filled with Fear of Coronavirus mixed with a Faith belief in God for protection.

Even more frequent washing of hands became the norm. Everywhere you were met with a Veronica Bucket (pictured) ready for the ritual of hand-washing with soap. We could not be left out!

Hand sanitizers and masks began to appear, especially in urban areas. The media reported on the large number of Covid deaths in developed countries. Very few Covid-19 cases and deaths were reported in Tanzania. On 29 April 2020, the last day official data was released, there were 509 cases and 21 deaths in Tanzania. And four coronavirus patients were receiving treatment in the largest city, Dar es Salaam

Many were concerned about what would happen if African countries were struck by the virus in a very serious way. In Tanzania, we have fewer medical specialists, less hospital equipment and do not even have sufficient facilities to contain large numbers of coronavirus patients! This thought increased fear in many Tanzanians and motivated the spirit of prayer for God’s intervention.

The President succeeded in calming the public’s fear by repeatedly assuring Tanzanians that Covid-19 had been eliminated and thanking God for listening to their prayers. Last June, he ordered the reopening of all schools. This order following the reopening of Universities and other institutions some weeks before, with strict guidelines in place, adhering to the different health and hygiene protocols.

Our National Novena in honour of Our Lady takes place from 14 – 22 May. Join our SMA Parish, Blackrock Road webcam at 7.30pm each evening as we pray for the needs of our supporters and their families, those who are studying for exams, the sick, our deceased loved ones and for many other intentions.

Go to www.sma.ie and click on the Novena link on the homepage.

Sadly, due to Covid-19, and for the safety of all our supporters and SMA / OLA members our annual Pilgrimage to Knock will not take place this year. Mass will be celebrated in Knock at 3pm on the final day of our Novena, Saturday, 22 May.

Go to www.knockshrine.ie and follow the link to the Mass in the Basilica.

Our Lady of Knock, pray for us.

As a result of the schools closure for four months, the Education ministry announced that teachers have to work extra hours to ensure that the school curriculum is completed. Students and pupils would have no holidays until December 2020.

Mikono Yetu (Joining our Hands)

With the support of the funding received from two American agencies, Women First International and NoVo Foundation, Mikono Yetu, (a non-governmental organization where I work) joined the global efforts to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the community level, we increased our awareness-creating activities on the dangers of the virus. The Ministry of Health distributed posters alerting the public on how to detect the signs of the virus and how to protect oneself from contracting the virus. A free telephone number was also available so that Tanzanians could call and seek advice.

We pasted some of the posters in areas that have a large population (market places, schools, health centres and public offices) as a reminder to everyone to continue reading the messages. Additionally, we recorded COVID-19 protection messages into horn speakers and distributed them in villages, dispensaries, market places and schools to back up the strategy of reaching more people instead of face-to-face meetings. Women entrepreneurs and the youth, particularly girls who had dropped out of school, were encouraged to continue growing their businesses while taking all the necessary precautions in a safe environment.

To reduce Covid-19 infections, Mikono Yetu provided protection equipment, including Veronica buckets, liquid soaps, face masks, horn speakers and thermo scans. We made a one-year agreement with a telephone company (Airtel) to provide prepaid phone calls to enable women entrepreneurs to communicate directly instead of having face-to-face meetings. With this arrangement, women received bulk messages about Covid-19 and other important business messages such as how to find markets and grow their businesses.

As a result, women are now able to conduct their small businesses more safely and easily, knowing how to protect themselves and their customers with regular hand-washing and mask-wearing. In schools, students continue washing their hands to keep themselves safe.



To sustain the hand washing exercise, Mikono Yetu staff trained 30 women to make liquid soap for self-use (pictured) and as an income-generating project, selling to individuals, schools, health centres etc. Other women were trained in making masks, all with the aim of finding ways to compensate for the loss of their regular income.

We also turned our attention to a group of more than 300 adolescent girls who had dropped out of school (some because of Covid-19) and their parents / caregivers to ensure that the girls are given opportunities to reach their full potential. Each week, we work with them on such issues as Self-Esteem, Girl Rights are Human Rights, Entrepreneurship, and Reproductive Health.

