



# African MISSIONARY



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## Supporting the Victims of Boko Haram in Nigeria

For several years, many men, women and children have fled the troubled parts of North-eastern Nigeria to seek safety in other parts of the country, while the violence unleashed by the Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram, rages on. In Abuja, many camps for Internally Displaced People (IDP) have sprung up with most living in very poor conditions.

**The OLA Sisters are present in Nigeria since 1878. One of their Nigerian Sisters, Sr Anne Falola, reports from Abuja where the newly opened Maria Centre is supporting those displaced by conflict.**

On entering the camps, Sr Anne was immediately struck by the very evident upset for her fellow Nigerians: *"It is indeed very sad to see the expressionless faces of children and young people who have been exposed to so much violence and have had to flee from their homes and region."*



Sr Anne with children of Durumi IDP Camp, Abuja

*"Together with other volunteers, we organized makeshift schools and we offered our friendship and basic material assistance to alleviate their pain. While the government is fighting hard to overcome the militants and disarm them, very little attention is paid to the victims who have lost so much and virtually live each day on the charity of others."*

The OLA Sisters along with other volunteers recently inaugurated the Maria Centre. Its aim is to accompany the young girls and vulnerable women in these camps. We hope that through our activities, the women will find friendship and trust, which will rebuild their self-esteem and confidence. With the help of volunteers and donors, we hope to help them acquire new skills, like sewing, cookery, crafts, etc. To coincide with International Women's Day [8 March] we opened a Craft workshop at the Maria Centre.

The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) was founded in France in 1876 by Fr Augustin Planque SMA. The Irish Province was given special responsibility for Missions in English-speaking Nigeria and Ghana. The first Irish OLA's went to Nigeria in 1878. In 1990, the Nigerian Province was officially inaugurated, the same year as the first Nigerian OLA Sister went on mission 'ad extra' [i.e. outside of her home country] to Argentina, Sr Assumpta Mordi OLA, now the Nigerian Provincial Superior.

**Society of African Missions (SMA)**

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Sr. Anne remarked: *"like every beginning, there was confusion, but God made something beautiful out of our chaos. About 50 people turned up for the first class and I was surprised at how much enthusiasm and expectation was on ground! After settling down, everything went very well and everyone went home happy with some homework to do and bring back for the next class on Thursday."*

It was also noteworthy that both Muslims and Christians attended the workshop, which Sr Anne says, *"confirms that our people have no problem living together in peace"*.

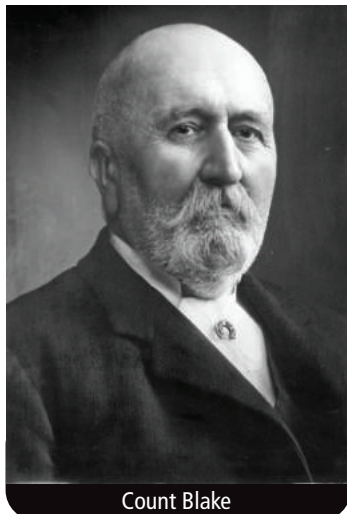
As numbers attending the craft workshop are expected to grow, Sr Anne made an appeal, *"we are looking for sewing machines and leather sewing machines for the shoes and bag making. We also urgently need large containers which can be used as workshops, so that we can lock up our equipment and have adequate shelter when it rains."*

Sr. Anne concluded by praying that *"the Maria Centre will bring fresh hope to a very sad situation, where displaced persons struggle to overcome their trauma and rebuild their lives. Whatever the future holds for these people, we pray that they will be able to smile and that our little love and support will help to erase the trauma they have been through."*



Sr. Juliet Ifediba, OLA, with children of Durumi IDP Camp in Abuja

To help the women and girls in the Maria Centre contact [info@olaireland.ie](mailto:info@olaireland.ie)



Count Blake

## In the image of the Little Flower

*'He had one thought and it embraced the world',* were the words of Fr. Maurice Slattery [a former SMA Provincial Superior] paying tribute to Llewellyn Count Blake on the occasion of his death, one hundred years ago, on 8 September 1916. Without doubt it was due to the support of this Mayo-born

scion of the famous Blake tribe that the SMA was able to put down solid roots in Ireland. Fr Devoucoux SMA was sent from Lyons, France [the birthplace of the Society in 1856] to establish the Society in Ireland. In 1882 Fr Joseph Zimmermann SMA replaced him and for thirty years criss-crossed the country making the Society known, gaining support from many of the diocesan clergy and soliciting financial help from the ordinary people of Ireland. And chief among those supporters was the man whose 100th anniversary we celebrate this year.

