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JUBILEE YEAR 2025 — IN POPE FRANCIS OWN WORDS



Pope Francis pushes open the Holy Door © Vatican Media



The Jubilee Year began with the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican on Christmas Eve 2024. In his homily, Pope Francis declared, *"Sisters and brothers, this is the Jubilee. This is the season of hope in which we are invited to rediscover the joy of meeting the Lord."*

"Pilgrims of Hope" is the theme Pope Francis chose for this Jubilee or Holy Year. He encourages the faithful to "fan the flame of hope" and approach the future with "an open spirit...Everyone knows what it is to hope...In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring...For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope."

This Jubilee year is an opportunity to renew our understanding of what it means to live the call of the Gospel, both as individuals and as a community. In his first Jubilee Audience of 2025, Pope Francis called on the faithful to embrace hope and renewal through service and fraternity, and through responsibility for our common home the Earth. *"This is the essence of the Jubilee: a new beginning grounded in God and a commitment to love and service."*

During a Mass on the Feast of Mary the Mother of God on 1 January 2025, he referred to the extensive renovation works to monuments and buildings carried out around Rome in preparation for the Jubilee Year and then he said: *"we must recognize that the decisive building site is in each one of us: the place where each of us works to allow God to change in me what is unworthy of a son or daughter... and in which I will commit myself, every day, to live as a brother and sister to my neighbour."*

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Holy Door and Swiss Guard

To be Pilgrims of Hope we must begin with ourselves. This Jubilee year is a God-given opportunity to start anew. It is an invitation to an inner conversion through which we become people who live differently. At the centre of this different living is love of God, others and the creation we share. Conversion calls for a change of heart, a move away from self-concern and fear towards a hope-filled attitude where mercy and reconciliation become the lenses through which we view our world and the principles that motivate our action. Only then can we look outward and be, in this Jubilee year, the *"tangible signs of hope"* that Pope Francis calls us to be, recognising God's presence in the midst of life with all its difficulties and challenges.

The Holy Door, opened at the beginning of each Jubilee or Holy Year, represents the passage to salvation opened by Jesus to humanity. When announcing the Jubilee Year Pope Francis said: *"For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the 'door'...of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as 'our hope' (1 Tim 1:1).*

The origin of the Christian Jubilee goes back to Old Testament times when the Law of Moses prescribed a special year for the Jewish people as a time of renewal and to proclaim liberty to all, a time for setting slaves free, for forgiving debts, and for allowing the land to rest (Leviticus 25). In the Catholic tradition, Jubilees have been observed in Rome since the early 14th century. They are a time when Catholics are called on to live our faith by embodying the core themes of the Jubilee: renewal, reconciliation, and a closer relationship with Christ. There is also a strong emphasis on penitence and mercy. In this year we are urged especially to be Pilgrims of Hope.

In his 2024 Christmas Eve sermon, the Pope was very clear when he said, *"we too are called to recover lost hope, to renew that hope in our hearts, and to sow seeds of hope amid the bleakness of our time and our world."* He then explained the meaning of hope: *"Christian hope is not a cinematic 'happy ending' which we passively await, but rather...a summons not to tarry, to be kept back by our old habits, or to wallow in mediocrity or laziness. Hope calls us – as Saint Augustine would say – to be upset with things that are wrong and to find the courage to change them. Hope calls us to become pilgrims in search of truth, dreamers who never tire, women and men open to being challenged by God's dream, which is of a new world where peace and justice reign...Hope is incompatible with the detachment of those who refuse to speak out against evil and the injustices perpetrated at the expense of the poor. Christian hope, on the other hand, while inviting us to wait patiently for the Kingdom to grow and spread, also requires of us, even now, to be bold, responsible, and not only that but also compassionate, in our anticipation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promise."*

"All of us have received the gift and task of bringing hope wherever hope has been lost...We are called to bring hope to the weary who have no strength to carry on, the lonely oppressed by the bitterness of failure, and all those who are broken-hearted."

