

FRONTLINE REPORT



Society of African Missions
American Province

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Doing Something in the Face of AIDS!

What comes to mind when you hear the word “AIDS”—images of emaciated victims, death, dying, orphans? The devastating effects on the family and society truly are immense. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a scourge in today’s world. It demands our attention.

According to the UN AIDS agency, in the past 25 years, 65 million people have been infected and 25 million have died. Right now, 33 million are living with the virus, 22 million of them in Africa. And of the 290,000 children under 15 who died of AIDS last year, 260,000 were African children. Says the U.N.: “*In the 21st century, we are all living with HIV, and we must all be part of the response.*”

What can be done?

There are many aspects to AIDS ministry. The following is the response of the Ilemela AIDS Outreach Program in Mwanza, Tanzania to the AIDS crisis. Their programs include testing, counseling and treatment for HIV+ patients; support groups for the patients and their caretakers; a program for the AIDS orphans; and the Uzima Center building to host the programs. **S.M.A. Lay Missionary Jen Viola** spent the last three years working with the AIDS orphans in the Ilemela



Above: Lilian hangs on to her bottle of milk provided at Uzima Center. Where it is a struggle for parents to provide enough food for their families, supplementary feedings for the children help to provide extra nutrition.



Above: Jen Viola, S.M.A. Lay Missionary, provides activities for over 48 orphans who come to Uzima Center. Activities include games, reading, workshops and a healthy snack “for the road”—some children walk 2- 4 miles to come to the Center. Ugali (cornmeal porridge) gives them strength and energy for the walk home.

AIDS Project. She has shared in the joys and sorrows of this ministry. Her skills as a Recreational Therapist have been put to good use in working with the orphans. The Program has grown, and Jen has been instrumental in gaining some partial local funding. She has come to know and love the people and shared in their joys and struggles. Life is not easy for the orphans.

Serving in the missions often calls for a response to need. In Mwanza, Tanzania, S.M.A. Affiliate member Evelyn Apilado saw that the children who were HIV+ did not have a place to go to school. Her heart went out to them and she began the Shalom Preschool Project. Her goal was to provide the children a place to play, learn, sing, and make crafts. She also saw the importance of providing a snack for them before they left for home. Lawreen McBride, S.M.A. Lay Missionary, joined Evelyn in the Shalom Preschool ministry and also helps out with organizing the office of the Diocesan Shalom AIDS Project.

The S.M.A. Fathers in their parishes see the devastating effect AIDS has on families and the community. Pastorally they visit with the patients and support the families of the AIDS victims, offering spiritual consolation and practical help in the form of food and medicine. Everyone must do what they can to deal with this pandemic. Help is needed and greatly appreciated!



A Dream Fulfilled

From India to Africa

Fr. Thomas T. Simon

Monsignor Melchior de Marion Bresillac spent twelve years serving the Church in India from 1842 to 1854 as a member of the Paris Foreign Mission Society. As a member of this missionary society, he was ordained a Bishop and hoped to stay in India for the rest of his life. However, God had other plans for him.

As a result of the resistance by many European missionaries to de Bresillac's far-sighted plans of establishing a local clergy, and because of insurmountable difficulties in breaking through the crippling caste system, de Bresillac made the painful decision to leave India. He was convinced that he would never return nor would he see his dreams of the formation of a local Indian clergy realized. Dispirited, he returned to France where after much soul-searching, he was led by God to found the Society of African Missions on December 8, 1856. The new Society would have, as one of its aims, the formation of an African clergy. Could he ever have imagined that one day, a large number of missionaries would come forth from his beloved India, join S.M.A. and offer their lives in service to Africa? It is happening!

Today there is a vibrant S.M.A. Indian-District-in-Formation (I.D.F.).

Fr. Thomas T. Simon, S.M.A., who is working in New Jersey for the IDF Development Office, tells us there are currently 31 ordained S.M.A. priests with 2

ordinations to the priesthood and 5 ordinations to the Diaconate this May. There are 76 Indian seminarians in the various stages. Yes, there is abundant life in the I.D.F.

Fr. Simon was born in Ooty, a town 80 miles away from where the Founder served in India. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 17, 1998 and his first appointment was to Zambia where he served in the Diocese of Solwezi for five years. He writes: *This is the place for Primary Evangelization—there are many places where the Word of God has not yet been preached. S.M.A.s are contributing towards the translation of the Bible into the local language. Learning the local language was my first task.* Like de Bresillac, sensitive to the new culture, Fr. Simon says: *It is important to learn the history, culture and heritage of the people to get to know, understand and serve them better.*

In the Diocese of Solwezi, there are 14 parishes and some of them have over 50 outstations. Each parish is comprised of many villages. For example, I was stationed at Kabompo, a parish center with 26 out-stations. The closest village, Mingeli, is 10 miles away and Kayombo, the farthest, is 102 miles away. When we had three priests, it was possible to cover all the villages for Masses and other pastoral needs at least once a month. When there are only one or two priests for all the villages, the catechists and the Eucharistic ministers conduct

Sunday.

When we go to the villages for Mass and other Sacraments, we spend the whole day with the villagers. They are very welcoming and hospitable. We eat what is set before us. The Church leaders usually come with the list of sick people to visit. We go to their homes and pray for them. Then in the evening, the whole village is gathered at the Church to sing, to dance and to discuss the issues of the village.

At night, the priest sleeps in the church, a mud structure with a thatched roof. The next day, we proceed to the next village and do the same. After covering all the villages in the area, we come back to the main parish. The day of the Mass is a day of joy and real celebration for the people. So we too rejoice with them.

