

World Mission Sunday Supplement

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# World Mission Sunday

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# Becoming a voice for the vulnerable



Sr Jo McCarthy

I was a missionary in a remote part of the Andes mountains in Peru from 1990 to 1993 during the revolutionary campaign carried out by the Shining Path terrorist group, whose aim was to destroy Peru's governmental and social institutions and replace them with a radical Marxist-Maoist regime. It led to the death of some 70,000 people. One of the reflections that emerged from Church groups at that time was that missionary groups had not engaged sufficiently with civil society. As well as providing education, health/social care and pastoral support through parish development, missionaries took on difficult social issues. They often became the voice for people who had little agency – children with a disability, women in prostitution, prisoners, landless labourers, etc. these were run efficiently and effectively in structures that ran parallel with civil society, but didn't engage sufficiently with civil and political entities.

Missionaries now work closely with local communities, and I was very aware of this new approach during a recent visit to Kenya. I was privileged to be part of Misesan Cara's inter-Church visit to Kenya in September. We visited four missions that have projects funded by Misesan Cara:

- Samburu is situated in a vast, remote and sparsely populated area 350km north of Nairobi, and the SAAP (Samburu Awareness & Action Programme) is supported by the Presbyterian Church under the direction of missionaries Stephen and Angelina Cowan and serves a population made up mostly of pastoralist herder communities, supporting edu-

cation and children's rights especially for girls, youth leadership capacity training, and sustainable livelihood initiatives.

- Tujisaidie Community School serves 350 children aged 3-15 in the poor and largely self-reliant informal settlement of displaced families in Soweto in the Kibera slum area of Nairobi. Since 1992, the Church Mission Society Ireland in partnership with lay missionaries from the Anglican Church of Kenya supports the school and local community

- The Daughters of Charity have been serving the semi-rural, impoverished community of Thigio, 40km northwest of Nairobi, for over 20 years. The KISIMA Special Needs Programme and School, provides education and care for 118 children, youth and adults with wide-ranging intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. Parents, older teens and young adults also attend classes. There is a Day Centre for the elderly, a Women's Development Project, a nine-bed hospice that provides palliative and end-of-life care for patients with terminal illnesses, a general medical clinic, a library and sports and arts programmes available to children from local schools.

**“They have built two primary schools and one secondary school, providing education for more than 1,000 children annually”**

- The Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa (FMSA) set up the Hands of Care and Hope (HCH) programme in 2007, serving the needs of people in the Huruma settlement, one of the poorest areas of Nairobi. They have built two primary schools and one secondary school, providing education for more than 1,000 children annually. Parents of students can also

participate in life-skills classes and an income-generating programme that helps them develop the skills, mindsets and resources to provide better for their families. The Sisters and staff at HCH also run programmes to teach students, youth and parents about social justice and how to advocate for their human rights. They have also set up an Out-of-School Youth programme, that engages local youth in an eight-week course of personal development leading on to a vocational training course of their choosing, including a certified nursing assistant specialty, mechanic training, plumbing and electric, and catering.

## Projects

Several elements stood out for me during this visit, how missionaries are approaching their work now and preparing for the future and the involvement of dynamic, committed women in the projects.

## Succession and empowering local leadership

All of the projects we visited are focussed on involving local communities in their plans, providing training and education for local leaders. Missionaries have an advantage as they live and work in the community and are immersed in the life of the local community. Their commitment is to local communities rather than to projects and they take a holistic view of the community and its needs. They know the problems and they are trusted by the communities.

In the Franciscan Missionary project we heard testimony from a young Muslim man who had come up through the school and was now giving back to the community as a teacher. In Soweto we met a youth leader who had been educated in the school and now wished to give back to the young people in his community. In the rural villages of Samburu we



Sr Jo McCarthy (far right) at the SAAP project in Samburu, Kenya, with (from left) Jenny Smyth, Mission Director of CMSI, John Moffett, CEO of Misesan Cara, and Faith Kasoni, SAAP Safeguarding Officer.

met young local leaders who had attended hands on training and were now in turn using their technical skills in mechanics, construction, plumbing etc in their local areas. Home gardens and diversity in fodder production are promoted to provide climate resilience.

## Education and women

I was really impressed by the strong representation of women we met in the different projects who are capable, articulate and providing strong leadership in their communities. In Samburu we met Faith who had herself been supported by the Mission as a young girl banished by her family because she would not submit to an arranged marriage at 12 years of age. She is now dedicated to promoting Children's Rights in the rural villages and especially the right to education for young girls and their protection from cultural practices like early marriage and FGM. Early marriage is the greatest threat to the education of girls as a girl of 12 handed over in marriage means a dowry of a cow or a few goats or even a camel for the family. Faith is now considering a possible involvement in local politics in order to share her skills and talents.

In Thigio, we met carers who have an extraordinary dedication to the special needs children they care for. One



St Clare Primary School in Kariobangi, Nairobi, a project of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa through the 'Hands of Care and Hope' programme.

young woman told me she feels she was born for this work. In Harumu, we saw the fruits of a group of women who have been active in the community for over thirty years. Everywhere, there was evidence that the missionaries are passing on their passion and commitment to their partners and collaborators in the community and are actively planning for a transfer to local leadership. The Franciscan Sisters and the Daughters of Charity spoke of their training programmes for their local Sisters, what they call their 'succession plan', ensuring proper governance and oversight as the work continues.

Finally, I was inspired by the courage and resilience of all the missionaries we met in the face of the many challenges, dilemmas and

paradoxes that face those working with the poorest, those furthest behind and most difficult to reach. The services they provide are non-denominational but the faith dimension of their lives and work was evident and sustains their courage and resilience and commitment, whether in the rural areas of Samburu County with non-existent road infrastructure or in the urban slums of Nairobi, where the waste water is flowing in open drains outside houses and there is a total lack of government support for communities living in such poverty.

**❶** Sr Josephine McCarthy is a Presentation Sister and Vice-Chair of the board of Misesan Cara

**“I was inspired by the courage and resilience of all the missionaries we met in the face of the many challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes that face those working with the poorest, those furthest behind and most difficult to reach”**



# Capuchin Missions - With Gratitude for the Past with Hope for the Future

In October each year we are reminded that the Church is missionary. Pope Francis underlines this truth by his journeys to the margins or peripheries of the world. He, like his namesake St Francis, has made the World his cloister bringing the message of the Gospel to all corners of the world. The missionary heart seeks encounter with Christ and with our brothers and sisters. This desire has compelled Irish women and men to leave their homeland and travel to all parts of the World bringing with them Christ's peace, love and joy. The global influence of

Irish missionaries over the past hundred years has been immense. It has been a chapter of our history that should not be forgotten. The Irish Capuchins have been part of this endeavour from the early 1900's when Capuchin Friars from Ireland spread their wings from California to Capetown, from Zambia to Wellington, from Korea to Madagascar. The Psalmist writes "They go out sowing in tears, they come back rejoicing" (Pslam 126) and this has long been the cry of battle cry of the missionary. We can ask 'Has it been worthwhile? Has it been successful?' For a

full and honest answer to those questions, one would need to ask the peoples who received these messengers of the gospel. For the most part the little seed planted has borne fruit, in growth of the Church in mission lands as well as local vocations to our Capuchin way of life. "Unless the Lord builds the house in vain do the labourers toil." (Psalm 127) - We thank the Lord for being with us and blessing our labours over the past decades. We can look to the future with hope in the Lord who calls and sustains his people. For the most part Irish

missionaries are part of our history however a new chapter continues to be written as our missions are getting local vocations. These young men need our encouragement and material support to set up and aid their formation.   
*You can support the work of the Capuchin Missions through enrollment in the Seraphic Mass Association. More information is available from the Capuchin Mission Office, Church Street, Dublin 7 - Phone 01 873 1022 Email: capuchinmissions@gmail.com*





# Delivering education in a nation born in conflict



The Irish Loreto sisters have been empowering young South Sudanese women for two decades, Chai Brady writes

From being exchanged for cattle to fulfil wedding arrangements, to becoming educated leaders in their community, the lives of women in South Sudan have changed dramatically due to the tireless work of the Loreto Sisters.

