



## It's a long way to... Tanzania



Fr Michael McKee SMA, hails from Dungannon, Co Tyrone, was ordained for the African Missions in 1973. After some months he set off for his mission... in Argentina, South America! After more than twenty years there, Fr Michael headed back across the south Atlantic to the diocese of Shinyanga in Tanzania, east Africa. He celebrated 25 years there this year.

Fr Mick, as he's known by most, is well-known for his language skills. He speaks English, Spanish, Kiswahili, Ki Sukuma fluently and, with the arrival of an SMA Priest Associate, Fr Steven Jun (from Korea), no doubt he'll pick up a few words of Korean!

St Mathias Mulumba parish, Mwandoya, has forty-one villages (outstations) under the care of Fathers Michael and Steven. When Fr Stephen arrived in Tanzania earlier this year he spent some months learning the national language, Ki-Swahili, at the Musoma Language School run by the Missionaries of Africa (White

Fathers). Fr Steven is now celebrating the sacraments in Kiswahili with the assistance of the parish catechists. The parish has one full-time, salaried, catechist. The rest of the catechists, women and men, give of their time voluntarily to prepare the people, young and old, for the sacraments (baptism, confession, Holy Communion, Confirmation and, in some cases, Marriage).

Another SMA, Fr Michel Domingue, from Canada, runs the Mipa Catechists Training Centre where many catechists receive training for their pastoral work in the surrounding dioceses. Most of the food used in the Training Centre, as in most parishes, is grown by the priests and local people. No SuperValu, Dunnes or Aldi!

A notable feature of the main parish compound is the Adoration Chapel, separate from the parish church. It is a haven of peace and quiet with parishioners calling in to pray, day and

night. There are also two shrines for people to visit, in honour of Our Blessed Mother and in honour of the Divine Mercy. The people participate in the daily and Sunday Masses, especially through singing – the parish has more than 20 choirs! These choirs gather every year to celebrate a Festival of Song and Praise.

In recent years, Fr Mick has been involved in replacing many of the outstation mud-block chapels with those made with cement blocks. Most of the work is done by the villagers themselves, bringing water, sand and cement to make the blocks and assisting the masons in the building work. In some cases, funds were sourced from outside, particularly from the SMA in Ireland, to buy the corrugated sheeting for the roofs.

Fr Janusz Machota, from Poland, leads the SMA team in Tanzania. It is the most multinational of all our SMA units, with lay people and priests coming from Benin Republic, Canada, France, Holland, Kenya, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Tanzania, Zambia and its latest arrival.... Korea!

This article is based on an article by Theresa Hicks SMA in the American Province Newsletter, 2019.



Fr Mick, Theresa Hicks and Fr Steven

# Three Months Nursing in Ghana with the OLA Sisters



**After many years of nursing in Ireland, Elizabeth Byrne, from Wicklow, realised a lifelong desire – to use her nursing skills for the benefit of the poor in Africa. We present here an edited version of an article Elizabeth wrote about that experience.**

In April 2018 I went to Ghana, in West Africa, to spend three months working in an OLA hospital. Flying from Dublin, via Amsterdam, what struck me when I stepped off the plane in Accra was the heat, even though it was almost 10pm.

Sr Georgina OLA and her driver met me at the airport and we spent the night in the OLA House in Accra. The next morning, after breakfast and stocking up on supplies, we set off on a 7 hour road journey for St Joseph's Catholic Hospital, Nkwanta, in the Central Volta Region of the country. Thank God the truck had air-conditioning! Nkwanta is a remote village near the border with Togo. As we travelled further from Accra the road surface deteriorated. In places large craters filled with water dotted the roads, making driving conditions extremely hazardous.

We passed through many small villages as well as customs check points along the way. Due to the tropical climate, the countryside was very green with Palm and Mango trees lining the sides of the roads. The soil looked very red and very poor.