Llewellyn Blake was born at Ballinafad, Co Mayo, which, through the kind gift of Count Blake, became the Sacred Heart College where many young men completed their secondary education before moving to a second property of the Blake

family, at Cloughballymore, Kilcolgan, Co Galway [which was used for Philosophy studies and as a Novitiate]. Ballinafad was the Blake family home for centuries. [By happy coincidence I am the last Ballinafad student to be ordained to the priesthood in the SMA]. Llewellyn was the youngest of five boys, one of whom became a member of the English Parliament. When not quite 40 years old, after he had served for fifteen years in the Connaught Rangers, seeing service in India (and retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel), Llewellyn married a widow, Mrs Honoria Murray of Kinvara, Co Galway. Always a devout man, on the death of his wife without issue, he dedicated himself to a life of prayer and charity. No sentimentalist, hard-headed in business matters, Llewellyn took care that the wealth at his disposal should be employed productively. Thus it was that he spent a considerable time seeking out suitable charities to endow.

Blake was renowned for his interest in and support of any group concerned with *"the propagation of the faith in Ireland, England and in foreign missionary lands."* The following was part of a tribute paid to him at the time of his death by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (known today as World Missions Ireland): *"we have to announce the death of our great benefactor, in fact our greatest benefactor in recent years...His charity was unbounded."*





His first contacts with the Society came in 1899 when, testing the waters as it were, he had sent insignificant sums of money to a variety of religious congregations. Fr Joseph Zimmermann [pictured], Superior of the Irish branch of the SMA, one of the beneficiaries, responded by a lengthy letter in which he outlined detailed plans for an Irish mission to Africa. Fr

Zimmermann followed up his letter by calling on Llewellyn in his home at Ballinafad and presenting, at first hand, his vision of a future which would revive Ireland's ancient missionary glory.

At the heart of his concept was the development of the Irish branch of the Society as an autonomous Province, which would recruit its own members, train them and then dispatch them to its own mission fields on the African continent. Taken by the determination of his interlocutor and persuaded that the project was viable, Llewellyn decided there and then to make substantial funds available to the Irish branch of the Society for the education of candidates to the missionary calling. And this work, begun in 1899, continues to this day through our loyal SMA supporters, particularly members of the Family Vocations Crusade [FVC].

Llewellyn had spent some of his teenage years in France and perhaps this is what endeared the SMA to him – gifting the Society with those two large properties as well as endowing it with funds to help train SMA seminarians, in France and Ireland. But we were not the only beneficiaries of his munificence. He supported the training of priests in China and Japan and elsewhere. "His annual revenue apparently was employed almost entirely in giving assistance to works of religion, partly at home, but more especially among the foreign missions" – in Africa, Asia, America and Australia and the islands. Truly his was

a world-wide vision. But his support was not just confined to missionaries. Fr John Horgan SMA recalls seeing a plaque beside the Calvary in the Mercy Convent, Bantry, Co Cork, commemorating the fact that it was a gift of Llewellyn Blake.

Count Blake served the community as a local Magistrate. He was considered a very impartial magistrate, whose judgements were wise and penetrating. "A mother one day complained to him that her son had stolen her daughter's potatoes. On being asked for the reason of her allegation she told the Count that she quite easily knew her potatoes. A sample was sent for. Count Blake put two more samples on the same table. The lady was then brought in again and asked to take away hers, but having chosen the wrong sample, the Count coolly informed her that she was deceived, for the son had stolen his own potatoes and not hers."

