



Sisters in Service: Working to Build a More Just and Compassionate World



OLA sisters in Elmina and Cape Coast, Ghana, 1928

Preserving the Past

The mission calling of the OLA Sisters has always been serving God by uplifting, empowering and supporting women and children, especially in Africa. The OLA Ardfoyle Archives remind us of the roots, the purpose, and the calling of our Sisters, past and present, ensuring that their sacrifices, struggles, and triumphs are not forgotten, but are celebrated and honoured. It is a living history, a testament to the courageous and faith-filled women who laid the foundation for the OLA mission, and to the women who continue to serve out that mission in various capacities. I was once reminded that it is not the Sisters' mission, but God's Mission, that they serve.

The Archives are an essential part of preserving the OLA identity in the rapidly changing context of Religious Life. It provides us with a wealth of information and knowledge that can help us to learn from the past, improve the present, and shape the future. As one Sister described it, "it contains documents, photographs, letters, and other valuable resources that allow us to trace our history, track our progress, and identify areas where we need to grow and evolve. It also helps us to appreciate our accomplishments, recognise our challenges, and stay true to our charism and mission. Our future lies in our past."

Creating and maintaining an Archive requires dedication, time, and resources to collect, organise, and preserve these items.

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Women's Interfaith Council meeting, Kaduna, Nigeria with Sr Veronica Onyeansi, OLA.

Health and Education

The first Sisters set out for the shores of the African continent in 1876, answering an appeal by the Superior General of the Society of African Missions (SMA), Fr Augustine Planque, for women to work in the SMA missions in West Africa. Few of these young women would ever return. They answered the call with faith and fortitude, with grace and tenacity, in the full knowledge that death was not just a risk, it was a likely outcome. This dire outcome is fortunately no longer the case, but the challenges of mission life still require a courage and commitment that few can muster. The health and education of the communities in which they serve were, and continue to be, of paramount importance to the OLA Sisters. The current generations of OLA Sisters stand on the shoulders of their predecessors and remain committed to providing quality healthcare, education, and other social and pastoral services, to the women and children of Africa, serving especially the most vulnerable members of society.

They are involved in a variety of programmes and initiatives aimed at improving the health outcomes of the communities they serve, administering or working in hospitals, rural health care centres and clinics, as well as mobile health services that travel to remote areas to provide medical care to those who might not otherwise have access. The OLA firmly believe that educating girls is crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty and improving the overall health and well-being of communities. To that end, they have established schools and programmes that specifically target girls, and they work daily to overcome the cultural and societal barriers that often prevent girls from receiving an education. That they have been, and continue to be, a beacon of hope and compassion in Africa is borne out by the numbers of past pupils who regularly travel to Ireland to visit with their beloved teachers and mentors in Ardfoyle.

the African continent. They collaborate with members of other faith communities to address common concerns, such as poverty, healthcare, and education. They also work to promote religious tolerance and understanding. The OLA involvement in interfaith dialogue is grounded in their belief in the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural background.

One example of the Sisters' successful interfaith work is the **Cork Three Faiths** Forum in Ireland of which the OLA and SMA are founding members. The Forum brings together members of the three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and seeks to create a space for open dialogue where people of faith can come together in the spirit of cooperation and friendship. The initiatives undertaken by the Forum include the hosting of interreligious and cross-cultural webinars and scriptural reasoning sessions. Another example is the **Women's Interfaith Council** in Kaduna, Nigeria, established in 2010 by the OLA Sisters together with local Muslim and Christian women leaders. This organization brings together women of these two faiths to empower women and ensure their active engagement in the promotion of peaceful coexistence. It also provides support and encouragement to victims of violence in the region. They work with young people in order to break down prejudices between religions and genders, and to ensure the active engagement of youth in peacebuilding. Sr Veronica Onyeansi OLA is currently serving as WIC's Executive Director.