After an invitation 20 years ago in 2004 by the Loreto leadership team to again find their missionary spirit and engage in a programme called 'Courage to Move', the Loreto provinces began discerning where to start a new mission in a new country. The Irish sisters accepted an invitation from the Bishop of Rumbek to southern Sudan – which would later become South Sudan after the country would split. The aim was to establish a girls' boarding secondary school.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Loreto Sr Orla Treacy IBVM (Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary) who has been working to empower the people of South Sudan for two decades said that work to get the school up and running began "in an area where we discovered girls weren't even going to primary school, let alone secondary school, in a culture where cows are valued more than girls, more than women – they are married in exchange for a cow dowry. The education of girls was certainly something very new for the people".

While it took a number of years to get settled, not only was a boarding school started – which has 385 female pupils – a primary day school was also established. It is currently educating 1,200 boys and girls.



Sr Orla Treacy, director of the Loreto mission in Rumbek, South Sudan, walks outside the school with children in 2017.

In the boarding school, some of the girls stay 365 days a year because of the circumstances they face at home. Sr Treacy puts this down to several reasons, including escaping forced marriage, insecurity in the areas they come from – South Sudan is still reeling from years of civil war – or simply because they have travelled from so far away to go to school.

Sr Treacy said in many ways the schools is also like a women's refuge and that there would be girls coming to them aged 16-17 and may only graduate at 21.

## Healthcare Centre

Loreto's Mary Ward Primary Health Care Centre opened in 2018 and is the newest of the core programmes at Loreto Rumbek. The clinic serves the school and the wider community. It provides basic health education and nutrition support, water sanitation and hygiene education, maternal and well-baby care, provision of essential drugs and supplies to those with minor illnesses and conditions, support and counselling.

To support the school and the healthcare centre they have been trying to engage local qualified staff which was

difficult with South Sudan being one of the most illiterate countries in the world. To combat this they set up an internship programme so that school graduates could return for two years to assist in the schools or in the healthcare centre.

Sr Treacy explained: "So a lot of those students now would provide classroom support in the primary school, or they provide administrative support or clinic support, or in development work in different areas around the compound. And then we would support them to go to university. So today we have 60 of our graduates in university in Kenya."

**“We now have about 500 graduates who are working within the country or studying outside. But those young women are now coming back as educated young women”**

She recalls South Sudan gaining its independence in 2011 and the President Salva Kiir Mayardit telling

the nation they were not rebuilding South Sudan, but building it. "So there's a sense for us in Loreto that education is our mandate and it's education in all areas – helping to build a community. So our graduates would be studying education, healthcare, engineering, law, journalism, business, IT, all the main areas that you would want in developing and building a new country," said Sr Treacy.

"We now have about 500 graduates who are working within the country or studying outside. But those young women are now coming back as educated young women. And they are now settling, marrying and having their children – and looking to the future."

Five of their graduates who are settled and working in the northern part of South Sudan approached the mission in Rumbek 18 months ago asking if they would consider opening another mission in their area of Aweil, as the young women there were not receiving the benefits of an education. The project has since been given the green light by the congregation's leadership team in Rome and by the local

bishop.

"We had come at the invitation of the bishop, whereas this time the invitation was coming from the graduates, which was really beautiful. It was a real synodal moment for us, where it was the laity inviting us," she said. While the area is traditionally Catholic there are no religious sisters there. The hope is that construction will start in November of a day primary school for boys and girls and a girls' boarding secondary school and a small clinic – the same as Rumbek. It has the support of the bishop of the Diocese of Wau.

## Conflict

Asked about South Sudan's security and often fraught political situation, particularly with elections recently being pushed forward, Sr Treacy said: "South Sudan was born from conflict. It is about building a country from the ground up. There was a push from the international community for elections. I think locally people thought 'yes if everybody is available and able', but we still have many people in camps in neighbouring countries and while peace is coming in, people are only slowly returning. I don't think there was disappointment from a lot of us that the elections were pushed, I think people feel we are still in a transitional period.

"We are still trying to grow as a nation together, we have a lot of identities, we have a lot of challenges around building a national community so I think it will take us time to settle. In terms of the fear of the conflict, when you live in a new country like this there is always going to be anxiety but you work with the needs that are there and as missionaries we always stay with the people. We have been blessed in Rumbek that we have been able to always work, the only time we ever had to close schools was during Covid and ironically, we never got Covid in Rumbek – at least we never saw it in our clinic."

The Pope has often prayed for peace in South Sudan over the years, even making a papal visit two years to the embattled country, which had a profound impact on Rumbek's schoolchildren. Sr Treacy said: "It was a fabulous

experience, as a diocese we walked to visit the Pope. That was an extraordinary experience for the young people because they had grown up in conflict and all of a sudden they were doing a peace pilgrimage through their own country, many of whom had never seen beyond the town boundary.

"When the Pope comes to your land he brings international eyes as well and that was really positive for all of us to recognise the international, universal Church and to feel the world in solidarity with us and to feel that love and hope from the Pope, he is very strong in his desire for peace."

**“I hope we come from a very different value centre and the idea is to live among the people and to be a message of hope, a message of love to the people”**

Asked about whether Sr Treacy feels Irish people understand or value the lasting impact Irish missionaries have made all over the world in developing healthcare, education and much more, she said in it doesn't really matter if people understand the impact.

"Missionaries don't do it for the glory of others to see them. I think we do it because we feel there's a need and there's a call and we're rooted in God and we respond to that need. If it brings pride and glory to a nation, that's an extra bonus, but I don't think any missionary would ever tell you that's something that they're either disappointed about or that they're expecting."

"I hope we come from a very different value centre and the idea is to live among the people and to be a message of hope, a message of love to the people, however we do that, whether it's through education, health care, whether it's through human rights, through a direct prayer ministry, pastoral ministry, whatever it is, I think it's about bringing dignity to the people and I think that would always be what we would want as missionaries," she said.

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# Loreto Rumbek is Expanding

In 2022, five graduates of Loreto Rumbek, now working mothers in the North of South Sudan, returned to the Loreto School in Rumbek with an exciting proposition. They invited the Sisters to open a new primary school for boys and girls and a secondary boarding school for girls in their hometown called Aweil, about a 10-hour drive from Rumbek. Mary Nyanarop Ameklai and Regina Ajok Deng were 2 of these graduates. The following is an extract from an interview where they explain their motivations behind making this invitation.

**Loreto:** Nyanarop and Regina, you both belong to a group of five former Loreto students who invited the Loreto sisters to open a new school in Aweil, Northern Bahr el Ghazal. Where is this idea coming from? Why does Aweil need a Loreto school?

**Regina:** The people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, especially women, have faced significant challenges accessing education due to the war. As a result, there is a lack of educational background and passion for higher learning in our community. I'm from Aweil, but I had the privilege of growing up in Lakes State, where I received a quality education. Now, I'm back to serve my community and make a difference.

**Nyanarop:** In Aweil, girls face significant barriers to quality education. Many drop out of school at an early age, often getting married young and missing out on opportunities for personal and professional development. The lack of dedicated boarding schools for girls is a pressing issue. Without these safe spaces, young girls often find themselves with limited options after completing primary school, frequently lead-

ing to early marriages and a cycle of unfulfilled potential

The establishment of a Loreto school in Aweil would address these challenges directly. Loreto schools are renowned for their commitment to providing quality education and empowering students to become confident, capable individuals. The unique focus on nurturing not just academic skills but also personal development sets Loreto apart from other educational institutions.