This Jubilee Year is both a time for personal spiritual renewal and a call to action.

May we walk as Pilgrims of Hope, carrying light into dark places, bringing freedom to the oppressed, and embodying justice for those in need. In this Jubilee journey, may each step we take testify to the worth, dignity, and beauty of all creation. May God's peace guide us, and may we be strengthened to continue on this pilgrimage, united in purpose and faith. Amen

Things to do during the Jubilee.

Pilgrimage: To visit Rome or sites designated by the Irish Bishops, such as Knock, Lough Derg or Croagh Patrick. In addition, each diocese in Ireland will nominate a local pilgrimage site.

Prayer and Spiritual Renewal: Pray the Jubilee Prayer daily for personal conversion and renewal in the Church. Pray for the Pope's intentions; participate in the sacraments of the Mass and Penance.

Acts of mercy and charity: Carry out Corporal Works of Mercy such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick; and Spiritual Works of Mercy, such as comforting the sorrowful, praying for the living and the dead, and forgiving offences.

Participate in Jubilee events: Join parish and diocesan services, retreats, or Jubilee celebrations.

Care for Creation: This year marks the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical on care for creation: *Laudato Si'*. Attend the *Laudato Si'* Mass in the last week of May, and participate with other Catholics in projects such as tree planting and beach clean-ups.

Pray for the dead: Obtain plenary indulgences for the souls in Purgatory by dedicating acts of charity and prayer for their intentions

The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven, may the faith you have given us in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother, and the flame of charity enkindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, reawaken in us the blessed hope for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.

May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos in the sure expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever.

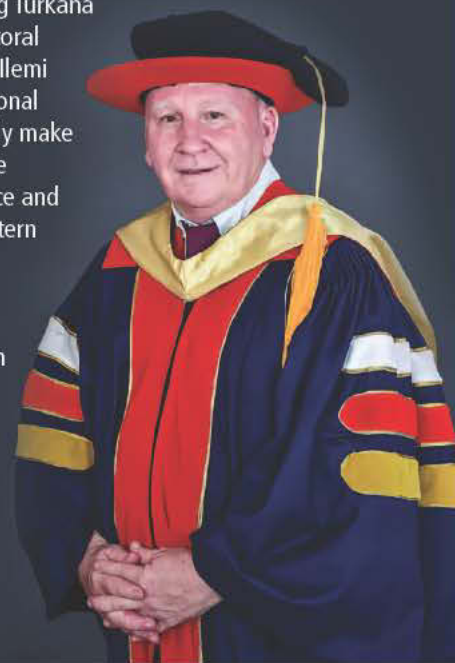
Amen

DR OLIVER NOONAN SMA - PHD

The Society of African Missions congratulates Rev. Dr Oliver Noonan SMA, Executive Director, Shalom Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (SCRR), Kenya, on the great achievement of being conferred as a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Transformation, at Tangaza University, Kenya.

His ground breaking research on the 'Dynamics of social organizing and implications of sustainable conflict management among Turkana and Dassanech pastoral communities in the Ilemi Triangle' is inspirational and will undoubtedly make a significant positive contribution to peace and development in Eastern Africa.

We ask God's Blessings on him, on his colleagues in SCRR and on all those who collaborate to establish peace and reconciliation among peoples in Africa.



On behalf of the SMA Irish Province, I want to express our heartfelt sympathies and sadness on hearing of the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday. He truly was a "peoples' pope" – ordinary and with a genuine commitment to the poor and those marginalised – he was the voice of those who had no voice. He highlighted the effects of climate change and challenged us firmly to care for mother earth and the importance of synodality in our church of today. We shall surely miss Pope Francis. May the risen Lord receive and welcome home this good and faithful servant of the Lord. May his soul rest in peace.

Fr Malachy Flanagan SMA
Provincial Leader



TRAINING SMA MISSIONARIES IN KABWE, ZAMBIA

By Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll SMA



Frs Benoit (Left) and Fachtna (right) with Kabwe seminarians

Since November 2023, Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll has been the Vice-Rector in the SMA House of Formation in Kabwe, Zambia. In this article, he begins with an overview of the very positive and thriving situation regarding the SMA's education of missionaries worldwide.