For his support of the missions Llewellyn was created a Papal Count by Pope Pius X in 1905. And in 1913 he became an Honorary member of the SMA. The Blake family motto, '*virtus sola nobilitat*' [only virtue ennobles], emblazoned over the



Count Blake headstone

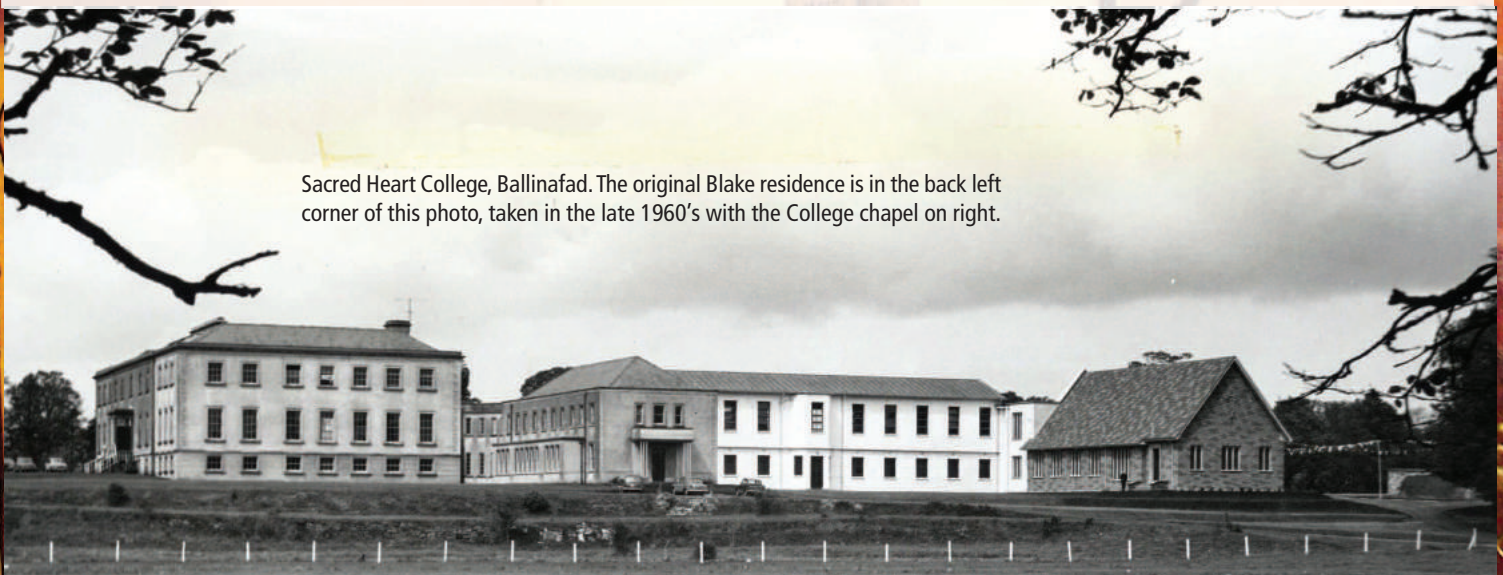
students' entrance door at Kilcolgan in 1918, truly summed up the man.

Reflecting on Fr Slattery's description of Count Blake, I'm mindful of the Little Flower, St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, whose entire [short] life was also totally dedicated to the missions. So too Llewellyn Blake.

He was buried outside the SMA parish Church in Wilton, Cork, looking down on the College where hundreds of Irish SMA students were trained for 'the missions'.

This article has drawn on information in the official biography of Count Blake [written by Dr Edmund Hogan SMA, Irish Provincial Archivist] and the quotations used are taken from three issues of the African Missionary, 1916

Sacred Heart College, Ballinafad. The original Blake residence is in the back left corner of this photo, taken in the late 1960's with the College chapel on right.





# Be merciful, even as your father is merciful

## Year of Mercy

When announcing the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy Pope Francis expressed the hope that it would be a time for the Church *"to rediscover and render fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time."* The Jubilee is a call to each of us to become missionaries of mercy in a world where there is so much that needs healing and cries out for mercy.

In the past year we have seen millions displaced by war and hundreds of thousands, men, women and children, risking their lives trying to get to Europe to find a safe place to live. This is a situation in need of the mercy and welcome that we can show.

We have also become more aware that even the earth itself is in danger. The poorest, especially those in Africa, are suffering most because of the climate change caused in the developed world due to greed and the selfish over-use of energy and resources. By being more careful about how we use energy and resources we can act with mercy, show greater care for God's creation and lessen the effect climate change has on the poorest living far away.

All around the world there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Here in Ireland this has been marked by an increase in homelessness and poverty. We can show mercy by supporting organisations that help the poor and homeless.

Pope Francis has said: **"A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just."** Our actions, our willingness to forgive, the assistance we give to family members, neighbours and strangers are acts of mercy that help to make the world a better and more just place.