With some Tanzanians, the wearing of masks and social-distancing have become something of the past, as they say, *"Our fear is gone. We live by faith in God and we believe COVID-19 is dead in our country."* Mikono Yetu will continue its mission to raise awareness of the danger of Covid-19 and how it is vital that each and every person take all the necessary precautions to safeguard themselves, and others, from this deadly virus. May God continue to protect us all.

SMA Family Vocations Community (FVC)



My family and I have been involved with the SMA for over 50 years. My mother, the late Mrs Mary Lyons, heard about the great work of the FVC and became a dedicated sponsor from 1965 until her death in 2007.

We were a family of twelve children and were brought up and led by our mother's example of devotion to the work of missionary priests all over the world. Faith was a treasured gift in our household. My mother's great faith and trust in God, supported and guided her throughout life and was a gift which she shared enthusiastically with all those she encountered. Mam was a firm friend and neighbour of Fr Richie Wall, who gave his life as a missionary priest with the SMA. (Fr Wall is now retired in SMA Wilton after 58 years in Nigeria). Four of our family went on to begin our own FVC groups.

I started my group in 1976, the year after I got married, and continue to this day. We are so grateful for the gift of the SMA missionaries and look to them as an extension of our own family. On any occasion when we are in need of prayerful support, the SMA's are only a phone call away. We cherish and value the care and concern of our beloved missionary priests. We have often had Masses said by the priests in our home here in Carrigadrohid, Co Cork. This is perhaps, the greatest gift that we receive and outweighs any contribution which we can make. When this Mass is celebrated, it is an opportunity for all those in our Family Vocations group to come together and hear about the wonderful missionary work which is still ongoing. It also allows us to gather the contributions from our group members.

The legacy which began with my mother over fifty years ago will continue on in the generations to come as our own children carry on the beautiful tradition of supporting the work of the missions. It is our fervent prayer and desire that this great work would continue for many years in the future and draw many hearts to the heart of Jesus.

Mass is offered each morning in the SMA, Blackrock Road, Cork for all our sponsors and supporters, particularly those who may be experiencing some difficulties in their own lives or of their loved ones. And remember... **God always answers our prayers!**



Nuala Crowley



Mass to celebrate the reopening of the school in October 2020

CLUB DU BONHEUR

Next year, the SMA will celebrate 145 years of its presence in Egypt. Tanta, Zifta, Mahalla El-Kobra, Zeitoun are names famous in the SMA annals of missionary work in that great country. The SMA founded several Colleges in Egypt, one of them is St Louis, Tanta, which is now a University. Today, our presence in Egypt is greatly reduced, with a total of eight priests in three communities (Sohag, Heliopolis and Shoubra). The OLA Sisters, however, continue to have a strong presence there with 26 Sisters in 8 communities, working in 5 schools, primary health care and facilitating workshops for the empowerment of women (including literacy, vocational training and health courses). Fr Peter Ajao SMA (from Nigeria) shares some news of life in St Marc's parish, Shoubra, Cairo.

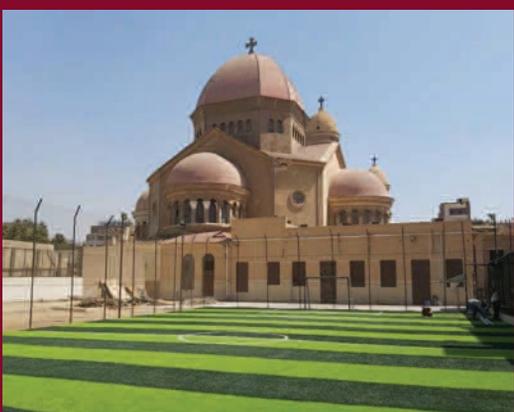
Four SMA priests work in St Marc's parish, which was founded in 1894. The parish School for those with Special Needs (Club du Bonheur – Happiness Club) recently celebrated Mass to mark the opening of the new academic year. In March 2020, the Education ministry ordered all schools and other education centres to close because of Covid-19. Fortunately, last August, the Minister for Education gave a greenlight for schools to resume in mid-October, as Egypt continues to record low number of cases of the virus.