SMA Worldwide

Currently, according to the latest statistics presented in preparation for General Assembly 2025, the SMA has 69 students in an initial orientation year, 162 seminarians taking philosophical studies, 46 in the Spiritual Year programme, 40 on Stage (year of pastoral training in parishes outside one's own country or culture), 117 in the four years of theology. That gives a total of 434 seminarians. This compares favourably with the period of the 1950s and 60s, when there were high numbers of seminarians in Europe and the Americas.

Almost 400 of the above figure come from Africa itself. This is a remarkable fact, given that up until 1983, when the Society of African Missions made the momentous decision to invite African candidates to become SMA missionaries, the SMA did not have a single indigenous African candidate for SMA priesthood. The previous policy of not recruiting indigenous candidates was built on the inspired vision of our Founder, Venerable Melchior de Marion Bresillac, whose dream and aim was to build up a local church with its own clergy and leadership. For 120+ years, this vision served the African Church very well. In those countries where the SMA was the pioneering missionary agent, the local church is well established with its own leadership. The same cannot be said of all those countries evangelised by other Congregations, who began to recruit for their own community from an early stage.

Twenty-six of the 434 candidates come from India, 8 from Philippines, one from Spain and one from Italy.

SMA Seminarians and their lives in Zambia

Zambia has in the range of 20 students in the different stages of formation. The house for philosophical studies is located in the pleasant city of Kabwe in Zambia's Central Province. A feature of the town is the high number of religious communities, male and female,

and, indeed, the multiplicity of Christian denominations scattered throughout. Presently, we have eight seminarians, five in 1st philosophy and three in their 2nd philosophy year of studies. Staff and seminarians reside at Fr Bernard Weiggers Formation House, Dallas, Kabwe. The house is roughly five kilometres from the town centre, situated off what is known as the 'Great North Road', which heads to the Copperbelt, Democratic Republic of Congo and places further afield. The compound is pretty and very well maintained. Over the past year, the electricity supply from the national grid has been very erratic. Fortunately, through the generosity of some Irish benefactors, we have been able to install solar panels. This has resulted in a regular electricity supply and is a tremendous saving on diesel for the generator.

The seminarians cycle eight kilometers to Mpima Major Seminary for the academic courses in philosophy. Once students complete the two-year philosophy programme, they move on to the next phase which is the Spiritual Year, followed by the year of Stage, and then they begin theology studies. SMA Zambian theology students study at one of our three centres: Ibadan (Nigeria), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) or Nairobi (Kenya).

At Dallas the seminarians follow a regular programme of spiritual formation, community activities such as sport and manual work, SMA studies and classes in the French language, to prepare them for the Spiritual Year programme which is conducted in francophone West Africa. The spiritual dimension at Dallas consists of daily Mass, communal Morning and Evening Prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a once weekly period of 'creative prayer' when the seminarians use their initiative and imagination to present creative prayerful liturgies, and a once-monthly Day of Recollection.

Staff join the students for lunch and supper in the dining hall. Regular interviews with staff are conducted through the course of the year. A once monthly community meeting and once monthly social night are excellent opportunities for interaction between staff and seminarians. Presently, we are two members of staff, the Rector, Fr Benoit Mondji SMA and myself. Benoit is from Togo. He also teaches some courses in the philosophy programme at Mpima seminary.



