

## HOPE INSPIRES VICTORY FOR KENYAN WOMAN

*Last year, Fr. Frank Wright, SMA departed from his longtime parish of St. Joseph's in the Jericho section of Nairobi, Kenya. He now serves as pastor of St. Ann's Church in Mataara (near Thika). A priest of incredible drive and commitment, he continues to devote himself to two pet projects: Finding funds to send deserving youngsters to school and helping impoverished women to find dignified work and become self-supporting.*



**Mass at Mataara - Fr. Frank Wright, SMA celebrates Mass in St. Ann's Church in Mataara.**

*Here he reflects on one woman from his former parish whose story is an inspiration to those whose lives are touched by her.*

### Reported by

#### Fr. Frank Wright, SMA

Doris Otieno is a Kenyan woman who has been HIV-positive for almost seven years. At one point, she was so ill that someone looking at her photo from that time would not recognize the woman she is today. A dynamic mother of two children who has also become "fairy godmother" to many others, Doris defies the "HIV" and lives the "positive" in her life, inspiring others to do the same.

Doris hails from western Kenya and got married before coming to live in Nairobi. Shortly after the death of her husband in 1997, Doris learned that she, too, was HIV positive. Thankfully, her children do not test positive for the virus. Doris' plight is not unusual in her country. Conservative estimates

say about 10 per cent of the people in Kenya are HIV-positive. What is unusual is that Doris has decided to face the challenge squarely. She is the founder of an advocacy group for HIV-positive women in the Eastlands area of Nairobi. This group is run exclusively by the women themselves who struggle to obtain food, schooling, medical treatment, and other types of assistance.

Doris is an articulate advocate for them, and her position is a very challenging one. Despite the rhetoric from governments and international organizations about assisting people with AIDS, the help often does not get directly to the people who need it.

The Kenyan government offers some aid; however, there are still serious problems. Though primary education is now free in Kenya, school supplies must be paid for by parents. Families also bear all expenses, tuition and supplies, of secondary-level education. Doris works to help those who cannot afford this. From the meager funds of SMA priests, she has been able to place

two children in secondary schools, but there are many others who also need help.

Support from SMA enabled Doris to complete a course in HIV counseling at the Liverpool Health Centre in Nairobi where she honed the practical skills already developed in her advocacy work, and she also earned official certification. Now Doris has a full-time job as a counselor and can support her own family while helping other women to help themselves.

Doris is also a liberator, working to set her people free from the stigma of HIV. Many of those in her area of Makadara-Hamza, a part of Jericho parish, are afraid to reveal that they are HIV-positive. Doris is quite willing to do so. She realizes it is only by being open, and by disseminating information about proper use of ART (the cocktail of drugs that keeps HIV-positive people stable) and about nutrition, that people can continue to live full and healthy lives and take care of their children. Doris is living proof of this...and of the fact that one faith-filled person can make a difference.

Her story is a reflection of the Easter promise...an affirmation that through the life-giving Christ, our faith and support for one another can transform defeat into triumph. Through her God-given courage and with the help of SMA and other supporters, Doris Otieno is transforming the meaning of HIV into "hope inspires victory" for women and children in her community and living her witness to the Easter promise of renewal and life.

**ALLELUIA**

# FR. ALBERT COONEY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS AS AN SMA PRIEST



Fr. Albert Cooney, SMA, celebrated the golden anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on February 5. At the age of 80, he now serves in Kenya. Born in Ireland, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1955 and began his mission service in Liberia where he served for 16 years. He also served throughout the USA and in Australia and the Bahamas. Fr. Cooney retired in 1995, yet continued to assist in parishes in the Diocese of Venice, Florida.

*He's Golden - Fr. Al Cooney in Kenya where he continues his missionary service.*

In 2002, when SMA was seeking a priest for a new mission in Nairobi, Kenya, Fr. Cooney - at the age of 77 - agreed to take on the challenge. "I had to go back. "Mission just gets into your bones," he had said. His first parish there was Mary Mother of God in the suburb of Embul-bul. He now serves at Mbagathi Center, a missionary guest house in a suburb of Nairobi. "Missionaries from throughout Kenya come to visit and to have meetings," he explained.

"I feel blessed to have had this many years of life. I didn't expect it," said Fr. Cooney who is one of several SMA priests serving in Africa at a stage of life when most people are retired. "Mission keeps your mind off yourself. You don't



*First Mission Assignment - Young SMA Fathers Philip Carrigan, Albert Cooney, Philip Bagnasco and Owen O'Sullivan prepare to leave for Liberia in 1956.*

have time to dwell on your own needs or problems." You see so many other people and their needs. Your heart goes out to them. You want to help them in any way you can." "This is what I was ordained for," he said. "I am a missionary, and I will do this until I cannot anymore."