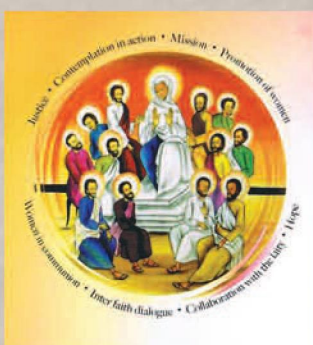
Social Justice

Social Justice is essential to creating a more just and equitable world for all. Many of the challenges facing the women and children we serve in Africa and throughout the world, are rooted in broader social, economic, and political systems. Addressing these issues requires systemic change.

To that end, our Sisters in Ireland are actively involved in advocacy work through our Justice Desk and the partnerships formed with various likeminded organisations. Their advocacy work is focused predominantly in Ireland where they work to raise awareness about the impact our choices in Europe and elsewhere have on the women and children of Africa. They advocate for changes to legislation and policies that that contribute to injustice and inequality, and propose ways to promote corporate responsibility, combat human trafficking, promote sustainability, and address other issues that contribute to the suffering of vulnerable communities, especially in Africa.

Interfaith Dialogue

We live in a diverse world and OLA Sisters believe that by engaging in dialogue with members of other faith communities, we can build bridges of mutual respect and understanding, and work towards a more just, peaceful, and harmonious society. To this end, the Sisters are involved in a variety of interfaith initiatives and programmes here in Ireland and on



The Sisters and their staff members are either active members of, or work in close collaboration with, a number of advocacy organisations and networks, both in Ireland and internationally. These include the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, the Irish Coalition on Business and Human Rights, RENATE (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation) as well as with other Religious in Ireland. Many corporations operating in the so-called 'developed' world have a significant impact on the lives of people in Africa. Hence, our advocacy for greater transparency, accountability, and responsibility on the part of these corporations. The Justice desk works to raise awareness about issues such as labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Human trafficking, the trade of human beings for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation, is a significant crime affecting vulnerable communities throughout Africa. The Justice desk raises awareness about the root causes of human trafficking, and they advocate for changes to legislation and policies that would address these issues.

OLA Sisters in various parts of the world also work to provide support and services to victims in war torn regions, collaborating with other organisations. In 2022, new OLA missions were opened in Liberia and in the Central African Republic, countries suffering from war and ongoing conflict. An OLA Sister recently completed a year in South Sudan providing support and counselling services to those who continue to be traumatised by the ravages of war.

The Sisters are equally committed to promoting sustainability and environmental justice in Africa, recognising that global environmental degradation and climate change have a significant impact on communities throughout the African continent. They advocate for changes to policies and practices that contribute to these issues.

Migrants and Refugees

Key areas of the OLA Sisters work in Ireland involves outreach to African Communities locally, and a commitment to supporting migrants and refugees.

Many Africans who come to Ireland face significant challenges in terms of integrating into Irish society, accessing services, and finding employment. Working with other organizations, the Sisters provide language classes, and other educational programs to help migrants improve their skills and qualifications, and better integrate into Irish society. They also work with local organisations and community groups to provide support and advocacy for African migrants, and to help them access essential services such as healthcare and housing.

Through their outreach to migrants and refugees, the Sisters provide friendship as well as hope and support to those who are often

marginalized and overlooked. They help individuals rebuild their lives and find a sense of community and belonging, even in the face of great adversity.

Communications

In addition to their on-the-ground work and advocacy efforts, our Sisters utilise the world of digital communications to further their mission. In today's interconnected world, the importance of utilising digital tools cannot be overstated. It has become an essential component of our outreach and communication strategy.

Through our website (www.olaireland.ie) and social media channels (Facebook etc.), the Sisters are able to connect with people around the world, share their faith and spirituality, tell their stories, and raise awareness about the issues facing women and children in Africa. They are also able to connect with supporters, partners, and donors, and share updates on their work.

Digital communications also provide an opportunity for the Sisters to engage in dialogue with people of different backgrounds and faiths, as well as those with no faith. They are able to connect with individuals and organisations from all over the world, and engage in meaningful conversations about the issues that affect us all.

Online efforts are invaluable in facilitating the Sisters' advocacy efforts. They are able to more easily reach out to policymakers and legislators, share information about important issues, advocate for change, and raise awareness. Through their digital channels, they are also able to mobilise their supporters and followers to take action and support their advocacy efforts.