**Regina:** In South Sudan, 2.8 million children are out of school, and the majority of them are girls. The lack of good schools and boarding facilities with strong standards, like those at Loreto, is a significant barrier. Loreto protects girls and provides them with an environment conducive to learning. If I hadn't attended Loreto, I would have likely dropped out after my first year and faced a life of early marriage and mistreatment, like many women here. Loreto Primary and Secondary is among the best schools in the country, where students gain confidence and valuable skills, even those who start school later in life.

**Nyanarop:** Loreto schools are

unique; my own journey reflects the profound impact of a Loreto education. Thanks to the skills and confidence I gained while at Loreto, I can now present myself effectively in front of others. When I moved to Aweil, my strong educational background enabled me to secure an excellent job with an NGO, competing successfully against other male applicants. Loreto's education empowered me to stand out in a competitive job market and pursue my ambitions fearlessly.

**Regina:** When I look at the five counties in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, I see a lack of representation for women in decision-making. Loreto taught me that women can achieve great things, gain respect, and participate fully in society. Many women here are suffering and being mistreated in their marriages because they lack awareness of their rights and education. That's why I believe extending Loreto Primary and Secondary to Aweil is vital. Educated women can stand up for their rights and take on leadership roles, changing societal norms gradually.

Freedom and respect are fundamental principles I hold dear.



Regina Ajok Deng, Mary Nyanarop Ameklai

Women are only respected when they are educated and aware of their rights. Without education, we will struggle to assert ourselves and gain the freedom we deserve. This is why I am passionate about having Loreto here in Aweil.

I want more girls to receive the same quality education I did and to be included in decision-making roles within the private sector, NGOs, and government. With educated women leading the way, we can create a society where mistreatment and inequality are no longer tolerated.

In our current state, women feel completely powerless, often unable

to claim ownership of their property. Even those who work hard find their assets taken by men. It pains me to see how women are treated. When we are educated, we can stand up and say, "No, I won't allow this to happen." That's why we need a school that offers quality education—so that women can claim their rights, participate in decision-making, and contribute to a better society.

**Nyanarop:** Can you help us bring this vision to life and collaborate with the Loreto sisters to educate our fellow sisters in Aweil?

**“If I hadn't attended Loreto, I would have likely dropped out after my first year and faced a life of early marriage and mistreatment, like many women here”** - Regina Ajok Deng



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# Frontline Report from the Missions

## Misean Cara 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary trip to Kenya

In September this year, Misean Cara CEO, John Moffett, journeyed to Kenya for a week, accompanied by the Board Vice-Chair Sr. Josephine McCarthy (Presentation Sisters) as part of a year-long celebration of Misean Cara's 20th anniversary.

They were joined on this special trip by leadership representatives from the three churches in Ireland, all of whom have overseas development projects that are supported by Misean Cara: Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Diocese of Waterford and Lismore; Reverend Uel Marrs, Global Mission Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; and Jenny Smyth (Mission Director of Church Mission Society Ireland (CMS Ireland)).

"I am constantly amazed while travelling, by the commitment of our members and their teams to patiently and diligently chip away at the systemic causes of poverty while providing much needed services," comments Mr. Moffett. "Nothing replaces being on the ground at the projects we fund, meeting the missionaries (our members) and the people whose lives they are helping through their holistic, long-term projects."

"By talking with people living in poverty and struggling every day with hardships few of us can imagine, we truly come to understand the incredible value of long-term missionary development work. Our members work tirelessly and with awe-inspiring commitment to help lift lives out of poverty every day and year after year," continues Moffett.

"As part of how we're marking our 20th anniversary this year, we are putting a special focus on telling the story of the Irish missionary tradition as exemplified by the work our missionaries are actively doing at the moment."

While in Nairobi, the group visited a project of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa, the Hands of Care and Hope in the very poor, informal Huruma settlement (slum) community. Hands of Care and Hope offers a holistic programme including two primary schools, a secondary school, an out-of-school youth



(Left to Right): Jenny Smyth, Mission Director CMSIreland; Paul Gichuki, Misean Cara Mentor East Africa; John Moffett, CEO of Misean Cara; Reverend Uel Marrs, Global Mission Secretary Presbyterian Church in Ireland; Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Diocese of Waterford & Lismore; Sr. Josephine McCarthy, Presentation Sisters and Vice-Chair Misean Cara Board of Directors.

training programme and other services aimed at addressing the great needs of families and children living in situations of extreme urban poverty.

"Pictures don't do justice to what life is really like for people there (in Huruma)," observes Moffett. "You never get the full sense of the overcrowded, unsanitary and precarious conditions in which people, even children, have to live their lives."

"The FMSA Sisters took our group to visit a site where they had previously constructed a primary school, for children living on the inner edge of the slum next to a river. Earlier this year, after flooding devastated the area, the government decided to create a flood plain by the river and with only two-days' notice they razed the school to the ground, providing no alternative accommodation. Just like that, the school, a safe educational haven for some of the poorest, most vulnerable children in the community, was gone."

"The Sisters and the teachers converted the only building left,

the kitchen, into temporary classrooms and they continue to turn up every day to provide an education to those children in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The Sisters are working to secure a piece of land to rebuild the school and continue to offer hope of a better way of life and a path out of poverty. It's a level of commitment and compassion that is hard to do justice to in words, but which we saw at work in all of the missionary-led projects that welcomed us in Kenya," Moffett continues.

"You have to admire their resilience, determination and ability to rebound from challenges."

### While in Kenya, the group travelled to four projects:

**Samburu Awareness & Action Programme (SAAP):** Situated in a vast, remote and sparsely populated area 350km north of Nairobi, SAAP serves a population of mostly pastoralist herder communities. SAAP is a part-

nership project of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, present in Samburu County since 1989 under the direction of lay missionaries Stephen and Angelina Cowan. The project, which receives Misean Cara funding, takes a holistic approach to its mission and ministry and is committed to community empowerment through training in sustainable livelihoods, promoting girls' rights and access to education, land rights advocacy, and climate change adaptation.

**The Tujisaidie Community School,** first set up in 2003 serves 350 children aged three to fifteen in the impoverished, informal settlement of Soweto, in Nairobi. The school is a vital part of the local community, which formed in 1992 when 350 families were internally displaced from their homes in the Muorto and Kibagare areas of the city after the then government seized the land and demolished all buildings there. Since 1992, the Church Mission Society Ireland has

been linked with the Tujisaidie Self-Help Group, attaching lay missionaries in partnership with the Anglican Church of Kenya.

Misean Cara funding for the construction of four new classrooms is helping to reduce class sizes.

**The Daughters of Charity Services in Thigio** (40km northwest of Nairobi) has served the residents of the mostly rural and impoverished local community for over 20 years. Through a multi-faceted approach, the project is catering for a diverse range of needs, including special education, medical and hospice care services, social programmes for the elderly, and a women's development project that provides small grants for micro-enterprises.

The specific range of services has evolved over the years, in close consultation and collaboration with the community itself, reflecting a relationship of listening and trust that has continued to grow from the start, and with an enduring objective of affirming the dignity of the people they serve. Misean Cara has supported the Sisters in Thigio since 2012.

**Hands of Care and Hope (HCH),** a project of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa (FMSA), set up in 2007 to serve the needs of the people in the Huruma settlement, one of the poorest areas of Nairobi, where need levels are chronically high and government-provided resources few. HCH has set up two primary schools and a secondary school, to provide affordable education for more than 1,000 young learners annually. Parents of students can also participate in life-skills classes and an income-generating training programme.

Unemployment in the community runs around 75%, and Misean Cara is currently providing funding to the HCH Out-of-School Youth programme, which engages local youth in personal development courses and vocational training courses to build skills for a secure future. Last year, 220 young people took part in the course, with a long waiting list in place for new participants.