We eventually arrived at our destination, a small hospital comprising an emergency department, Outpatients (OPD) clinic, eye clinic, ante-natal clinic, labour ward, male and female medical wards, surgical ward, children's ward and an operating theatre. It also had a well-stocked pharmacy, laboratory and medical records area. The staff were very friendly and almost all of them spoke English. After a general tour, I went on medical rounds to see the wards and the various conditions patients were being treated for. My work day started at 7:30am and, at that time of the morning, the waiting area would be almost full with patients who had travelled or walked through the night to attend the hospital. After prayers and hymns, which they all participated in, the day's work would begin.

In the emergency department in the Irish hospital where I had worked, adult and paediatric patients are seen in two completely separate departments, but in Nkwanta both are seen in the one department. At first I felt a bit out of my comfort zone, especially when looking after small babies, but the staff were very helpful and I soon became adept at treating these small children. The vast majority of both adult and paediatric patients suffered from malaria in one form or another. Diabetes, hypertension, tuberculosis, gastroenteritis and other infections were very common in adults and quite a few were treated for snake bites. Often the children with malaria were malnourished and had other associated conditions. Many had been treated with



home or local remedies or by faith healers before they came to the hospital, and often the full history of the illness was not initially shared. The adults would attend prayer camps for days, hospital was the last resort and so by the time they were admitted, they were already very ill.

Fortunately the hospital was well stocked with medicines and antibiotics to treat the conditions. The same could not be said of the equipment in the hospital. There were no cardiac monitors, no ECG machines and no defibrillators.

Patients were assessed very quickly by nurses, a token history taken, vital signs checked, blood samples taken, and treatment commenced prior to being seen by a doctor. The nurses were very experienced, competent and very much relied upon by the medical team. The patients were treated in underequipped facilities in difficult circumstances where staff often had to improvise with treatments.



Nurse Elizabeth checking a young baby

The work was not physically hard, but the heat and the humidity combined meant that I became easily tired until I acclimatised. I found it difficult to deal with the fact that many children and young adults, who would most likely have survived had they been treated in Ireland, died in the hospital in Nkwanta.

A tragic example is that of a 22yr old male with gastroenteritis and intestinal bleeding. He was transfused with blood, but the hospital did not have the facility to perform a gastroscopy which was needed to determine the cause of the bleed. His family could not raise the money to facilitate transfer to another hospital and, sadly, he died.

Young children were brought in by their parents, or in many cases, a grandparent, in very weak condition and would receive urgent treatment, but would not survive. Often, depending on their religion or customs, the body of the child was wrapped up, placed on the parent or



Going to a village Clinic

grandparent's back, and taken home to be buried the same day. When someone died the family grieved, but they were very accepting of it and believed that it was God's will.

On the opposite side many patients and relatives were so grateful for any help or treatment received, they would come to say Thank you and pray for us.

The people of Ghana are very happy in their general disposition. They're extremely patient, waiting for hours without complaining, for their turn to be seen. They are happy with their lot, even though they are poor, and trust that God will provide. Family is their priority and they work hard to provide for them.

The children are very affectionate, but initially a white person is viewed as strange, a novelty and a little suspicious, but as they relax they love to wave, say hello and to touch your white skin.

There are many religions in Ghana, and the people are open about what they believe. They are not afraid to attend whichever church they have chosen, and are more than willing to invite you to attend also.

The OLA Sisters are involved in the hospital but also very involved in providing education, especially to young females, in order to break the cycle of poverty that often follows early marriage.

My experience has made me more patient, more thankful for what I have, and has taught me to live more in the moment and enjoy the here and now. I would like to thank the OLA Sisters for their kindness and help during my stay in Ghana.

# God Counts on us - so do our Children



**Christ the Lord is Risen - Alleluia, Alleluia!!**

The picture above, taken at a dawn Easter morning ecumenical service at Monkstown, County Cork, reflects the faith and the Easter hope that is part of our lives. As Christians we believe that Jesus died and rose again. He is the Light of the World and we are called to reflect that light each day. This means showing love and respect for our neighbour and for the world we share.