The Sisters recognise that digital communications are not a substitute for face-to-face, on-the-ground ministry, but rather an essential complement to that work. By using digital tools in conjunction with their other efforts, they are able to extend their reach and impact, and engage with people from all over the world in a meaningful way.

Collaboration

An African proverb says: **"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together"**. The OLA Sisters understand that they cannot carry out their mission alone. They recognise the importance of collaboration and relationship-building with other individuals and organisations, both religious and secular, that share their vision of a more just and compassionate world. Joining hands and sharing knowledge, experience, skills, and resources, in collaboration, enables all to achieve more than we can alone and to have a greater impact. By working together, we can overcome the challenges that stand in the way of a more just and compassionate world.

As women of faith, the OLA understand that their work is an expression of their faith in God and their belief in the inherent dignity of all people. They recognise that this work is challenging, and that there are many obstacles to overcome, but they remain steadfast in their mission, knowing that the work they do is not their own, it is a reflection of their faith and of God's love for the world.

Visit www.olaireland.ie to find out more about the OLA Sisters, Courageously Committed to God's Reign of Peace and Justice.

Michelle Robertson



Bugisi OLA Health Centre, Tanzania



From FAST-FASHION to "TRASHION"

100 billion items of clothing are produced every year - the fashion industry is booming. Most of it is highly industrialised, allowing the rapid production of low-priced copies of the latest catwalk designs. Glossy advertising campaigns then boost and maximise sales and profits.

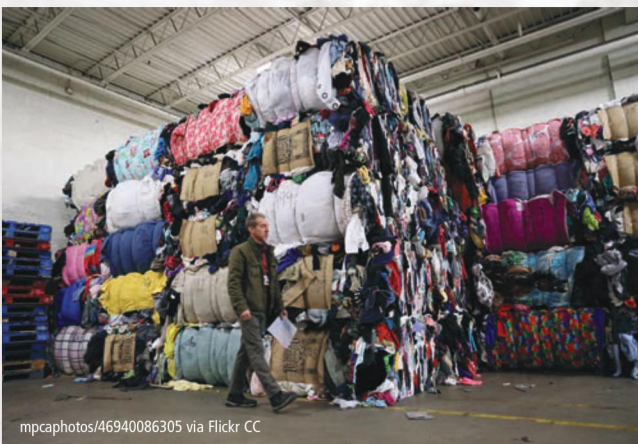
This business model has almost trebled the annual volume of clothes produced since 2000. It relies on cheap labour, cheap synthetic fabrics, frequent purchases and short-lived garment use. Welcome to the world of Fast-Fashion...



SYNTHETIC TEXTILES

Most of the fabrics used in fast-fashion e.g. polyester, nylon, acrylic and lycra are derived from the same petrochemicals used to make everything from plastic to fertilizer. Polyester, the most common clothing fibre in the world takes over 200 years to decompose.

Research has shown that fast-fashion garments are worn about eight times and then discarded. Fast-Fashion now accounts for almost 90% of the fashion industry, with the remainder being made up of traditional forms of garment production and the high-end, expensive and exclusive brands whose garments are mimicked by Fast-Fashion.



In the past, people had fewer clothes and these were repaired and patched to extend their life. They were made of wool, cotton and linen, natural and biodegradable fibres that quickly break

down in the soil. Now, most people have lots of clothes, they are rarely repaired and are replaced frequently.

Another big change is that now 66% of garments are made from non-biodegradable, synthetic fabrics, a proportion that is expected to increase to 75% by 2030. So, while other industries are decarbonising and aiming for a circular economy, the fashion industry is heading in the opposite direction.

Throughout their entire lifecycle, synthetic fibres (in essence plastic) cause environmental damage and health problems. In landfills the decomposition and burning of these textiles generate greenhouse gases and release toxic chemicals into the air, groundwater and soil. They pollute waterways and release micro-plastics that damage biodiversity and enter the food chain.

European Union consumers discard 5.8 million tonnes of textiles annually. This means that on average, every one of us disposes of 10kgs. of clothing each year. Part of this ends up in rubbish bins, some is donated via Clothes Banks or are resold in local charity shops. A portion may also be recycled as cleaning rags or as insulation. However, most ends up either being given to or sold-on to commercial second-hand clothes dealers who gather, process and pack the clothes we no longer need in preparation for the next stage of their existence.