Misean Cara staff and guests with Daughters of Charity Sisters, Thigio.



SAAP Home Garden training for improved food security in pastoralist communities, Samburu.



Tujisaidie Community School, Nairobi - a visit to a new classroom block funded by Misean Cara.





Mother Kevin Community School, Hands of Care and Hope, Nairobi.



Misean Cara CEO, John Moffett (second from left) visits St. Clare Primary School, of the Hands of Care and Hope project, Nairobi.

### Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Diocese of Waterford & Lismore

I was privileged to have been invited to join a small team going to Kenya to see projects which are sponsored by Misean Cara, which is celebrating 20 years of its existence.

Leaving behind many preoccupations in the Diocese I entered into a very different world in Kenya. It was my second time in the country but the contrast with home was still very stark.

After our first night in Nairobi, we travelled by small plane to Samburu to see a mission under the direction of Stephen Cowan, a lay Presbyterian missionary from Co. Down who has been there for 30 years. He knows the people and their language and is bringing the Gospel to life in such practical ways. He and his wife, Angelina (who was away) and those he has gathered around him have improved life greatly for the native people of the area.

Back in Nairobi we went to visit a wonderful education mission and school run by an Anglican community in a quarter of the city where the local city authorities decided some years ago to clear a part of a slum area of the enormous capital, displacing many families who were given small plots to resettle on. The people built as best they could and have together formed a strong community and are gradually building up lives filled with hope and vision through education and enterprise.

Just an hour outside the city we travelled to a haven of peace in Thigio where the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul run a school for special needs children, a hospice, a clinic and day care centre. I remember the love with which the children were treated. The clinic runs on a shoestring and sheer grace of God. We were again blessed to witness the Gospel in action.

My last day in Nairobi was spent in one of the slum areas of which

there are several in the city. The Franciscan Missionaries of Africa (founded by the extraordinary Mother Kevin Kearney of Co. Wicklow) showed us some of the schools they run.

It is hard to believe the utterly basic nature of the resources available to the staff and students. We heard testimonies of people who were themselves brought up in the nearby slums and who were won over by the love of the Sisters and lay staff and the education they were offering. One 'star' student is now on the staff with the FMSA and is himself a Muslim. Such is the peaceful co-existence which is possible when love is genuine.

The work of Misean Cara goes on. My visit to Kenya was a reminder of the great efforts of countless people of faith to make a difference and, urged on by the will of God, to help those less fortunate and to do what they can to relieve the human suffering which is in the world and indeed always has been. By God's grace a great deal of loving work is being done through people working together, supported by the generosity of Misean Cara.

### Sr. Josephine McCarthy (Presentation Sisters), Vice-Chair of Misean Cara Board of Directors and former missionary to Peru 1990 - 1993

I was really impressed by the strong representation of women we met in the different Misean Cara-supported projects in Kenya. These are women who are capable, articulate and providing strong leadership in their communities. One such woman we met in Samburu, Faith, had herself been supported by the SAAP project as a young girl, when she was banished by her family for not submitting to an arranged marriage at 12 years of age. She is now dedicated to promoting Children's Rights in the rural villages and

especially the right to education for young girls and their protection from cultural practices like early marriage and FGM. Faith is now considering a possible involvement in local politics in order to share her skills and talents.

In Thigio, we met carers who have an extraordinary dedication to the special needs children they care for. One young woman on staff at the centre told me she feels she was born for this work.

In Harumu, we saw the fruits of a group of women who have been active in the community for over thirty years. Everywhere we went, there was evidence that the missionaries are passing on their passion and commitment to their partners and collaborators in the community and are actively planning for a transfer to local leadership. The FMSA and Daughters of Charity Sisters spoke of their training programmes for their local Sisters, what they call their 'succession plan', ensuring proper governance and oversight as the work continues into the future.

Finally, I was inspired by the courage and resilience of all the missionaries we met in the face of the many challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes that face those working with the poorest, those furthest behind and most difficult to reach. The services they provide are non-denominational but the faith dimension of their lives and work was evident and sustains their courage and resilience and commitment, whether in the rural areas of Samburu County with non-existent road infrastructure or in the urban slums of Nairobi, where the waste water is flowing in open drains outside houses and there is a total lack of government support for communities living in such poverty.

**i** To read the full reflections by Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan and Sr. Jo McCarthy, please visit the Misean Cara website <https://www.miseancara.ie/2024/10/kenya-reflections/>



Stephen Cowan, SAAP Project Manager (left) and Reverend Uel Marrs, Global Mission Secretary, Presbyterian Church in Ireland (right) in Samburu

“Since 2019, very crucial input from Misean Cara to SAAP has helped the project reach out to the most vulnerable of girls in the area with opportunity for education, and is also helping with farm skills training for the local pastoralist people. So the support of Irish Aid and the significant input of Misean Cara over the past five years have really enhanced and strengthened the work and enabled much progress in a broad range of development initiatives.”

– Reverend Uel Marrs, Global Mission Secretary, Presbyterian Church in Ireland

“The most striking impression from all of the locations visited was the dedication and servant-hearted nature of those involved in delivering the projects. The quality of care and commitment to the communities where they were living, pride in their work and the clear difference being made in peoples' lives, was remarkable. Long term sustainable change has been enabled through long term commitment by Irish mission personnel and the funding availed through Misean Cara.”

– Jenny Smyth, Mission Director CMSI



Jenny Smyth, CMSIreland Mission Director (far right, standing)

**Learn more about Misean Cara, celebrating its 20th anniversary of support to Ireland's missionary organisations: [www.miseancara.ie](http://www.miseancara.ie)**



# Discover how Your Legacy can support Respond's mission to Build Homes and Improve Lives by including a Gift in Your Will

Ireland is facing a severe housing crisis, with more people than ever before experiencing homelessness. This has placed tremendous pressure on services across the country. Respond works tirelessly, with their statutory partners to provide affordable homes and essential community services, helping families and individuals in desperate need.

## How your gift can make a difference:

By including a Gift in Your Will to Respond, you become a vital part of our mission. Your generosity helps us to continue delivering not only high quality homes but also vital services that provide support to people of all ages – from newborns to older adults.

## A Legacy Rooted in Faith:

Respond was founded in Waterford in 1982 by Father Patrick Cogan (Order of the Friars Minor), with a purpose to provide meaningful solutions to housing insecurity and homelessness.

Since our inception, we have collaborated closely with religious orders to address the housing shortage, including the development of land and the repurposing of former religious buildings where feasible.

Our core values remain deeply rooted in the Franciscan spirit of peace-making, compassion, and community development. These values continue to guide us as we collaborate with religious orders across the country supporting them to preserve their legacy by repurposing buildings to provide homes

and essential services. For instance, St John's College in Waterford, a former seminary and training college, has been transformed into 57 social homes addressing specific housing needs, including age friendly housing. The site also hosts an onsite cafe, conference facilities and offices used by Respond and other local community groups. Additionally, two of our Family Homeless Services in Dublin are also based in former convent buildings. These projects ensure that the legacy of these sacred spaces lives on by serving those in need.

In 1983, Father Cogan opened Respond's first housing scheme in Larchville, Waterford. Since then, Respond has grown to become one of Ireland's leading Approved Housing Bodies, now providing over 7,700 homes to more than 17,000 people across all 26 counties working closely in partnership with local authorities, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and others. We are committed to offering high-quality homes in areas where people want to live, recognising that a secure home is fundamental to improving lives and enhancing health and well-being. Our vision is that every family and individual in Ireland will have access to high-quality housing within a vibrant and caring community.