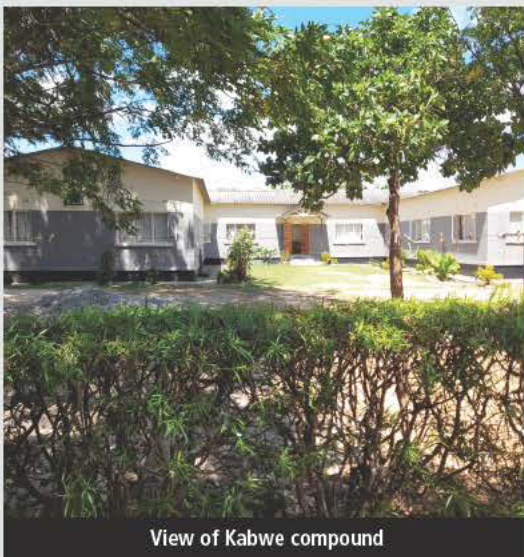
Group after Mass



Apart from reciting the Jubilee Prayer during Evening Prayer the Jubilee Year 2025 has not yet been noted in any formal way in the house. Nevertheless, the theme for the community year invites us all to be pilgrims of hope to other community members and to those who visit us from outside, for example during a once monthly community Mass that is open to visitors.

The very positive situation regarding the formation of SMA Seminarians described by Fr Fachtna in his article is greatly contributed to by donors and Family Vocations Community (FVC) members in Ireland, without whom the SMA could not provide our seminarians with the training they need. We are most grateful for this support.

If you would like to make a donation towards the education of SMA Priests or learn more about the FVC contact the SMA House in your area or donate online via www.sma.ie



View of Kabwe compound

WHERE MISSION MEETS A CHANGING WORLD

by Michelle Robertson
(OLA Communications Officer)



AI and digital technology will be part of their world - Credit: Zeljkosantrac

The mission of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles has always been one of presence, of going where the need is greatest, of walking with communities, and of being a voice for those who might otherwise go unheard. As the world changes, so too must our ways of engaging in mission. Today, mission is not confined to physical presence alone. It extends into the vast and ever-evolving digital landscape, where conversations unfold, communities are formed, and hearts are reached.

Technology, often seen as impersonal, pulling us away from human connection, when used with discernment and guided by faith, becomes a means of deepening engagement and strengthening relationships. The challenge is doing so in a way that reflects our values and enriches the mission to which we have been called.

Recognising this, the OLA Sisters have actively embraced digital communications in mission while beginning to explore artificial intelligence (AI) as an area of learning, ensuring that the charism entrusted to us remains as relevant today as it was at our founding, 150 years ago.



SMA OLA Meeting, February 2025

Lifelong Learning

In recent years, the OLA congregation in Ireland has been supporting our Sisters in building the skills needed to confidently engage with the digital world. In 2022, the Digital Media Mentorship Programme was introduced and made available to our

Sisters worldwide. Created for those sisters working in communications, the programme has evolved to include a Level 2 component, providing the training and guidance necessary to share their work and engage meaningfully with the wider world.

Social media is widely used by young people. Even in rural communities across Africa, where our Sisters live and work, digital platforms have become a vital way for people to stay connected despite economic challenges and limited access to technology. They allow our Sisters to remain part of these conversations, engage with others in meaningful ways, and step into the online spaces where people are gathering. Rather than seeing technology as a distraction, Sisters recognise its potential to create deeper connections, to listen, and to be present in new ways.

Beyond digital literacy, we have begun exploring artificial intelligence (AI). Though often met with hesitation, particularly in faith-based contexts, AI is no longer a distant possibility confined to the realms of science fiction; it is already embedded across industries, shaping everything from communications and education to healthcare and beyond. It's a field that's evolving daily, and engaging with it is not a choice. Without awareness and understanding, we risk being absent from the conversations shaping the world around us. As we reflect on its implications, we are beginning to consider how it might intersect with our own work in ways that remain true to our values and mission. AI is already raising critical social justice questions, and we cannot engage meaningfully in those conversations if we do not first seek to understand it.

In collaboration with Vocations Ireland, Communicators for Women Religious (CWR Ireland), and other faith groups, the OLA have extended these efforts beyond our own sisters, offering training and embracing opportunities for shared learning with members of other religious congregations. Listening, learning, and walking together in this digital age is deeply connected to the spirit of synodality—the journey of shared faith and discernment. As a congregation, we have engaged with the synodal process in many ways, and this approach naturally embodies that commitment in practice.