We live our faith in a changing world, where increasingly the light and hope of Easter is absent and where the beliefs and values we grew up with and hold dear are being challenged.

In the past few years there have been many worrying changes. Nations are becoming more divided. Walls are being built, borders closed – will we have a hard border here in Ireland? Hard won international cooperation and goodwill is disappearing. We have Brexit, trade wars, inward-looking nationalism and growing racism. Homelessness and poverty still dog us in spite of economic recovery. With regard to our environment, climate change, plastic pollution and most recently, an awareness of the mass extinction of species show us that our world is being spoiled by human activity which is

driven by greed and self-interest. The light of Christ is less and less evident.

In the face of these huge problems it would be easy for us to despair, to give up hope and say, "What can I do?" But we are people of hope – an Easter people who believe in the Resurrection, that what seems impossible is possible. As Christian individuals, families and communities we have an important part to play: to be witnesses to the light of Christ in our world today.

It is true that many problems are far too big for us as individuals. In such cases, Governments must lead. Our role is to encourage them to do what is necessary and right to promote the common good. Recently we have seen this approach succeed, we have seen what individuals and communities can do. Young people all around the world have called for change and for attention to be paid to climate change. Greta Thunberg, a sixteen year old Swedish girl, has become a powerful voice calling on leaders to concentrate on what is important for the common good rather than national interests, economics or power. Leaders and Governments, including our own have begun to listen.



Cork climate strike march Photo: Shamim Malekmian

## God Counts on Us



*Only God creates*  
**but we are called to  
enhance that  
creation**



*Only God gives  
life*  
**but we are  
called  
to cherish  
life**

*Only God  
makes us grow*  
**But we are called  
to nourish that  
growth**

*Only God  
gives faith*  
**but we are called to  
be signs of God  
for each  
other**



*Only God  
gives love*  
**but we are called  
to care for  
each other**

*Only God  
gives hope*  
**but we are called to  
give each other  
reason to  
hope**





There is an African proverb which says:

**“The Earth is not a gift from our parents, it is a loan from our children.”**

This emphasises our individual and collective responsibility to care for the world and the society we live in for the benefit of those who come after us. Exercising this responsibility is a core part of living our faith and loving our neighbour. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.” (Paragraph 66). Living our faith and letting the light of Christ shine through us means making sure these are just and good relationships. We all have a part to play in achieving this.

**The earth...is a loan from our children.** To pay back this loan, we and our leaders will have to make and live with, some hard decisions – decisions we have so far not been willing to make. National interest, personal choice, personal convenience and comfort need to give way to the common good and to caring for the creation entrusted to our care. This will not be easy.

We can no longer view development or progress as having more and more, or being able to have what we

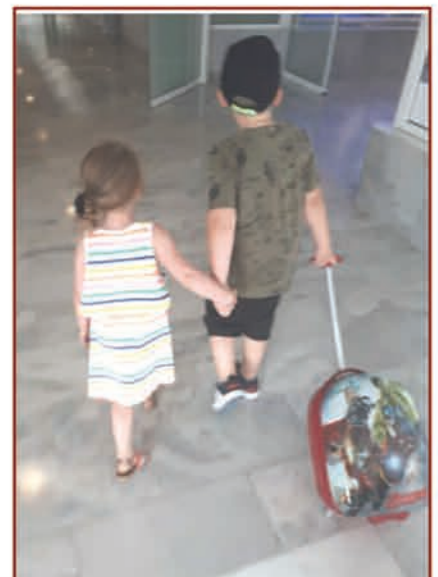
want, or do what we want as often as we want. These are the attitudes that have fuelled our over-use of the world's resources, led to climate change and are at the root of the tensions and divisions we are now experiencing.

**Perhaps the biggest gift we can give to our children is to be open to the big changes that will have to be made and to be willing to live with their consequences.**

It's time to lessen the debt to our children. It's time to hold our leaders to account, to advocate for a more just world. Above all it is time for us to be open to the changes that need to be made and by doing so be truly Christian, true reflections of the light of Christ and bringers of hope to our world.