Everyone was happy with the decision. The 50+ kids (4 to 12 years old) and our 12 staff were excited as well. We also have classes for those aged 18 to 30 years. Though many are from different Christian churches (Roman Catholic, Coptic, Orthodox...) we also have a number of Muslim pupils. For our part, different precautionary measures have been put in place to ensure a safe academic year. This included limiting the number of children in school. They are divided into two groups with each group attending school on different days, the checking of their temperature before boarding the school bus and when they arrive at St Marc's. Teachers and all other staff are also checked when they arrive each day. Regular hand-washing, hand sanitizing, mandatory wearing of mask for the adult and face-shield for the young ones, physical distancing and proper ventilation of the classrooms are now 'normal' practice each day. Hygiene signs are fixed in the classrooms and around the school. In addition, teachers are watchful and attentive if any pupil shows any kind of symptom of ill-health.

"I wish you 'Happy Mission Sunday'. May we continue to be effective instruments of God's mission in our world, bringing God's love to all, especially the most abandoned. I also use this special day to thank all our benefactors in Ireland for their constant support towards the mission in Shoubra, Egypt. May the Lord bless and reward them all. God bless you all. Keep supporting us!

Fr Peter Ajao SMA

The football field was built with the support of the Irish Province and is now used by about 500 young people every week. St Marc's Basilica, Shoubra, is in the background.



Human Trafficking

“Every human being, man, woman, boy and girl, is made in God’s image. Therefore, modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labour, prostitution, and organ trafficking, is a crime against humanity.”
(Pope Francis)

The International Labour Organization–ILO estimates that there are more than 40 million people living in slavery today (up from 27 million in 2013). More people are enslaved today than during the entire 400 year period of the transatlantic slave-trade.

Slavery exists today

Human trafficking is modern day slavery. It causes unimaginable misery and suffering to those who are dehumanized, treated as commodities that are bought, sold and abused. The human freedom and dignity that we take as a birthright, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is denied to millions of people.

There are victims of trafficking in over 160 of the world’s 197 countries, driven by greed and the huge profits it generates. It is maintained by an insatiable demand for cheap labour, sexual services, cheap goods and even for transplant organs. It happens because people turn a blind eye, willing to deny other human beings their God-given dignity.

Ireland and Trafficking

471 victims of human trafficking have been identified in Ireland since 2013 (Trafficking in Persons Report 2020, p270). Given the secretive, controlling and coercive nature of human trafficking the actual figure is much higher. A 2019 UN document stated that the overall level of trafficking in Ireland was approximately 50% higher than what is currently being detected (Source: MECPATHS). Roughly 50% of victims come from Eastern Europe, 30% from Africa and the remainder mainly from Asia.

According to the Irish organisation APT (Act to Prevent Trafficking) 76% of victims in Ireland are trafficked for sexual exploitation. They also report that “up to 97% of women

in indoor prostitution in Ireland are migrant women (3-13% are Irish)” and that “there are at least 1,000 women (and girls) in indoor prostitution at any one time in Ireland.” Other reports, including the Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland (Dept. of Justice and Equality), indicate the presence of victims of trafficking in situations of sexual exploitation, in fishing, farming, domestic servitude, nail-bars and car washes.

Human Trafficking is a reality in Ireland.

There are people who perpetrate and profit from this crime and people who sustain it through their use of the services of trafficked human beings. Countless reports give us estimates, facts and information but behind them is the reality of suffering, injustice and the denial of human rights and dignity caused to the victims who are enslaved.

There are many Irish groups working to support the victims of Trafficking: APT, Ruhama, Mecpaths, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, The Sexual Violence Centre in Cork and others. We can also become involved in Campaigns run by these organisations lobbying for better legislation, better services and supports for victims of trafficking. Check out their websites for further information.

