MISSION matters

WORLD MISSIONS IRELAND

Issue 3: September '19 *Newsletter for supporters of World Missions Ireland*

The missionary priest dedicating his life to nurturing communities of faith in Nigeria

Fr Michael Walsh is an Augustinian Missionary. Ordained in Dublin thirty-nine years ago, he first packed his bags for Nigeria at the age of just twenty-four. Originally from Knocklong in Limerick, he recollects being told during his time as a Novitiate that, 'a missionary's job, is to do him or herself out of a job'. Now based in the Diocese of Jalingo, which he estimates to be about half the size of Ireland, he spends his days 'preaching, hearing confessions...and listening'.

Pictured in his home this Summer, Michael holds a treasure to bring back to the children of Zing Parish

When he first arrived in Jalingo, 'there were fifty-three Irish Augustinian priests and brothers.' Today in 2019, 'there are one hundred and twelve Nigerian Augustinian priests and brothers, and four Irish.' Augustinian Missionaries first left for Nigeria in 1939, and by the mid-90s they had succeeded in enabling the local people to build and sustain their own communities of faith. 'When you've done the work, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church grows by itself', Michael proudly states. A statement that beautifully reflects Pope Benedict XV's hope in *Maximum Illud*, when he said, 'local Church, for local people'.

The proud history of Irish Missionaries goes back thousands of years, and it is estimated that between 1920 and 1970 alone, over 30,000 Irish women and men answered the call 'to go and preach the Good News to...

Michael's story continues on page six

Dear Friends,

It's 100 years since Pope Benedict XV's encyclical *Maximum Illud*. It signalled a new journey to understanding more fully the 'momentous call' of the Lord to 'go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation' (Mk 16:15) In commemoration, Pope Francis has declared October to be an Extraordinary Month of Mission. This special month of prayer and action calls us all to renew our missionary commitment by sharing the Good News of Jesus with all people. Throughout Ireland, parishes the length and breadth will hold events to reawaken and reinvigorate missionary hearts!

During this Extraordinary Month of Mission, we will also celebrate World Mission Sunday on 20th October. It's theme, 'Together We Are Mission', is a message for everyone. As Pope Francis said in his World Mission Sunday message, 'I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptised man and woman is a mission.' This goes to the heart of our baptismal call. It also challenges the idea that mission work is solely done by missionaries by asking you to consider the part your missionary heart plays in changing the lives of others.

World Mission Sunday brings the entire global Church together in support of mission. Our Church is a global community. We depend on one another, on our shared prayer, solidarity and generosity. This special papal collection recognises this by calling every parish, in every corner of the world, to stand together and share what they can towards mission – no matter how little.

Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly, SMA. Chair of the National Mission Council

The contributions offered on this day are essential for the survival of the Church. Funds are used to help build much needed church infrastructures, from chapels and clinics, to nurseries and schools - in some of the most impoverished communities in our Church family. It also supports the training and education of priests, brothers, sisters and catechists overseas. Through your ongoing support, World Mission Sunday not only helps the Church to survive, it allows it to thrive by enabling local people to form and sustain communities of faith.

On behalf of the missionaries, and the men, women and children's lives you change because of your on-going support of World Mission Sunday and World Missions Ireland I extend my gratitude. Together we are one of the largest communities of believers in the world - a global family where all can find refuge and shelter. Together we are mission!

+ Kieran O'Reilly

MISSIONARY UPDATE : Sister Veronkia, The Solomon Islands

Last summer we introduced you to Sr Veronika, a Sisters of Charity missionary. Originally from Croatia, Veronkia was staying with the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin, to improve her English ahead of her first missionary placement.

A year later, she is now in the remote village of Buma in The Solomon Islands. Recently Veronika contacted World Missions Ireland to thank you for your kindness. Your prayers and generosity make so much possible for missionaries like Veronika. You give her the means and strength to keep going, or as she says, you allow her to put her 'love into action'.

On page four we share with you her message of gratitude, beautifully told in her own words.

BECAUSE OF YOUR KINDNESS MISSIONARIES ARE:

Caring for our global Church family by building church infrastructures, so local people can sustain communities of faith

Enabling brighter futures by caring for vulnerable children through educational, medical, welfare and faith programmes

Nurturing the missionary spirit by educating the faithful about mission

Protecting our Church by training the priests, sisters and catechists of tomorrow

To make a gift call Fiona on 01 497 2035

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We respect everyone you help us to support. While stories are always true, names and images may be changed to protect people's privacy. Thank you for understanding.