According to Oxfam 70% of the clothes that people in Europe and the USA donate end up being shipped to Africa.

Second hand clothes are a multi-million Euro business for those exporting them from Europe and the USA and for wholesalers who distribute them to the traders in markets all around Africa.

Clothes gathered by dealers are weighed, baled and then shipped to Africa where they are sold to traders, usually sight unseen, (40kg is the average bale weight, with an average of 200 items of clothing per bale). Sometimes small traders will pool their



Falkue via Wikimedia Commons CC

resources to buy a bail or two in the hope that when they open contents, they will be able to sell enough of what is inside to make a profit that will allow them feed their families. There is a big demand for second hand clothes in Africa because most people cannot afford new clothes and local producers cannot compete with the mass-produced cheap imports.

TRASHION: this play on the words “Trash” and Fashion” is the title of a recent report issued by Clean up Kenya, a group advocating for sustainable public sanitation. Although written about Kenya, it reflects what is happening in countries all over the continent – our trash in the form of unwanted clothes ends up being dumped in Africa and is causing big problems.

The report says: *“Nearly 900 million items were sent to Kenya from around the globe in 2021 – nearly 150 million items came from Europe (over a half a million from Ireland). While exporting recycling companies often portray trade in used clothing as a way to reduce waste and help the Global South, the sheer volume constitutes a massive dump of clothing on Kenya...an overwhelming volume of used-clothing shipped to Kenya is waste synthetic clothing, a toxic influx which is creating devastating consequences for the environment and communities.”* At the heart of this problem is the fact that more and more of the Fast-



Tumu2, via wikipedia.org CC

Fashion clothes we buy eventually end up in landfill sites in Africa and are made for synthetic fabrics that can take hundreds of years to decompose.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

While second hand clothing is needed and useful, African countries should not be burdened with our unwanted synthetic and polluting waste. The EU is in the process of strengthening its laws around the export of material by “recycling companies”, but how effective they will be remains to be seen. We as individuals and Christians also have a part to play. How we use materials and how we recycle them has rightly become a very important part of caring for our world and by extension of loving our neighbour.

In the best of all worlds, it is better to use less so that less needs to be disposed of or recycled. With regard to clothes the best thing we can do is to reject the fast-fashion industry that wants us to buy, use, dump and buy again and again. Instead, buy longer lasting clothes made of biodegradable natural fibres. Mend, repair and reuse rather than throw away. If we want to dispose of clothes then it’s better to give them to a charity shop that will resell them locally or else sell them yourself online – this will extend the use and life of the clothes here in Ireland and make it less likely that they will end up in a bale exported to Africa.

FAST FASHION FACTS

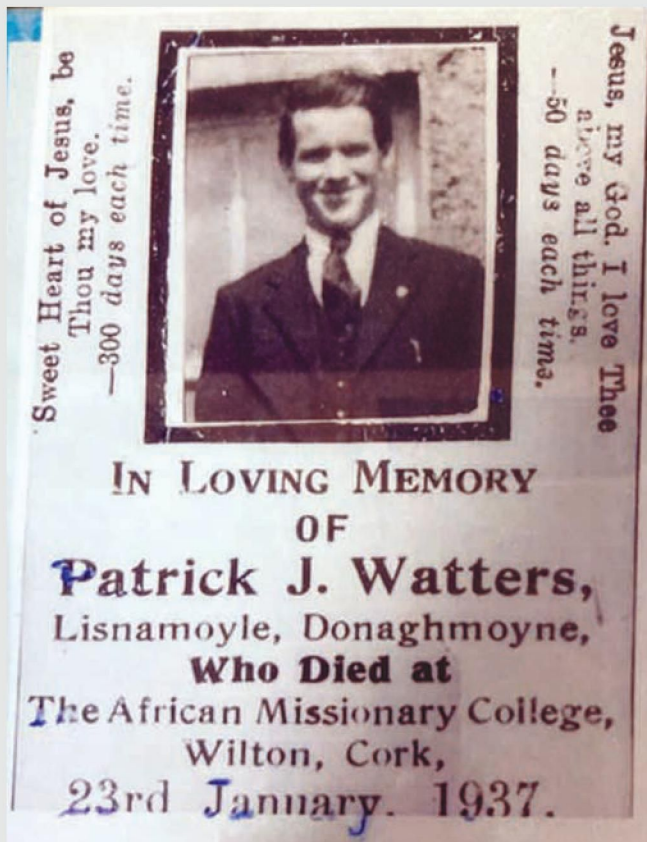
- Fast fashion produces 92 million tonnes of waste a year.
- It is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions - more than the aviation industry.
- Three out of five fast fashion garments end up in a landfill within a year of purchase.
- Synthetic fabrics use 342 million barrels of oil every year.
- Clothes production processes such as dyeing requires 43 million tonnes of chemicals every year.
- The fashion industry uses and pollutes (dyes + toxic chemicals) an enormous amount of water (according to the UN, 20% of global waterwaste comes from the textile industry).

