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## LIBERIAN REFUGEE FINDS RENEWED LIFE IN GHANA



*Steve Phillips is an SMA Lay Missionary serving in Buduburam, the Liberian Refugee Camp in Ghana. He shares his story of a young woman, aptly named Mamie Free, whose spirit reflects the liberating joy of the Easter season.*

Mamie Free is a beautiful person. At 26, she has a calm and intelligent demeanor, and usually gets around with someone pushing her wheelchair. Like many others with disabilities in the camp, Mamie suffered injuries during the war in Liberia, but was unable to receive adequate treatment until she escaped. Now in therapy at Nsawam Orthopedic Training Center (OTC) in Accra, Ghana, Mamie wrote the following account of her ordeal.

*I, Mamie Free, write to inform you of my plight. On September 24, 1990, rebel forces captured the James Spriggs Payne Airfield where my family lived in Liberia. Searching for supporters of the former President Samuel K. Doe, they entered our home, took my father outside, and began questioning him. After finding out his ethnic identity (Sammy Free, a police training officer), they shot him in the head. The rebels then began shooting at us. They shot me, and damaged my ability to walk. I was 13 years old.*

*I could not get proper treatment until two years later. Though fighting continued in Liberia with violence between the rebels and peacekeeping troops, I managed to undergo surgery with the aid of the*

*peacekeepers. The bullet was removed, but I still couldn't walk, so I was given a walker to assist me.*

*We were forced into exile and lived in an Ivory Coast refugee camp. I visited the local hospital and was transferred to Abidjan, the capital. There, I visited Treicheville Hospital, but a doctor said he could not help my condition. Three years later, a long-term civil war broke out in Ivory Coast.*

*We suffered greatly at that time, mainly because of our ethnicity.*



**NEW LIFE FOR FREE** - Mamie Free, a Liberian refugee, is recovering from disabilities caused by a bullet wound. She is living in Ghana and receives therapy that has put her on the mend.

*Fearing for our lives, we fled to Ghana and now live at the Buduburam Refugee Camp. The camp clinic doctor referred me to a hospital in Accra where a doctor examined me, but gave a poor prognosis. I later met Steve Phillips, an SMA lay missionary. With his help I was referred to a specialist who is from Holland and has been working at the OTC in Accra for more than 25 years. This is where I am now.*

The trials that affected Mamie and her family were devastating. They lost loved ones and suffered abuse by soldiers. But Mamie never gave up in her quest for healing. The specialist at OTC examined her and felt the prognosis could be good. She has sensation in both lower limbs and good muscle tone in her thighs. However, when Mamie uses her walker or stands up, her support comes from her upper body. Her legs, weakened from disuse, just drag along.

The specialist believes that with intensive physical therapy and more ankle support in her footwear, Mamie could show significant improvement. He recommended daily therapy for one month and a re-evaluation at the end of that time. Already, Mamie has increased sensation in both legs and can wiggle her toes and lift her legs.

*With prayer and plenty of loving support from Steve and the medical specialists, Mamie may one day overcome her affliction entirely to become as free as her name.*

## THEY'RE NEW AT SMA



Two new lay missionaries were commissioned last December at the SMA Lay Missionary Formation Center in Takoma Park, Maryland. SMA also welcomes a new affiliate member.

Jun Apilado is from Fairfield, California. He and his wife, Evelyn, are the parents of five children and also have three granddaughters. As a couple, they ran a program to feed hundreds of homeless people in California, but had the desire to do more for others. Jun is an electrician with experience in building and construction. He is now serving in Tanzania. Evelyn is also in Tanzania, supporting the work of our missionaries there.

### NOW SERVING - (l to r) Sean Hogan and Jun & Evelyn

Sean Hogan was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and grew up in Missouri, the eldest of nine siblings. A multi-talented man, he holds a degree in Art History and is trained in radio broadcasting. Sean has served as a VISTA volunteer and has worked for social service agencies in Seattle where he developed a capacity for working with the disabled and mentally ill. Yet he felt a calling to do more with his life. An interest in Africa led him to explore missionary service. I want to turn my life over to God, he said, and I want to make a difference for people who are deeply in need. Sean's first SMA missionary assignment is to Ghana. May God bless our new missionaries as they take up service in our Jubilee Year and continue to live the Gospel in Africa.



## LIBERIA: A TIME TO BE (RE) BORN

After 14 years of civil war and misrule, Liberia is moving forward. Last January, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn in as Liberia's president, making her that nation's first elected head of state since 2003 and Africa's first elected female leader.

"She has her work cut out for her," said Fr. Ted Hayden, an SMA missionary priest serving in Liberia. "Unemployment is over 80 per cent. The capital city, Monrovia, has no running water or electricity. Roads are terrible, and education and health services suffered badly during the war," he said.

Educated at Harvard University, the former World Bank economist is an experienced politician and was head of the United Nations Development Program for 50 African countries. The president says her top challenge during her six-year term is to maintain peace, law and order after years of violence and suffering.



### INAUGURAL - Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf takes the oath of office.

"If she can surround herself with honest and competent people, she can begin to rebuild essential services," said Fr. Hayden. He added, "Liberians have a popular saying, 'With God and a determined mind, all things are possible.'"