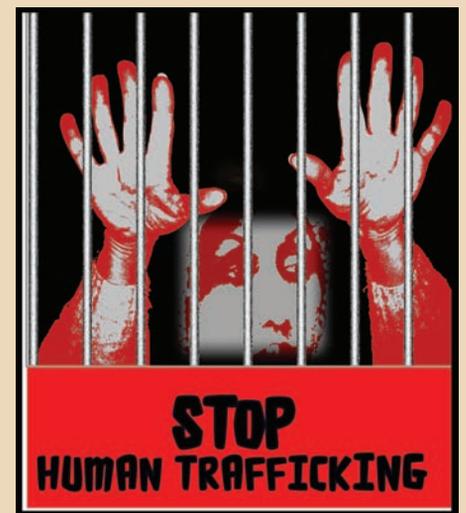
The APT website www.aptireland.org has a “What Can I do” section that advises us to keep ourselves informed – to be aware – to talk to others to make them aware – and to do whatever we can to raise awareness of this issue in Ireland.

We can report suspicions to the Gardaí. To report anonymously, call The Garda Confidential Hotline 1800 666 111 or email Blueblindfold@garda.ie

At the heart of Christianity is the call to love our neighbour – at the core of Church Social Teaching is the principle of Human Dignity that we, as believers, are called on to promote and protect as part of living our faith. How do we do this in relation to the injustice of Human Trafficking that is taking place around us in Ireland?

Many richer countries view modern slavery as a problem that happens elsewhere, denying all responsibility. This can be the

direct result of policy decisions allowing the importation of goods produced by victims of trafficking. The link may also be indirect, i.e. resulting from a blind-eye being turned to practices that facilitate and profit from the sale of goods made through the forced labour of slaves. The GSI identifies critical gaps that criminals are exploiting with regard to irregular migrants, the homeless, workers in the shadow economy and certain minorities.



Such goods include computers, mobile phones, clothing, fish, cocoa and timber. As long as we continue to allow the importation and sale of the products of slave labour we fuel and perpetuate the demand for the slaves needed to produce them or to mine the raw materials needed to make them in Asia and Africa. In this way we contribute to the conditions that allow slavery to prosper.

One of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – 8.7 – is to eradicate Slavery. To achieve this by 2030, we must act to prioritise prevention, focusing on discrimination, safe migration, support for victims and the prosecution of traffickers. We have an obligation to take serious steps to address the slave labour products they import. We owe this obligation both to consumers in our own country but more especially to victims along the supply chain, where products are made, packed and shipped.

The GSI reveals that the prevalence of modern slavery in the USA, Canada, UK, most European countries, including Ireland, is higher than previously understood, with enormous differences between the estimated size of modern slavery and the small number of victims that are identified.



On an individual and everyday level modern slavery touches all of us, through the food we eat, the clothes we buy and other goods we purchase. We all have a responsibility to address and eliminate this crime everywhere it occurs and in every way that we can.

The choices we make matter, the goods we buy may cost much more than the money we pay, in terms of human suffering and the lifelong bondage of people in countries far away.

When children are enslaved

Because of poverty, parents may sell their children as labour. Such is the case in Lake Volta, Ghana, where children are forced to work for fishermen. Parents are told their children will get to do an apprenticeship. But in reality, they're kept as slaves in appalling conditions. According to the ILO there are around 10 million child slaves worldwide.

Modern day slavery: millions of people toil in debt bondage in Asia, forced labour in the Gulf states, as child workers in agriculture in Africa or Latin America and in prostitution throughout the world. Tens of thousands of illegal migrants work in agriculture in Europe, many living in abysmal conditions as they slave away for well below the minimum wage. Are they in Ireland?

Millions are held in debt bondage, forced to work to pay off a debt. Often the debts continue to pile up, even when the whole family works for 10 hours a day at the brickworks, or in their owner's quarries, fields or mines. The debts are often 'inherited' by children. The ILO estimates there are around 30 million people working as debt slaves, most of them in India and Pakistan.

Child Brides

UNESCO says that one in five girls are married before they turn 18. Not all of these marriages are forced arrangements. But every year millions of underage girls are forced into marriage before the age of 15. In many cases they're taken out of school and essentially live as unpaid labourers in their spouse's home. Many report physical and sexual abuse in the marriage.