Tradition, Innovation and a Future of Possibilities

Some might view these advancements as a shift away from tradition, but they are a natural evolution. The Church has always embraced new ways of communication, through the letters of St. Paul, the printing press, and through television and radio broadcasts, each serving the same purpose: to share the message of faith in changing times. Evolving technologies are simply the latest ways to extend this work.

The challenge is to use them in a way that keeps us rooted in our spiritual identity. The digital world can be overwhelming, making it easy to lose focus. This is why discernment matters: understanding these tools, setting healthy boundaries, and being mindful of both the opportunities and risks. With intention, we ensure that our presence online reflects the values we hold dear.

Looking ahead, we remain thoughtful about how we engage with technology, ensuring it serves God's purpose rather than pulling us away from it. The world is changing, and we must change with it. What matters is how we move forward, with openness, insight, and a commitment to remaining true to the calling of the Spirit.

The depth of the connections we make infuses life into mission, allowing us to know and love God so that we may make God known and loved. We draw strength from the wisdom and encouragement of our founder, Fr. Augustine Planque, and the protection of Mary, Queen of Apostles, as we embrace the possibilities ahead. Trusting that our path will continue to be illuminated, we bring the Word to the world through the witness of our lives.



The internet is part of all our lives. Credit: Nzewe Confidence

FATHER MICHAEL WATERS SMA



Fr Salisu Yakubu Sabo SMA was born in Kano State Nigeria and Ordained in 2019.

He is the first priest from the Hausa Catholic or "Maguzawa" Community and was greatly influenced by Fr Mick Waters. Fr Salisu is now a missionary in Angola.

Fr Michael Waters lived and worked with the Maguzawa, (A term used by the Muslims for Hausa people who rejected Islam. It literally translates as "the ones who ran away," i.e. from Islam) for many years, committing himself to their cause in an extraordinary manner. I knew him personally because he was my Parish Priest, having baptised me in 1999. His example inspired me to become an SMA priest. So who is this man so loved by all?

He was born in Cork City on 12 July 1941, and was ordained as an SMA priest in 1966. He arrived in

Nigeria in 1968 and spent the next 50 years as a missionary there – originally in the Archdiocese of Kaduna, then Kano Missio sui iuris, and finally Kontagora Diocese.

He ministered in Kaduna from 1968 until in 1991. He was working in St Anthony's Parish, Refawa, when it became part of what would become Kano Diocese. From 1991 to 2000, his work and that of his predecessor, Fr Seán Hayes SMA, began to bear fruit and the parish went through a period of amazing growth. New churches were opened, and eventually new Parishes were founded in Gamashina and then Bakin Nana.

This phenomenal growth followed a typical mission development: very slow growth for many years and then a sudden flourishing. Fr Waters had a very significant part in this flourishing, particularly due to his fluency in Hausa, his ability to engage with the old and the young, and the setting up of dry season courses to train lay people to become church leaders. He also worked at developing formal primary and secondary education of secondary education for young people. This has had great success.



Fr Michael Waters SMA

APOSTLE TO THE MAGUZAWA PEOPLE OF KANO STATE, NIGERIA

by Fr Salisu Yakubu Sabo SMA



Fr Mick Waters - parishioners Kano State

Fr Waters was an energetic and enthusiastic missionary who worked for the growth of the Church and for social justice. He set up a legal process that returned misappropriated land to the people of Refawa, and, in addition to nurturing faith, he promoted social development and education in the ways mentioned here.

Fr Waters made a deliberate choice to minister to the most abandoned by choosing to minister to people who lived on the peripheries of Nigerian society. He moved from an established Diocese to a new one and from established parishes he moved on to set up new ones. His actions echo the words of the SMA Founder, Bishop de Brésillac: "happy the missionary who, when he founds a church and sees that it is growing, moves quickly to another place in order to found a new one".