## Year of Mercy motto and Logo

The motto *"Merciful Like the Father"* (Luke, 6:36) serves as an invitation to all Christians to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure.



The image in the logo represents Jesus, as the Good Shepherd taking humanity upon Himself. Through this He touches us and does so with a love that has the power to change our lives. As followers of Christ we too are called on to be ready and willing to forgive and to be merciful by helping those in need.



## Who is my Neighbour?

In recent months we have witnessed dramatic scenes on our television screens and we are very aware of the impact the migrant crisis is having on communities and societies as well as the cost in lives lost at sea. In response to this situation we also hear many voices for and against. Some call for generosity, openness and the protection of human life while others are extreme, uncaring and even hostile.

### MERCY

*is the ready willingness to help anyone in need, especially in need of pardon or reconciliation.*

Catholic Dictionary

As Christians we must be guided by our faith and its call to love our neighbour as ourselves. Our position as Catholics is based on scripture and on the consistent social teaching of the Church. Here we briefly examine what these have to say.

## Migrants in the Bible

In both the Old and New Testaments there is a history of hospitality and receiving migrants or strangers who are often referred to as *"sojourners."* Abraham was the perfect host at Mamre providing his three visitors with water to wash, food and a place to rest (Genesis 18: 1-8). Job declares: *"The sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the wayfarer"* (Job: 31: 32). *"The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself."* This verse from the Book of Leviticus (19:33 – 34) makes the position of the stranger clear as do these: *"You shall not oppress a stranger"* (Exodus 22:20) and *"cursed be he who perverts the justice due to the sojourner."* (Deut 27:19)

The New Testament also emphasises hospitality and receiving the stranger. Jesus received hospitality from many people, e.g. from Zacchaeus, from Martha and Mary, from the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Saint Paul urges us to *practice hospitality* (Romans 12:13). The writer to the Hebrews states: *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."* (Heb.13:2)

Scripture makes it very clear that the migrant or sojourner is to be treated with justice and that his or her human needs must be met. The parable of the Good Samaritan exemplifies this treatment. Even though hated by the Jews the Samaritan is





# *For I was a Stranger and you made me Welcome*



merciful. Moved by compassion he provides what the injured man needs. The account of the Last Judgement in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25, is even clearer in explaining what has been described as the "core of the moral teaching of Jesus". Here caring for the basic needs of one's fellow human being is identified as the only standard by which we will be judged. Further, Jesus identifies himself with those to whom service is given or refused.

*"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of my brethren you did it to me."* A person's behaviour towards another human being is one's behaviour towards God Himself.

## **Migrants in Church Teaching**

Church Social Teaching also gives clear guidance. It states that: *"Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the confines of their country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate and take up residence elsewhere"*. (Pacem in Terris: No.25, Gaudium et Spes: 1965: No. 65)

Church teaching recognises the right of a sovereign nation to protect and control its borders in the service of the common good of its citizens. However, at the same time, nations also have an obligation to the universal common good – to accommodate migration to the greatest extent possible in a safe, orderly and dignified manner. (Gaudium et Spes: 1965: No. 87)

Persons who flee their home countries due to fear of persecution must be afforded safe haven and protection in another country. This must include food, clothing, housing, education, access to medical care, freedom to practice their own faith and traditions – as well as the gradual assumption of responsibility for their own lives. (Pontifical Council for Migrants, Itinerants, Refugees and People on the Move: 1992).

In these times we, as believers, are called on to say, **"No to silence and indifference"** By our words and actions, we can prevent immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from becoming scapegoats for the ills of society. We must refuse to accept the exploitation of immigrants. This is particularly important when their presence is being exploited to distract attention from domestic problems. We can and should reject deliberate attempts to promote xenophobia and hatred. Human dignity and the

*"It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples."*



***Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.***

*And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.*

**Pope Francis, The Face of Mercy No.15**

protection of human life is paramount in Catholic Social Teaching. ***"Every person is priceless; human beings are worth more than things"***. (Pontifical Council for Migrants : Welcoming Christ: June 2013.)

As Christians we are called to show solidarity with those in need, be they migrants, homeless or people affected by climate change. Solidarity means *"a persevering determination and action"* to promote the good of each and all. It means being merciful which above is defined as *"a ready willingness to help anyone in need"*. Solidarity calls us to stand together especially with the poor and the powerless.