The new president seems to have both. Known as "Iron Lady" for her resolve, her faith is apparent from her inaugural speech delivered last January. "Let us first praise Almighty God, the arbiter of all affairs of humankind whose omnipotent hand

guides and steers our nation," she began. President Johnson-Sirleaf also paid tribute to Archbishop Michael K. Francis of Monrovia, calling him "the conscience of our nation." Archbishop Francis, a friend of SMA who has appeared often on these pages, has been a bold and outspoken critic of Liberia's corrupt leadership. (See item on next page).

The president vowed to wage a war on Liberia's "major public enemy" - corruption. She also asked the support of the United States in rebuilding Liberia, especially so the young people can have hope for a future and not fall into rebellion and violence again.

"More than 50 per cent of the population is under 19," said Fr. Hayden. "These Liberians only ask for the chance to attend well-staffed and well-equipped schools." He continued, "Liberians are tired of conflict and war," said Fr. Hayden. "They want and deserve peace."

## ALL THINGS ARE MADE NEW (Rev. 21:5-8)

By Fr. Michael Moran, SMA



With the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, *everything* becomes a New Creation. All things are made new through Him with Him and in Him. For through the death and resurrection of Our Lord, we have opened to us the hope of new life and faith. The Easter event is not just about Jesus dying on the cross. Or about His rising from the dead. It is about His entire life lived in simple and complete faith. No matter the consequences.

Jesus was both praised and criticized by people, sometimes for the same action. Praised for healing the sick, but criticized for doing so on the Sabbath. Hailed by some, but reviled by others for associating with tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus' life was not about seeking praise or even justification from others. It was about doing the will of God. This came to fulfillment in the manner of His death. Publicly humiliated and condemned. Abandoned by almost everyone. Completely innocent, but found guilty...*and quickly*.

It was His faith that enabled him to assent to His Father's will...that gave Him the strength to endure...that made the Resurrection possible. Even in the darkest hour of the universe, His faith saved, by giving him the knowledge that God is in control and has a plan for all of creation.

How fortunate we are to be part of His *New Creation*, to be part of Him. We do not stand with the world but rather look to be one with Jesus who is the Alpha and the Omega. Easter is about us being one with Him and forgetting what the world has to say about us. Easter is about us believing in God's power and glory. Easter is about freedom from the things of this world. Easter is about the *New Creation*.

Our prayers go out in a special way to the people of Liberia. They begin a new chapter of their history. They have seen the darkness that comes with terror and hatred. They have tasted the obscurity that greed and power bring. I know that it is their faith that will move them from this obscurity to the light and to His Creation. Liberians often say, First of all I thank God. And so let it be. To Him be the glory forever. AMEN



*Fr. Michael Moran served in Liberia during some of that nation's most turbulent years. He is now vice-provincial of the American Province and director of the SMA-USA Justice & Peace Department.*

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LIBERIA



*Celebrating 100 Years  
&  
A Century of SMA Service in Liberia*

**Archbishop Michael Francis of Liberia chats with Fr. Ted Hayden, an SMA missionary priest who has served more than two decades in Liberia.**

**Please keep Archbishop Francis in your prayers as he recovers from the effects of a serious stroke. We thank God for his courage and leadership in Liberia.**



**Jimmy Neary (l) and Fr. Brendan Darcy, SMA share a moment.**

## HAPPY BIRTHDAYS

This year, SMA celebrates its 150th birthday. The Catholic Church in Liberia honors its 100th anniversary. And SMA marks a century of service in both Liberia and the USA missions. Our supporters helped make these milestones possible. Here are some stories about how their birthdays help increase ours.

### A GENEROUS HELPING

Jimmy Neary, owner of the popular *Neary's*, a fashionable restaurant in New York City, turned 75 last September 14. To celebrate the occasion, he donated the entire day's intake at his restaurant - about \$3,000 - to the Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund established by SMA. "America's been good to me, so I wanted to give something back," explained Neary who came from Ireland to the USA as a young man. He now lives in New Jersey with his family and often attends Mass at the SMA chapel in Tenafly. "My faith is a very important part of my life," he affirms.

Neary's generosity was contagious. Loyal customers were so impressed, they added their own contributions to the restaurant's donation, bringing the total up to \$10,000. "It was overwhelming, and so typical of Jimmy to do something like this," said Fr. Brendan Darcy, an SMA priest and longtime friend of the Neary family. The donation was sent by SMA to the Blessed Sacrament Sisters in New Orleans who tended to victims of the devastating storm. Many thanks to Jimmy Neary!!

### A VOCATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD...and you!

Fr. Pat Kelly, SMA, has great news...vocations are not scarce after all. "Many young men want to be priests today. In fact, SMA currently has over 250 seminarians," he said. However, most of them come from Africa, Asia and South America, places where faith is strong, but funding for priestly training is scarce. An energetic SMA of the Irish Province, Fr. Pat now travels the USA and Europe seeking support for these vocations, especially through his birthday project. "This will assure a new generation of missionary priests and of people who will support their work," explained Fr. Pat.

"I'm asking people to make a gift to God on their birthday every year by making a donation to SMA," he explained. Fr. Pat will send a birthday card each year as thanks. Some people have pledged a day's salary each year. Some children offered a full week's allowance. "Everybody can afford to give something, no matter how small," he noted. "My first donation in the USA was one dollar from a homeless man in Washington D.C."

"To include you on our birthday list, all I need is your name, address, and the day and month of your birth. Looking forward to hearing from you. God bless you."

**Fr. Pat Kelly (r) is invited to gatherings at homes and churches to celebrate his birthday program. You can arrange one, too.**



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