

Overseas missionaries in crisis



When I saw the poverty in the villages, I cried for nights on end', says Sister Marie Catherine Kingbo.

Mother Marie Catherine, as her sisters call her, came from Senegal to Maradi, a village in Niger, West Africa, in 2006. It was here, on the edge of the desert, where she founded the 'Servants of Christ' congregation, the first Christian community in this predominantly Muslim country.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world. The West-African monsoon used to bring rain from May to October. But it's become increasingly rare. Famine and drought means that over 2.4 million, including

800,000 children, are starving and vulnerable, and there are no improvements in sight.



Niger's neighbouring countries bring the constant threat of invasion from the militant Islamic group - the Boko Haram fighters.

Women and girls endure the lion's share, mostly due to child marriage which can see girls of ten or...

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twelve being married to men old enough to be their grandfathers, and female genital mutilation, a cruel, centuries-old tradition, still widespread in Niger. It is nearly always carried out on young girls, sometime between infancy and adolescence. It has no health benefits, it only causes harm.

But there is hope

Sister Marie Catherine Kingbo and her fellow sisters fight not only poverty and drought, but these inhumane, and degrading practices that are a violation against human rights. In fact, much of their endless work is dedicated to the empowerment of girls and women.



When 16-year-old Sylvie looks hopefully to the future, it is due to Sister Marie Catherine. She is achieving incredible possibilities for girls threatened by terror and brutal traditions.

Each day the sisters rise at 5:30 am, starting with morning prayer and meditation. After breakfast they leave their community to tend to their countless social initiatives and

projects; which includes a school, nursery, health and feeding centre, and catechesis with the villagers.

Their community gardens and craft workshops give local people the tools they need to tackle hunger and poverty. Hygiene programmes show women how to make soap and the simple precautions needed to prevent the spread of malaria, cholera and now COVID-19. Their feeding centre allows maize to be distributed to those families who need it the most. While their school offers girls and boys the key to a better future - an education. It is only towards evening that the sisters come together again to pray the rosary or adoration.

Against the odds

Regardless of serving in a mostly male-dominated Muslim society, the sisters have still managed to gain the respect of Imams (Muslim religious leaders), village chiefs and the Sultan. Their work is not concerned with converting Muslims to Christianity, they simply, 'want to know the people and show them the tenderness of the Lord', says

Sr Félicité, a fellow sister of Marie Catherine.

Sister Marie Catherine is a champion of inter-religious dialogue. By

opening channels of conversation among village elders and imams, she is achieving incredible possibilities for the future of girls like Sylvie (pictured previous page) who is now allowed attend her school.

They need your help

But why should you care about overseas missionaries, when we ourselves are in such challenging times? The truth is underdeveloped countries like Niger simply can't handle the devastating implications of COVID-19. However we may be suffering, just spare a thought for the men, women and children from the communities served by Sister Marie Catherine. These people are already forced to survive alongside endless hardships - political conflict,

violence, drought, extreme poverty, malnutrition and diseases.

However, Sister Marie Catherine remains hopeful, 'the symbol of our congregation is a large cross in a little boat. Our community is young and small', explains Mother Marie Catherine 'but our devotion and trust in God is great. Our little boat is not easily rocked, even by big waves!'

The people of Niger need missionaries like Sister Marie Catherine, and Sister Marie Catherine needs the support of people like you.

Please support our overseas missionaries serving around the world today



**Phone Fiona:
01 497 2035**



**Visit:
www.wmi.ie/mission**



The sisters bring hope. 'We want to know the people and show them the tenderness of the Lord', says Sister Félicité Sampo.

Dear friend of missionaries, a significant event marks World Mission Sunday 2020 - the COVID-19 pandemic, which is raging throughout the planet. Indeed, our world, especially the most disadvantaged areas, will be dealing with its effects for many years to come.

Here in Ireland, many families are grieving the loss of a beloved family member. Our medical services personnel, our frontline staff, have shown themselves to be truly heroic in their service to the sick. They have, through their unstinting commitment and professionalism, shown to our society what it means to truly care for our brothers and sisters. They are, in the words of Pope Francis, operating in one of the most critical 'field hospital' situations of our time. Their witness of care and solidarity to those who are fragile has been a powerful sign and antidote to the individualism found in modern culture.

However, on World Mission Sunday, our thoughts go beyond our island to the families, especially in the mission countries, who have also lost loved ones. In every part of the world, the human heart is filled with sadness when a member of the family dies. It is particularly difficult for families when those who die receive only limited medical care. They are part of our prayer intentions but also, we must see how we can assist them practically through our financial offering, however little that may be.



**Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly, SMA
Archbishop of Cashel & Emly
Chair of the National Mission Council**

World Missions Ireland has adopted the following theme for this year's Mission Month: 'Together we can do more: Blessed are the peacemakers.' A new world order is emerging from the global pandemic. We now live in a world that calls us to act in solidarity with our neighbours both near and far. Through World Mission Sunday, it is possible for you to reach out and participate in this mission.

In this time of uncertainty, Pope Francis asks us, 'to invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. To hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them, like the disciples, we will experience that with Jesus on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength turning to the good what happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.'

+ Kieran O'Reilly

Together we can do more

Blessed are the peacemakers (Mt 5:9)



WORLD MISSION SUNDAY

18th October 2020

The world is in crisis. In many poorer parishes in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, it is missionaries who are on the front line. These women and men already do so much. Walking hand-in-hand with marginalised communities, long before and long after any emergency. But right now, they desperately need your help.

Show missionaries you care by supporting their life-giving work on World Mission Sunday and throughout October. Your prayers and generosity will change lives.

Donate towards the life-giving work of missionaries now!
www.wmi.ie/mission or call Fiona on **01 497 2035**

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