**Respond not only deliver quality homes but also works to improve lives by providing a range of services in the community, for families and individuals including:**

- **6 Family Homeless Services** providing emergency 24/7 accommodation to **174** families (240 adults and 250 children) in 2023. Families experiencing homelessness often need ongoing, wraparound support in relation to accessing long term housing, mental and physical health services, family or parenting support. Our Family Homeless services follow a trauma-informed approach.
- **3 Day Care Services for Older People** provide a social outlet, links to support services, meals and provided respite for 227 older people in 2023. These services support people to live independently in their homes and community for as long as possible.
- **15 Early Learning and School Aged Care (ELSAC) Services** which provided community-based affordable early years education and after school services for 507 children in 15 communities nationwide in 2023.
- **Family Support:** We have dedicated support staff who provide needs-led individual support, group programmes, and activities for families to promote social wellbeing and tenancy sustainment. These range from walking groups, parent and toddler groups, parenting support groups, and cookery classes.
- **Refugee Resettlement services** Respond actively works with families to support their integration into their new communities. Delivered through a Resettlement Support Worker and an Intercultural Worker.



## Respond has a long legacy of providing high-quality housing in vibrant and caring communities, be a part of it with a Gift in your Will.



### Why leave a gift in your will?

It is important to remember the housing crisis is about people, it's about families, children and older adults who are struggling. In July 2024, over 14,000 individual's, including many children, were living in emergency accommodation.

Tragically, some children are even being born into homelessness. Your support can help reduce the trauma they face and offer them a better start in life.

In 2023 alone, **35 new-born babies** and their parents were discharged from maternity hospitals directly into a Respond services. **Currently, 70 children under the age of one are residing in our homeless services.** A gift of any size will make a meaningful difference strengthening our ability to meet the growing

demands of the housing crisis. Your support can help us to continue to support families in crisis.

Our Early Learning and School Aged Care services are often located in areas of high socio-economic need, providing essential resources to those who need them most, including parenting support, funding for external trips and necessary supplies. As we see a growing number of neurodiverse children in our care, we are committed to offering personalised support in environments designed to be accessible and inclusive.

Our Day Care for Older People services are evolving to meet the growing needs of older people with dementia, who now make up 42 percent of our service users. To further support these individuals we need additional resources to enhance

staff training, expand activities, and upgrade equipment, ensuring our services are more accessible and effective.

With many of our upcoming developments being large-scale, mixed tenure developments including both social and cost rental homes, expanding the scope of our Family Support team will be important to promote community wellbeing and integration helping to create vibrant and caring communities.

We rely on gifts from people like you to make a positive impact on communities nationwide. Legacy gifts ensure that Respond can adapt to increasing demands faced by our communities as a result of the housing crisis and help us to continue to provide housing and community services for generations to come.

*Including a gift in your Will to Respond is very straightforward.*

*It is helpful to have the following information to hand when you are speaking with your solicitor*

**Our Registered Office Address:** Airmount, Dominick Place, Waterford. X91 A397

**Registered Charity Numbers:** 20012625. CHY6629.

**Cliona Maughan** our dedicated Legacy Officer is here to help if you have any questions you can contact her confidentially at [legacy@respond.ie](mailto:legacy@respond.ie) or 087 355 6341



**respond**  
building homes,  
improving lives





# respond

building homes,  
improving lives

## Remember Respond in your will



**Your legacy will ensure that future generations can access affordable homes and support services**

Cliona Maughan our dedicated Legacy Officer is here to help if you have any questions. You can contact her confidentially at [legacy@respond.ie](mailto:legacy@respond.ie) or 087 355 6341.

Registered Charity Numbers: 20012625. CHY6629.





# Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

One Heart, One Mission... Witnessing to God's Love in the World



## The Mission We Carry

Mission is not a concept bound to the past, nor is it an abstract ideal. It is the work of responding to the needs of the world as they are now—living and dynamic, constantly evolving. Today, mission calls for a new kind of presence, one that sees deeply into the heart of suffering, but also into the depths of hope. We are living in an age where global challenges—whether they be environmental crises, forced migration, or social inequality—call us to expand our understanding of mission beyond borders and denominations.

In Ireland, we carry a legacy of mission, rooted in the stories of those who left our shores to serve in far-flung places. But our mission today is no longer about crossing seas; it is about crossing thresholds of indifference, fear, and division within our communities. It is about finding new ways to bring light where shadows of loneliness and despair have grown. This doesn't always require grand gestures. Often, mission manifests in the smallest of acts—listening to those whose voices that are overlooked, standing in solidarity with those who feel invisible.

At its core, mission is about transformation, but not just of others. It transforms the one who responds to it. It is a call to action that leaves no one the same. To be on mission is to witness to something greater than ourselves: a vision of a world reconciled, where dignity and justice are not aspirations but realities.

We are an international group of Religious sisters, apostles rooted in faith and hope, ready to risk it all for the Lord. As 'Women in Communion,' we live in international communities, passionately committed to living out God's call.

Be part of our mission! Explore ways to get involved by visiting our website. Join us as we witness to the presence of God in our lives and strive to make a difference in the world.

[www.olaireland.ie](http://www.olaireland.ie)   



## MEDICAL MISSIONARIES of MARY

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The Medical Missionaries of Mary are an international congregation of religious women. We serve in 12 countries around the world.

Sisters are trained in a variety of health-related professions. We go to peoples of different cultures where human needs are greatest. Our special concern is the care of mother and child and the fostering of family life. To find out more about MMM please visit our website or listen to our MMM Sister's stories on our Podcast.

Our 2024 MMM Yearbook and the 2025 MMM Calendar are out now! If you would like a FREE copy of these and our upcoming supplements, please fill in the form underneath with your details, so we know where to send them and mail it to the address below.\*

\*Please do not fill this form in if you are already receiving our calendars and yearbooks in the post. We appreciate that you are already on our mailing list and thank you for your continued support!

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# Amplifying voices of Catholic sisters around the world



## GLOBAL SISTERS REPORT

GSR: A PROJECT OF NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER



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*Go and invite everybody to the banquet*

(cf. Mt 22:9)

By choosing to make a gift to Missio Ireland, you will help local missionaries overseas, train future priests and sisters, and give hope to the world's poorest children, like the children from the Maasai tribe who live in Northern Tanzania (pictured).

**Missio Ireland is the Holy Father's official charity for overseas missions.**

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National Director Fr Michael Kelly SPS

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 Here is my donation of €10  €35  €50  €125  Other € / £ \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Or debit my Visa  Mastercard   
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 Please indicate where you would like your donation to go:  
 Poor Mission Dioceses  Training of seminarians and sisters  Children's projects



# Three Gifts from my Captivity

**O**n the night of 17 September 2018, Fr Pierluigi [Gigi] Maccalli SMA [Italian Province] was kidnapped from his Mission in Bomoanga, Niger Republic, by GSIM jihadists [Group of Support for Islam and Muslims]. He was dressed in his pyjamas and slippers. He was released in Mali Republic on 8 October 2020. Since his release, Fr Gigi has taken time to rest, to pray, and to recover his health, having spent nearly all of his captivity in chains. He spent some weeks with our SMA community in Wilton, Cork, last August, to improve his English. During that time, he spoke of his 'trial' at the Sunday Masses in the parish.

After thanking the SMA and our supporters in Ireland for our prayers, he continued:

"I may summarise this long time as a prisoner, in two words: *sadness and bitterness*. This time has been for me the period, by far, the darkest of my life. From September 2018 to October 2020, I have counted 753 days in captivity, otherwise 25 new moons that means two years and three weeks, *a long holiday!* But I have to add, right now, that since the first day of freedom, I have washed away these two years or sadness and bitterness.

## Gifts

At my arrival in Rome, my nephew Andrea hugged me so strongly in his arms that I poured out all my tears. So these tears have cleansed (baptised) me... I'm reborn, and now I feel at peace.