Second-hand clothes are a needed part of local economies all over Africa. They go by different names in local languages; **Mitumba** in Kenya, **Obroni Wawu** in Ghana, **Mabhero** in Zimbabwe, **Hudhey** on Somalia, **Abloni** in Togo, **Gwanjo** in Nigeria.

No greater love...

Patrick J. Watters, from Donaghmoyno, Co Monaghan, came to the SMA Secondary School at Wilton, Cork, in 1934. He was to die there on 23 January 1937. Some years ago, the late Fr Jim Harrold, SMA, a schoolmate of Paddy, recounts the events leading up to his death.

St Joseph's College, Wilton, was a Minor seminary (secondary school) for students who wanted to become SMA priests and go to the African Missions. Others were preparing for the Matriculation Exams (which would allow them to go to university). I was already a year in Wilton when Patrick arrived in September 1934.



Two years later, he was a member of the senior class. Each year, two members of the senior class were selected for two very important positions: Prefect of Studies and Infirmarian. Great care was taken in choosing the Infirmarian. He checked on any student missing from class or meals in case he was ill. He attended to the sick, bringing them medicine and meals. He needed exceptional qualities, akin to those required to be a doctor or nurse: a caring disposition, have great patience, be generous of his time and willing to make sacrifices for others. The staff recognized all these qualities in Paddy Waters and he became Infirmarian in September 1936.

In January of the following year, after we had returned from our Christmas holidays, a virulent influenza swept the south of Ireland. The University students were infected and all classes were suspended. Perhaps my class was responsible for spreading it to the other Wilton students. Be that as it may, we were all confined to bed, all sixty of us.

The doctor spent hours attending to us, assisted by Paddy, the Infirmarian. Then Paddy fell victim himself but refused to go to bed. He continued to help all the others, including me. He was very

conscious of his position as Infirmarian. But eventually he too had to give in, but it was too late. He had contracted a virulent form of pneumonia and within a few days the great Physician in Heaven called him Home.

My last memory of Paddy Waters is still with me though it is well-nigh seventy years ago. No student could attend the funeral. The top floor of the present building was one long dormitory. Those of us who were able, jammed the windows facing the Church. I was one of them who watched Paddy's coffin being brought from the College up the steps of the Church for his Funeral Mass and burial in the cemetery. We cried our hearts out.

Paddy died on the 23rd of January 1937. He has no need of our prayers now. Instead from his place in Heaven, he is praying for us. Paddy's niece, Rose McMahon, and her husband Peadar used visit his grave in Wilton. On one occasion, Fr Harrold celebrated Mass for them and shared his recollection of Paddy which he later wrote down for the family. Rose only knew of her uncle through the stories she heard about him, as she was born a couple of years after he died but her connection to the SMA has lasted a lifetime. Many thanks Rose and Peadar for giving me permission to publish this recollection.

Favours received...

The Cause for the Canonisation of the SMA Founder, Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, is ongoing. In 2020, Pope Francis declared him 'Venerable' (someone whose Cause has not yet reached the beatification stage but whose heroic virtue has been declared by the Pope – the last step before someone is declared Blessed). Over the years, many people have said the Prayer for his Canonisation asking him to intercede for them for particular needs. Regularly, people write to our different Houses telling us of 'favours received' through his intercession.