Experts tell us that we have only ten years to make these changes. If we don't, it will be the children and grandchildren already born to us - not unknown generations in the far distant future – who will have to live with problems we and the generations before us have created. Our openness to change and the actions we take in the next decade will determine the road they have to travel.

Our faith gives us clear guidance, it tells us what to do. This guidance is reflected in the Prayer below. It tells us what God has done for us and what we must do in return.



**God counts on us and so do our children.**

*Only God  
gives power  
but we are called to  
get things going*

*Only God  
can bring peace  
but we are called to  
build bridges*

*Only God  
brings happiness  
but we are invited to  
be joyful*



*Only God  
is the way  
but we are called  
to show the way  
to others*

*Only God  
is light  
but we are called  
to make that light  
shine in the  
world*

*Only God  
makes  
miracles happen  
but we must offer  
our loaves and  
fishes*



*Only God  
can do the impossible  
But it's up to us to  
do what is  
possible.*





# CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY SYRIA IS IN TURMOIL?

The dreadful refugee problem in Syria results from a civil war that began as a protest movement in 2011. Throughout the Arab and North African nations a movement had begun in Tunisia in 2010 in protest over food prices. Some describe it as the Arab Spring! It spread to many countries in 2011, including Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria.

From food riots it developed into anti-corruption and anti-regime riots. Many countries had dictatorships and the people demanded reforms and freedom.

This wave of protest resulted in a change of regimes in Tunisia, Libya (with NATO help), Egypt and Yemen. However, in Syria the small clique that ruled Syria were unwilling to relinquish power without a fight.

Syria is an unusual country as it has many Muslim, Christian and other religious minorities. In Syria one such minority, the Alawites led by President Assad Senior, and under the umbrella of the Ba'ath party (same party as Saddam Hussein in Iraq), had held power since 1971. This religious group was a strange sect, even condemned by Muslims for their beliefs, and came from the North West mountainous region of the country. They, with the Ba'ath members, ruled the country with a very repressive regime.

When the Arab Spring reached Syria initially some reforms were offered. The opposition knew they were cosmetic changes and began to organize resistance as government repression grew. They split into many groups in alliances with Turkey, Iran (with Russian support), USA, al Qaeda, etc. Then ISIS appeared into this conflict and viciously grabbed a lot of Syrian territory and ruled with an iron fist.

The people were caught in the middle and some initially fled to Jordan and Turkey, their nearest neighbours. As the conflict worsened more cities and towns were attacked, minorities were persecuted by both the rebels, especially ISIS, and government forces. Refugees poured out of the country, heading for Europe, driven by fear for their lives as their properties had been destroyed. **It is estimated 5 million refugees have fled from Syria while 6 million are internally displaced.**

The Syrian regime, with army support from Iran plus the Shi'a groups like Hezbollah, and air support from Russia are regaining control of the country. Many, but not all, rebel groups have been defeated. The Province of Idlib is holding out against the government regime. The government is willing to use every means to regain control of a destroyed country. The people suffer and more innocent families will flee from their homeland in this final wave of government terror. It is a shocking situation for what was once a prosperous multi-cultural country.

Jarlath Walsh SMA





SMA members who attended the Irish Provincial Assembly with the SMA Superior General, Fr Antonio Porcellato and the new Provincial Leader, Fr Malachy Flanagan (front row, 2nd and 3rd from left).

# Christmas in Nigeria

Fr Donal Fennessy SMA



Fr

care for the local Prison. Masses were celebrated in all of them over the Christmas period. Many of the outstations prepared a big meal after the Mass as they 'celebrated' Christmas Day on the day we had Mass with that village.

Before the end of the Christmas period we had our usual Christmas party for the four seminarians from this parish. A few days later we had our party for the thirteen Postulants and two Sisters of the Nativity congregation. They live about 12 miles away. Arriving at 12 noon and left around 5.30pm. After our lunch I got out my Bingo set, and they enjoyed playing Bingo until all the prizes were finished! Sometimes if I'm in a crowd and I hear a shout, 'Bingo', I know it's one of the Nativity Postulants greeting me.