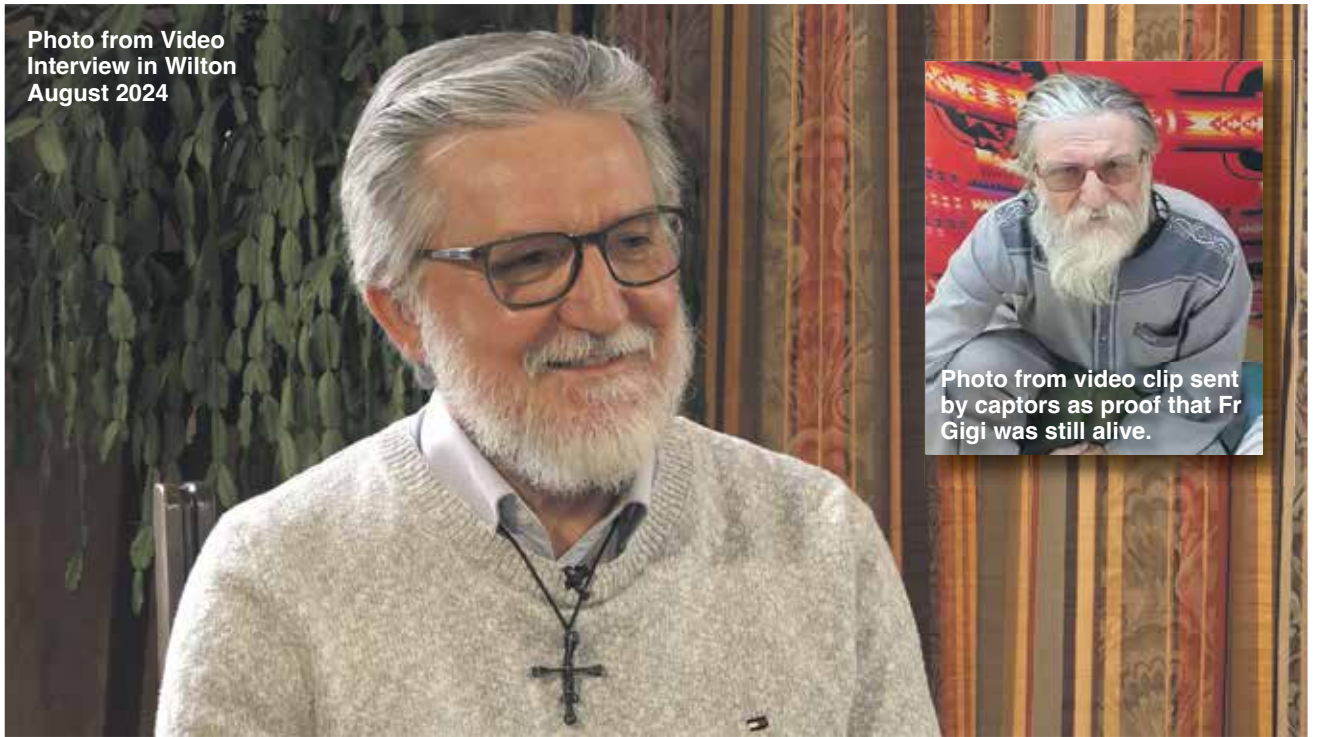
**I summarise my story using three objects that I brought home from my captivity. They are the gifts of my desert experience: chain, rosary and this Cross.**

**Chain:** this is a piece of the chain that I had on my feet. This link is the only part that I was able to open because it was not welded. After 17 days on a motorbike, a man came with a chain (1.5 metres long), and put one end of the chain around my ankle and the other end round a tree. I remember it well, it was on October 5, 2018. For 22 days I was held there, day and night. I cried out all my pain to God. "Why have you forsaken me? What wrong have I done? Where are you God? Lord come *haste* to my aid....."

**“The strength came from above, I am convinced. I cried, prayed and invoked the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit”**

After that I was taken away into the Sahara. For a whole year the Sahara was my open-air prison. For the first 6 months I was the only prisoner there, then I was joined by two other hostages, Luca [Tacchetto] and Nicola [Chiacchio]. The guards took off the chain, but then, on 14 September 2019, they put it on my feet again. This happened because Luca tried to escape during the night. From then on I was in chains each night from sunset to sunrise until my release. Sleeping in chains was very

Photo from Video Interview in Wilton August 2024



very uncomfortable.

Even though it might sound strange to you, I tell you that being chained has opened up 'my free inner space'. One evening I was upset, looking down at my feet in chains. Then suddenly an inner awareness came to me and I said to myself "my feet are chained, but my heart is not!". I thought of St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, who said: "I will be love in the heart of the church". I recalled what our Founder said: "I will be a missionary from the bottom of my heart." So the prayer of the heart was my free space.

This piece of chain reminds me of all those who are suf-

fering as victims of war and injustice and the urgent need for mission for peace.

**Rosary:** I made this Rosary myself from the material used to protect me from the sun. I tied 10 knots, so I could say the Rosary twice a day. Even now, I use it to pray for all the innocent victims of the war (every morning that is my first intention). I continue to pray this Rosary (one decade) that I wear also on my wrist for all the innocent victims of war and also for those who persecute the peace.

These 10 knots remind me that the important thing in life is.... to tie RELATIONSHIPS, to build bonds of friendship / fra-

**“It was 2 years of great silence, sadness and isolation. My greatest sadness as a missionary with 21 years of presence in Africa (10 in Côte d'Ivoire and 11 in Niger) was to see young people (my jailers and supervisors) indoctrinated by propaganda videos praising Jihad and violence”**

ternity. As Pope Francis says in his Encyclical Letter *Tutti Fratelli*, we are all brothers and sisters.

These same words I said to Abu Naser (one of the mujahidin's leaders) on my last day in captivity: "... may God help us to understand that we are all brothers and sisters!" Before leaving the desert, I forgave him.

In spite of the words they spoke against me (they looked on me as kafir and an enemy, good only for hell), but I am convinced that only forgiveness and pardon can break down the chains of hate and violence.

Finally, the 3rd Gift is the **Cross:** I made this cross by myself but I didn't show it to anyone. I've always hidden it in my pocket. This cross reminds me of the silence.

## Symbols

The silence is the greatest gift I've brought back from the desert. I cried out as Jesus did on the cross: "Father, why have you forsaken me?" And God didn't answer (or better) he answered me with the sound of silence. But that heavy silence allowed me to go deeper into myself and see beyond my own horizon. I discovered in this silence something about God. Today I dare to say, *God is silence*.

I have experienced that the desert is not empty, but the best place to hear God deeper. The word of God comes from the silence. The silence is the father of God's word. God is

light in the darkness and he speaks and communicates thorough the silence.

The keyword / symbol of my desert experience is the cross, and from the cross I've learned two lessons: **first, I learned to pray differently**. I like what St. John of the Cross has said about prayer: "prayer is the harmony of two silences".

**And the second lesson,** I bought home from my story is...to love and forgive my enemies. During my captivity, I often meditated on the words of Jesus on the cross: **Father, forgiven them, they don't know what they are doing**. Before leaving the desert for freedom, I forgave my captors. For all the details of my story, I refer you to *Catene de libertà*, the book I have written on my time in captivity. But at least these three objects highlight the main elements of my desert story.

Last but not least... I'm set free, but peace is still a hostage... so, please let us continue to pray for peace. Don't stop praying for all those who suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Thank you.

**i** View a video in which Fr Gigi speaks about his captivity via: <https://youtu.be/8y2HS3OM3tQ> - by going to [www.sma.ie](http://www.sma.ie) or by scanning this QR Code



**“Along with the appeals of Archbishop Lompo of Niamey and the Catholic community in Niger, two young Protestant pastors organized a vigil of ecumenical prayer and the Muslim leaders of Niger joined the Christians in praying for Fr Gigi's release, asking his kidnapers that, following the true teaching of Islam, they stop all violence and respect the rights of every person”**

Since his release, Fr Gigi has written a book *Catene de libertà [Chains of freedom]*. It has been translated into English and will be published soon.