**Both scripture and the teaching of the Church show that our neighbour is not just the person next door. Those in need, strangers, the homeless and even those who live far away are also our neighbour.**

***"Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown Mercy."***

Mt 5:7



# Opening wide the door to the human heart



Fr Peter McCawille SMA

The enthusiastic welcome afforded to Pope Francis on his inaugural visit to Africa last November provided further evidence that the Catholic population (even if many of those who welcomed him were not Catholic) is growing faster in Africa than anywhere else in the world. Recent statistics provided by Catholic Relief

Services (a Church-affiliated US humanitarian group that works in Africa) indicate that the Catholic population in Africa has grown by 238% since 1980 and is now approaching 200 million. It was also predicted that if current trends continue 24% of Africans will be Catholic by 2040. The 2016 Vatican Yearbook ('Annuario Pontificio 2016') recently indicated that 'the Continent is home to almost 40% of the Catholic global population'.

While the foregoing statistics are encouraging we might also bear in mind that Pope Francis' evangelisation intention for April 2016 ('That Christians in Africa may give witness to love and faith in Jesus Christ amid political-religious conflicts') suggests that we might respond to any upbeat statistics with cautious optimism. In his 2016 World Day of Peace (WDP) message (The theme of which is **"Overcome Indifference and win Peace"**) the Pope emphasises that while we must be firmly and confidently engaged in the pursuit of justice and peace we are only too well aware that "war and terrorism, accompanied by kidnapping, ethnic or religious persecution and the misuse of power, marked the past year from start to finish". (WPD, No. 2).

Thus we need to look behind the statistics and into our hearts to see how far we are truly living out in practice what it means to be a caring Christian in a world which is dogged by discord and disharmony. We are constantly reminded of flashpoints around the world where conflict is raging on a global scale and our hearts are daily touched by the unimaginable suffering that so many innocent people - men, women and children - have to endure. However, almost inevitably, the daily diet of bad news often leaves us inured to the point of no longer being disturbed by recurring reports of the wanton loss of human life. Pope Francis in his New Year message pointedly reminds us that "Almost unconsciously, we become incapable of feeling compassion for others and for their problems; we have no interest in caring for them, as if their troubles were their own responsibility, and none of our business." (WPD, No. 3).

On a more personal level, my own most vivid recollections as a missionary in Nigeria bring to mind the numerous occasions when I had my own faith greatly enhanced by the devotion and joyous enthusiasm of those – not always Christians – among whom I lived. My nearest neighbour at one time was Lasisi, a Pentecostalist who earned his living as a bricklayer. What a refreshing experience it was to hear him speak with such obvious sincerity of his admiration for St. Teresa of Avila and the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, whose autobiography, *Seven Storey Mountain*, he knew almost by heart. Neither do I forget Mama Lucy, a petty trader, who enthralled me on Sunday afternoons with her explanation of that morning's Gospel. Lucy's faith was fashioned out of a life of struggle but it was a truly enlightened faith, far removed from self-pity or self-delusion. Like thousands of others they were both 'ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope that you have.' (1 Peter 3:15). A strong religious spirit pervaded every aspect of their lives. They felt comfortable with God and his message, while remaining innately courteous and sensitive to those who didn't share their faith.

However, those of us working in Africa are also acutely aware that today the Christian message is facing a crisis of identity, not just in Africa but worldwide. In his World Day of Peace Message Pope Francis encourages us all 'not to lose hope in our human ability to conquer evil and to combat resignation and indifference...in the face of critical situations'. Commenting recently on the ongoing religious and ethnic challenges in Nigeria the Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Bishop Matthew Kukah, stated that 'The key actors, who have turned religion from a weapon of love to an arsenal of fear and savagery, claim that they are acting in the name of religion. They believe that they are acting to expand the frontiers of power and authority of their religion. They believe they are defending religion and working for God. As it is, they have become the worst advert for their religions and how non-believers see both'. ('The future of Religion in Nigeria's politics' by Bishop Matthew Kukah, during a Conference at Fountain University, Osogbo and organised by the Islamic Welfare Foundation). The latest atrocity in Brussels is yet another cruel reminder of the untold suffering brought about by extremism, blind violence and twisted logic.