My first missionary days are full of different experiences! Every new day teaches me what it means to be a missionary, and every one is unpredictable. Sometimes driving a pregnant woman to hospital, or accepting families whose houses were crushed by a hurricane. In our community, I mostly work with the young. They are very active and dedicated, which motivates me to do more. The biggest reward is their simplicity of heart – they don't have a lot, but they are sincerely grateful for every small thing you do.

On Saturdays we have youth gatherings, and in February we are starting an education programme for young girls who don't attend school. There are many girls who are forced to stay at home to work. The Sisters and I organise three-month programmes for them, to give them basic life skills and education. We are especially thankful to the World Missions Ireland supporters who donated money, it helped support this project.

Our parish is dedicated to the Holy Spirit, who inspires us daily through the great field of work with the sick, single mothers, abandoned children, and young people. The Spirit speaks through simple, everyday encounters. He speaks through little Veronica, who was abandoned by her parents, her eyes hide too much sadness for a six-year-old. Through the cheerfulness of Heda, her joy of seeing a banana for the first time after eye surgery! The Spirit speaks through Sosimo who has leprosy. In his fluent English, he recounts the days of his youth when he attended school and had great plans for the future. He is struggling. He walks to our clinic to take medicine. A deep glow in his eyes, but always a smile.

Our days are filled with a multitude of encounters, people, and life stories. Through them the Spirit invites, encourages and teaches us to be missionaries of compassionate love and instruments of His actions. On behalf of my community I would like to thank you all for supporting us spiritually and materially. Thank you for being drawn to our story, all part of the great work of the Holy Spirit. Let Him constantly inspire us as we walk beside Him!

When there is love, it doesn't matter if the umbrella is small! Sr Veronika with girls and boys from the community of Buma

TOGETHER

Every church, every parish and YOU in solidarity

WORLD MISSION SUNDAY
SUNDAY OCTOBER 20th

Play your part in the future of our Church by digging a little deeper during Mass collections, and praying a little harder on World Mission Sunday

EXTRAORDINARY MONTH OF MISSION PRAYER

Baptised and sent

Heavenly Father,
when your only begotten
Son Jesus Christ rose from the dead,
he commissioned his followers to
'go and make disciples of all nations'
and you remind us that through our
Baptism we are made sharers in
the mission of the Church.

Empower us by the gifts of
the Holy Spirit to be
courageous and zealous
in bearing witness to the Gospel,
so that the mission
entrusted to the Church, which
is still very far from completion,
may find new and efficacious
expressions that bring life and light
to the world.

Help us make it possible for
all peoples to experience the saving
love and mercy of Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever

Amen

all nations'. These people were not agents of any colonising power, just men and women - like Fr Michael - who went out into the world to share the universal beauty of their faith.

Traditionally mission work was a one-way service, with Irish missionaries going overseas to serve - but times have changed. In modern Ireland, as domestic vocations dwindle, the Church looks to the vocations boom that is happening in Africa and Asia. As Ireland welcomes sisters and brothers from these communities, it is beginning to benefit from its proud missionary heritage. In fact, many of these religious men and women would have heard and answered their call because of the influence that Irish missionaries had on their lives as children.

It is through their gentle and practical actions that missionaries share the pure beauty of their faith. Fr Michael speaks of a young man called Kenneth, 'from the parish of Zing. Kenneth is crippled, his back is hunched, probably from polio. Unless someone carried him, he could only move by dragging himself on one elbow.' Two years ago Michael helped get Kenneth a wheelchair. However, 'this year, Kenneth showed me his wheelchair's tyres, they were completely worn. I asked contacts in

Through the support of Fr Michael, Kenneth gained more than just a wheelchair, he gained his dignity

Nigeria to look out for similar tyres, but to no avail. So, on my last visit home I bought a pair from the Irish Wheelchair Association and brought them back with me.'

Kenneth is a living and breathing example of how the selfless actions of missionaries are still needed, and still relevant. Although much has changed since the heyday of Irish missionaries, some things remain essential for the missionaries of today – their personal desire to serve others, allied with the generous support of the Irish faithful.

During October and on World Mission Sunday, please keep missionaries like Michael in your thoughts, hearts and prayers.