Government authorities were unwilling to give Hausa Christians any meaningful education unless they were ready to change their religion to Islam. Fr Waters, like Fr Hayes, realised this and saw how crucial it was to address this problem. Therefore, he decided to establish primary schools in the villages, setting them up as branches or extensions of the existing St. Louis Primary School in Kano City.

I am a beneficiary of this system. Thanks to this initiative, today, among the beneficiaries, there are many priests ordained for the diocese of Kano and beyond. Others are doctors, nurses, lawyers, journalists, teachers, accountants, etc.

Apart from the promotion of formal education, Fr Waters also introduced a dry season literacy course for our parents who did not have the chance to go to school. Centres, opened at strategic locations, allowed people learn to read and write in the Hausa language. From among these, the "early" church found lay readers, catechism teachers, service leaders and choir members. Fr Waters also organised programmes on leadership, health education and other skills. As a result, we now have trained individuals who help, lead and empower their own people.

Attentive to the needs of the sick (the Good Samaritan; Lk 10:25-37), he built clinics that contributed greatly to the health sector in Kano State. They were recognised as the best health centres in the rural areas – better run and equipped than many state facilities. These are now run by Kano diocese and staffed by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. On a personal level, Fr Waters also provided medical assistance, treating some ailments and binding up wounds when people were injured.

To improve the socio-economic wellbeing of people Fr Waters introduced irrigation systems that benefitted the farming communities of Refawa and Nasarawan Kuki parishes. Through the provision of water-pumps and training, local people were able to improve their farms and incomes. In addition to the above, he dug or repaired wells in almost all the places where he worked, in order to provide people with clean drinking water without having to go a long distance. This was something he was to be involved in later in Kontagora Diocese which has a very well developed 'well-digging' programme under the guidance of Fr Donall O'Catháin SMA (from Cork City).

Conclusion

Fr Waters was truly a Father to the Maguzawa people. He risked his life in order to live and work in an environment hostile to the Gospel. I see him as the St Paul of our time, a great apostle to the Maguzawa people. While we recognize the great intellectual, moral and financial support that the SMA, especially the Irish Province, must have given to Fr Waters, we cannot fail to give him credit for his courage, hard work and dedication to the mission. He is an inspiration to today's missionaries. We pray that these gracious words of the Master Jesus may be heard by him: "Well done good and faithful servant...enter into your master's joy" (Matthew 25:21).

Fr Michael Waters died in SMA House, Blackrock Road, Cork on the 5th of November 2024 aged 83 years. May God grant him eternal rest. Amen.



Fr Mick Waters SMA with young Parishioners

SMA PILGRIMAGE TO KNOCK

Saturday 24th May

We invite you to join us for
the closing day of our Annual
Novena in honour of
OUR LADY



Ceremonies begin at 2pm

REMEMBER THE MISSIONS IN YOUR WILL

By remembering the SMA and OLA in
your will you can help the mission work
of the SMA and OLA to continue after
you.

For more information contact the SMA
or OLA House nearest to you.



“I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE COURSE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH.” (2 TIM 4:7)

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

Fr Michael Waters (Cork City), served in Nigeria and died on 5 November 2024 aged 83 years.

Sr. Colombiere O'Driscoll (Kilbrittain, Co. Cork), served in Ghana, Nigeria, Ireland
and died on 23 November 2024 aged 96 years.

Fr Martin O'Hare (Dromintee, Co. Armagh), served in Nigeria, Ireland
and died on the 28th of November 2024 aged 73 years.

Fr Tom Fenlon (Carlow, Co. Carlow), served in Nigeria, England, Ireland
and died on 23 January 2025, aged 79 years.

Sr. Clare (Mary Patricia) Fitzgerald (Cork City), served in Ghana, Nigeria, England, Ireland
and died on 14 February 2025 aged 92 years.

Fr Michael Kidney (Cork City), served in Nigeria, Ireland and died on 5 March 2025
aged 93 years.

Fr Matthew (Matt) O'Connell (Skreen, Co. Sligo) served in Nigeria, Australia, Ireland
and died on the 28th of March aged 92 years.



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

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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