The rosary, cross and chain link referred to in the article.



The terrain in Niger where Fr Gigi worked



Fr Gigi and Parishioners – Baptism



# Salesians Missions – 1875 - 2025

## Missionary work and Missionaries

**M**issionaries are people whose hearts have been moved by Christ's love enabling them to live and practice charity in a very radical way. They leave their own communities and travel to new cultures to proclaim the Gospel way of life, caring for people in need and proclaiming God's Word of salvation, freedom, hope and joy.

In Mark's Gospel chapter 16:15 Jesus told the disciples to 'Go out to the whole world: proclaim the Gospel to the whole of creation.' In Luke's Gospel chapter 4:18 he said, 'The spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, sight to the blind and let the oppressed go free'.

In former times missionaries were generally Europeans and North Americans who travelled to the developing world to proclaim the Gospel. Nowadays, missionaries come from every continent. In the period 2020 – 2024 one hundred and twenty-three Salesians have volunteered to work and live as missionaries.

A missionary is one whose life is centered on God and who lives the Gospel of the Good Samaritan in a tangible way through feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, welcoming refugees, consoling those in prison, and offering hope to the most vulnerable.

## The Salesian story - Don Bosco and Turin

Don (Fr) John Bosco founded the Salesian congregation in 1859. He was born near Turin, Italy in 1815 and ordained a priest in 1841. It was a time of rapid change in Europe. In late 1841 Don Bosco began a three-year pastoral course in the city. At the time Turin was home to many poor young people.

Don Bosco made himself familiar with the social, cultural, and political issues the people of Turin were living through. He walked the streets, talked to the young and old, and visited the prisons where he met thousands of young people without hope or a future. This was the mission territory.

Seeing all these needs and especially the vulnerability of the young people, Don Bosco started an Oratory a modern-day youth centre, which began through an encounter with Bartholomew Garelli on the 8th of December 1841. Don Bosco was in the sacristy of his local Church preparing to say mass when young Bartholomew entered the room. The sacristan asked Bar-



**150**  
GIVE THANKS  
RETHINK  
RELAUNCH

**“For Don Bosco the success of his projects was always due to the role of Mary, Help of Christians in his life. We put the renewal of the Irish Salesian missionary project in her care and we ask for her direction and guidance”**

tholomew if he could serve Mass and, when he replied no, he was very firmly asked to leave. Don Bosco followed the young boy and had a conversation with him. Bartholomew was 15 years old and from the country. Both parents were dead. He could neither read nor write and had no employment skills. Don Bosco proposed they both meet again and suggested to Bartholomew to bring his friends along with him the following Sunday. This Bartholomew did and so began Don Bosco's very famous Oratory.

Today, the Salesians continue Don Bosco's mission of creating the Oratory spirit in each school, parish, youth center, or other work. A home where young people are welcome, a school where they learn the lessons of life, a parish where they gather to deepen their spirituality, and a playground where they can meet friends. These offer a variety of dynamic activities designed to help young people reach their full potential and achieve happiness in this life and in the next.

## The beginning of Salesian Missionary work

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Catholic Church in Italy promoted the 'missions', that is the bringing of the Word of God to cultures and countries where it was not proclaimed.

Don Bosco wanted to be part of this missionary outreach. He constantly talked about Salesians becoming missionaries. In 1872 he had a dream concerning Salesians starting a mission in Patagonia, Argentina with indigenous people. His hope became

a reality in November 1875 when a group of ten Salesian missionaries sailed from Genoa to Argentina. Their initial work was with Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. In 1879 a missionary centre was set up with the indigenous people in Patagonia, Argentina.

On the 14th November 1877 the first missionary Salesian Sisters departed from Genoa for Uruguay, full of enthusiasm and zeal. Just three years later, in 1880, the second missionary expedition of the Salesian Sisters to Patagonia (Argentina) departed, as they followed their Salesian brothers who had prepared the way for their arrival.

The Salesian missionary movement had begun, and it is now located in 135 countries worldwide.

## The Salesian Missionary Approach

The educational principles and values Don Bosco used and learned at his Oratory directs the Salesian missionary ethos worldwide: meeting the young and particularly poor youth where they are and where they live, welcoming them, providing a safe place where their needs can be met, and enabling them to take charge of their lives

There are nearly 30,000 Salesian missionaries (priests, brothers and sisters) serving in 135 countries worldwide. Many are in the poorest places of the world. They work and live within the communities they serve building partnerships with governments and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) enabling them to quickly provide humanitar-

ian assistance when emergencies occur.

## 150th Anniversary

The 150th anniversary of the start of Salesian missionary work is an opportunity to reflect and to make this story better known. As our logo states: we give thanks, we rethink and relaunch.

Give thanks: We give thanks to God for the gift of missionary vocation.

**Rethink:** This is an opportune occasion to rethink and develop a renewed vision on the Salesian Missions in the light of new challenges.

**Relaunch:** We have not only a glorious history to remember and be grateful for, but we look to the future with missionary zeal and enthusiasm so that we may reach out to even more poor and abandoned youth.

## What is needed today?

Education is at the core of Salesian mission and today hunger is a big obstacle to the work. The UN estimated in 2023 that 783 million people, or more than 9% of the world's population, suffered from chronic hunger and more than 333 million people faced acute levels of food insecurity, an increase of almost 200 million people compared to pre-Covid levels.

Young people cannot learn on empty stomachs. Kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, technical colleges and shelters all offer food to the hungry. For many being able to get a meal encourages them to go to school. To mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary the Irish

Fr Dan Carroll



Fr Francis Trong, a native of Vietnam and now a Salesian missionary in Chile



Salesian community is starting a project to provide food for children and young people attending missionary schools. It will be known as 'Don Bosco Meals'.

What could you the reader do?

- Pray for missionaries, asking the Lord to strengthen their faith, hope and love as they encounter the impoverishment of our world.

- Pray also for the poorest and most vulnerable people of our world that, somehow, they escape the poverty that threatens to destroy their lives.

- You may wish to financially support a project or programme for needy people. Have a fundraiser in one's own circle or group of friends to promote Don Bosco's meals.

- Another possibility is to volunteer with Salesian mis-

missionaries.

- Please share your suggestions regarding being part of the Salesian missionary story. Always feel free to contact Don Bosco Aid at Salesian house, 45 St Teresa's Road, Crumlin, Dublin 12 XK52. Telephone 01 4650717. E-mail dba@salesiansireland.ie.

Finally, for Don Bosco the success of his projects was always due to the role of Mary, Help of Christians in his life. We put the renewal of the Irish Salesian missionary project in her care and we ask for her direction and guidance. We give thanks to God for this wonderful gift and we ask for the grace and faith to support, develop and make known the Salesian missionary story.

Fr Dan Carroll  
Director, Salesian Missions Ireland.



# Pioneer Sisters 175 years on... Missionary Sisters of the Assumption

On 15 December, 1849, a group of seven nuns from the Religious of the Assumption congregation in Paris arrived in Grahamstown, South Africa, under the leadership of 27-year-old Sr Marie Gertrude de Henningsen. They were invited by Wexford-born Bishop Aidan Devereux of the Eastern Vicariate of the then Cape of Good Hope to establish schools for girls, teach catechism and minister to the Catholic community. The Archbishop of Paris thought they were "all mad to consider the request". The Sisters were missioned to the Cape of Good Hope by Mère Marie Eugénie, (now St Marie Eugénie), Foundress and Superior of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris. Regardless of the risks of this venture into the unknown, Sr Marie Gertrude and her six companions were filled with zeal for this call to spread God's Kingdom.

Their journey was beset by dangers and conditions when they arrived were grim.