The Church in Africa is the fastest growing in the world. *The number of adults who embrace the Catholic Church every year is on the increase. The program for the Adult Catechumens (RCIA) is well established in all the villages. The adults are well prepared for two years to receive the sacrament of Baptism. Accompanying them in their spiritual journey is one of the most important pastoral activities of the missionaries.*

Fr. Simon sees that the needs are great. In the mission areas, people also depend on the church for their social needs. He worked with the refugees from Angola and the agriculture development in Kabompo. He encourages the laity to share in this mission, helping out where they can, to make life better for those in need.

Congratulations to our S.M.A. Jubilarians



Fr. Thomas (Ted) Hayden, S.M.A. on February 3, 2008 celebrated the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination. He currently is serving in Barrake, Liberia, in a parish that he worked

in earlier during his priestly life and which was built by Mr. Tony Riggio, an SMA lay missionary in the early 60's.

Fr. Hayden has worked in a number of countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya). He was ordained by Cardinal Cushing on the 3rd of February 1958 in Boston, MA. He remains to date a fan of the Red Socks.

During most of his life he has been called to work in administrative posts. He was director of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Liberia and Ghana, Provincial of the American Province from 1978-83, Vice Provincial (1973-78, 2001-04), to name just a few.

We wish him many more good years of joy and fulfillment in service to Our Lord and to His Church.

Fr. Edward (Ed) Biggane, S.M.A. celebrated the 50th Anniversary of his priestly ordination on February 8, 2008. Fr. Ed resides at S.M.A. Headquarters in Tenafly, NJ. where he gives a cordial welcome to visitors. When his editing or other skills are needed, he is happy to help out

Fr. Biggane worked in a number of places for the American Province. Just after being ordained he was assigned to Liberia where he served until 1962 and he returned to Liberia for another 2 years in 1966.

A good portion of his time was spent in academia, serving on the faculties of: Queen of Apostles Seminary (1962-66, 73-74), Mary-



knoll (74-78) and Holy Family College in Philadelphia (1984-2004). He was also on the administration in Rome (1968-73) and in the US (1978-83).

May God continue to bless him and all his endeavors.

Congratulations to our new S.M.A. Deacon



Above: (L-R) Deacon Eliecer Sandoval, S.M.A. and S.M.A. Vocation Director Deacon Keith McKnight.

The S.M.A. American Province is pleased to announce that **Eliecer Sandoval, S.M.A.**, will be ordained to the Diaconate on June 8, 2008 at the St. Anthony Chapel in the Provincial House of the SMA Fathers in Tenafly, NJ. Eliecer first joined S.M.A in 2001 when he became an S.M.A. Lay Missionary and served in the Diocese of Cape Palmas, Liberia, helping in the Caritas Development Office. Later, he was assigned to the Hope for Life Project in Accra, Ghana. When he returned to the U.S. he felt called to the priesthood and was encouraged in his discernment process by Deacon Keith McKnight, the S.M.A. Vocation Director. He was accepted as an S.M.A. Seminarian in September 2004. Eliecer has words of encouragement for those discerning their vocation. "He says: *God has a wonderful plan for each person. It is with His grace (and lots of prayer) that we can discern our life vocation and embrace it. It is also our freedom to respond to this call and be able to experience peace and profound joy.* "

"It is God who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace."

(II Timothy 1:9)

THE LITTLE PICTURE: A Reflection

by Fr. Frank Wright, S.M.A.

During the course of this election year, we have become used to pundits of all kinds trying to give us the “big picture” about the economy and the environment—all those “e” words. The only problem is that once you have a handle on the big picture, it becomes just all too easy to forget about the “little picture,” about all those little pictures that go to make up someone’s interpretation of the state of the country or the state of the world.

A good example of the above is the coverage in the media on the crisis in Kenya since the beginning of the year. Most of the time the savants boil down the crisis to a question of ethnicity: Kikuyus against Luos, the Mungiki militia against the “Taliban” militia, or anybody else’s private army. Readers then sit back comfortably, secure in the knowledge that they have gotten a grasp of the crisis, whittled it down to size, as it were.

After fourteen years on the missions in Kenya, I cannot allow myself the same luxury.

Since the beginning of the year, I have received a flood of e-mails



Fr. Frank Wright, S.M.A. takes time to visit a widow in his Parish, St. Ann Mataara, Kenya, to offer prayers and support to the family in their time of loss. Fr. Frank served for fourteen years in the missions in Kenya. He is now in the Province Administration in the U.S.

from my friends and former parishioners. The Luo lady that crafts the jewelry that I market in the States as part of a micro-enterprise project had to hide for part of the time along with her two sons. My former driver, who is a Kamba, had to flee his home for a while following the murder of a local MP, because his door had been marked with an X.

I was sitting around the supper table with some of my Kenyan parishioners visiting at the S.M.A. Lay Mission house in Maryland and learned that the area around

the church had been kept free from roving gangs, because the youth of the parish from all ethnic groups had chosen to sleep outside the two-storey apartment blocks.

Each of these images forms its own “little picture” and reminds me that the repercussions of big events are played out in the lives of ordinary people. When we in the SMA work for a more accurate understanding of Africa and African events, it is always with the “little pictures” in mind.



Rita Martor was accepted into the Korle-bu Nursing School Training College, Accra, Ghana in October 2007, through funds provided by S.M.A. Rita writes:

Dear Father,

I was informed that you provided the funds for my tuition fees. I want to say thanks for all you have done to make it possible for me to gain admission to the Korle-bu Nursing Training College. Things are going on well, though the course is a bit stressful. It is very interesting especially when we go on rotation at the hospital. I really enjoy going to the wards because we are able to learn faster and easily, since everything is practical. I would like to say thanks once more and I am very grateful. May the Good Lord richly bless you as you strive in His Vineyard.

Yours faithfully,

Rita Rose Martor