Christmas in Kontagora, Nigeria

Donal Fennessy SMA, from Cork City, is a member of the British Province and he will celebrate his 54th year of priesthood in December. Most of his life has been on mission in northern Nigeria. When he first left for Africa all those years ago an aunt, the late Mrs Eily Dillon, gave him the gift of a portable typewriter (no laptops in those days). Every year since then, Fr Donal faithfully sends a letter to family and friends using that same typewriter! Both the typewriter and Fr Donal are still going strong after all these years. The following is an edited version of Fr Donal's latest letter (June 2019) detailing his life in Nigeria over Christmas 2018 and early this year.

"My new curate, Fr Joseph Damen, arrived just before Christmas and has settled in well and is a great help. He was ordained for the diocese of Lafia in October 2018. All our Christmas programmes went well. Our parish – Queen of Apostles, Shinge – has 18 outstations. We also

Kidnapping is increasing in Nigeria. The Chairman of the Church Council in a neighbouring parish was kidnapped in January and was released after two weeks when a ransom was paid. At the end of March a priest in the Archdiocese of Kaduna was kidnapped and, until now, there is no news of him. We are told that we should not pay ransom, as to do so would only encourage more kidnappings. That is ok, but when someone close to you is taken it's hard to refuse to pay a ransom.

In February, Nigeria's President, Muhammed Buhari visited Shinge. The entire town was blocked off for the entire day, but the occasion was a peaceful one. He was re-elected on 9 March. We have a new State Governor. The outgoing Governor was elected to the Senate in Abuja. I taught him Maths and Education in the Government Teachers' College in Keffi.

Normally in Nigeria the hot season is February – March, but this year it has extended into the middle of May. We had only a few rain showers since November 2018, the end of the rainy season. We were all praying for the rains to come, to cool us down and to help the farmers. By the end of May the rain came, and it's coming more frequently, thank God.

Preparations for our Children's Harvest Thanksgiving Mass started in April. Each of our 17 parish groups submitted three names to form the Harvest Committee. I attended their first meeting to supervise the election of their officials. They were then on their own. They met weekly to arrange everything. On Harvest Day – 9 June – I led a three-hour Mass, which included each group dancing to the Altar with their Harvest gifts. We resumed at 3pm for many activities, including auctioning all the gifts brought up during the Mass – sacks of rice, live chickens, yams etc. The money raised at the Harvest goes to help different parish needs."



## Prayer for the release of **Fr Pierluigi Maccalli** **SMA**

God our Father,  
you call us to freedom,  
your Son Jesus submitted to suffering  
to take away the sin of the world.  
Grant your servant, Fr Pierluigi,  
imprisoned,  
the freedom that you want to give to all your children.  
Give us, in our time, the grace of peace.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Saviour and our Lord.  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us.  
Saint Michael the Archangel, protect us. 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](http://www.sma.ie) homepage.



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

For further information, contact  
**Fr. Anthony Kelly at**  
**[vocations@sma.ie](mailto:vocations@sma.ie)**

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

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

**Fr Alberto Olivoni** (Turin, Italy), served in Nigeria, on 17 April, aged 82 years.

**Ms Margaret McMahon** (SMA Honorary member), late of Letterkelly, Miltown Malbay, Co Clare, on 23 April 2019.

**Fr Willie Cusack** (Dublin), served in Nigeria, Zambia and Ireland, on 4 May 2019, aged 78 years.

**Fr Patrick (Paddy) Mackle** (Castledawson, Co Derry), served in Nigeria and Ireland, on 13 June 2019, aged 94 years.

**Sr Jacinta Finnerty** (Bridewell, Athlone, Co Roscommon) who served in Nigeria, England, Ghana and Ireland, died 6 July 2019, aged 86 years.

**Fr Johnie Haverty** (Poulnabany, Craughwell, Co Galway), served in Nigeria, on 8 July 2019, aged 83 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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