Pope Francis' proclamation of an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy looks even more prophetic and appropriate at this critical time since mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life and the Church's credibility hinges on the willingness of all





Fr Dan McCauley SMA [from Strabane, Co Tyrone] surveys the damage done to the Kontagora parish house following the anti-christian riots of 2006. The ongoing violence of Boko Haram means that missionaries- of all faiths - still face danger as they announce the Gospel of Peace, Love and Mercy.

its members to be merciful and compassionate. At the local level within the confines of our own parish communities **'it is a special time for us as members of the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective'** (Pope Francis in the Bull of Indiction, The Face of Mercy, no. 3).

It is generally acknowledged today that the practice of mercy is on the wane in the wider culture where the "eye for an eye" and the "tooth for a tooth" mentality seem to be the more desirable option. However, the message of Christ must always supersede the frequently more established norms of vindictiveness and revenge. It is the great desire of Pope Francis that during this special Jubilee Year a greater appreciation of the importance of mercy and compassion should penetrate the heart and mind of every person. "It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the very credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father" (The Face of Mercy, No. 12).

Our gaze today is fixed on the holiest week of the year when we reflect on the dark events of the first Holy Week. Alongside those reflections I also recall the example of Lasisi and Mama Lucy and the witness they both gave to love and faith in Jesus Christ. Today, in spite of the horrors being perpetrated in many places in the

name of God, there are still millions of African Christians, and non-Christians, who remain steadfastly committed to the building up of peace and justice in the human family. The challenge before the Church, as always, is to make sure that there is no contradiction between faith and life, between the way we as Christians profess our faith with our lips and the way we respond in faith to the unrelenting challenges of our daily lives. May the Lord continue to deepen our faith, sustain our hope and fill us with His love.

**Fr Peter McCawille, SMA, Abuja, Nigeria**



**ONLINE  
DONATIONS**

You may send money, at no additional cost, for our Missionary Work, Family Vocations Crusade (FVC), Mass Association Cards etc. using our **Donate Online** facility on the [www.sma.ie](http://www.sma.ie) homepage.

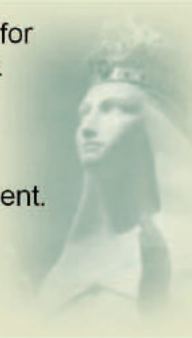




## SMA Pilgrimage Programme for Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016



- 10.30am SMA priests will be hearing Confessions in the Reconciliation Chapel for those who wish to celebrate the Sacrament as part of their pilgrimage.
- 11.50am Pilgrims assemble at the Basilica to begin Pilgrimage Procession.
- 12 noon Stations of the Cross, Rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
- 1.30pm Break for lunch.
- 3pm Concelebrated Mass & Anointing of the Sick (in the Basilica).



**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May is the final day of the SMA Novena in honour of Our Lady.**  
The Novena will be preached each evening at the African Missions Church, Blackrock Road, Cork.  
Wherever you are, each evening at 7.30pm, we invite you to join us in prayer during the Novena.

### How to Travel

For information about a Bus  
going from your area or if you are  
interested in organising a group  
to go by car, bus or train please  
contact one of the following:

African Missions, Wilton, Cork

0214541069

SMA House, Claregalway, Co Galway

091 798880

SMA House, 81 Ranelagh Road, Dublin 6

01 4968162

African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork

021 4292871

African Missions, Dromantine, Newry, Co Down

028 30821224

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

We commend the following SMA and OLA missionaries and our deceased supporters to your prayers.

**Fr Thomas Gorman** (Borris, Co Carlow), served in Nigeria, Rome and Ireland, aged 93 years on 4 February 2016.

**Sr Dorothy O'Brien** (Rineen, Skibbereen, Co Cork), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 95 years on 28 February 2016.

**Sr Catherine O'Connor** (Blarney, Co Cork), served in Ghana, Nigeria and Ireland, aged 93 years on 20 March 2016.

**Fr James Higgins** (Collooney, Co Sligo), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 92 years on 3 April 2016.

**Sr Theresa** (Catherine) O'Brien (Shepperton, Castlehaven, Co Cork), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 92 years on 6 April 2016.

**Sr Stella Marie O'Sullivan** (Castlehaven, Co Cork), served in Nigeria and Ireland, aged 92 years on 8 April 2016

Lord God, welcome our deceased SMA 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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