I recently received the following letter (I've edited it slightly to protect the privacy of the family concerned).

"Just to let you know that I received the Prayer from you some time ago for Venerable Melchior. I was rather low and running out of money and thinking I might have to give up my home. I am in my 80's and my adult children and their families are unable to give me all that I would need." They came home and helped me to sort it out. "In the end I was able to borrow some money against my home. Once I had started the Prayer for Venerable Melchior I was able to let go of the worry and I now thank God and Venerable Melchior for it all." Yours sincerely

We encourage you to pray through the intercession of our Venerable Founder and if you have had favours received through his intercession to let us know.



Passing through one of the parish outstations



Pilgrims on the journey



Prayer for the Canonisation of the Venerable Melchior de Marion Brésillac

Lord God, you called Melchior de Marion Brésillac to serve you.
 To make you known and loved, you sent him to India and then to Africa.
 For you he gave everything – even his very life.
 Guided by your Word, he was a missionary from the bottom of his heart.
 He cared for the poor, the sick and the abandoned.
 He sought to build a local Church with a well-formed and respected clergy.
 We pray that, through the intercession of this great servant of mission,
 we will receive the graces we need...(In particular...)
 We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

A Lenten Pilgrimage in Sierra Leone

Our SMA parish, dedicated to St John the Baptist parish, Buedu, held our Lenten Pilgrimage on 25th March 2023, Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord. We joined with a neighbouring parish, St Joseph's, Koindu. We were more than 500 parishioners in all, some coming the evening before from our seven outstations. We celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) before setting out. Then, with a brief Introduction and Opening Prayer we headed for Peravum, 14 kilometres away. The Koindu parishioners had 12 kms to walk to meet us there. I invited everyone to offer this Pilgrimage as a prayer and the sacrifices involved in union with Christ's suffering. Many children, youths, adults and the elderly took part. Representing the different church groups: Holy Childhood, Catholic Youth Organisation (CYO), Catholic Women and Men's Associations (CWA, CMA) etc.

We prayed the Stations of the Cross at different points along our journey.

It was an amazing, prayer-filled occasion. The people were concentrated in prayerful mood and the organization of the whole Pilgrimage ensured a joy-filled moment in what is often a very difficult life for them. Knowing that the journey was long, the CMA had water available at various stations. The CWA ladies had gone to Peravum on Friday evening to have the food ready for us on Saturday. Our CYO youths led the singing as we prayed at the different Stations.

The final place of the pilgrimage was prepared with our Koindu neighbours. When we reached the last Station – Jesus laid in the Tomb – we celebrated Mass. I was accompanied by Fr James Jamiru (Koindu Parish Priest), Fr Peddy Sinda SMA (from Zambia) and an SMA seminarian – Freddy (from Côte d'Ivoire). We then had the meal prepared so well by the CWA ladies. It was well-needed and greatly enjoyed by all.

To return home those who could afford it took motorcycle 'taxi' (the most common means of transport) and others walked back to their respective villages.

Fr Patrikson Francis, SMA



Newly-baptised parishioners on Holy Saturday

SMA PILGRIMAGE TO KNOCK

**SATURDAY
27 MAY 2023**

We invite
you to join us
for the closing
day of the SMA
Annual Novena
in honour of
Our Lady of
Knock

12 noon
Pilgrims assemble
at the Basilica

SMA Missionaries, OLA Sisters and the SMA family of mission supporters from all over Ireland will gather at Our Lady's Shrine to give witness to our faith and to ask Our Lady's intercession for our intentions.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones...

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

Sr Helena O'Connell (Portmagee, Co. Kerry) served in England, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Ireland, died on 19 November 2022, aged 94 years.

Fr Fintan Daly (Killoran, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway), served in Nigeria, died on 22 February 2023, aged 85 years.

Fr John Dunleavy (Lackagh, Co. Galway), served in Nigeria, England, USA and Ireland, died on 14 April 2023, aged 86 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?



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