***MANY THANKS & GOD BLESS YOU, FR. AL***

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2005



**Drummer Bernadette McGowen (left) teaches a workshop during the annual SMA Black History Month Celebration at American Province Headquarters in Tenafly, New Jersey.**

**The two-day event, held last February 12-13, featured African films, presentations by African journalists and a United Nations consultant, sampling of African foods, and lively cultural programs.**

# FOUNDATION DAY AT SMA



**Friendship in Faith - Deacon Keith McKnight, SMA Vocations Director, enjoys a moment with members of the Franciscan Handmaids following the special Foundation Day liturgy.**

Each year on December 8, SMA branches around the world celebrate Foundation Day, the anniversary of the founding of SMA in 1856 by Bishop Melchior de Marion Bresillac. Last December, the American Province was honored to welcome special guests to our celebration: Members of the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. This order was founded in George in 1916 by Fr. Ignatius Lissner, the first Provincial Superior of the American Province.

While serving in the South, where he established Catholic parishes and schools for African-Americans, Fr. Lissner realized the need to have black religious sisters (and black clergy) who could help minister to their own people. Some years later, as the black population grew in Harlem, the sisters relocated to New York. Today, they have locations in Harlem and Staten Island. Many thanks to the Franciscan Handmaids for sharing SMA's history in the USA.

## AN EASTER MESSAGE FROM SMA

By Fr. Tom Wright, SMA

The Easter season brings a great surge of hope. Jesus gave his followers a message that has been handed down to us: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Christ crucified, dead and risen is the foundation of our life, the One we follow whether times are good or difficult. The primary mission of the Society of African Missions is to share the Good News of Easter with the people of Africa and those of African descent. Next year, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of our humble beginnings. SMA continues our mission in 17 different African countries. God has blessed us with approximately 250 seminarians worldwide. We look forward with hope to a future of Easter joy.

At the same time, we confront difficult realities today in Africa. We struggle along with the people who face poverty with great dignity, as they try to provide food, shelter, medical care and education for their families. We strive for justice based on Christian principles, so the people can live in peace and security. One of the biggest challenges in Africa today is the catastrophic situation in the Darfur region of Sudan where genocidal policies have resulted in the killing of hundreds of thousands of people. Countless millions have been forced from their homes and endure human rights abuse on a daily basis. Our Province is involved in projects to raise awareness of this crisis and to encourage the world community to honor the promise made after the terrible slaughter in Rwanda ten years ago: "Never again."

Christ is the Light of the World. His light infuses our lives. As we live in His light, our prayers and actions reflect it to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. May God bless you for all that you do in sharing our mission and helping the light of Christ to continue to shine more and more brightly in Africa and at home.

# HOW YOU CAN HELP



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**TAKE ACTION FOR AFRICA**  
SMA's Lenten petition drive "Make a Difference for Darfur," urges our government leaders to take action to halt and heal the atrocities in Sudan, particularly the Darfur region. For info on how you can help: visit us at [www.smafathers.org](http://www.smafathers.org)

**PLEASE PRAY FOR AFRICA**

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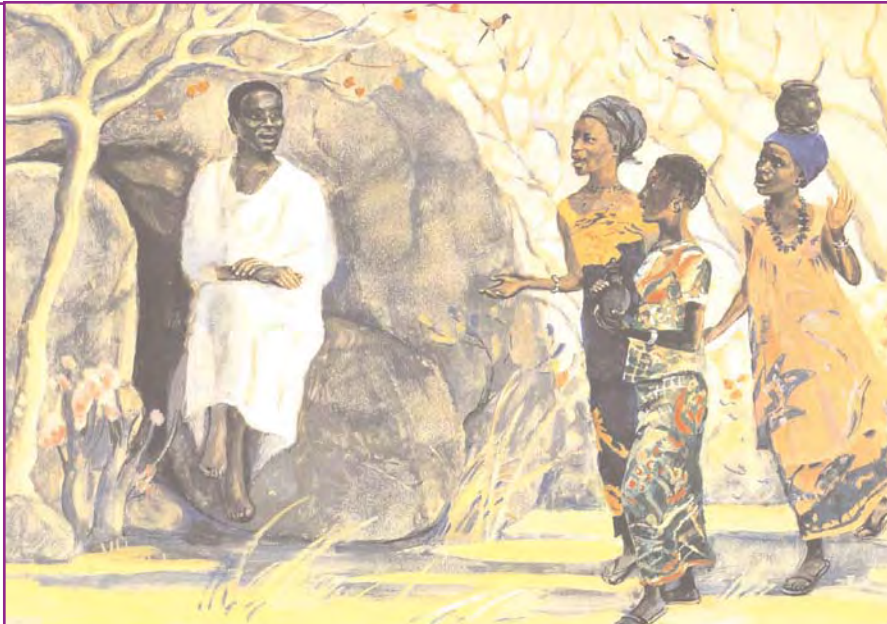
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*The Empty Tomb*  
Photo courtesy of  
(Vie de Jesus MAFA)

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