In her memoirs, Mother Gertrude wrote a harrowing account of their voyage from Antwerp to Port Elizabeth on a Belgian whaling ship, the *Océanie*. The journey took three months and they endured slavers, violent storms, mutiny and fire.

On 3 December 1849 the first religious Sisters to set foot in Africa, south of the Equator, arrived in Port Elizabeth. The sisters then travelled 120 km to Grahamstown by ox-wagon, having to drink scarce water from muddy puddles, encountering a huge cobra up-close, and dealing with the intense, unfamiliar heat. Despite all this, Amelia found herself falling in love with this strange, beautiful country.

Once in Grahamstown the sisters spent the first six months in rented accommodation until the bishop bought them a small piece of land, and they became the proud owners of a little cottage.

The Sisters immediately set up a dispensary using a much-treasured medicine chest they had brought with them from Paris, treating and bandaging wounds, mixing and dispensing medicines.

They started two schools, a fee-paying one in a room of the cottage, and a free school which began in converted stables.



Small business & savings groups from the Assumption Development Centre, Makhanda (Grahamstown) share their stories with Sr Maureen



After-school activities at the Assumption Nutrition Centre, Makhanda



Project teams from Caritas-DKDA, Kroonstad



Following in the footsteps of Mother Gertrude, a young woman from the Eastern Cape, Sr Pikelwethu makes her Final Vows in Grahamstown, February 2024



Fr Brian Brown congratulates Sr Mary Cunningham on her 70th Anniversary of Profession



Sisters and pupils of the Assumption Convent School, Malvern, Johannesburg



## In 1850 on Christmas Day the 8th Border War broke out.

It devastated the local farming community. Many children became orphans. Bishop Devereux brought these children to the convent and handed them into the Sisters' care. Suddenly, the cottage became home to 7 sisters and 100 orphans. Nearly every night a cannon signalled imminent attack on the town. Mother Gertrude and the sisters brought the orphans for safety and shelter to the nearby St Patrick's Church. It was at this time that Mother Gertrude became known as Notre Mère (our mother).

Mother Gertrude and her six sisters, as Religious of the Assumption, were under obedience to their Mother House in Paris to live according to the strictly ordered way of life in Paris. Instead, the beleaguered sisters were stretched to their limits staffing two schools, an orphanage and a dispensary, growing their own food, gathering cow dung as fuel, sewing late into the night to feed themselves and 100 orphans and frequently attending the sick and dying at night. The sisters prayed constantly.

In 1852, Mère Marie Eugénie, recalled the Sisters from the mission. The Sisters were to return to France and leave the orphans and schools to others. We cannot imagine the agony Mother Gertrude must have faced. She was a woman with few resources, little support and thousands of miles from home. Letters took about six months to exchange. Finally, following her conscience and trusting in Divine Providence, Mother Gertrude made the painful decision to remain in Grahamstown, where she and her sisters continued to serve the needs of the people and the local church.

Subsequently they became a separate congregation, the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption.

Over the years the sisters established schools, clinics and development projects in South Africa and beyond. Many young Irish women had joined the congregation. In 1932 the sisters came to Ireland and founded the Assumption Convent and High School in Ballynahinch, Co Down.

Today the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption, a small congregation, continue their mission in schools and adult education, development work and skills development for young people with special needs, bringing to all the message of hope and God's love for them.

THY KINGDOM COME



Sr Pikolwethu's family celebrate her Final Profession in Grahamstown (Makhanda)



MSA celebrate Sr Pikelwethu's Final Profession



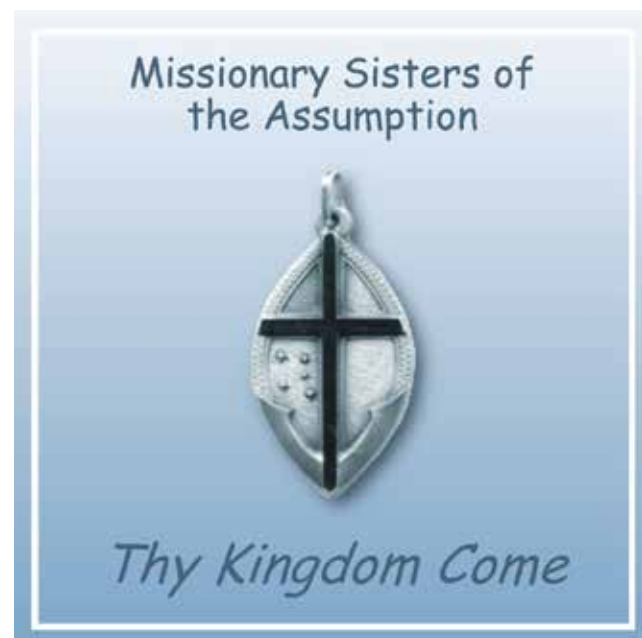
Novices sing at Profession ceremony



Young people learning sewing and baking at the Enkuthazweni- Beyond Limits Skills Development Centre, Port Alfred



Sr Kgomotso puts a question to you.....





# The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

## – Celebrating 10 decades of joyful service –

The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary was founded on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1924 in Killeshandra Co. Cavan, Ireland by Bishop Joseph Shanahan, a member of the Holy Ghost Congregation (Spiritans). He was motivated to found the congregation for the upliftment of the dignity of women and girls of Southern Nigeria where he was on mission at the time. While boys went to school, girls were left to take care of house chores as a way of preparing them for marriage and home management as was the belief. Bishop Shanahan saw education as a channel of evangelization and knowledge which he strongly believed would greatly help in the upliftment of the girl child and women folk. For him, proper education of women could be better done by women who were themselves educated. Although there were a few lay Irish women volunteers serving in the mission of Southern Nigeria at the time, he desired to have a group of women missionaries who would devote their entire life to this work. Therefore, he would establish a missionary congregation of women whose members would be wholly devoted to the education of women in Nigeria- in his own words *'without women missionaries, the young girl and the wife are inevitably neglected'*

He made several efforts to get a diocese in Ireland in which to establish this proposed missionary congregation of sisters. Eventually an encounter with the God-sent Bishop Patrick Finegan of Kilmore yielded the fruit he greatly desired. Bishop Finegan accepted that the congregation could be founded in his diocese. After much house hunting, Bishop Shanahan bought Drumully House and lands in Killeshandra, Co Cavan with a loan of £5,000 from the Ulster

Bank.

The courage, faith and perseverance of the first seven young women (six Irish and one American) saw the birth of the congregation when they entered in Killeshandra. The Dominican Sisters of Cabra, Dublin, were commissioned by Bishop Shanahan to undertake the formation of the new congregation. The Dominican Sisters worked with the new congregation for the first ten years of their foundation, and helped to put in place all that would lead to their autonomy. In 1928, the first group of five professed sisters left for Nigeria. Later, the Holy Rosary Sisters equally expanded and moved to other parts of the world to expand their missionary work.

The congregation has seen growth in both membership and ministry. They have moved from the education of girls and women only to inclusive education, health care services, pastoral work, community development, working with refugees, human rights advocacy and anti-human trafficking activities. They are also involved in care of the Earth, our common Home and care of the vulnerable with particular attention to children and young adults living with disabilities. The Sisters endeavour to implement the motto of Bishop Shanahan; *'Lord that I May See'* by seeing God in all of creation and seeking out new ways of being on mission today. At present, the Sisters serve in four continents - Africa, Europe, North and South America and the membership includes many sisters from these places. Intercultural living in community, sharing their vision for mission and breaking new ground in response to the needs of the time -those special gifts like perfect ingredients, blend well in expressing the missionary charism of the congregation.



*As the sisters celebrate one hundred years of their foundation and stand at the threshold of a new century, they hope and pray for more blessings and growth into the future.*

Sr Mary Kemjei MSHR



[www.miseancara.ie](http://www.miseancara.ie)

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