Nowhere to turn

Illegal migrants are especially vulnerable to exploitation, regardless of where in the world they are. They often have nowhere to claim rights, usually cannot speak the local language, and don't know where they can turn for help.

Born into Slavery

The descendants of African slaves in Mauritania are called "Haratin." Although slavery is officially banned in the northwestern African country, people are still inherited or sold as property. An estimated 600,000 women, men and children in Mauritania are currently exploited as domestic workers or in the agriculture sector. That's one-fifth of the entire Mauritanian population.

Authors: Helle Jeppesen, Natalie Muller. <https://www.dw.com/en/why-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-still-exist-world/a-52853992>



FACTS ABOUT TRAFFICKING

Trafficking comes in many forms, including:

- Forcing victims into prostitution
- Subjecting victims to slavery or involuntary servitude
- Compelling victims to commit sex acts for the purpose of creating pornography
- Misleading victims into debt bondage
- It's estimated 80% of trafficking involves sexual exploitation, and 19% involves labour exploitation
- Nearly 70 percent of victims are female and many are children
- After illegal drugs and arms trafficking, Human trafficking is the third most lucrative international crime
- It reportedly generates a profit of €27 billion every year, 50% of which is made in the developed world
- Trafficked victims come from all age groups; many are female and under 18 years old
- Only 1-2 percent of victims are rescued
- Only 1 in 100,000 Europeans involved in trafficking are convicted
- Approximately 30 million children have lost their childhood through sexual exploitation over the past 30 years.
- Globally, the average cost of a slave is €120.

Source:

<https://www.renateurope.net/trafficking-resources/>



Ghana SMA reaches out to the hearing-impaired

Fr René Yao SMA, from Ivory Coast, began his studies for the SMA in 2008. He spent one year of his formation in Liberia where he had a life-changing experience which he writes of in this article. After completing his studies in Nairobi, Kenya, he was appointed to the SMA mission in Ghana.

St Martin Deaf Ministry was born out of a genuine desire to minister with and to those who are hearing-impaired, based on the mission mandate given to Christians by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19).

It was during my time as a seminarian in Liberia (2013) that the voice of God resonated inside me on the great and urgent need to address the existing gap in our ministry with and for those with hearing impairment. I was unable to teach catechism to those who had hearing challenges during our pastoral experience at Mary's Meals, a Liberian-based local NGO. In short, my passion to minister to the Deaf community came out of a big failure. I literally failed to minister to the Deaf community in Liberia. It is interesting to underline that my failure in Liberia was a big eye opener which in turn made me progressively realize that the Deaf community has been literally forgotten in the Church's pastoral care. In the words of our Venerable Founder, Melchior de Marion Brésillac, these people are among "the most abandoned".

But my unfortunate experience in Liberia awakened a hunger in me to learn the Liberian Sign Language, plus some online basics of the American Sign Language; and later on the Kenyan Sign Language for pastoral ministry as part of my four-year theological course in the Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya. All these life experiences encourage me today to be an advocate for those with hearing challenges.

During my ministry as a deacon, I organized the very first interpreted Mass in Kenyan Sign Language for those with hearing difficulties at Mary Mother of God Church, Embulbul Parish, Kenya.

After ordination in 2018, I was appointed to Ghana. With a passion for touching the lives of those with hearing challenges, I constantly visited Akuapem Mampong Senior High and Technical School for the Deaf to become better acquainted with the Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL).

It was after that period of learning that I was invited by Archbishop John Bonaventure Kwofie (CSSp.) of Accra to interpret at the TV / webcam Masses from the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra. The positive feedback (both from the hearing and hearing challenged Christians), confirmed for me, all the more, the great need there is to minister to Deaf people.

Officially, the St Martin Deaf Ministry (SMDM) was launched on 22 November 2020 as part of the 140th anniversary celebrating the arrival of the first missionaries in Ghana: French-born SMA priests Eugène Murat and Auguste Moreau at Elmina. The anniversary Mass was interpreted in Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL).

