

Society of African Missions (S.M.A.)

Easter Newsletter

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CHRIST IS RISEN, ALLELUIA!



Announcement

Rev. Michael Bova's, S.M.A., ordination to the priesthood will take place on Saturday, September 14th, 2019 at 1:00pm at St Anthony's Chapel, 23 Bliss Ave. Tenafly, NJ. It is the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross! Everyone is welcome to join and witness such a significant event!

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"What do you seek? Honours? Then do not come here. Joys of the ministry? Then do not come here. Friendship, gratitude, consolations, a return Bishop for all you have done? Then do not come here. However, if, faithful to your vocation, you accept the life of sacrifice and all that that means; if you seek Jesus, Jesus alone, Jesus the poor man, Jesus the humble and humiliated man, Jesus the crucified man, then come!"-

Marion de Bresillac - (Founder of The Society of African Missions).

The Presence of S.M.A. Fathers in Sasstown, Liberia.

Christ the King Church in Sasstown, is a parish in the diocese of Cape Palmas. Sasstown is where the first S.M.A. missionaries arrived. Therefore historically, the Catholic Church in Liberia was born in Sasstown. It is from here that all other parts of Liberia, received the Catholic faith. From the beginning, the S.M.A. Fathers were in charge of the parish, but it was later destroyed because of the civil war and the S.M.A. were forced to leave. After the war, the diocese took over and tried to renovate the church along with the school. However, even under the difficulties they were facing, they called back the S.M.A. to Sasstown. Since 2016, the S.M.A. has maintained its presence in Sasstown. Sasstown is located in Grand Kru County and it is near the sea. Before the Ebola outbreak in 2014, Sasstown had a population of 10,000. The locals are subsistent-level fishermen. Though being in an area of re-evangelization, the parish has witnessed a significant growth both in size and in number since the arrival of the S.M.A.

“We currently have four outstations and we are trying to open two more. We are two S.M.A. priests working together. Every Sunday, we have one mass in the main parish at 9.30 a.m. After mass, the first priest goes to the next outstation, Betu, at 11 a.m, where you have to cross with a canoe. While the second priest goes to the outstation, Buah Jeken, at 10 a.m. and the next outstation, Buah Jelateken, at 12 noon. For the past two years, the diocese of Cape Palmas has chosen Sasstown as their place of Diocesan Annual Pilgrimage. Every first Saturday during Lent, we host this pilgrimage in our parish. Moreover, the parish is involved in education through its school and strives for the respect and rights of our population. Through the parish, justice and peace flourish. The parish is also involved in poverty alleviation.”



A nice place of mission.

“We can say that today, Sasstown, is the largest indigenous town in all of Grand Kru County and continuously growing. However, it is a very remote, rural area. Road access is very poor especially during rainy seasons. After the war in Liberia, the rectory for the priests was destroyed. Priests have been living in a rented house, which we pay for annually. We have recently moved into the Sisters Convent, making this much safer for us. But aside from all the difficulties we are facing, such as bad road conditions, living expenses and many other factors which contribute to the quality of life here, Sasstown is a nice place of mission and we are happy to be here for the Gospel and by living this wonderful experience with our people.”

- Rev. Fr. Moïse Sabaga, S.M.A.



A Vocation Story

By Rev. Michael Bova, S.M.A.

My vocation story has been an exciting one thus far. It has been a journey that has taken me from California to Massachusetts, from France to West Africa, back to Boston, M.A. and now, where I have just been ordained to the diaconate in Tenafly, New Jersey. When people ask me about my vocation story, I always say that the Lord works in mysterious ways. Probably more aptly stated by St. Mother Theresa, “the Lord writes straight but in crooked lines.”

*“...when the Lord gives
you an invitation...”*

The perfect place for me.

I left my career in the pharmaceutical industry when I was in my prime. It was exciting and I enjoyed it but when the Lord gives you an invitation to work for him, the proper response is to accept. My vocation director at the time for the S.M.A. sent me to Pope St. John XXIII Seminary outside of Boston, which was a seminary for late vocation men. It was the perfect place for me to start. I met many men like myself and the priests treated us very well. That is not to say there weren't a lot of adjustments for me. Seminary life is a grind, on some days you don't even have time to go to the bathroom it seems. Also, I hadn't taken an examination in 20 years so studying for tests also required some adjustments. I once asked one of the upper-classmen for advice on getting through the seminary and he told me that no matter how much your academic load is taxing you, don't sacrifice your prayer life. It was good advice that I followed and do not regret. Your prayer life during seminary and afterward, is the most important facet of your life as a religious.



“I experienced God and his grace in ways that I had not experienced before.”

After two years of seminary, I went to Lyon, France for language training for six weeks and then spent nine months in the Republic of Benin for what is known as the S.M.A. spiritual year. The exact place is known as Calavi. It is a name that resonates with all S.M.A. seminarians and we all have to go through it and it is meant to be rigorous. As a 50 year old man, I was probably 25 years older than most of the guys there. We came from 14 different countries so it was truly an international experience. I think internationality is one of the charisms of the S.M.A. that makes it such a good order to be with. I learned so much about Africa and its wonderful people. It was also a deeply, spiritual experience for me. I experienced God and his graces in ways that I had not experienced before. I also met and made many life-long friends. When you finish Calavi (the Spiritual Year) the guys that you finish with become like family to you, it is an eternal bond, a band of brothers. There is much manual labor at Calavi but I hung in there and finished pretty well. Some highlights included killing a king cobra with my machete and competing with guys 25 years younger than me on the soccer field.

After the spiritual year, I came back to Pope St. John XXIII seminary to finish my last two years of academic training. However, the best part of the last two years was my pastoral assignment at St. Katharine Drexel (KD) parish under the mentorship of Fr. Oscar Pratt. He was a phenomenal preacher and spent countless hours nurturing my preaching skills, which needed a lot of nurturing. St. KD parish is an African American Catholic Church in downtown Boston. I loved the people and they loved me, it was a wonderful experience to have the privilege to train and minister there.

After finishing up at the seminary, I then went to stay at the S.M.A. mother house in Tenafly, New Jersey. My provincial, Fr. Michael Moran, and I thought it would be a good idea to do some hospital ministry and for the last seven months I have worked as a Chaplain intern at a hospital in New Jersey. I have found hospital chaplaincy to be amazingly rewarding and something that I hope to continue in some manner in the future. I was also just ordained to the diaconate on March 2nd in what was a beautiful ceremony in Tenafly. We had a Kenyan choir that was awesome and the S.M.A. flew in Bishop O'Regan from Ireland to perform the ordination. I am continuing to finish up my hospital chaplaincy where my contract is up at the end of May. I look forward to ordination to the priesthood on Saturday, September 14th, 2019. It is the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. You couldn't pick a better day for a priestly ordination. I don't know what my next adventure will be, but I am sure it will be exciting.



-Rev. Michael Bova, S.M.A