Since then, St Martin's Deaf Ministry has been involved in Mass interpretation every Sunday at 9am at Queen of Peace Parish, Madina (Accra); a wedding celebration for a deaf couple (Mr and Mrs Ashong, pictured), home visitation, teaching Catholic Doctrine; enabling catholic hymn practice and teaching others the Ghanaian Sign Language.

May God, through St Martin and the Blessed Virgin Mary, bless us all, Amen!



Fr René signing with some parishioners in Madina



Special Celebrations in Islam

All world religions have special celebrations throughout the year. We Christians celebrate Christmas (Birth of Jesus) and Easter (Resurrection of Jesus) while the Hindus celebrate Diwali (Festival of Lights) as well as Rami Navami (Birth of Rama) among others. Islam is no different and two of their major celebrations are 'Id el Adha (after the hajj pilgrimage) and 'Id el Fitr (at the end of the month of Ramadan). What do these celebrations signify? Perhaps, when we see in the newspapers or on TV that Muslims are celebrating these occasions, either in the mosques in Ireland or in the Islamic world in general, we might have a greater understanding of these occasions from these few lines below!

'Id el Adha

The Muslim calendar is different from the Christian (Western) calendar. It follows the moon and therefore has a shorter month. One of their months is called the month of Hajj or pilgrimage. Each Muslim, who is able to go to the holy city of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) once in their life time, is expected to perform the hajj in accordance with command set out in the Qur'an (Muslims holy book).

Mecca is the centre of the Islamic religion. The Ka'bah (or house of Allah / God) is to be found there, in the centre of the Great Mosque, and is considered by Muslims to be the most sacred spot on earth. Muslims also pray in the direction of the Ka'bah for their five daily prayers and are buried facing it.

Tradition has it that Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ishmael raised the foundations of the Ka'bah from a shrine built by Adam. The Prophet Muhammad later cleansed this house of Allah of any signs of polytheism and made it the focal point of Muslim piety. In

memory of Abraham who was asked to sacrifice his son Ishmael (not Isaac as in Biblical tradition) in this place, Muslim celebrate this festival by sacrificing a goat or a sheep to show Allah's mercy and Abraham's obedience.

'Id el Fitr

Islam is often said to have 5 pillars or statements of their faith. To go on pilgrimage (hajj) is one, as is the need to fast from food and drink during the daytime for the full month of Ramadan. As it is a lunar month the fast can last for 29/30 days and is very strictly followed by followers of Islam. This month is also regarded as one of the holiest months of the Islamic calendar because on the 27th day (known as the Night of Power) the Prophet Muhammad received the first verses of revelation of the Qur'an.

At the end of the month of fasting, known as Ramadan (when the new moon is sighted to show the month has ended) and on the first day of the next month (known as the month of Shawwal), Muslims celebrate. They give thanks to Allah for blessings by attending the mosque and give alms to those who cannot afford food for the celebration. Families also give each other presents, especially to children. As we do for our Christmas celebration, people dress up in their finest clothes and while attending the mosque they offer special prayers for this day of thankfulness. It was always a major family and community celebration. No Muslim should fast on this day. It is felt that food is better appreciated because of the experience of fasting during this holy month of Ramadan.

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 Mary Martin HEALY (Rathmore, Co. Kerry & Kildinan, Co. Cork) served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 13 November 2020, aged 85 years.

Sr Henrietta POWER (Ballyvelig, Co. Wexford) served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 30 November 2020, aged 97 years.

Sr Bernadette FLYNN (Stradbally, Castlegregory, Co. Kerry) served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 4 January 2021, aged 86 years.

Sr Mary Catherine O'SULLIVAN (Knocknagown, Rylane, Co Cork) served in Ireland, died on 15 January 2021, aged 83 years.

Fr Michael BOYLE (Strabane, Co. Tyrone and Belfast), served in Nigeria, died on 17 February 2021, aged 96 years.

Sr Marie TREACY (Ballinturly, Co. Roscommon) served in Nigeria and Ireland, died on 19 February 2021, aged 79 years.

Fr Don BURKE (Waterford City), served in Nigeria, Poland and Zambia, died on 31 March 2021, aged 88 years.

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 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.

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